

Using Mixed-Method Technique to Investigate Role of Local Governments in City Branding

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Abstract: Local governments provide a range of local services, preserve the life and liberty of residents, creating space for democratic participation and civic dialogue, supporting market-led and environmentally sustainable development. City branding supplies the principles for the city developing policy to sustain the local development. In other words, city branding means being powerful to face the increasing wild competition for resources, investment, and tourism facilities, both for addressing crucial social issues and cultural variation. The purpose of this study is (i) to investigate the role of local governments in city branding, (ii) to determine city branding contribution to local economic development (LED). Although there are plenty place branding techniques in the world, the success of the city branding strategy cannot be performed without the participation of a local government. In addition, the current study selects the city of Durban in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa as the context of the study and a local government to focus on. The problem is that the city of Durban has not been successful at making the city competitive enough to attract the needed investments. The city officials have also not been effectively marketing the city to the world to make known of its inherent potentials. This study seeks to overcome this issue by developing city branding strategies. The city management need to take proactive action in implementing them to effectively market the city to the world. To achieve objectives, the study adopts the form of a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative (survey questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth interview) as methods and instruments for data collection. The study follows a sequential design starting with quantitative and followed by qualitative data collection. Since the study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods, both purposive sampling (for qualitative phase) and simple random sampling (for quantitative phase) techniques will be selected. The researcher selected participants from Durban municipality. The study's sample size constitutes 350 participants (N=320 was surveyed) and (30 were interviewed). The researcher analysed the data collected with questionnaires through descriptive and inferential statistics and data collected using in-depth interviews through content analysis.

Keywords: mixed-methods, sequential design, local government, city branding.

1. Introduction

Research based on studies deploying a mixed-method approach is scant and limited. Hence, the current study uses the mixed-method approach to extend the knowledge on mixed-methods approach. Creswell (2014) and Denscombe (2016) argued that methodological integration results in improved understanding of research issues and strengthen the position of the study.

The current study aims to examine the role of local governments in city branding to gain city competitive value. The following are subordinate objectives of the study: (i) To examine the role of local governments in city branding, (ii) To explore the branding strategies of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, (iii) To determine city branding contribution to local economic development (LED).

Academic discourse about mixed-methods approach has not been receiving increasing interest on scholars and practitioners. Researchers either employ qualitative method or quantitative method as a research strategy. Therefore, the current study fills this gap by examining the role of local governments in city branding by applying the mixed-method approach. Although there is a great abundance of research on local governments and city branding, however, the specific academic literature seems to be fuzzy when it comes to understanding the role of local governments, exploring the branding strategies, and determining the contribution of city branding on LED using mixed-method approach.

The current paper has developed from the PhD thesis which is an in-progress thesis on the research methodology chapter (Zulu and Phiri, 2021). The PhD thesis has employed the mixed-method technique to approach the study. Studies by Phiri and Madondo (2018:10) has found that "research on business management studies predict that in South Africa researchers generally prefer the quantitative and qualitative methodological adoption and implementation." This suggest that authors neglect the adoption of a mixed method and select either qualitative or quantitative method (Phiri and Madondo, 2018). This is where the current study wishes to close the gap in knowledge and employ the mixed-method technique to investigate the current issue. The study begins by

presenting the review of literature which includes the main studies related to the theme under the current study. The explanation of the methodology section in the current study follows, with the subsequent analysis of results. This section will be followed by the presentation of discussion of the findings, followed by the conclusion and reference list.

