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Co-Creating a Sustainable Regional Brand from Multiple Sub-Brands: The Andaman Tourism Cluster of Thailand

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore how a regional brand can be co-created among different cities by employing the concept of place branding and brand culture. The Andaman Tourism Cluster of Thailand (ATC) generates the most tourism revenue in Thailand. Developing a regional brand identity can strengthen the competitive advantage of the ATC. Data were collected using multi-method research through questionnaires, projective techniques, and focus group interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This study also shows that multi-method research contributes to brand management by facilitating collaboration, participation, and brand congruence among stakeholders. Quantitative and qualitative data were synthesized in order to develop the brand identity of the ATC. Focus group interviews were also employed to co-create the regional brand identity as 'Irresistible Andaman', of which sustainable tourism management is a fundamental aspect. This study demonstrates how multiple sub-brands with different stakeholders can be integrated into a single regional brand. Moreover, stakeholders should focus on internal branding by communicating with all stakeholders to co-create brand congruence.

Keywords: multi-method research; regional brand; brand culture; Andaman tourism cluster of Thailand

1. Introduction

An important aspect of place branding, as described by Zenker et al. (2017) [1], Kotsi et al. (2016) [2], and Braun et al. (2013) [3], is the network of associations in tourists' minds, which tourists interpret from visual and communication messages, including the architecture in the particular place. John et al. (2006) [4] recognized the branding concept as a branding model in which consumers or tourists tend to perceive and consume brands on the basis of their memories and perceptions. Therefore, brands are the meanings, experiences, emotions, images, preferences, and behaviors toward particular objects, including places, countries, or regions. However, this perspective tends to view brands in terms of how consumers/tourists interpret communication messages and overlooks the cultural aspects of the place, as each place/country consists of unique rituals and traditions. One of the potential gaps is the identification of images or associations related to place branding [2]. Schroeder (2009) [5] reported that consumers or tourists tend to have perceptions below the expectations of marketing because there are different factors in consumer perception.

As indicated in the place branding literature, one of the potential research gaps is that there are multiple stakeholders within the place branding; therefore, to gain insights for developing a place brand, brand scholars require a multi-method approach to collect data for the branding process [2]. As seen from the literature, most research has been conducted using quantitative methods [2,6–10], but there has been little interest in conducting qualitative research on the development of place branding, in spite of the fact that both quantitative and qualitative techniques can fulfil drawbacks of each method. Additionally, as mentioned by Zenker et al. (2017) [1], branding is complex; therefore, it requires a variety of methods to respond to the multiple dimensions of a brand. Kotsi et al. (2016) [2] studied the role of visual and auditory branding signatures in place branding by focusing on multiple stakeholders. They employed storytelling and collected multiple brand interpretations to create a place brand. As described in Hankinson (2004) [11], Maheshwari and Lodorfos (2014) [12], Matiza and Slabbert (2020) [13], Souiden et al. (2017) [14], and Zenker et al. (2017) [1], place branding is similar to destination branding, but the former goes beyond the boundary of tourists and tourism by focusing on place, location, city, and multiple stakeholders, especially local stakeholders. Many scholars, e.g., Braun et al. (2013) [3] and Freire (2009) [15], have reported that local stakeholders, governments, NGOs, tourists, businesses, and residents play an important role in place branding. Therefore, place branding scholars require different methods to understand the place branding process [2,3,16]. Kotsi et al. (2016) [2] maintained that place branding requires the advantages of quantitative and qualitative studies to extend our knowledge on this process. They included multiple stakeholders and storytelling among the necessary considerations to develop the branding concept through visual and auditory signatures.

Thailand is one of the countries with the highest growth in tourism in terms of revenue and the number of tourists [17]; therefore, other countries, e.g., Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, have developed branding strategies in order to increase their share in the tourism market [18]. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, studies the situation and continuously develops the national tourism strategy through tourism clusters. The Andaman Tourism Cluster of Thailand (hereafter, ATC) is a strategic tourism region with five sub-brands that consists of five provinces: Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang, and Satun. ATC is the largest tourism cluster of Thailand, i.e., 29.36 million tourists and USD 20.84 billion in revenue in 2019 [19]. As a regional tourism cluster, the ATC vision is to be 'the world-class and sustainable marine tourism based on Andaman culture' [18]. To achieve ATC's vision, both sustainability and branding efforts in the region need to be involved in driving the action plan [18]. Therefore, the ATC requires a brand strategy that can facilitate collaboration among the stakeholders of the five sub-brands to establish a regional brand. In such cases, multiple stakeholders and politicians from different agencies and organizations play important roles in brand management as a power relationship, because each of them have their own policies or strategies [12]; therefore, typical research techniques might not be able to provide sufficient resources to develop regional branding.

