

# Rethinking the destination branding of Mauritius – Perspectives from the Local community

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## Abstract

The present study assesses the relevant elements of a destination branding framework which can be applicable to the island of Mauritius by considering its brand identity, brand positioning, brand image and the influence of local community support of the brand. Mauritius is currently being branded as a 'sea sun and sand' destination with the brand slogan '*Maurice C'est Un Plaisir*'. Sunny and warm climate, white sandy beaches and local cuisine have always been the attributes to describe the brand image of the island. However, the present research demonstrated that to some extent that a rise in cultural diversity and their festive representations also serve as an important attribute of destination attractiveness. The relationship of the framework elements have been tested by using descriptive analysis and linear regression analysis. Results indicated that brand image is an influential variable in the branding process. 23% of the aforementioned variables would explain a sustainable branding strategy for the country as a destination brand. The results indicate that there is an urgent need to rethink the major elements for a destination brand development in Mauritius as supported by Ministry of Tourism during the 'Assises du Tourisme' in 2017. The present study highlights upon the importance of the destination's brand and recommends that the local community must be involved in maintaining the destination branding by regular education programmes and brainstorming sessions. Findings also suggest that Mauritius can be rebranded into a honeymoon destination with "*Mauritius, more than an island*" as a slogan.

**Keywords:** Destination branding, brand identity, brand position, brand image, local community, sustainable destination branding, Mauritius

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## 1.0 Introduction

In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, the need for destinations to create a unique identity to differentiate themselves from competitors has become more critical than ever. Today, most destinations claim to

have spectacular scenery, superb attractions, friendly people, and a unique culture and heritage. However, these factors are no longer differentiators, and successful destination branding lies in its potential to reduce substitutability. To achieve this, destination marketers are increasingly focusing on the tourist experience, and creating marketing messages based on these experiences that will appeal to the emotions of potential travellers (Hudson and Ritchie (2009).

The present study assesses the relevant elements of a destination branding framework which can be applicable to the island of Mauritius by considering its brand identity, brand positioning, brand image and the influence of local community support of a brand. Mauritius is currently being branded as a 'sea sun and sand' destination with the brand slogan '*Maurice C'est Un Plaisir*' (Acanchi, 2017). Sunny and warm climate, white sandy beaches and local cuisine have always been the attributes to describe the brand image of the island.

Destination brands have similarities with product and services' brands (Pike, 2005) and represent a selection of "consistent element mix to identify and distinguish a destination through positive image-building" (Cai, 2002: 722). Through these elements a destination can build visual representations, feelings, and a positive experience for the tourists, Cai (2009) also emphasised upon the local community's participation in the destination branding so as to ensure a continuing process that will create positive experiences for the tourists. Strong, consistent marketing of a destination's heritage and culture which evolves and remains contemporary makes successful destination brands (Baker and Cameron, 2008).

According to the destination branding process concept by Pike (2012), the framework consists of three major steps namely -brand identity, brand positioning and brand image. Their importance and relevance for a sustainable branding is analysed in the present study. There are other factors studied by previous academic researchers such as Aronczyk (2008), Hsu and Cai (2009), Li, Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrin (2012) such as political parties' perceptions of the national branding, brand awareness and loyalty of visitors and word of mouth communications which motivate the visitors' choice of a destination. Henkel *et al.*, (2006) pointed out that any sustainable tourism model can only be developed if the local community's perception of the destination matches the destination promotional marketing message. Baker and Cameron (2008) researched international destination branding slogans and argued that brand associations which are in the consumers' mind and memory have to be in order of priority, strong, favourable and unique, if ever a slogan requires further promotional material, it will fail to capture the audience at first glance. The success of the aforementioned proposition lies in its simplicity as it stays in the working memory of a destination branding.

The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) has been mainly responsible for marketing Mauritius and its brand image in targeted markets and has positioned Mauritius as a luxury destination in Europe with focus on the destination's history, spa, therapeutic centres, sports activities and promoted the safety of the island (Naidoo *et al.*, 2010). However, the actual branding slogan concept marketed only one attribute or the tourism sector alone, and neglected the importance of the other economic sectors of Mauritius (Gilmore, 2009).

There has been limited research and study regarding brand destination development and its positioning strategies. Since 1990s, few researchers such as Hall (1999), Curtis (2001), Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott (2002) published studies on this subject of importance. However, there has been a lack of study on the brand positioning slogans and guides for DMOs. Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrin's (2012) research focused on the brand image from a tourist's perspective. Researchers (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994: 359) further added that the local community's attitude towards visitors has a major role in the latter's experience of the destination and its attractiveness.

Acanchi Brand Book on Mauritius (2017) branding describes Mauritius as being ethnically diverse and privileged with a decent level of social harmony and understanding of the various cultures such as Hinduism, Christianity,

Islam, Buddhism. The destination promotes a peaceful and safe cohabitation of all religions with national celebrations of each festival. The Mauritius destination brand represents the country’s values and beliefs at heart of the nation and its philosophy. Values of Mauritians are empathy, connectedness, Team Spirit, Resourcefulness, Acceptance, Harmony, Reverence and are shown in Table 1 below. The nation consists of its people’s spirit, its history and the place itself and connecting with its past, present and future activities.