2. Literature review

2.1 Local government

The two-fold essentialities (purposes) that local government serves are (a) supplying goods and services come under administrative purpose, (b) the representation and the involvement of masses in locating particular public need and objectivity to understand how these needs can be met (Adnan, 2012). The administration and representation at local levels inside the structure of local government is connected and formulated by the process of representatives at local government (Adnan, 2012). For the enhancement of creating a better understanding about the local government's structure and functions, it is essential to elaborate and define local government. As an element of decentralization, local government is a result of devolution. Adnan (2012:4) posited that "in the context of literature, there are two advances to define the local government. In aspect of comparative studies, under the central government, all those national structures are regarded as central government. In the second approach, the specifics and particular characteristics that determines local government in more circumspect manner." Therefore, these distinguished features mainly focus on the five following aspects: (1) legal personality, (2) localness, (3) effective participation by citizens, (4) extensive budgetary and employing self-sufficiency in regard to bounded control from central authority, and (5) particular powers to execute a variety of functions (Adnan, 2012). These attributes are significant in separating it from the different forms of institutions at local level and furthermore, it makes certain that organizational effectiveness is maintained at a speedy rate.

Robson (1937:574) studies found that local government from the perspective of legality as: "In broad categorization, local government may engage the formation of a protective, community that is non sovereign and contains the legal rights and essential institution to articulate its internal associations. The prevalence of authorities at local level with authority to perform without external involvement and control along with the local community's participation in the administration of its own affairs are assumed in turn of those regulations". In addition, Gomme (1987:1-2) studies of local government found that local government "is a sub part of the entire government of a nation or states is regarded as local government that is managed and administered by the system subordinate to authority of state but independently elected of the state's authority control, by competent persons local, or containing properties in specific localities, which regions have been structured through common interests and common histories by the communities."

The views of both Robson (1937) and Gomme (1987) have strongly argued that local government are not entirely free from the control of the central government. This indicates that the power and authority enjoyed by the local government is to relative extent and it is because of the responsibilities are split among national and local government for the provision of services. Furthermore, it is vital to note that these divisions of responsibilities are done according to the political interests and policy related agenda. In the designing of sound democratic political system local government should be viewed as the cornerstone as it serves as a cardiac vehicle on specific level to ensure able and conscientious citizenship.

2.2 Local government efficiency

Narbon-Perpinaa and de Witte (2016:2) studies found that "the efficient management of the available resources in local governments has been a topic of high interest in the field of management studies." Therefore, according to de Borgerand Kerstens (1996a) there is possibility of two strands of the empirical study. First studies by Worthington and Dollery, 2001; Benito-Lopez et. al., 2011; Benito et. al., 2015 focused on evaluation of a particular local service, such as refuse collection and street cleaning, water services (Garcia-Sanchez, 2006a), street lighting (Lorenzo and Sanchez, 2007), fire services (Garcia-Sanchez, 2006b), library services (Stevens, 2005) or road maintenance (Kalb, 2012). Other studies by Narbon-Perpinaa and de Witte (2016) evaluate local performance from a "global point of view" considering that local governments supply a wide variety of services and facilities. The efficient provision of these services impacts the image of the city hence attracts inward investment.

From the global point of view, numerous studies have attempted to investigate and determine external factors affect local governments' performance. In their study de Witte and Kortelainen (2013:2) found that "municipalities face different environmental conditions in terms of social, demographic, economic, political, financial, geographical, and institutional, among others. These environmental variables can have a huge impact on the efficiency scores because they are beyond the control of local managers." For example, municipalities located in tourist attraction areas may have higher costs when providing some public services and facilities during some periods of the year. These municipalities could be unable to achieve the "best practice" due to their relative harsh environment and, as a consequence, leading to biased efficiency results and wrong-headed policy implications (de Witte and Kortelainen, 2013).

In addition, there are many contextual variables that face municipalities and affect their performance. According to Narbon-Perpinaa and de Witte (2016:2) the most prevalent method they employed in their research include Tobit censored regression model and ordinary least squares (OLS) or single and double bootstrap methods (Simar and Wilson, 2007). These methods were selected to understand environmental variables in local government efficiency. Their studies found that "the multistage approaches assume (implicitly) a separability condition where the operational environment would not influence the input or output levels, but only efficiency." Da Cruz and Marques (2014) proposed a classification for the different type of determinants, and they are observed variables in six main categories: social and demographic determinants, economic determinants, financial determinants, and geographical or natural determinants. According to studies by Narbon-Perpinaa and de Witte (2016) these are determinants that affect the city. However, the current study focused on discussing the economic determinant as it relates to the theme of the research. Narbon-Perpinaa and de Witte (2016:2) found that "this group of environmental variables is composed by variables related to the economic situation of each local government. It is explained by seven indicators: unemployment, citizen's disposable income, economic status, tourist index, commercial activity, industrial activity." On tourism particularly, Gimenez and Prior (2007) and Perez-Lopez et. al., (2015) found a positive relation between this variable and efficiency, concluding that the more tourism activity, the lower the cost excess. Finally, some studies (Nakazawa, 2014) found that tourism is not statistically significant.