To develop the conceptual framework of the study, the concepts of brand culture and place branding were explored in order to understand the branding process. Many traditional branding papers have viewed a brand as a name, sign, design, or package in order to identify the ownership of products [20,21]. However, with the emergence of Web 4.0, tourists are playing an active role during their trips and moving beyond physical resources; they employ tourism to co-create meaning from their consumption, e.g., the tourist experience described in Blain et al. (2005) [22]. Additionally, many scholars studying value co-creation have demonstrated how consumers co-create brands through their active role of consumption [5,23–27].

Bassols and Leicht (2020) [28] and Cunningham and Platt (2018) [29] also stated that a value co-creation process that includes all stakeholders is a proactive strategy to create a brand by facilitating collaboration among all participants. To respond to this movement, the modern concept of branding—brand culture (see also Schroeder, 2009 [5])—is required to develop a place brand in which culture is one of the place identities; therefore, multi-method research

is required to explore the components of the brand culture by integrating the perceptions of both tourists and stakeholders. Multi-method research allows us to integrate qualitative and quantitative data on brand identity from multiple stakeholders [30,31]. We employed the place branding and brand culture concepts to develop a research methodology that allows all stakeholders to participate in the branding process in order to create brand congruence (see also Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2017 [23]). Due to complexity and numerous stakeholders with different authorities, the branding process is not an autonomous activity; instead, the brand is employed as the focal point that aligns all stakeholders. The aim of this study was to apply the concept of multi-method research to the development of a regional brand from multiple sub-brands and thus answer the following research question:

How can we co-create sustainable regional branding from five sub-brands with multiple stakeholders?

In response to the call for multi-method studies on regional branding with multiple stakeholders and politics within the region, this paper sheds light on how a regional brand can be co-created among different cities by employing the concept of place branding and brand culture. This paper demonstrates how multiple sub-brands with different stakeholders can be integrated into a single regional brand. The first part of the paper provides an understanding of the key concepts—place branding and brand culture. This is followed by the research methodology, which describes how multi-method research works to develop a regional brand. Tourism stakeholders in the ATC were included in this study and co-created the regional brand. The third part describes the findings of this study, and finally, the discussion, limitations and future research, and acknowledgments are presented.

2. Literature Review

To demonstrate the theoretical perspective of this study, place branding and brand culture were employed as a guideline, as depicted in Figure 1. Section 2.1 discusses the concepts of place branding and stakeholders in the branding process, and Section 2.2 explains how brand culture can be employed to co-create the regional brand.
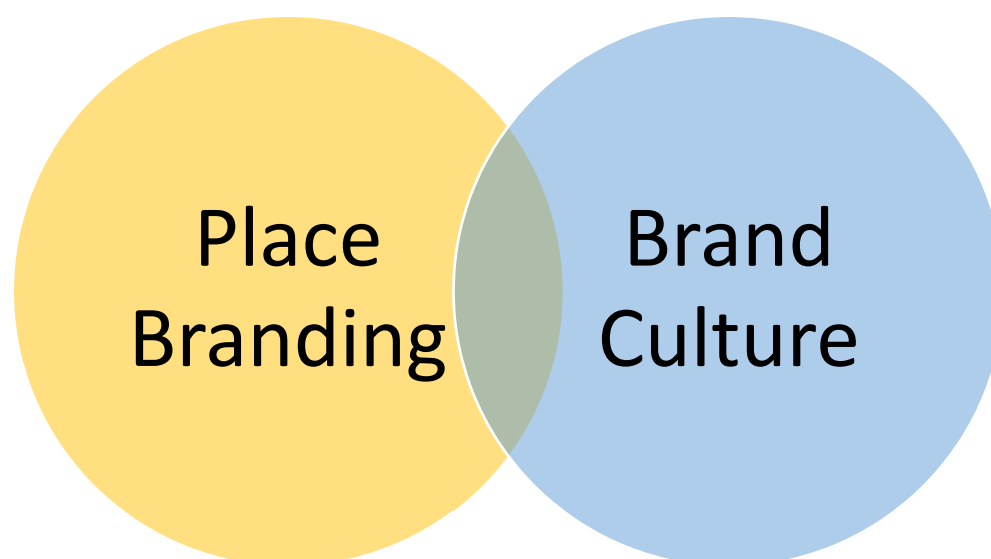
Figure 1. The conceptual framework for developing the regional brand.

