A Typology of Organisational Stakeholder Engagement with Place Brand Identity

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Abstract

Introduction: This study explores how stakeholders engage with a place brand identity (PBI) in the context of country branding. This research extends beyond the importance and challenges of stakeholder brand engagement with place brand identity by exploring several typology of stakeholder engagement with PBI.

Problem Statement: Although place branding researchers have proposed multiple components of PBI, studies on this domain are predominantly conceptual and lacking empirical evidence. This research proposes a typology of stakeholder engagement which constitutes various components of PBI. The research problem that this research aims to investigate is: “To what extent are stakeholders engaged with an overarching PBI and its different components?”

Method: A case study approach using semi-structured interviews with 39 senior-level representatives from national Australian organisations was adopted to explore how internal stakeholders in Australia are engaged with the current PBI initiative in Australia: Australia Unlimited (AU).

Results: A typology of stakeholder engagement with a PBI, including philosophical and concrete engagement was identified. Stakeholders’ philosophical engagement is reflected by their moral support, future engagement intention, as well as positive word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviour. Concrete engagement, on the other hand, is reflected by place brand partnership and internalisation of PBI in the organisations’ strategy.

Conclusions: The research findings offer practical ways for place brand managing organisations (PBMO) to enhance stakeholder engagement with a PBI. The identification of multicomponent nature of PBI from the research findings allows PBMO to identify which PBI component lacks stakeholder support in order to make necessary improvements. Further, identification of the typology of stakeholder engagement with PBI provides alternative strategies of how stakeholder engagement can be managed.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement; place brand identity; nation branding; country branding; place branding
Introduction

The number of places (e.g. cities, regions, countries) making strategic use of branding has grown considerably over the past decade. Consequently, studies on the topic of place brand management, albeit relatively new, have attracted increasing interests in recent years (Bose et al., 2016, Lee et al., 2016). Central to the idea of place brand management is the notion of place brand identity (hereafter PBI) -- a joint identity formally created for the place to communicate to external audiences (Anholt, 2010). Given that a PBI projects an ideal and desired picture of the place, it needs to be supported by key internal stakeholders to ensure that the reality of the place is consistent with the communicated identity (Florek, 2005). Indeed, several scholars have emphasised the need for place brand managing organisations (hereafter PBMO) to engage with key stakeholders within the place in order to gain support for PBI implementation (e.g. Hanna and Rowley, 2012, Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015, Zenker and Erfgen, 2014).

The general branding literature has suggested that brand identity has multiple components that encompass both tangible and intangible attributes (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2002). This multi-component concept has also been applied to the context of corporate brands (e.g. Balmer, 2010). While place branding researchers have proposed multiple components of PBI, studies on this domain are predominantly conceptual and lacking empirical evidence. Thus, we know remarkably little as to how and in what ways stakeholders are engaged with various components of PBI. This is an important research gap because PBMO needs to understand how stakeholders engage with each PBI component in order to develop specific strategies to enhance stakeholders’ engagement with PBI.

Given the gaps in the literature, the aim of this study was to explore how stakeholders are engaged with a multi-component PBI in the context of country branding, particularly during its implementation phase. Specifically, a case study approach was adopted using Australia’s current country branding initiative - Australia Unlimited.
RELATED WORK

Place Brand Identity

PBI is closely related to corporate brand identity as they both serve as an umbrella term for entities that have multiple identities and meanings (Merrilees et al., 2012). Within corporate branding, brand identity is understood as a multidimensional construct that comprises intangible components such as brand vision, values (Urde, 2013), and personality (Olins, 1978), as well as tangible components such as visual imagery, symbols, and physique (Balmer, 2008).

Within place branding content, prior studies have recognised the multi-component nature of PBI (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2013, Hanna and Rowley, 2012, Rodrigues, 2019), with scholars placing different emphasis in their conceptualisation. This is in line with Herstein’s (2012) conceptualisation of country branding in tourism context as having two components which are representational (intangible) and functional (tangible) components. Some scholars (e.g. Yan, 2003, Kavaratzis, 2004, Balakrishnan, 2009) focused on the strategic component of PBI such as communications (e.g. Fernández-Cavia et al., 2018, Kotsi et al., 2018), whereas others focused on its personality (Kaplan et al., 2010), visual (Blain, 2005) and relational component (Hankinson, 2004). The relational component is particularly important in PBI implementation phase as PBMO needs to develop a strong relationship with key organisational stakeholders to gain support for various PBI implementation activities (e.g. international trade shows, promotional events).