TABLE 1 : MAURITIUS BRAND VALUE (ACANCHI BRAND BOOK,2017)	
VALUES	DESCRIPTION
<b>Empathy</b>	Mauritians being bilingual and knowledgeable in different cultures are natural diplomats at understanding other people’s feelings and points of view
<b>Connectedness</b>	Being multicultural, Mauritius has global networks having common culture. There is a genuine appreciation of this diversity through celebrations.
<b>Team Spirit</b>	Having a culture of respect and solidarity, a unique team spirit stems from understanding that each person has qualities regardless of their background.
<b>Resourcefulness</b>	Highly adaptable and ability to reinvent itself. Mauritius has the spirit of practicality, open mindedness and sensitivity.
<b>Acceptance</b>	There is a feel of integration and community regardless of religion and culture. It is an acceptance which represents more than tolerance.
<b>Harmony</b>	Mauritians strive for an equilibrium of mind, body and spirit between work, leisure and family. Relaxation is made possible due to the serene atmosphere in Mauritius.
<b>Reverence</b>	There is a respect for our natural resources and mother nature.Mauritians have the blessed feeling of a divine presence.

The Mauritius National Export Strategy Branding Cross Sector 2017-2021 reports that in the process of national branding, Mauritius has a range of positive touristic attributes from its tropical climate with beaches, lagoons, tropical fauna and flora and a multi-cultural population to consider. It also stems from the roots of a nation’s identity as perceived by its locals and others.Mauritius has a rich colonial history and a cultural diversity which marketers have been conserving its identity and using it as Unique selling proposition to promote the destination. Communication tools have promoted Mauritius as a ‘Sun, Sea and Sand’ destination with multi-ethnic locals and has now evolved to promoting the richness of its heritage, culture and its people around the world. Previous marketing campaigns for the national brand have been unsuccessful due to inconsistent destination attributes combined into one concept only. Some concepts focused on different aspects of the idea of a paradise island bringing a memorable experience and pleasure or eventually using the image of the Dodo bird (now extinct) in the branding process. Another reason for unsuccessful branding of the destination was because the concept only

marketed one attribute or the tourism sector alone, however neglecting the other supporting sectors as it was intended to be representative of all economic sectors. (Gilmore, 2009).

Figure 1 illustrates “The visual concept of the name Mauritius being written using national colours, beginning with a big stylized M in the shape of the Pieter Both Mount, and underlined by the phrase “it’s a pleasure” in English, towards the slogan “Mauritius, it’s a pleasure” in English and “Maurice, c’est un plaisir” in French.” (Acanchi, 2017). At the centre of the brand is the Mauritian people and the place itself with a nurturing atmosphere, with a generosity of spirit. The present study therefore seeks to gain further knowledge concerning the local community’s attitude towards the visitors and their role in shaping up their experience in the destination and its attractiveness.

**Figure1: Mauritius Brand Slogan representation**



The national brand’s evolution created variations of the slogan used in the target markets as communication tool such as ‘Mauritius made with care’ designed for trade purposes when exporting goods and services. However, the brand started to be perceived as unclear by the tourism and travel sector stakeholders as it did not communicate correctly the destination’s attributes and uniqueness. The original brand ‘Mauritius it’s a pleasure’ was again centralised and streamlined to be used by all sectors. A technical advisory committee and target market subcommittees were created to focus on the brand positioning in the main existing and new target markets. When the NES stakeholders report was published in 2016, it was observed that ‘Mauritius Brand required a serious rethink and a more holistic, coherent and coordinated approach for export branding and promotion.’ (NES, 2016)

Therefore the present paper takes a closer look at the process of branding a destination experience and attempts to fill up the gap in the literature by assessing the local community perceptions of ‘Maurice C’estUn Plaisir’ brand slogan for the destination. It will also evaluate the brand identity and personality of the country and recommend a sustainable slogan for the effective positioning of the country in the international sphere. The findings of the study will provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners into the process of branding of a destination experience and serve to identify the critical success factors necessary for effective destination brand positioning as it has been an area that has received very little attention in the tourism literature.

## 1.2 Objectives of the study

Against this background, our research objectives will be to analyse the ‘local community perceptions of ‘Maurice C’est Un Plaisir’ as a brand name and to assess and evaluate Mauritius as a brand identity and personality and achieve a rethinking of the Mauritius’ brand slogan and its destination’s positioning .

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The literature review provides an overview of destination branding elements based on Pike (2012) framework and an adapted conceptual framework for branding process including local community support. Bregoli (2012) stated that the success of destination depends upon a brand identity which is in harmony with the values of the host community and their stakeholders’ objectives and aims.

### **2.1 Destination Branding**

Destination branding is a communication tool to express a destination identity (Morrison & Anderson, 2002). The destination brands have similarities with product and services’ brands and comprise both tangible and intangible components which are mostly service dependent, and can be positioned through the use of slogans.

As pointed out by (Task & Gartner, 2009), the process of destination branding is not only about marketing and advertising. The process also involves recognising the destination’s value and actual identity and delivering a consistent brand image and theme. Therefore to ensure the consistency of the brand message, it can only be done with the involvement and participation of all the stakeholders in the branding process especially the internal stakeholders. It shows that it is critical in branding a destination to have stakeholders’ involvement. These stakeholders’ contribute to the brand identity development and image projection to the visitors and create the ultimate destination travel experience. Therefore this empirical study being carried out will focus on the perspectives one of the stakeholders namely the host community.