2.3 City branding

In our days, the branding of places and more specifically of cities, has gained an extraordinary momentum among city officials (Anholt, 2010). As such, "place marketers are striving to settle the city as a brand, with the purpose of promoting to existing and potential target groups; and differentiate themselves from each other, to assert their individuality in pursuit of various economic, political, or socio-psychological objectives" (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005:183). Living in a world where competition is fierce, it is about time to start thinking about finding new ways to improve the image of the city with the purpose of attracting visitors and investors. In this respect, Kotler et al., (2003:3-4) advocate that "many cities and towns are "dying or chronically depressed", others can experience "boom and bust characteristics", while "favoured few" enjoy continuous and strong growth.

Because city officials are becoming aware of the strategic importance of branding a destination, the average per capita of city marketing budget allocated has reached promising numbers (Kotler, 2011). The need to establish a successful brand for the city has been further applauded by other scholars, who rationalize upon the consequences of not having a city brand. Therefore, Trueman et. al., (2004) cited in Kasapi and Cela (2017) highlights:

"Poor perceptions of a city can devalue its image and have far reaching consequences for its future prosperity. These negative associations may reduce the likelihood of inward investment, undermine business community activities, and have a detrimental effect on the number of visitors, thereby exacerbating urban decline"

3. Methodology

The methodological procedure used in the current study is tied in the mixed-method paradigm. With qualitative analysis it was possible to contextualize and collect information about the object of the study, the data collection, its analysis, and respective results (Bogdan and Biklen, 2013); these data were subsequently coded and analysed quantitatively. Leedy and Ormrod (2001); Williams (2011) describes the research methodology as the holistic steps a researcher employ in embarking on a research work. Research methods in social sciences are often divided into two main types: quantitative and qualitative methods. The current study employed both

qualitative and quantitative research method. According to de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011:6), each method has its “own purposes, methods for conducting an inquiry, strategies for collecting and analysing data, and criteria for judging quality”.

3.1 Research Strategy: Mixed-Methods

Bryman (2008:22) refers to a “research strategy as a general orientation that determines how the research is to be conducted.” The research approach is usually informed by the nature of the research problem. Three classification of research strategies as identified by Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) and Bryman (2008) are quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2004:27), “a mixed-methods approach is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches.” According to Creswell (2015), a mixed-method strategy of inquiry includes the sequential strategy, concurrent strategy, and transformative strategy. The current study adopted the sequential mixed methods strategy, which involves the researcher expanding the findings of one method with another method (Creswell, 2015). Bryman (2008: 607) stated that this is a “form of mixed methods approach arises when one strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other strategy.” Therefore, the quantitative approach will be adopted as the main strategy being facilitated by the qualitative approach. The researcher will begin with a quantitative approach, followed by a qualitative method involving explanation through semi-structured interviews with a few individuals. The elements described and analysed will be people, governance, tourism, exports, culture and heritage, and investment and immigration.

The current study subscribes to the research strategy recommendations on similar studies by Lewis and Soureli (2006) and Mostert (2002) who adopted a mixed-methods approach. To a greater extent, there will be a need to measure the relationship between variables and to test hypotheses in this study. This will be done through statistical (quantitative) analysis. To a lesser extent, there will also be a need to examine the role of local governments in city branding to gain competitive value. This will be done through a qualitative approach. The qualitative dimension will also be inevitable as it will allow for speculative discussion in the discussion chapter. In support of this, Schiffman and Kanuk (2004:27) maintain that “quantitative and qualitative approaches are complementary in nature.” Quantitative research makes prediction possible while qualitative research provides a better understanding of the phenomena. Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research results a richer and more robust profile of consumer behaviour than either research approach used alone (Makanyeza, 2014). “Combined findings make it possible for marketers to design more meaningful and effective marketing strategies” (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004:28).