The notions of brand personality and brand values that originated in the consumer context have been recognised as important PBI components. For example, Kaplan et al. (2010) found that place brand personality might facilitate stakeholders’ interaction with the place, particularly when stakeholders see congruence between their self-concept and the PBI personality. Similarly, brand value is considered an important PBI component as it reflects the
desirable characteristics underlying cultural, social, natural and economic components of the place (Iversen and Hem, 2008, Gnoth, 2007). Recently, the strategic aspect of PBI such as brand communications has attracted the interests of PBI scholars. For example, Fernández-Cavia et al. (2018) argued that because a place is a complex entity, PBI communications need to be seen as a dialogue rather than a linear process.

Following an overview of the literature, we propose a conceptualisation of a multi-component PBI which includes tangible and intangible components. The tangible components of PBI include the actual place itself (physique) and the visual presentation of the place through brand elements (e.g. logo, symbol, slogans). Indeed, logos and other visual brand identity elements that were traditionally applied in the domain of business are now being effectively applied to places (Anholt, 2005). Studies have found that PBMO could build positive reputation about a place through visual representation, which ultimately could lead to stakeholder engagement (Anholt, 2003, Kavaratzis, 2004). The intangible components of PBI, on the other hand, include the place vision (Donner and Fort, 2018), strategy (Fernández-Cavia et al., 2018, Kotsi et al., 2018), personality (Taecharungroj, 2018, Ruzzier, 2012), values (Govers and Go, 2009), and relationship (Kavaratzis, 2009). Evidence from practice suggests that PBI component has a dynamic and interdependent relationship with each other. For example, in New-Zealand’s place branding campaign (“100% Pure New Zealand”), Morgan et al. (2003) found that stakeholders’ relationship with the PBMO (intangible component) influences how the visual presentation of PBI (tangible component) is utilised. Similarly, Iversen and Hem (2008) contended that the image of a place’s physique (tangible component) could become a foundation upon which to build PBI values (intangible component).
Organisational Stakeholder Engagement with a Place Brand Identity

In this study, the term ‘stakeholder’ refers to any entities that have the power and urgency to affect and be affected by the creation, implementation and evaluation of a PBI (Haddaway et al., 2017). The literature has focused on the place’s people (citizens, residents) as PBI stakeholders, whereas organisational stakeholders – the focus of the present study – have received relatively little attention in the place brand literature.

Bregoli (2013) contended that organisational stakeholders play an important role in delivering place brand promise. However, getting organisational stakeholders to be engaged with a place brand identity is not an easy task, because stakeholders have their own interests to pursue and may prioritise their own brands over the PBI (Ooi and Pedersen, 2010). Such conflicting priorities represent barrier of organisational stakeholder engagement which need to be addressed by the PBMO.

In the consumer literature, brand engagement refers to customers’ psychological bond with a brand, manifested in their cognitive, affective and behavioural state (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The cognitive state refers to customers’ psychological bond towards a brand that is manifested in their minds through thought processing (Leckie et al., 2016). The affective state refers to customers’ emotional bond with the brand, while the behavioural state relates to customers’ specific actions and behaviour (Hollebeek et al., 2014). In the management literature, Buckingham (2008) conceptualised employees’ brand engagement as the employees’ commitment to the corporate brand. The characteristics of stakeholder engagement with a PBI may resemble both customer brand engagement and employee brand engagement in two ways. First, PBI stakeholders can be considered as “target customers” because the brand identity has to be communicated to external and internal audiences to encourage stakeholders’ engagement with the brand (Harrison-Walker, 2013). Second, stakeholders are expected to demonstrate behaviour that is aligned with the brand values (Anholt, 2010, Kavaratzis, 2012),
which resembles employee brand engagement in corporate brand context (Buckingham, 2008). Moreover, PBI can serve as a unifying factor for a country in a way that is similar to the role of corporate brand in unifying employees (Balmer, 2012).

In tourism context, Bregoli (2013) adapted employees’ brand commitment theories to evaluate tourism organisations’ commitment to a tourism brand. Bregoli’s (2013) studies reveal that an employee-corporate brand relationship may inform internal stakeholder-PBI relationship, although place stakeholders are not under “employee” contracts. Such findings are relevant to the present study, as we sought to determine the ways in which national organisational stakeholders are engaged with an overarching PBI where little formal or contractual arrangement exists.