2.1. Place Branding

Traditionally, marketing scholars have tended to view branding as a marketing tool to communicate with consumers, where the company plays an important role in brand co-creation [20,32]. Company competencies are required to develop identity and personality in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors [32,33]. Tourism brands have

typically been developed by using a quantitative approach [2,6,9,10,34,35]. There is the need to employ the qualitative approach as it allows marketing scholars to understand consumers' insights for the branding process [36]. To add another perspective of tourism branding, brand scholars can integrate both quantitative and qualitative branding data and include all stakeholders in the branding process.

Place branding requires the integration of demand and supply data to mitigate the tension of complexity and dynamism of a brand [1,2]. As mentioned by Schroeder (2009) [5] and Holt (2004) [37], a brand is a myth, history, or cultural code of consumption; therefore, it requires stories, myth-making, heritage, cultural meaning, and prominence of a place, city, or destination. It needs the interpretive perspective to understand the brand context, and also the integration of tourism businesses, residents, government offices, and city administrators to co-create a strong brand identity [38]. Additionally, it is not only a creative process, but it also requires an interactive process from all stakeholders whereby in-depth and focus group interviews can serve brand managers to access the collaboration among stakeholders. However, tourists are one of the important stakeholders in place branding [1], and brand managers should be able to understand tourists' perceptions about brand image. Therefore, quantitative data from questionnaires can provide a broader understanding of place branding by fulfilling the gap in how tourists perceive the place brand identity. Given that the research question emphasizes on multiple stakeholders perspectives, the multi-method approach provides us a unique opportunity to capture the views of different stakeholders in this study as well as triangulate and increase the credibility and validity of research findings.

As discussed in the literature, place branding can be viewed from the perspectives of both stakeholders and tourists. Many scholars have described the causal relationship between different variables, while, as branding scholars, we examine how branding research can create a brand. Therefore, marketing scholars need to focus on brand image and brand identity [5,39–41]. To develop place branding, brand managers should be able to establish a balance between tourists' perceptions and stakeholders' desires. Viewing the process from tourists' perceptions can reveal brand image—how tourists perceive the particular country, region, or city. Furthermore, the desires of tourism stakeholders contribute to understanding brand identity and developing a value proposition to persuade tourists to visit a place or destination [42]. From the viewpoint of consumer culture theory, consumers or tourists play active roles in consumption and co-create their own value/brand [23]; therefore, brand scholars need to develop a method to co-create brands that correspond to tourists' values and encourage them to interpret brand messages in a positive light. Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2011) [25], Pongsakornrungsilp et al. (2011) [26], and Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2017) [23] demonstrated that, as brand scholars, we cannot control or manage tourists' perceptions of brand meaning, but we can develop a value proposition based on brand identity in order to appeal to tourists' interpretations. In this process, branding requires a balance between functional and emotional aspects [11]. Balakrishnan et al. (2011) [8] studied the components of a place brand, which consists of brand image, functional destination brand components, and symbolic components, and symbolic value plays an important role in deriving competitive advantage. As mentioned by many scholars (e.g., Hanna et al. (2020) [39]; Zenker et al. (2017) [1]; Freire (2016) [43]; Moilanen (2015) [44]; Syssner (2010) [45]), place branding relates to multiple stakeholder perspectives; therefore, corporate identity [46,47] can be applied to understand the place branding process [2].

Place branding is different from destination branding: the former involves all dimensions of a place, e.g., environment, politics, commerce, investment, and media [48], while the latter is related to tourists' perceptions [49]. In other words, a destination brand is the perceived image of a particular destination. Zenker et al. (2017) [1] considered the 'place brand' to be the network of associations perceived by stakeholders depending on the situations and participants. They measured residents and tourists' place attitudes, place behavior, and brand complexity in Germany in order to prove that a place brand is

more complex than a destination brand. In this circumstance, a quantitative method plays an important role in testing hypotheses and demonstrating the relationship of the place brand components [1]. Place branding has been applied to manage brands for countries, regions, and cities [50]. However, Anholt (2002) [42] criticized that place branding needs to place greater focus on value propositions to entice tourists by describing why they should visit a given place. In addition, brand scholars require a branding concept that is able to integrate cultural and geographical identities [51,52]. Both Caldwell and Freire (2004) [51] and Herstein (2011) [52] considered the cultural aspects of a place (i.e., country, region, or city) derived from local identity, geography, community, and ethnicity; therefore, rituals, traditions, local myths, and arts should be included in the branding process. However, the branding model tends to focus on functional utilities, especially in regional and city brands [53], because the product brand concept has long been applied in the development of place brands [42,51]. Additionally, many studies on place branding have been conducted in only one destination, e.g., the City of Liverpool [12], Cartagena, and Colombia [28], but there has been little interest in developing a regional brand from multiple sub-brands. Therefore, in developing and managing destinations, the concepts of product and service brands cannot be applied in tourism management because tourism places and city brands are not solely owned by one owner or party.