3.2 Research Design

Zikmund and Babin (2007:75) described a research design as “a general plan that guides how the research is to be conducted.” According to Malhotra and Peterson (2006: 71) a “research design provides a framework that directs the procedures to be followed when collecting data relevant for particular research.” In other words, a research design is the overall plan or framework in which the study is conducted. It is a logical structure of enquiry (De Vaus, 2001). Bryman (2008) noted that the choice of research design is largely influenced by the research problem. Research designs are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. The overall decision involves which design should be used to study a topic (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013).

Creswell (2009: 59) stated that “researchers benefit from being familiar with the numerous classifications of mixed methods designs found in the literature. These classifications represent different disciplines, and they use different terminology.” Creswell (2009) posited that researchers should be aware of the range of mixed methods design types, as well as the discipline-based discussions of mixed methods designs. According to Creswell (2009: 59) “there are four major types of mixed methods designs and these are the Triangulation Design, the Embedded Design, the Explanatory Design, and the Exploratory Design. The following table 5.2 provide an overview of the mixed method design classifications.

Amongst the four major types of mixed methods designs identified by Creswell (2009), the current study has adopted the explanatory design. The explanatory design is a two-phase mixed methods design. The overall purpose of this design is that qualitative data helps explain or build upon initial quantitative results (Creswell, Plano Clark, et. al., 2003). This design is well suited for the current study as the researcher needed qualitative data to explain significant (or nonsignificant) results, outlier results, or surprising results (Morse, 1991). This design can also be used when a researcher wants to form groups based on quantitative results and follow up

with the groups through subsequent qualitative research (Morgan, 1998; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) or to use quantitative participant characteristics to guide purposeful sampling for a qualitative phase (Creswell, Plano Clark, et. al., 2003).

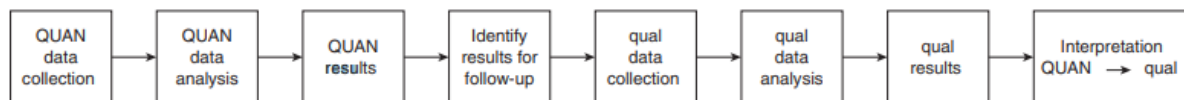
3.3 Procedure of the explanatory design

The explanatory design (also known as the explanatory sequential design) is a two-phase mixed methods design (see fig. 5.1) (Creswell, 2006). This design starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This first phase is followed by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The second, qualitative phase of the study is designed so that it follows from (or connects to) the results of the first quantitative phase. Because this design begins quantitatively, researchers typically place greater emphasis on the quantitative methods than the qualitative methods (Creswell, 2006).

(a) Explanatory Design



(b) Explanatory Design: Follow-up Explanations Model



(c) Explanatory Design: Participant Selection Model

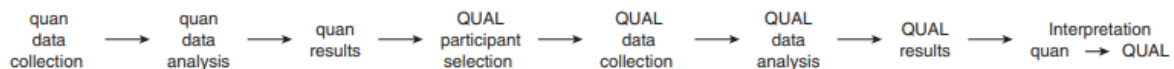


Figure 1: Explanatory design

Source: Creswell, 2006

4. Strengths and challenges of explanatory design

4.1 Strengths of the explanatory design

The Explanatory Design is considered the most straightforward of the mixed methods designs. The advantages of this design that made the researcher to adopt it incorporate the following:

- Its two-phase structure makes it straightforward to implement, because the researcher conducts the two methods in separate phases and collects only one type of data at a time. This means that single researchers can conduct this design; a research team is not required to carry out the design (Creswell, 2006: 74).
- The final report can be written in two phases, making it straightforward to write and providing a clear delineation for readers (Creswell, 2006: 74).
- This design lends itself to multiphase investigations, as well as single mixed methods studies (Creswell, 2006: 74).
- This design appeals to quantitative researchers because it often begins with a strong quantitative orientation (Creswell, 2006: 74).