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Two prominent research gaps emerge from the extant literature and are addressed in this study. First, within place branding literature, there is a lack of research examining how national organisations are engaged with an overarching PBI. The studies discussed in the preceding section have generally attempted to explore how stakeholders – particularly citizens or individuals – relate to an overarching PBI from diverse perspectives in various place contexts (i.e. city, region). However, no studies have identified the specific PBI component with which stakeholders are engaged. This is an important research gap because PBI components are interdependent and may have an impact on each other. By understanding how stakeholders are engaged with each PBI component, PBMO could develop strategies to enhance stakeholders’ engagement with specific PBI components.

Second, due to conflicting priorities, it is unclear how organisations with their own brands are engaged with an overarching brand identity with or without a contractual obligation. Thus, a more comprehensive exploration was warranted to support this assumption. This study
explored how organisations with their own brand identity are engaged with a multi-component overarching PBI within a country context during the implementation phase, and whether such engagement is possible at all. This leads us to the following research question:

“To what extent are stakeholders engaged with an overarching PBI and its different components?”

Method

Case study: Australia Unlimited

Given that there is insufficient knowledge of organisational stakeholder engagement with PBI, we adopted exploratory research method in the form of in-depth interviews to address the research question. A case study approach was considered appropriate for this research as we aim to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ organisational stakeholders are engaged with place brand identity – a phenomenon over which the researchers have little control (Yin, 2009).

Australia’s country branding initiative: Australia Unlimited (hereafter AU) was selected as the case for investigation because of its major focus in engaging national organisations to adopt and support its PBI (Australian Trade Commission, 2013). Prior to AU, Australia’s previous country branding initiatives (e.g. See Australia, Where the bloody hell are you?) were effective in positioning Australia as a tourism destination with leisure image (Winter and Gallon, 2008). However, such leisure image undermined Australia’s credibility as a business / investment destination. The Australian government developed AU to promote Australia’s professional and business-related capabilities to international audiences (Australian Trade Commission, 2012b). At the time of data collection, the AU initiative had moved from brand identity creation to the brand implementation phase (Australian Trade Commission, 2012a). In this phase, the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade), which was responsible for assisting Australian businesses with trade and investment, was mandated to be AU’s PBMO to
seek internal support from cross-sector organisational stakeholders within Australia – especially those involved in promoting Australia’s capabilities (i.e. business, investment, education, culture) internationally (Australian Trade Commission, 2013).

Data collection

In the initial phase of the research, we held interviews with three senior-level representatives of AU’s PBMO (Austrade) and brand consulting company that were involved in AU creation to get further insights about AU and its relevant stakeholders. This phase helped to refine the participant selection and the development of interview questions for the subsequent in-depth interviews. Phase 2 comprised semi-structured in-depth interviews with 39 senior-level representatives (i.e. Chief Executive Officers, Presidents, Marketing Directors, Senior Managers and other top-level strategic employees) of Australia’s national organisations (see Appendix 2). All participants were responsible for managing senior-level marketing, branding, positioning strategy and strategic decision-making of the organisation as well as any engagement with AU. Senior representatives of the organisations were considered as the most appropriate participants for this research as they could evaluate their organisations’ brand engagement on behalf of their organisation (Yin, 2009).

We employed purposive judgmental sampling (Cresswell, 2007) to access the most appropriate interviewees who were willing to provide insights regarding their organisations’ engagement with the PBI based on their experiences. We selected the organisations based on the data received from the PBMO as well as their roles in the development and implementation of AU (Merrilees et al., 2012). In total, 30 cross-sector national organisations (i.e. government agencies, public and private organisations as well as industry associations) participated in this study. In terms of sampling, we selected participants differentiated as primary (have direct involvement, high contribution and interactivity with the PBI) and secondary stakeholders
(may affect or be affected by the initiatives but do not have direct involvement) of AU, as study respondents. Thus, in this research, primary stakeholders refer to national organisations that were proactively involved in (See Appendix 1):

1) Both AU creation and implementation phases (coded as ‘A’); or
2) Either of the phases (coded as ‘B’) — involved only in the creation, coded as ‘B’ (creation), involved only in the implementation, coded as ’B’ (implementation).

Secondary stakeholders then were coded as ‘C’.

This study used thematic analysis method to analyse the transcribed interview data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). QSR NVivo 10.0 was used to assist in managing, analysing, and shaping the data (Creswell, 2007). The themes that emerged from the data were consequently integrated and compared with the literature.