To understand the linkage between place branding and brand management, brand scholars need additional methods to develop a strong value proposition. For example, Kotsi et al. (2016) [2] introduced a new qualitative inquiry method—Casual Layered Analysis in developing United Arab Emirates (UAE) branding by understanding informants' interpretations toward visual and audio messaging related to the UAE. They also demonstrated that in place branding, multiple stakeholders' perceptions and perspectives should be included in the place branding process [2]. However, they suggest that alternative methods such as quantitative surveys can help to provide a rigorous view of place branding. With multiple dimensions and different participants, using one single method will not adequately explain all perspectives and stakeholders within the different levels of a brand (i.e., country, region, city, or particular destinations) [38,51,52]. By employing multiple methods (i.e., combining different types of qualitative methods, combining multiple types of the quantitative method, or mixing qualitative and quantitative methods), the errors and biases from untrue responses can be cross-checked and the inconsistencies can be demonstrated [54]. The combinations of various methods can capture the meanings of a particular case in the dynamic environment and generate an integrative and comprehensive picture of the situation [54].

As supported by Zenker et al. (2017) [1] and Kotsi et al. (2016) [2], brand scholars should apply multi-method research to integrate the complexity of place brand, especially within the different sub-brands. This leads to our first proposition:

Proposition 1. *Multi-method research is required for brand management to enable the inclusion of all dimensions in the place branding process.*

2.2. Brand Culture

As mentioned by tourism brand scholars, e.g., Balakrishnan et al. (2011) [8], Herstein (2011) [52], and Caldwell and Freire (2004) [51], cultural aspects—the myth, rituals, and traditions of a destination—play an important role in driving the branding process; therefore, branding scholars need to apply different branding concepts to develop a brand. Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling (2006) [55] responded to this call for a branding strategy by demonstrating the 'Brand Culture' perspective in order to capture the complexity and culture of a brand. This is in line with Holt's (2004) [37] 'Brand Icon', which also focuses on brands as cultural products. From this perspective, consumers are key players in branding as brand co-creators [23]. It is in line with place branding, for which Caldwell and Freire (2004) [51] and Herstein (2011) [52] emphasize the cultural perspective in a place as well as a destination. To understand cultural perspective in place branding, the concept of

brand culture should be employed to integrate cultural aspects, e.g., culture, ritual, art, myth, local tradition, architecture, and so on, into the branding process. In addition, while in place branding, tourists are only viewed for understanding their perception, attitude, or interpretation [1,2], the perspective of brand culture can contribute to the active roles of tourists in the branding process. The brand is an output of an interactive process between consumers and producers, and consumers are inevitably a central part of branding because they share brand stories with their peers [23,25,56]. In another word, they act as a consumer agency (see also Askegaard, 2015 [57]) by co-creating the meaning of their consumption with the brand and their peers. The focal point of branding has been transformed from producers versus consumers to consumers versus brands [58], as well as consumers versus consumers [25–27]. Consumers co-create and construct the symbolic meaning of their consumption and experience of a particular brand in order to establish the cultural code of the brand [5].

From the cultural perspective, brand management needs to reveal how brands co-create culture or construct their identities, meaning, or myths. Schroeder (2009) [5] stated that, in order to capture the cultural perspective, branding requires a specific tool to understand how a brand can be co-created as 'brand culture'. In the branding process, the synthesizing qualitative and quantitative data can reduce the tension of politics within the place branding (within the province, and also the ATC) because all stakeholders need to collaborate to develop brand congruent through discussions and interactions whereby all numeric data provide evidence to support their decision [59]. Schroeder (2009) [5] has called for a branding model that is able to incorporate the cultural and sociological aspects of the brand because, in brand co-creation, participants of the branding process include not only consumers but also staff and other external participants.

To develop place branding, many scholars, e.g., Hanna et al. (2020) [39], Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) [59], Gover and Go (2009) [48], and Anholt (2002) [42], have characterized brand dimensions, which consist of brand identity, brand image, and brand reputation. However, developing place branding is not simple because each stakeholder has his or her own perception and value. It is difficult to compromise among different values from different stakeholders, therefore, this political issue needs to be taking into account in the place branding process [39,42,48,59]. Storytelling is one mechanism to reduce the gap between supply and demand. Kotsi et al. (2016) [2] employed storytelling to create a place brand identity through lifestyle, celebrations and festivals, artefacts and daily life, wildlife and landscape, and occupations. As mentioned by Rodrigues et al. (2020) [38] and Botschen et al. (2017) [60], place brand identity is the integration of sociocultural aspects of experience that all stakeholders would like to co-create with tourists. From the brand cultural perspective, Schroeder (2009) [5] proposed brand culture as an additional dimension in the branding model, in which consumers and stakeholders play important roles in co-creating the cultures, myths, histories, and rituals of brands. Pongsakornrungsilp et al. (2021) [61] employed the concept of brand culture in destination branding by including stakeholders in the branding process of one destination. However, a challenge in developing branding knowledge is determining how brand management can employ brand culture to co-create the regional brand by including the different cultures, politics, and identities of all stakeholders [12]. Therefore, this study also responds to Schroeder's (2009) [5] call for a method to understand the cultural aspects of brands from different stakeholders; i.e., tourism businesses, government offices, local communities, NGOs, tourists [12]. This leads to our second proposition:

Proposition 2. *Multiple stakeholders in different sub-brands need to collaborate in co-creating the regional brand.*

Table 1 demonstrates the key literature reviewed in this paper to cover the theoretical concepts used in this study.

Table 1. Summary of key literature.

References	Concepts
Hanna et al. (2020); Zenker et al. (2017); Freire (2016); Moilanen (2015); Syssner (2010)	Complexity, dynamism, and multiple stakeholders in place branding
Trueman et al. (2004); Caldwell and Freire (2004)	Place branding as the concept of corporate branding
Hanna et al. (2020); Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013); Gover and Go (2009); Anholt (2002)	All dimensions of a place—environment, politics, commerce, investment, media
Hanna et al. (2020); Kavoura (2013); Briciu (2013)	Brand dimensions are brand identity, brand image, and brand reputation
Zenker et al. (2017)	Network of associations in consumers' and stakeholders' minds
Pongsakornrungsilp et al. (2021); Pongsakornrungsilp et al. (2011); Schroeder (2009); Holt (2004)	Consumers play an important role in brand co-creation, and cultural aspects should be included in the branding process

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Multi-method research was employed to co-create destination branding by integrating stakeholders' brand identities or potential images and tourists' perceived images. Multi-method research is required to study the regional branding process because data sets from both stakeholders and tourists need to be synthesized to co-create the brand [30,31]. For example, Hunter and Suh (2007) [62] employed multi-method research to study destination image perception in Jeju, South Korea, in terms of cultural identity. This study applied multi-method research to develop regional branding by facilitating collaboration among stakeholders and applying the concept of place branding. As mentioned above, the ATC brand is complex and dynamic, which requires collaboration among different stakeholders. Many works about place branding have focused on quantitative methods by exploring tourists' images of the destination, e.g., Alvarez and Campo's (2014) [63] conflict between image and intention to visit Israel; Kim and Purdue's (2011) [64] ski destination branding; and Qu et al.'s (2011) [65] tourism image from the tourist perspective. However, there has been little interest in employing qualitative techniques to study the branding process, e.g., Mak's (2017) [66] destination image in Taiwan; Konecnik and Go's (2008) [67] destination identity of Slovenia; Fox's (2006) [68] tourism and gastronomic identity of Croatia; Dredge and Jenkins' (2003) [69] destination identity; and Hall's (2008) [70] brand identity of Christchurch, New Zealand.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) [71] and Saunder et al. (2009) [72] argued that multi-method approaches are useful because they provide better opportunities to answer multiple research questions and help to better evaluate the extent to which the research findings can be trusted and inferences can be made from them. The multi-method strategy has gained popularity because it allows a researcher to collect diverse types of data and gain the best understanding of the research issue [31]. In branding research, Koll et al. (2010) [30] recommended multi-method research to understand consumer perspectives and associations toward a brand. The exploratory and explanatory nature of this study prompted us to use the multi-method approach, i.e., a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods [73]. While quantitative research normally uses a deductive approach, qualitative research usually uses an inductive approach [74]. The use of the qualitative method can address social and cultural construction in the context of cultural meaning. In contrast, the quantitative method can be applied to measure aspects of social life [75]. Although the quantitative method is mainly used in deductive research, the qualitative method can be combined in order to provide a more discursive argument, from evidence to hypothesis testing [76]. This study, therefore, followed the multi-method approach, where empirical data collected through a survey questionnaire were first analyzed, and the