Based on the Cai’s (2009) conclusion that by putting an emphasis on the local community’s participation in the destination branding ensures a continuing process that creates the experiences for the tourists. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the local cuisine also serves as a foundation for creating a destination brand. Strong, consistent marketing of a destination’s heritage and culture which evolves and remain contemporary makes successful brands. As an effort by the government to develop India’s destination brand a social awareness campaign under ‘Incredible!ndia’ was launched named 'Atithi Devo Bhavah' meaning ‘Guest is God’ to bring a feeling of hospitality and welcome. This campaign was oriented to training of taxi drivers, guides, immigration officers, tourist police and other stakeholders who come into contact with tourists. (Monica Khanna, 2011). It has been named as the land of tigers and snake charmers, an IT hub, origin of yoga and non-violence and that of poverty. India was referred to as the Bird of Gold as it attracted many mercenaries searching for gold and richness (Baker and Cameron, 2008).

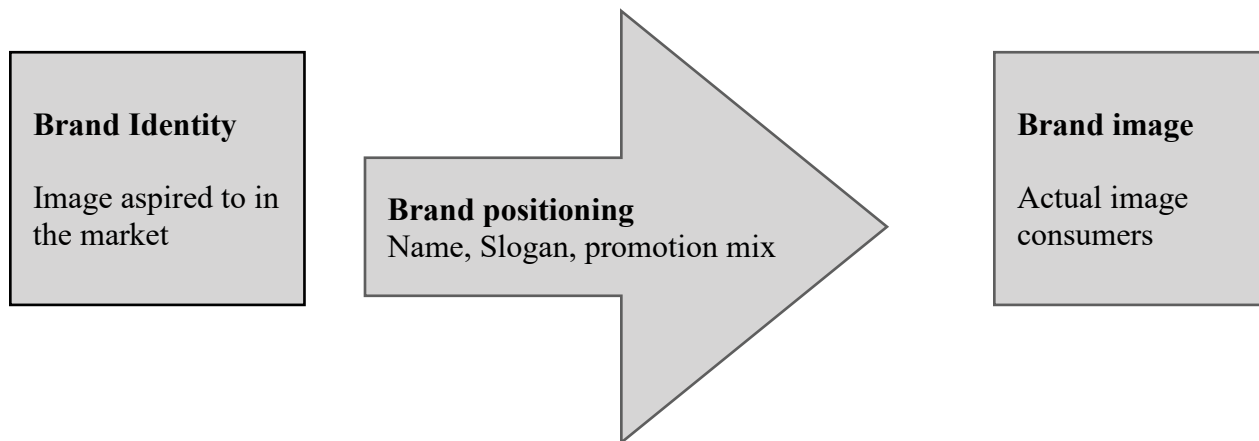
Furthermore, in the case of Mauritius, “C’est un plaisir” has several dimensions. At the core, it is the expression of the feeling of visitors and investors when they visit Mauritius as a destination brand and the pleasure of dealing with Mauritians at call centres, hotels, shopping malls, banks and also attract foreigners to invest and live in Mauritius through the integrated resort scheme. “C’est un plaisir” as a concept is applicable to all economic sectors of the country (Gilmore, 2009).

### **2.2 Brand Identity and local community perceptions**

It can be observed that brand identity is one of the major elements of destination branding and the best perspective is described from the internal stakeholders’ point of view, i.e the supply side.

According to the destination branding process concept by Pike (2012), the framework consists of three major steps, i.e brand identity, and brand positioning and brand image as shown in Figure 2 below:

**Figure2: Destination branding elements (Pike, 2012)**



Floreket *al.*, (2006) stated that to be able to brand a destination or place, destination marketers must use the destination’s brand identity, i.e its physical, cultural features and events to differentiate itself from other destinations. Furthermore, as part of the brand identity it has been concluded by previous researchers such as Berthonet *al.*, (2007) that meanings, symbols and values form part of the brand. Its purpose is to reinforce a destination’s identity and uniqueness. Campeloet *al.*, (2011) further added that these aforementioned values also reassure the local community of their values, local cultural representations and habitus to preserve the destination’s state of being.

Lin *et al.*, (2010) also pointed out that despite their similarities; brand identity is different from brand image. Morgan and Pride (2002:13) argues that “*Building a place brand strategy around the skills, aspirations and culture of its population is far more likely to result in credible, sustainable and effective results than something cooked up by a team of ministers or PR consultants in closed meeting rooms.*”

Therefore it is agreeable with the statement of Wheeler *et al.*, (2011a) that brand identity must be a reflection of the host community’s values and meanings. These values and meanings come from social, cultural, historic such as heritage sites, geographical and economic factors in the local destination. In doing so, this harmonisation with the host country brings an optimum touristic experience when it is delivered by the local community itself who live and work there. Therefore research on perception and involvement of the supply side of the destination branding might bring new conclusions on the destination brand image and thus the destination branding process.

### **2.3 Destination Brand Positioning**

According to Ries (1996) positioning theory, marketing messages communicated are so vast from competing products and substitutes and thus it can be said that the objective would be to create a brand message that can be

remembered for the reasons that the marketer intends it to be. It can be observed that one of the greatest challenges Destination marketing organisations face in implementing a brand positioning design is undeniably handling the difficult and often delicate relationship that the local tourism industry politics has with a destination branding strategy. Local community consists of a diverse cultural background, attractions, natural attributes and heritage which would be meaningful in the brand positioning proposition.