**Data analysis and interpretation**

The findings suggest that stakeholders have different extent of engagement with various components of PBI. All primary stakeholders demonstrate engagement with the intangible components of AU. The vision of AU is to encourage favourable perceptions of Australia’s business and professional sectors, and their unlimited capabilities (Australian Trade Commission, 2013). The primary stakeholders could show that they are not only aware of AU vision but also show some identification with it, as exemplified below:

“We’re not limited by anything. We’re not even limited by the sea, we’re not limited by distance. We are Brand Australia, we see ourselves as Australian, we’re unlimited in what we can do…”

(B9)

Similarly, primary stakeholders showed that they understood the key strategy of AU, which is to convey a message that Australia is a future-focused country with unlimited opportunities (Australian Trade Commission, 2012a). For example, an executive chairman of an industry
association was able to articulate clearly AU’s strategy and showed that their organisation has been actively involved in promoting AU since its launch and integrate AU in their organisation strategy:

“The goal was to... pull everything together under a common brand which allowed Australia to tell the world in a single voice what we were all about... One message, one key message and the key message was that the opportunities within Australia for a business point of view are unlimited... once they launched [AU] we at the [A5] have been marketing ever since...” (A5a)

“Absolutely... We use the Australia Unlimited branding on our website, we use it in our publications, we use the designs for our trade shows...” (A3)

The majority of primary stakeholders highlighted that their organisational values are in alignment with that of AU, as expressed below by a Marketing Director of a public organisation:

“therefore our brand values revolve very much around innovation, outward looking, forward thinking and features such as that... [A7] in terms of our brand positioning are very much aligned to the [AU] positioning, innovative, forward thinking, future oriented... “ (A7)

In terms of AU brand personality, primary stakeholders demonstrated a positive attitude towards it, describing it as “competent” (A3) and “[high] quality” (B7). A positive brand is more likely to attract the stakeholders’ engagement and encourage them to adopt the brand in their organisational activities:

“Can do attitude, skill levels, competency, quality, ease of doing business with, all of those things... We’re probably one of the few organisations that use it on everything. I think we would be seen as one of the more supportive organisations in terms of using it across all our activities.” (A3)

When asked to describe their organisational relationship with AU, primary stakeholders highlighted that they have a “close relationship” (A4a) with the brand as well as with Austrade. The executive chairman of an industry association mentioned that they have "regular meetings with the AU team” (A5b). Another executive of a private organisation mentioned that they “see AU team as part of [our] corporate team” (B9), indicating that there is some degree of
integration between both entities. On the other hand, some primary stakeholders were unable to discuss their relationship with AU although they showed a positive attitude towards the other intangible components. A chief executive of a public trading company mentioned that although they could see the importance of AU, they do not have any relationship with the brand:

“So Australia Unlimited, I don’t know where it’s going to go. I will look forward to reading your paper. Part of what they’re on about has got our full support, we just question the symbolism that they’ve adopted.” (B7)

Almost all primary stakeholders are engaged with the AU tangible elements. Since all participants are national Australian organisations, they are engaged with the realities of Australia’s **physique components**. Almost all other stakeholders mentioned that they feel connected to and can identify with AU because it has been successful in representing Australia’s positive capabilities:

*we’re a pretty large continent and if you just look at the statistics about the size of the country and the capability of the country, for us we look at the tourism value as well and promoting Australia as a cruising destination for [xxx industry] (A3)*

While most of the stakeholders are aware of AU’s **visual presentation component**, some are not engaged with it. AU’s visual presentation refers to its logo, symbol and slogan that were created to visually represent the professional capabilities of modern Australia (Australian Trade Commission, 2012a), as shown in Figure 1. All secondary stakeholders, except C2, were generally aware of the visual component of AU compared to other PBI components. They clearly stated that they are at least aware of what the logo and slogan look like, although they do not understand its meaning:

“It’s like two boomerangs with Australia Unlimited written in it... I can see merit to it with the trade part but not with [my industry] and development at all. I think it would be inappropriate to use that overarching brand for that...” (C4)

“What it looks like?... With the two sort of boomerangs? No, I think it’s not a very good logo because it’s more of a tourism logo than anything else...” (C3)
Stakeholders that were engaged only in the creation phase show no clear engagement with the visual presentation since they misunderstood the meaning of AU’s logo:

“You’re talking about the branding with boomerangs?... Part of what they’re on about has got our full support, we just question the symbolism that they’ve adopted... The difficulty they’ve got is it’s a symbol that doesn’t immediately connect with Australia... A lot of people say different things to that, a lot of the people that I deal with quite a bit call refer to it as the bent sticks” (B7)