findings were further verified through the inductive approach by conducting focus group interviews, as illustrated in Figure 2.
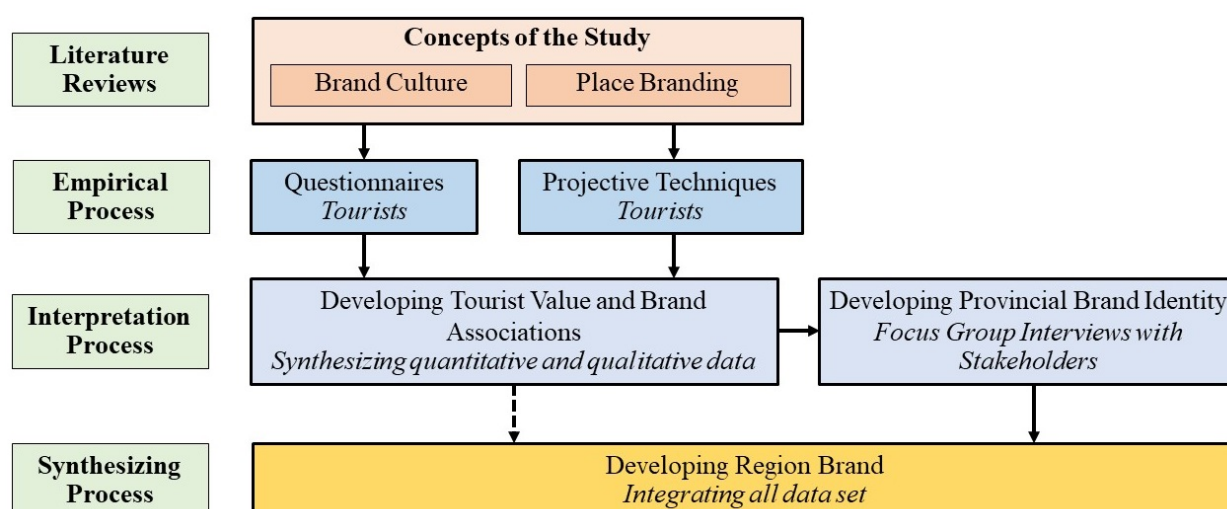

Figure 2. Data collection and analysis process.

3.2. Quantitative Research

First, quantitative data were collected to explore tourists' images and values from tourists who visited the five sub-brands in the ATC. In total, 3750 questionnaires from 5 provinces were completed to collect data from 2106 domestic tourists and 1644 international tourists in the ATC, Thailand, as shown in Table 2. Tourists' perceived brand images were studied by employing questionnaires, using a five-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree). Informants were asked to rate their tourism image and value of travelling to the ATC. Questionnaires were developed through the concepts of functional utilities as well as emotional aspects, including experiential aspects [11,34,53]. Item generations were done by revising from the tourism brand research projects [77,78]; i.e., World-Class Destination, Eco-tourism Destination, Wellness Destination, Cultural Tourism Destination, High-Quality Destination, The Most Beautiful Diving Destination, High Safety Destination, Destination for Shopping, Family Destination, Elder Destination, Adventure Destination, Marine and Beach Tourism, Sports Destination, Destination with good climate and low pollution, Destination with less/no traffic jam, Nature-Based Tourism Destination, Gastronomic Tourism Destination, Convenience, Comfortable, and Safety Transportation, Value for Money Destination, Eco-Friendly Destination, Destination with Fair Business and Do Not Exploit Tourists, Excellent Service Destination, Community Based Tourism Destination, Multi-Cultural Tourism Destination. Additionally, Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder's (2011) [25] customer value and item generations from previous research projects in branding [77,78] were also employed to develop questionnaires for understanding tourist value; i.e., Aesthetic Tourism, Once-in-a-lifetime experience, Friendship from new friends, Worth of Money, Pleasure and happiness, True holiday, Getting recognition, Peace, Exclusive customized services for each tourist, Fun, Impressive tourism atmosphere, Exploring new experiences.

Convenience sampling was used to collect data by distributing 4000 questionnaires to individuals in different destinations in the ATC, and 3750 (93.75%) of questionnaires were able to be analyzed. The results show that more than half of tourists are female (53.2%) and single (55.0%), and most tourists are 21–40 years old (71.4%). Most of them (62.0%) are independent tourists who plan and manage their trips by themselves, and 75.7% of them travel for tourism and leisure. Interestingly, 63.4% of informants obtain information about tourism and destinations from the internet, followed by friends (43.0%) and family members (13.1%). However, 53.4% of them are influencers on the trip, followed

by friends (26.4%). Trips include an average of 4.14 tourists per group, and they stay for approximately 7.66 days. On average, they spend about 4.61 h (4 h 36 min) on the internet. Google is the top internet site that informants visit on the internet, followed by Facebook (28.7%) and Tripadvisor (13.0%).

Table 2. Domestic and international informants in five provinces.