Dooley and Bowie (2005) studied the case of New Zealand and its brand positioning concept – its brand slogan and symbol, the silver fern represents the destination’s sports, tourism, trade and commerce, film industry and education. New Zealand’s tourism campaign ‘100% pure New Zealand’ was launched in 1999. According to New Zealand Tourism authorities, in the case of New Zealand, when 100% Pure New Zealand was launched in 1999, it was the first time New Zealand had one message in all of its tourism markets around the world. The campaign was developed to be clear and concise: to communicate a single message about New Zealand that captured the imagination of their target market. Initially 100% Pure New Zealand relates to the landscapes, destinations’ local people and activities which are 100% unique to the entire destination experience. Now, it also represents the 100% pure relaxation, 100% pure welcome, 100% pure adrenalin, and 100% pure you. Other destinations with successful branding slogans are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 : Destination branding slogans (Baker and Cameron, 2008)	
Destination	Slogans
New Zealand	100% Pure New Zealand
Australia	Australia: A Different Light
Spain	Everything Under The Sun
India	Incredible India
Singapore	Live It Up in Singapore
Paris	Paris is for Lovers
Copenhagen	Wonderful Copenhagen
Amsterdam	Capital of Inspiration
Las Vegas	What Happens in Vegas, Stays in Vegas

There have been studies on the effectiveness of brand slogans and logos and it was observed that destination promotion has shown limited creativity. According to authors such as (Dann 2000, Pritchard & Piggott 2003), most campaigns’ failure are due to the fact that these DMOs only create an ephemeral image and message instead of a memorable one. These messages usually sustain a short life and fail their purpose of differentiating the destination from other destinations with similar attributes and facilities. Previous researchers on slogan success included (Pritchard 1982, Richardson & Cohen 1993, Klenotsky&Gitelson 1997, Pike 2004b). According to Keller (2003), brand associations in the consumers’ mind and memory has to be in order of priority strong, favourable and unique. Slogans design should have the ability of being differentiated amidst the media clutter of information and promotions.

## 2.4 Brand Image and its relationship with local community

According to Plummer (1985) brand image and brand personality are essential elements of brand loyalty and brand positioning. It has been observed that it was achievable through a consistent destination identity, its induced image and the actual tourists' experience. As Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), the challenge lies in creating a consistency between brand associations in terms of attitude and actions to all stakeholders in a sustainable manner. Therefore, a destination with unified stakeholders provides the platform for a successful sustainable branding. It is especially the case for local community residents who are one of the main stakeholders of a destination and it has been pointed out that any sustainable tourism model can only be developed if local community's perception of the destination matches the destination promotional marketing message (Henkel *et al.*, 2006). Tourism destinations are made up of symbolic meanings and affective values and the brand personality concept which can be considered to understand personality and experiential attributes given by local community. (Henderson, 2000; Santos, 2004).

### 3.0 Methodology

For the purpose of this study, both qualitative research and quantitative research methodology were identified as the most suitable techniques in order to assess local community's perception on whether there is a need for rethinking Mauritius as a destination branding. Primary data was collected through in-depth interview with professionals in the tourism sector and survey questionnaires with Likert scales (from 1-5) were distributed in shopping malls of Mauritius namely Bagatelle Mall of Mauritius, Trianon Shopping Park, Phoenix Mall and Cascavelle Shopping Mall. For this study, the targeted population was the local residents in Mauritius. The proposed sample size consisted of 98 local residents above 18 years old so as to elicit more mature and responsible findings.

A semi-structured interview was structured to address the objectives of this study in line with Pike's (2012) framework. The first section is focused on gaining an understanding of the actual branding of Mauritius considering the strengths and weaknesses of the slogan '*Mauricec'est un plaisir*'. Furthermore, the second section addressed the rethinking of the brand of Mauritius in terms of brand identity, branding slogan and the relevance of local community support to the branding process. The questionnaire focused on the branding elements of a destination according to Pike (2012) mainly -Brand Identity and brand positioning, Brand Slogan and Brand image and its functional and psychological attributes, local community support and participation and proposed sustainable slogan and brand. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20 was used for the analysis of the information obtained to assess relationships between different variables. For this research, linear regression and descriptive analysis were used.

### 3.1 Testable Research Hypotheses

Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, & Pitt (2007) stated that meanings, symbols and values forms part of the brand. Its purpose is to reinforce a destination's identity and uniqueness. It has been pointed out that any sustainable tourism model can only be developed if local community's perception of the destination matches the destination promotional marketing message. Therefore a strong brand identity leads to a strong sustainable destination branding. It is therefore posited that:

**H0<sub>1</sub> : There is no direct relationship between brand identity and sustainable destination branding concept**  
**H1: There is a direct positive relationship between brand identity and sustainable destination branding concept**