The word “boomerangs” was used by secondary stakeholders to describe the AU presentation. For them, such “boomerangs” do not represent their organisation, industry and Australia’s capabilities. In fact, according to the PBMOs, the logo is not supposed to be perceived as “boomerangs”:

“they weren’t boomerangs or anything like that, this idea of the shape of Australia, we didn’t want to use a marsupial or a kangaroo, we wanted an intelligent expression of Australia so we based on the map of Australia the idea of this bright arrows of optimism like containing great ideas but also reaching out into the world.” (A2)

Primary stakeholders showed not only awareness, but also positive understanding of what the visual presentation means, and have used it in their international activities. They are not only aware of AU brand presentation but have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what the logo means. While secondary stakeholders described the logo as “boomerangs” that has no significant meaning for them, primary stakeholders related the word with more meaningful associations:

“... it’s like two boomerangs and it looks a bit like it’s more like ...a direction sign... We use it on our business cards and it’s on our letterhead.” (A5b)

“... it’s sort of the two sides of a boomerang and looks like a map of Australia... We use it on our home page, our web page. We use it on our primary print material. We use it on any promotional material where we think it’s appropriate... ” (A6)

When asked about the significance of referring to AU’s visual presentation in their activities, the chief executive officer of B11 explained in detail how they adopted the AU brand presentation, especially in their international activities:
“Everywhere we went we had [AU]. We put [AU] on our road cases so we had big stickers made that went on all our road cases that we travelled with. We had it here. We held a function here before we left as well. So we held two functions: one here and one in London and the function here was attended by a lot of ... [AU]’s also on our website as well...[showing t-shirt” (B11)

Emergent typologies of engagement

It is clear from the data that stakeholders engage with PBI in different ways. This leads to an identification of typology of organisations’ engagement in the place branding context, as summarised in Figure 2. As will be discussed later in this section, there are some degrees of similarities between stakeholders’ engagement with AU and the typologies of engagement discussed in the consumer context (customer brand engagement - Hollebeek et al., 2014) and employee context (employee brand engagement - Burmann et al., 2009b). Some stakeholders are engaged only with the intangible aspects of AU by demonstrating moral support, positive word-of-mouth, and future engagement intention, without internalising AU as part of their organisation’s strategy. Such engagement is termed *philosophical engagement*. Other stakeholders demonstrate engagement with both the tangible and intangible aspects of AU by becoming AU brand partner, adopting its logo, and formally internalising AU as part of their strategy. Such engagement is termed *concrete engagement*.

As seen in Figure 2, organisations with concrete engagement show behavioural support towards AU by becoming its brand partner and sponsored partner in international events. Such engagement is managed through the stakeholder-PBI relationship:

“...we partnered with Australia Unlimited in the missions that year and that helped us in both [xxx] and in [xxx] as well... we actually had the Australia Unlimited booth at what’s called the [B3’s event in xxx] and we had each of the states underneath that umbrella of Australia Unlimited. [B3-AU co-branding has] really been a branding when we’ve been overseas. Our constant marketing, our website has very similar colours to Australia Unlimited...” (B3)
The importance of partnership in place brand building is evident in this study. Stakeholders partnered up with PBMO to participate in international events to ‘bring the brand to life’, making it more visible for the international target market. The literature suggests that such partnership will ensure that the brand values are understood and engaged with by all partners (i.e. primary service, infrastructure, customers and media relations) by conforming to certain partnership standards and requirements (Hankinson, 2007). This is also evident in this research as both the PBMO and stakeholders confirmed that there are partnership standards to which both entities need to conform. In this study, primary stakeholders have shown concrete engagement by adopting and conforming to AU’s tangible components, such as visual presentation, by becoming AU brand partners.

Some scholars have indicated that stakeholders might be engaged with a PBI in the form of brand alliances (Dooley and Bowie, 2005, Hankinson, 2004). The notion of brand alliance is relevant to the findings of this study. Co-branding has been identified in this research as one of the visible means by which stakeholder organisations could be engaged with a PBI. Primary stakeholders have indicated that they are engaged with AU by becoming its co-branding partner:

“They came to B10 to tell us about the brand, about the Australia Unlimited programs and then to invite us to co-brand and then we’ve had regular meetings with them by phone or in person since we joined or signed the co-branding agreement and so they update us on their activities through those meetings as well as through various mail outs and other means…” (B10d)