4.2 Challenges in Using the Explanatory Design

Although the Explanatory Design is straightforward, researchers choosing this approach still face challenges specific to this design (Creswell, 2006). For all variants:

- This design requires a lengthy amount of time for implementing the two phases. Researchers should recognize that the qualitative phase (depending on the emphasis) will take more time than the quantitative phase, but that the qualitative phase can be limited to a few participants. Still, adequate time must be budgeted for the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2006: 74).

- The researcher must decide whether to use the same individuals for both phases, to use individuals from the same sample for both phases, and to draw participants from the same population for the two phases (Creswell, 2006: 74).

5. Results

The current study collected data from 350 participants. Data was collected from the city central government of Durban municipality and staff members within this municipality. Data was explored and presented in the form of tables. The researcher addressed critical objectives of the study by collecting data using a survey questionnaire (quantitative technique) and semi-structured interview (qualitative technique). A stratified random sample of 320 respondents was selected, and the questionnaire was administered. This was followed by the collection of qualitative data using the semi-structured interview of 30 participants. This section presents quantitative data followed by the qualitative data.

5.1 Response rate

The response rate is defined as the ratio of the number of usable questionnaires to the legible respondents in the sample (Fincham, 2008). The researcher distributed 320 questionnaires to the respondents. The researcher anticipated a high response rate hence the respondents returned 299 completed questionnaires yielding a response rate of 92%. This high response rate was attributed to the simplicity and the length of the questionnaire (questions were structured very well and were simple to complete), and the way in which the questionnaire was administered (respondents will be given the questionnaires and will be told that once they had completed it, they could return them to the researcher). On the other hand, qualitatively the researcher received an 69% response rate from the executives of the city. The reason for this percentage was that the city government is considered busy officials however the researcher made efforts to receive the highest response rate possible.

5.2 Reliability of research instrument

Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to assess the reliability of the questionnaire and internal consistency adopted for the study (Taber, 2017). In the business arena and social sciences research, the acceptable Cronbach's coefficient alpha score ranges from 0.70 to 0.80 (Taber, 2017).

Table 1.1: Cronbach's alpha test

Section	Valid Cases (N)	No of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Comment
A	320	35	0.785	Internally reliable

N=questionnaires the researcher distributed

The statistic in Table 1.1 above revealed 35 items that will have Cronbach alpha index of 0.785 which is above 0.7. This result indicates good internal consistency of the research instrument used. The questionnaire was reliable. The researcher concluded that the number of questions in the questionnaire document might have contributed to this high figure. This implied that the questionnaire results could be subjected to further analysis.

5.3 Qualitative results

The properties of cities are the basic elements which allow them to have a brand as a value in terms of the branding axis. A city's historical, geographical, cultural, and economic characteristics are the main criteria to be taken into consideration to evaluate a city in terms of making it a brand. The cities with a long history, the cities with geographical location which is suitable for presentation and the cities which are open to economic and financial development are one step ahead. However, as expressed in the definition of brand, the city must also have distinctive and characteristic features (such as logo, symbol, image, etc.) and this also must be supported by social values as well as individual lifestyles and behaviour patterns (Anholt, 2010:6-7; Cevher, 2012: 107-108).

6. Discussion

The aim of this paper aimed at inspiring and extending knowledge on the power of a mixed-method approach as developed by ongoing research and methodology studies scholars like Collins et. al., (2006) and Creswell (2014). In addition, mixed method research approach values multiple disciplines, and allows interpretive and integrative which is the heart of continuum (Dumay, 2009). It addresses a wide spectrum of exploratory, explanatory, and confirmatory questions at the same time, whereas studies that use one methodological component usually addresses single-minded results and findings and that keeps theory away from practice (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2006; Dumay, 2009). This paper therefore proposes more consideration in adopting mixed methods reducing the methodological bias and scepticism in business management academics and

experts (Phiri and Madondo, 2018). This means proposing for research results that are less biased – but close the gap between theory and practice (Dumay, 2009).