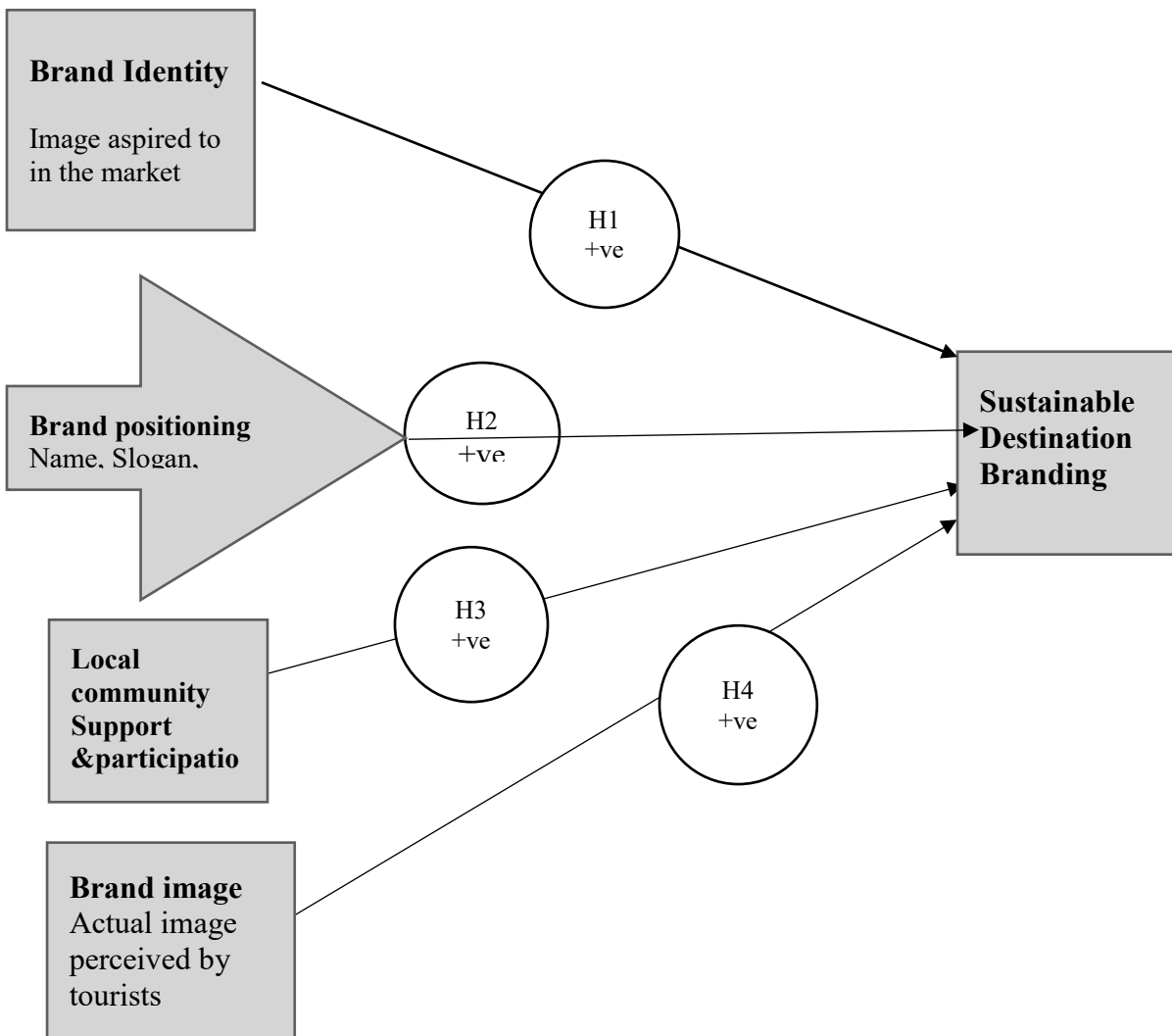


According to Keller (2003), brand associations in the consumers’ mind and memory has to be in order of priority strong, favourable and unique. The objective would be to create a brand message that can be remembered for the reasons that the marketer intends it to be. Aaker (1996). It was concluded that brand segmentation, choice of target group and positioning were equally important basis for defining a brand strategy Kotler (1994). The more memorable the brand positioning, the more sustainable is the destination branding which leads to the development of the third hypothesis as follows:

**H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between brand positioning and sustainable destination branding**

**H2: There is a direct positive relationship between brand positioning and sustainable destination branding.**

**Figure3: Hypotheses based on Framework**



Furthermore Henkel *et al.*, (2006) have argued that any sustainable tourism model can only be developed if local community's perception of the destination matches the destination promotional marketing message. It is actually in line with Bounckenet *al.*, (2006) findings about destination attributes leading to a memorable experience to word of mouth which contributes to a sustainable branding concept. It is therefore posited that:

**H03: There is no relationship between local community support and sustainable destination branding in Mauritius**

**H3: Local community support has a direct positive impact on a sustainable branding in Mauritius.**

Keller (2003) observed a shift to a destination brand identity of having more symbolic meanings, and that the intangible elements are not directly related to the service specifications and its contribution to differentiating the destination brand. Belisle and Hoy (1980) pointed out that tourists avoided destinations with less attractiveness and the lack of a welcoming attitude. Hypothesis 4 therefore has been developed as follows:

**H04: There is no relationship between brand image and sustainable destination branding**

**H4: There is a direct positive relationship between brand image and sustainable destination branding.**

## 4.0 Empirical findings

### 4.1 Part A – Socio Demographic Profile of the respondents

Respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 3. From Table 3, it can be noted that from the 98 questionnaires administered, 49% of the respondents were male (N=48), and 51% of the respondents were female (N=50). Most respondents were between 18 to 28 years of age (59%) whilst respondents 51 to 61 years were in minority (4%, N=4). 40% of the respondents have a Higher School Certificate, 46% have a Bachelor's Degree. Only 10% have studied up to School Certificate.