Helmig et al. (2008) suggested several characteristics of co-branding in the product branding context such as: being independent of each other, having a similar purpose, and showing cooperation visible to potential buyers. Participants in this research indicated that their brands were independent before the agreement (e.g. B10), have a purpose similar to that of AU (e.g. A3, B9), and show visible brand cooperation to their targeted audience a (i.e. on their collaterals, international events) because of the co-branding agreement:
“They [Austrade] were a great partner to work with... I have to say their Australia Unlimited article is one of the best written... it is on our website but I think it’s on their website too... Then we also had massive great hanging posters and stuff all with Brand Australia all over them. So I think there was quite a lot of recognition and then of course all over our website and you’ve got the social media that goes with it, brand site recognition, front page website recognition, all of that…” (B9)

As Helmig et al. (2008) suggested, co-branding in the product context will result in a product integration of two co-branded brands. A product in the place branding context refers to the place as well as its people, architecture, capabilities, functions and all other elements that make up the place, which may satisfy the needs, wants and demands of the target audiences (Kotler et al., 1993). In the place branding context, co-branding refers to collaborative efforts to enhance and develop the place’s physique (e.g. people, infrastructure, education) to deliver the promises of the co-branding agreement.

While this notion is consistent with the literature (Hankinson, 2004), the findings reflect that product integration in this case study is mainly in the context of consistent marketing collaterals and publications. According to the stakeholders, Australia’s as well as their organisations’ capabilities have been well presented by AU and its brand promise has already represented facts about Australia’s capabilities (i.e. B3, B9, A5). The main issue for Australia was not to develop the actual physique to deliver the PBI promises, but rather to distribute consistent and favourable communications about the country (i.e. B7). The integration of product that was referred to in general branding studies could refer to the integration of brand communications in the case of AU. However, in the context city branding, a more concrete engagement where place branding effort is seen as a place transformative tool, not merely an alignment of marketing collaterals and publications can be seen in in Joo and Seo’s (2018) case study of Seoul’s city branding. Seoul’s internal stakeholders’ concrete engagement in a form of partnership with place branding effort and strategy was clearly evident as actual changes were made in the city policy. In their research, it was clear that place branding effort was seen as a transformative tool for the city’s identity, not merely marketing collaterals, as the internal
stakeholders re-aligned their policies with that of the place brand. This is also consistent with the most recent developments in the literature where place branding is seen as an opportunity for internal stakeholders to participate and transform the place (Lucarelli, 2018). Arguably, place brand internalisation or integration in terms of place physique, nor merely marketing collaterals or visual brand elements, seems possible.

Place brand internalisation also evident in this research. In the context of corporate branding, the internalisation of a corporate brand is defined as the degree to which the corporate brand values are being conveyed to employees to ensure that such values are delivered by employees to relevant stakeholders (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). This involves the ways in which senior employers within the stakeholder organisations communicate and convey the brand internally within the organisation (Balmer et al., 2006). In PBI context, Balakrishnan (2009) argued that stakeholders should assimilate and internalise the brand in order to deliver brand promises. There is limited research on place branding that explores how stakeholders internalise a PBI within their organisation. Our findings suggest that highly-engaged stakeholders are not only engaged in place brand participation, but also proactively internalise AU within their organisations by conveying the AU brand components to specific departments, employees and member organisations (in the case of industry associations):

“All of our internal communication tools are branded with the same visual identity so we have stuff in our newsletters, internal website, internal site, various other tools like that and they’re all branded following the visual identity guidelines… all of our communicators or all of our business development managers, they would have had a greater awareness of what the AU program was doing and why it’s beneficial for [B10] to be involved in that.” (B10b)

Other stakeholders demonstrate understanding and identification with the PBI vision, values, values, personality, and strategy while maintaining close relationship with PBMO without necessarily becoming AU brand partner, as exemplified by the comment below:

“Look I think [AU is] really positive as well. Again I guess it really reiterates that a place to do business and anything’s possible and that proactive opportunity as well. I think it fits really well from a business perspective….” (B1)
Some stakeholders (industry associations) show philosophical support, not by using the visual presentation components, but through advocacy—by spreading positive stories about AU and promoting it to other organisations and their members. The characteristics of these stakeholders resemble the characteristics of brand advocates, especially the ‘silent loyalists’ proposed by Schultz (2000) – those that are not very proactive or visible in supporting the brand, but will encourage others to do so.