Is city branding policies effective at attracting business? Respondents were broadly positive about place branding's potential utility in attracting businesses. Place branding policy can be used to guide identification, enhancement and leveraging of the place-based advantages a city or region has to offer, tailoring the image of the area to align with the needs of the business (Cleave, Arku, Sadler and Gilliland 2016). It is through this well-measured and substantive approach to coordination, organization and promotion of local resources that provides the best opportunity for effective policy development (Cleave et al., 2016). The current study found that effectiveness in the city is purely the alignment of city elements. This demonstrates how place branding can be maximized to increase its utility in business attraction (Cleave et al., 2016). Lever and Turok (1999:792) noted that 'cities and other places compete with one another. This takes many different forms – some direct head-to-head competition for particular projects or events; others more indirect, subtle and incremental in nature'.

Place branding is a competitive tool, as the policy aims to differentiate one area from its competitors with the goal of creating inward investment (Cleave et al., 2016). If properly designed and executed, it has the potential to benefit to the local economy. An important caveat, however, is that simply undertaking place branding will not guarantee local growth or prosperity (Cleave et al., 2016). The uneven distribution of a finite set of resources will result in some area becoming winners and some becoming losers (Ashworth, 2010; Leigh and Blakely, 2013; Malecki, 2004).

The responses from the city central government possibly indicate that despite the success of city, place-branding policy in Durban often takes a 'low-road' approach. Typically, these failures are associated with superficial branding attempts. These failures are associated with socio-economic issues. The poorly executed place branding resulted in negative national media attention and may be held as an example of government wastefulness.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a means of examining how local governments want people to think about their city. As city branding is becoming an increasingly present part of local economic development, local and regional governments must be careful to undertake it in a way that is both effective and an efficient use of public resources. As such, the elements meaningful to a target audience i.e., a business considering relocation must be considered, rather than appealing to a sub-group unlikely to invest in the community. Without this alignment, the brand will fail and the potential for attracting investment will be hampered, as it will be difficult to align or enhance assets to present any form of competitive advantage.

A good relationship between municipal government and the residents of the city should also exist for the city to be successful in their place branding strategies. Since each city resident is a walking-talking advertisement, support from residents and belief in the city brand are important attributes successful cities possess. Successful cities brand themselves in ways their residents found the city believable, and in doing so, the brand is reinforced as truthful. This reinforcement come in many forms such as word-of-mouth, political climate perception, advertising, early public relations, and graphic design. As their positive attributes are exposed, this reinforces the positive city brand.

Ultimately, this study provides a means of examining how local governments want people to think about their city. The purpose of the city executives involved in marketing the city is to transmit information about a municipality to existing and prospective residents, businesses, and visitors. However, as the typology of marketing themes illustrates, most local governments do not passively provide information but instead actively attempt to shape how the viewer interprets it. The use of the Internet in this way signifies an expansion of the city marketing apparatus, yet unlike the physical environment or even promotional material, a homepage can be easily and frequently altered to fabricate a narrative around a city even when it is lacking iconic structures, unique histories, or other identifiable features. As such, the strong marketing role has implications for the ways in which municipalities market their cities deliver information. Although not directly explored in this study, the preponderance of marketing images and the lack of focus on public services and civic engagement imply that the imaging role overshadows other potential uses of the city homepage, such as providing information about new tourist attraction areas in the city or improving access to municipal services and departments. Future

research could tackle this issue by examining how city websites for instance are actually used using the mixed-method approach.

As the aesthetic dimensions of places and quality of life amenities are increasingly on the agendas of municipal governments, marketing and branding will likely remain a critical strategy to distinguish a city and to boost its economic development potential. Thus, an understanding of the various ways that local governments brand cities is a significant concern for urban planners and designers.

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