**Table 3 : Respondents' Demographic Profile**

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage ( %)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	48	49
	Female	50	51
<b>Age Group</b>	18-28	58	59
	29-39	29	29
	40-50	7	7
	51-61	4	4
	Above 61	0	0
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	Primary	0	0
	SC	10	10

HSC	39	40
Degree	45	46
Master	4	4

**4.2 Descriptive Analysis**

A descriptive analysis of the variables was carried out by using the mean and standard deviation to obtain an understanding of the dimensions of this study on destination branding

**Table 4 : Average Mean and Standard Deviation of Brand Identity of Mauritius as perceived by the destination marketers**

Variables(Descendingorder of Mean)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Our Brand identity is represented by our cultural and heritage sites, e.g. Tea route, blue penny museum, AapravasiGhat	98	4.03	0.843
Harmonisation of our cultural diversity is the brand identity of our island	98	3.99	0.793
Mauritius Brand identity is represented by its cultural events, e.g. Festival creole, Porlwi by Light	98	3.93	0.922
Values such as Empathy, Connectedness, Harmony, Acceptance best represent Mauritian Identity	98	3.86	0.799
Our classics literature, e.g. Le Cleziot’s Paul and Virginia is our national identity	98	3.23	0.939
Valid N (listwise)	98		

From Table 4 above , most respondents agreed that the brand identity of Mauritius is represented by local cultural and heritage sites, example tea route, blue penny museum, Aapravasi Ghat ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.03), ‘Harmonisation of our cultural diversity is the brand identity of our island’ ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.99), Mauritius Brand identity is represented by its cultural events, e.g. Festival creole, Porlwi by Light ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.93), Values such as Empathy, Connectedness, Harmony, Acceptance best represent Mauritian Identity (3.86).

However Table 5 below illustrates the brand positioning of Mauritius as perceived by the destination marketers. Respondents agreed that the Heart of Mauritius’ positioning in the world is its people, place and identity ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.94). It can be observed that most participants also recognised that the current target market would be a

sustainable one in the future ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.83) and they also perceived that Mauritius is a preferred sea sun sand destination ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.82). Relatively few respondents thought that “Maurice c’est un plaisir” is a strong slogan ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.15) as it reminded some of a notion of pleasure which they felt did not reflect adequately what Mauritius has to offer as destination brand

**Table 5 : Average Mean and Standard Deviation of Brand Positioning of Mauritius as perceived by the destination marketers**

Variables(Descendingorder of Mean)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Heart of Mauritius' positioning in the world is its people, place and identity	98	3.94	0.810
Targeting European and Asian market is appropriate for a sustainable tourism sector in Mauritius	98	3.83	0.920
Mauritius is a preferred sea sun sand destination	98	3.82	1.097
Maurice c’est un plaisir’ is a strong, effective slogan	98	3.15	1.009
Valid N (listwise)	98		

**Table 6 : Average Mean and Standard Deviation of Brand Image of Mauritius**

Variables(Descendingorder of Mean)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Functional Attributes</b>			
sunny and warm climate	98	4.34	0.673
white sandy beaches	98	4.24	0.733
cultural diversity	98	4.24	0.704
standards of hotels	98	4.14	0.626
local cuisine	98	3.98	0.885
spa facilities	98	3.86	0.812
<b>Psychological Attributes</b>			
hospitality of local residents	98	4.09	0.826
peaceful and relaxing	98	4.06	0.730

safety and security	98	3.27	1.051
Valid N (listwise)	98		

From Table 6 , the majority of respondents strongly agreed that Mauritius brand image is sunny and warm climate, white sandy beaches and cultural diversity ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.34, 4.24, 4.24). It is in line with local community opinion that Mauritius brand identity is in fact a harmonisation of its cultural diversity as demonstrated in Table 6 .It can be observed that the highest mean for psychological attributes is the hospitality of the local residents ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.09) which is related to that respondents’ views that Mauritius brand position is effectively represented by its people. Safety and security received the lowest mean as many respondents had strong objections on the actual safety of the destination after rape incidents of tourists on beaches, hotels and murder of Lara Rjis in her luxury residence, Mauritius has been labelled as a death destination on social media (Bastien, 2017).

**Table 7 : Average Mean and Standard Deviation of Local Community support and participation in Branding Mauritius**

<b>Variables</b> (Descendingorder of Mean)	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
local community perception of Mauritius identity must be same as promoted by destination marketers	98	4.11	0.702
Training, associations of local community are required for a successful branding	98	4.06	0.771
local community participation influences branding	98	3.88	0.750
Valid N (listwise)	98		

Table 7 analyses the mean and standard deviation of local community support in the branding of Mauritius. The results corroborate the studies of Bregoli (2012) whereby it is deemed important to have a harmony between the host community and their stakeholders’ objectives. Local community agrees that both parties should have the same perception ( $\bar{x}$ = 4.11). Despite Tsartas (1996) studies, according to this research, most respondents were either neutral or disagreed that the participation of local community influences branding of a destination ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.88). Table 8 describes the mean and standard deviation of the proposed slogans obtained in the qualitative research. Findings show that respondents thought ‘Mauritius, more than an island’ was a more appropriate slogan ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.69) and the least appreciated slogan was “Mauritius the Heart of Wellness” ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.09). This reflects the findings in Table 7 that only a minority of local community ( $\bar{x}$ = 3.78) think that Mauritius should be branded as a Wellness destination.