Province	Domestic Tourists	International Tourists
Phuket	541	334
Phang Nga	504	279
Krabi	350	355
Satun	374	254
Trang	337	422
Total	2106	1644

3.3. Qualitative Research

Two types of qualitative research were used to collect the data: projective techniques and focus groups. The imagery association projective technique was employed in the second stage to discover tourists' brand associations with respect to the ATC [79]. This method allows researchers to tap into subconscious associations and emotional connections, which then lead to a deep understanding of tourists' perceptions and beliefs toward particular brand associations [80,81]. Different pictures in 20 patterns were presented to 123 international tourists, who were then asked for their perspectives about travelling, destinations, and branding in 5 provinces. Informants were asked for permission to participate in the research projects. The pictures were employed to prompt informants to share insights, values, and meaning from their travels [80]. These data were synthesized with tourists' images and values from the first stage to develop a brand identity. However, to develop a regional brand, the tourism identity according to stakeholders needed to be synthesized with tourists' perceived images in order to identify gaps in the branding process. A focus group was then chosen because it allows researchers to invite homogeneous informants to have a group discussion on a selected topic. Focus group interviews with stakeholders (i.e., tourism business owners, Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand, government officers in tourism, local communities, Tourism Associations, Hotel Associations, Provincial Tourism Council) in each province were then conducted to discuss destination identity, particularly strengths and prominence. The purposive sampling was used to select these informants, based on their experiences, expertise, and relevance as they were the major players and policymakers in Thai tourism. They can be good representatives of the data. Ten focus group interviews with 143 informants were conducted in 5 provinces in order to co-create the brand identity. The first author was the moderator during the focus group interviews. The length of each focus group interview was about 90 min with 7–25 informants. All tourist data were presented to tourism stakeholders in each province in order to let them discuss and co-create the brand identity of each sub-brand. The researchers used a mechanical device to record the focus group and kept field notes of the informants' actions and interactions during the investigations. The authors also attended the ATC monthly meeting in order to validate the data with tourism stakeholders within the ATC. This process is to confirm the results and the region brand identity and also to reduce the politics within the ATC whereby the brand committees are the Governor and tourism stakeholders from each province. The regional brand was developed by integrating all data sets and with the collaboration of stakeholders.

To ensure the credibility and validity of this research, triangulation methods were used [82]. These methods included (1) data triangulation as the researchers employed multiple data sources from five provinces in one study; (2) methodological triangulation as the use of multiple data collection methods, which are survey, projective technique, and focus groups to determine the congruence of the results; and (3) investigator triangulation as there were four investigators to study this particular phenomenon and all of them involved

in data analysis procedures. This collaborative and multi-method research permitted cross-validation and facilitated exploration of place branding and brand culture issues. In addition, to prevent researchers' bias and selective inattention, the researchers asked focus group informants to review the results and evaluate the meanings and applicability regarding their experiences [83].

3.4. Data Analysis

This study employed a multi-level analysis in which each data set was included in the processes. Firstly, the frequency and mean were used to analyze quantitative data of tourists' perceived images and values. This part aimed to explore associations toward tourism images and values for developing the region brand identity, therefore, inferential statistics did not apply in this study. The three most prominent tourists' images and values for the 5 provinces were employed in the next stage—tourists' brand associations with respect to the ATC. Secondly, thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data [84], which requires experience and competence in interpretation through the imagery association projective technique [79]. This process contributes richness to the data for developing the regional brand identity. All transcripts were reread many times in order to develop codes. Codes were reconsidered, recoded, and given meaning. The iterative process of interpretation recommended by Thompson (1997) [85] was the framework of data analysis, which entailed the rereading of data, codes, and themes many times in order to ensure the reliability of data analysis [86]. At the end of this stage, the components of brand associations for each province in terms of tourists' perspectives were defined. Thirdly, the data from quantitative and qualitative research were synthesized in order to develop a sub-brand identity. All data sets from stages 1 and 2 were presented to the tourism stakeholders in each province—the Governor, Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, provincial office, Director of the Provincial Tourism and Sport, and tourism businesses—in order to develop the brand identity of each sub-brand. This multi-level analysis allowed us to complete the triangulations [87]. Investigator triangulation was conducted in the analysis process whereby the first and third authors used marketing and branding lenses during data analysis, and the second and fourth authors analyzed data through the tourism perspective. To provide data triangulation, the data involving tourists' values and perspectives toward the ATC were integrated with tourism identities from stakeholders' perspectives. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to reduce tourism variables into a small number of factors regarding the ATC brand [88]. Factors were synthesized with sub-brand identities and discussed with tourism stakeholders to develop the region's brand. To confirm the results, one author presented a draft brand identity for each province at the ATC meeting in order to triangulate all data with tourism stakeholders from the 5 provinces. This stage was crucial for eliminating overlapping and erroneous data from the data set. Finally, all data sets were synthesized in order to develop the ATC regional brand identity to represent all sub-brands. This brand identity was also developed with the ATC committee.