“They gave me folders of information and I probably looked at it at the time ... so I would have passed on that information to my members…” (B5)

Stakeholders have also demonstrated engagement with AU strategy components by having their members featured in AU marketing tools such as AU magazines and publications, and vice versa. However, their involvement is limited to the creation of such campaign and they did not continue their engagement in the implementation phase:

“... we had five artists that they were able to write about in their Australia Unlimited magazine and they were able to film and photograph which we did. I have to say their Australia Unlimited article is one of the best written...So I often use that programme when people ask me to explain the orchestra, I just say go read this, it’s fantastic.” (B9)

“So we had a story done in [AU] magazine and then all of the social media that they generated as a result of the relationship and around the event so there’s all those additional activities…” (B11)

Some stakeholders are willing to be engaged with AU in the future, but not currently engaged with it at the time of the interviews:

“... there’s probably a bigger opportunity into the future... I’ve definitely got a lot of Australia Unlimited collateral... it would be an opportunity for us to look to explore in the future…” (B1)

“I’m keen to learn more. I think it’s a good thing and considering we’re a very small player in the international convention space, any advantage or collaboration we can have with the federal government...could be very powerful. So for a client to understand that they’ve got the Australian industry backing is important...” (B2)

**Discussion and Implications**

This study aimed to explore how and in what ways organisational stakeholder are engaged with multiple components of PBI in the implementation phase, in the context of country branding
initiative. Several findings that emerged from the data have addressed the research question and provided several theoretical and managerial implications.

Because the focus of literature to date is on residents’ engagement with a PBI (e.g. Braun, 2013, Kemp et al., 2012, Merrilees et al., 2009, Zenker and Erfgen, 2014), we know little about how organisational stakeholders are engaged with a PBI. This study therefore contributes to the place brand literature domain that have been predominantly applied to individuals (i.e. customers and employees). By examining organisations’ engagement with a PBI, this study has responded to the call for research from recent scholars (Zenker, 2013, Hollebeek, 2011, Kavaratzis and Dennis, 2018), who encouraged more research into brand engagement beyond the context of customers so as to include organisational stakeholders.

This research contributes to the literature by providing a refined definition of what stakeholder engagement means in the organisational context. Place brand literature to date has not provided a clear and comprehensive definition of organisational stakeholder engagement with a PBI. This research contributes to the literature by providing a clearer and more comprehensive definition of stakeholder engagement in the place branding context by considering the multi-component nature of the PBI. This definition would ensure that there is a unification of understanding in the literature that may lead to integration of research and knowledge in this area and better machination of stakeholder engagement with PBI (Hanna and Rowley, 2011). According to the themes emerging from the findings, organisational stakeholder engagement with a PBI can be defined as:

the extent to which organisational stakeholders demonstrate understanding, alignment, and identification with the place brand vision, values, personality, and strategy by becoming brand partner and/or advocate.
A key contribution of this research is a clearer conceptualisation of stakeholder engagement in place branding context on the basis of empirical findings. Our findings suggest that the conceptualisation of PBI is comparable to the conceptualisation of brand engagement in customer or employee contexts. As shown in the findings, philosophical engagement is reflected by an organisation’s understanding, identification and alignment with the brand’s intangible components. Such engagement is closely related to ‘cognitive and emotional engagement’ in the consumer brand engagement context (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and ‘identification’ in the employee branding context (Burmann et al., 2009a). On the other hand, concrete engagement includes elements of philosophical engagement plus visible support such as the adoption of the brand for promotional purposes and becoming a brand partner through co-branding and place brand internalisation. This form of engagement is akin to the ‘behavioural’ element in the consumer brand engagement context (Hollebeek et al., 2014) as well as ‘internalisation’ in the employee brand engagement context (Burmann et al., 2009a).

While the literature focuses mainly on the creation phase of PBI (Karvelyte and Chiu, 2011, Peric, 2011), this research contributes to theory development for the PBI implementation phase, which is crucial because the long-term success of any place branding activities depends on its actual implementation (Konecnik and de Chernatony, 2012). On a more practical note, the typology of PBI components established in this study offer a framework for place brand managers to better identify the components that are currently lacking stakeholder support, and to subsequently provide a platform for improvements without overhauling the whole place branding initiative. For example, in this study, although many stakeholders demonstrate philosophical engagement with AU, concrete engagement with the visual presentation of AU is lacking. Identifying such engagement gaps is important as because stakeholders need to be comprehensively engaged with all PBI components to effectively deliver place brand promise (Hanna and Rowley, 2011, Kavaratzis, 2012).
The typologies presented in this study allow place brand managers to have a clearer understanding of the different roles that stakeholders play in the whole process of place brand management. To encourage co-branding partnership with stakeholders, a PBMO needs to develop consistent marketing collaterals and publications as a form of ‘product integration’ between the PBMO and its key stakeholders. Such marketing collaterals provided by the PBMO is regarded as marketing support that would facilitate a more concrete engagement.