**Table 8 : Average Mean and Standard Deviation of proposed branding slogans for Mauritius**

<b>Variables(Descendingorder of Mean)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
‘Mauritius, more than an island’	98	3.69	0.968
“Mauritius, an experience of a lifetime”	98	3.65	0.964
“Mauritius, a unique and exotic destination”	98	3.63	1.049
“Heaven is Where Mauritius is!	98	3.61	1.163
“Mauritius, Untold Story of Happiness”	98	3.48	0.944
“Mauritius, so much more than beaches”	98	3.39	1.071
“Mauritius, a colourful fusion of nature at its best, wonderful people, cultures and exotic food”	98	3.34	1.308
“MauPassion”	98	3.32	1.031
“Mauritius, it’s not all about beaches”	98	3.17	1.103
“Mauritius the Heart of Wellness”	98	3.09	1.006
Valid N (listwise)	98		

**4.3 Hypothesis Testing**

**4.3.1 Linear-Regression Analysis**

A linear regression analysis was used to establish the relationships between the dependent variable ‘sustainable destination branding’ and independent variables ‘brand identity’, ‘brand positioning’, ‘local community’ and ‘brand image’. The above variables were created on SPSS 20 through the mean of all items (statements) used for each variable.

**H0<sub>1</sub> : There is no relationship between brand identity and sustainable destination branding**

**H1: There is a direct positive relationship between brand identity and sustainable destination branding.**

<b>Table 9: Coefficient Table for Brand Identity</b>					
<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>					
<b>Model</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Collinearity Statistics</b>

	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.254	0.547		2.292	0.024		
Brand Identity	0.120	0.093	0.138	1.300	<b>0.003</b>	0.739	1.352
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Destination Branding							

Brand identity having a significant p value less than 0.05 (  $p \leq 0.05$  level) implies that H1 is accepted and that there is a significant relationship between brand identity and sustainable destination branding. This result supports Morgan’s and Pride’s (2002) statement that a brand strategy that builds up around its local community culture and skills is more likely to be efficient and sustainable as compared to being created by marketers.

**H0<sub>2</sub> : There is no relationship between brand positioning and sustainable destination branding**

**H2: There is a direct positive relationship between brand positioning and sustainable destination branding.**

Table 10: Coefficient Table for Brand Positioning							
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.254	0.547		2.292	0.024		
Brand Positioning	0.155	0.095	0.185	1.628	<b>0.01</b>	0.646	1.547
a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Destination Branding							

From Table 10, variable brand positioning had a p value of 0.01 (  $p \leq 0.05$  ) therefore H2 is accepted and implies that there is a significant relationship between positioning and a sustainable destination branding. The results reinforced the importance of a memorable brand message in differentiating a destination and support the findings of (Dann 2000, Pritchard & Piggott 2003), who stated that brand campaign messages which sustain a short life will fail their purpose of differentiating the destination from other destinations with similar attributes and facilities. It also proves that brand positioning concept as mentioned in Aaker’s study (1996) is therefore essential to the design of a brand strategy.

**H0<sub>3</sub> : There is no relationship between brand image and sustainable destination branding**  
**H3: There is a direct positive relationship between brand image and sustainable destination branding.**

Table 11: Coefficient Table for Brand Image							
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.254	0.547		2.292	0.024		
Brand Image	0.284	0.113	0.258	2.512	<b>0.014</b>	0.789	1.268

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Destination Branding

Table 11 analysis resulted in p value of 0.014 ( $p \leq 0.05$  level) therefore H3 is accepted. It is in concordance with Belisle and Hoy (1980) who pointed out that tourists avoided destinations with less attractiveness and a lack of a welcoming attitude. As stated by Bounckenet *al.*, (2006) findings, ‘when a destination branding is based on their existing attributes, there is a greater rate of satisfying the tourists’ expectations’. It can also be said that Gartner & Hunt (1987) observations are correct and that changes in a destination’s brand image rarely occurs and that the brand positioning must be consistent over a long time vision of the destination.

**H0<sub>4</sub> : There is no relationship between Local community support and sustainable destination branding**  
**H4: Local community support has a direct positive impact on a sustainable branding in Mauritius.**

Table 12 : Coefficient Table for local community support							
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	1.254	0.547		2.292	0.024		
Local Community support and participation	0.100	0.091	0.102	1.099	<b>0.002</b>	0.964	1.037

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Destination Branding



According to this study, variable local community support obtained a p value of 0.002 ( $p \leq 0.05$  level) and thus H4 is accepted. These findings are in line with Henkel *et al.*, (2006) who argued that any sustainable tourism model can only be developed if the local community's perception of the destination matches the destination promotional marketing message. It is actually in line with Bounckenet *et al.*, (2006) findings about destination attributes leading to a memorable experience and positive word of mouth which contributes to a sustainable branding strategy.

### **5. 0 Theoretical Contributions and Managerial implications of the study.**

Findings have shown that most respondents disagreed that "Maurice C'est un Plaisir" is an effective slogan ( $\bar{x} = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) as the slogan lacks an aggressive marketing strategy and follow up to be considered as a successful destination brand. "Plaisir" or "Pleasure" is what travellers were seeking several centuries ago while the new generations now seeks a 'positive tourist **experience**'. Respondents supported the actual slogan but indicated that it was not sufficiently representative of the sectors affiliated to tourism such as ICT, textile, food and beverage industry and production industry, taxi services of Mauritius and that the slogan language did not reflect the international target market which use English mainly as their first language.

Pike (2012) framework has recognised brand identity as a major element in the branding process. However, in a branding process framework perspective, it was proven that it acts as a strong influence for a sustainable branding ( $\beta = 0.138$ ,  $t = 1.3$ ,  $p < 0.5$ ). The study does highlight the importance of the destination's brand identity as Cai (2002) researched the contribution of brand image in creating the brand identity and as Florek *et al.*, (2006) well stated, it also enables a reflection upon the brand identity after it has been developed. Furthermore, as the study has depicted that local community participates directly in the branding process, also demonstrated in the above hypothesis testing (H4 accepted,  $p \leq 0.05$  level). Findings in this paper demonstrated that local community also agreed that they can influence the destination branding ( $\bar{x} = 3.88$ ). It was highlighted by Cai (2009) that their support and participation in the branding process ensures a continuing process that creates the positive experiences mentioned earlier for the tourists. Therefore, after the proposed slogans were analysed by respondents' opinions, the study suggests a rebranding of the slogan to 'Mauritius, more than an island' ( $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). It is more representative of the vast array of sectors associated to tourism in Mauritius.

As per the findings of this study, it can be observed that there is a need to rethink the branding process and the impending need for a rebranding of the destination brand of Mauritius. This is supported by the views expressed by stakeholders during the 'Assises du Tourisme' (Le Defi Media, 2017) which promulgated the need for a more sustainable rebranding. Majority of respondents agreed that Mauritius should be branded as a honeymoon destination rather ( $\bar{x} = 4.24$ ) or a family holiday destination ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ) as compared to ( $\bar{x} = 4.18$ ) who responded that Mauritius must continue with its actual destination branding of the 'sea sun sand' destination.

Local community support has been proven to have a direct positive relationship with sustainable branding. Findings have also suggested that education, training and platform of brainstorming at a regional level connected such as 'Force Vive' and 'Assises du Tourisme' to government level serve as important elements for this continuing process as supported by locals' opinion ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ). If the local community does not support the country's vision for tourism, then issues like theft, robbery, scams may arise and Rajesh (2013) argued that word of mouth marketing motivated the visitors' choice of destination when there is a trusting relationship between a destination and the visitors. A national branding competition could be organised as suggested by the findings so as to devise a new slogan for Mauritius as a destination brand in collaboration with different stakeholders such as hoteliers, DMCs and government entities.

As from the findings of the study, two main alternatives of rebranding Mauritius have emerged. First, Mauritius can be rebranded into a honeymoon destination as the figures in Statistics Mauritius (2015), for the first 6 months in 2015, a survey of Inbound Tourism also demonstrated that honeymoon was the second ranked purpose of visit to Mauritius. Secondly, destination branding can focus on Mauritius as a family holiday destination ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ) by marketing the diversity of activities both inland and water based as pointed out by the findings of the study. From the slogans as proposed by specialists, the study suggests a rebranding of the slogan to 'Mauritius, more than an island' ( $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ).

The present study also supports the study of Plummer (1985) which highlighted that brand image is essential to achieving brand loyalty through consistent destination identity, its induced image and the actual tourists' experience. According to this paper, this independent variable is influential in the branding process towards sustainability (H3 accepted,  $p < 0.05$ ). Specialists interviewed supported the attributes from the study. It was pointed out the element of safety and security attribute in particular is an important element to be considered in the branding of a destination.

## **6.0 Conclusion and Future research agenda**

As the competition between destinations increases, destination branding is emerging as one of the most powerful marketing weapons available to contemporary marketers (Morgan *et al.*, 2002). Yet despite the increased attention in the subject of destination branding over the last few years, little published research in this area provides pragmatic guides for destination-marketing organizations (Pike, 2005). With only 23% of the variables explained in the branding process, previous studies have shown that there are other factors to consider apart from the destination's brand identity, brand positioning and brand image. Furthermore, as the quantitative research showcased, the brand image is the only variable in the branding process to have a significant influence on a sustainable branding. Therefore, this paper proves that Echtner's and Ritchie's (1993) functional and psychological attributes characterised by (Zougali *et al.*, 2012) of the destination is an essential variable to research upon for future studies. In-depth interviews concluded that Brand Identity of Mauritius should be our cultural and history of heritage sites and also its people and the harmonisation of multiculturalism as represented by the cultural and food festivals in Mauritius. Zougali *et al.* (2012) gave general examples of attributes varying from climate, comfort, safety and security, sightseeing, gastronomy, literature, language, tradition, friendliness of local community. It was demonstrated that attributes with the highest mean (sunny and warm climate, white sandy beaches, hospitality of locals, peaceful and relaxing) from Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrin (2012) have also received the highest mean in this study. However, it can also be deduced from this study that there has been a rise in importance of cultural diversity and festivals ( $\bar{x} = 4.24$ ). This has shown a consistency in the attributes perceived from both tourists and the local population.

### **Limitations of the study**

The present study only serves as a starting point for the process of rebranding Mauritius as a destination. It focuses mainly on whether there is a need for rebranding rather than researching an actual rebranding for Mauritius. Therefore, the suggested destination brand and slogan may serve as the basis for future research. The present study also did not analyse an appropriate time frame for the rebranding exercise to be carried out for a destination. Therefore, this study has gained a basic understanding of the need for rethinking a brand. It did not cover in details the rebranding aspects of the destination and the viability of the proposed slogan.

### **Direction for Future Research**

Future studies are required to assess the viability of destination brand alternatives as this study only assessed whether there was a need to rethink the rebranding process of Mauritius as a tourism destination. Future research could follow on this actual rebranding process and consider the other variables such as such as political parties' perceptions of the national branding, brand awareness and loyalty of visitors and word of mouth marketing which motivate visitors' choice of destination as referred to by these different authors respectively. (Aronczyk, 2008; Hsu and Cai, 2009)

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