Additionally, our findings provide useful insights for brand managers, especially those operating in an environment where several independent corporations may share a brand (e.g. tourism and food industries). For example, in the tourism industry, many tourist places share an overarching brand identity representing their region, while also managing their own brand (Charters and Spielmann, 2014). The typologies of engagement found in this study could help regional brand managers to classify their stakeholders based on the extent of their engagement with the regional brand, and devise strategies to encourage a more concrete engagement among all stakeholders. While previous studies did not consider philosophical engagement as a form of engagement, our study found that brand managers should pay attention to such engagement type as stakeholders with this type of engagement could potentially demonstrate a stronger (more concrete) engagement in the future.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The researchers acknowledge several limitations in this study that could be addressed by future research. First, this study relied on qualitative data based on one case study to answer the research questions. Future research might consider the use of other case studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the PBI phenomenon. Second, with regards to the research instruments, a priori constructs, which are included in the interview questions, may constrain the study findings. Future research can rely solely on participants’ descriptions of their
experiences in order to provide deeper insights that did not emerge in this study. Finally, the use of judgmental sampling technique may have limited the type of respondents that could participate in the present study. Future research could address this limitation by expanding the types of respondents to include more business representatives, particularly those intending to expand their business globally, as this is a relevant target segment for any PBI initiatives. Further, recent developments in place branding literature have shown some possibilities of a more concrete and intense integration with the place’s policy (e.g. Joo and Seo, 2018, Lucarelli, 2018), which were not evident in this research. Future research might investigate whether or not this integration is applicable to country branding context.

The themes that were identified from the data in this study lead to further questions that could be addressed by future research. For example: given the lack of awareness of primary and secondary stakeholders of what a place brand represents, what would be the most appropriate method to educate stakeholders of PBI? What are the most effective strategies that PBMO could implement to convert stakeholders’ philosophical engagement to a concrete engagement with a PBI? It is hoped that the present research will draw more attention to this important topic.


### APPENDIX 1. National Organisations Stakeholders of Australia Unlimited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary ‘A’</th>
<th>Primary ‘B’</th>
<th>Secondary (C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both creation and implementation</td>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Associations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Organisations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Organisations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30 Organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX 2. Respondents Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>Coded</th>
<th>Industries</th>
<th>Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Agencies</strong> (4 organisations; 7 interviewees)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1a</td>
<td>Trade (international, education, investment)</td>
<td>General Manager - Marketing, Online and Business Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1b</td>
<td>Trade (international, education, investment)</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1c</td>
<td>Trade (international, education, investment)</td>
<td>Assistant General Manager, Marketing &amp; Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A4a</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>Director, Economic Diplomacy, Trade Advocacy and Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A4b</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>Executive Officer, Trade and Economic Diplomacy Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B13</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Chief Marketing Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C4</td>
<td>Public Diplomacy</td>
<td>Assistant Director, Public Diplomacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry Associations</strong> (11 organisations; 12 interviewees)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A5a</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>Executive Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A5b</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>National Manager/Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Tourism (business events)</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Tourism (business events)</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services (creative)</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Manufacturing (food and grocery)</td>
<td>Director Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B5</td>
<td>Public Administration and Safety</td>
<td>Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Trade (international)</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B8</td>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services</td>
<td>National Manager - Communications and Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services</td>
<td>International Development Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Organisations</strong> (12 organisations; 17 interviewees)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Manager, International Marketing &amp; Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Director Marketing and Future Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10a</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Service</td>
<td>National Operations Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10b</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>Advisor, International Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10c</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>General Manager, Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10d</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>Communications advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12a</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Executive Director, Engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12b</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Manager, International Campaigns and Customer Acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B14a</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Deputy Vice Chancellor and Vice President (Global Engagement)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B14b</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Associate Vice President</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B15</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Vice President, International L8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B16</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Senior Manager International Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td>Trade (wholesale)</td>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Information, Media and Telecommunications</td>
<td>Head of Marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Director Marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>International Director</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C7</td>
<td>Education and Training (tertiary)</td>
<td>Director, Marketing and Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Organisations</strong> (3 organisations; 3 interviewees)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
<td>Co-founder and Managing Director</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B11</td>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services (performing)</td>
<td>Artistic Director/CEO</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B9</td>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services (performing)</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td></td>
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