To increase the auditability, all data sets were initially analyzed by two authors—the first one is a marketing scholar who has experience in branding and tourism research, and the second one is a tourism scholar who has performed many research projects in the ATC. All themes and codes were reconsidered by other authors in order to validate the data from different perspectives, and the process was repeated until there were no additional comments. Importantly, the ATC brand was also presented to stakeholders from different organizations in both public and private sectors in order to recheck the data and brand concept.

4. Results

The findings of this study indicate that multi-method research can integrate all stakeholders in the branding process. A brand requires multiple methods to gather relevant and rich data through different lenses.

4.1. Understanding Tourists' Values and Brand Associations

As mentioned earlier, neither the quantitative nor qualitative technique can provide a holistic framework in place branding [2,36]; therefore, brand scholars need to integrate resources from both methods to co-create the regional brand through multi-method research [30]. A quantitative method was employed with both domestic and international tourists to acquire their values and perceived images of tourism and leisure in the ATC, which comprises Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Satun, and Trang. A total of 4000 questionnaires were circulated to tourists, and 3750 questionnaires, or 93.75% of completed questionnaires, were analyzed through descriptive statistics in order to explore the top 5 tourists' values. The top five tourists' values from both domestic and international tourists were prepared for stage 3. As mentioned by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2017) [23], consumers can co-create value by employing objects to construct meaning from their consumption; therefore, we need to identify tourists' values in order to prepare and generate a plot for developing brand identity. In this context, the plot is a story that the brand manager will employ to attract tourists by generating interest in the regional brand. Multi-methods were employed a quantitative method to explore tourists' value toward the ATC through the questionnaires and conducted a qualitative method—the projective technique with tourists—to develop brand associations as materials for developing the place brand identity.

4.1.1. Tourism Value

Table 3 reports the top three tourists' values in relation to provinces in the ATC, i.e., fun, exploring new experiences, and pleasure and happiness. These data are in line with Amjad (2013) [34], who observed that tourists emphasized their experience from tourism. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) [89] characterized consumer experience as consisting of the three F's: Fun, Feeling, and Fantasy. These quantitative data contribute to an understanding of the benefits that tourists derive from travelling, which can be employed to support tourists' brand images of the ATC and develop a brand identity corresponding to their values. Furthermore, these data play an important role in the branding process; as mentioned by Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder (2017) [23], consumer experience is the objects or materials that consumers employ to co-create a brand.

Table 3. Tourists' values from traveling in the ATC of Thailand.

Province	First	Second	Third
Phuket	Fun (Mean = 4.29)	Exploring new experiences (Mean = 4.28)	Pleasure and happiness (Mean = 4.26)
Phang Nga	Aesthetic Tourism (Mean = 4.29)	Pleasure and happiness (Mean = 4.23)	True Holiday (Mean = 4.21)
Krabi	Pleasure and happiness (Mean = 4.33)	Exploring new experiences (Mean = 4.27)	True Holiday (Mean = 4.25)
Satun	Exploring new experiences (Mean = 4.10)	Fun (Mean = 4.02)	Impressive tourism atmosphere (Mean = 3.97)
Trang	Exploring new experiences (Mean = 4.16)	Pleasure and happiness (Mean = 4.13)	Fun (Mean = 4.12)

4.1.2. Tourism Image

To develop a brand identity, the perceived image needs to be explored by asking informants to share their perceptions about the tourism image of each destination within the ATC. The findings in Table 4 show that, according to tourists' perceptions, the prominent

aspect of the ATC is marine and beach tourism, followed by nature-based tourism, family destination, world-class destination, the most beautiful diving destination, and gastronomic tourism destination, in that order. These data were integrated with tourists' values and brand associations in order to create a regional brand identity.

Table 4. Tourists' perceived images of the destinations within the ATC of Thailand.

Province	First	Second	Third
Phuket	Marine and Beach Tourism (Mean = 4.42)	World Class Destination (Mean = 4.18)	Family Destination (Mean = 4.08)
Phang Nga	Marine and Beach Tourism (Mean = 4.18)	Nature-Based Tourism Destination (Mean = 4.17)	Family Destination (Mean = 4.08)
Krabi	Marine and Beach Tourism (Mean = 4.26)	Family Destination (Mean = 4.13)	World-Class Destination (Mean = 4.12)
Satun	Marine and Beach Tourism (Mean = 3.93)	The Most Beautiful Diving Destination (Mean = 3.93)	Nature-Based Tourism Destination (Mean = 3.88)
Trang	Marine and Beach Tourism (Mean = 4.07)	Nature-Based Tourism Destination (Mean = 4.04)	Gastronomic Tourism Destination (Mean = 3.95)

4.1.3. Brand Associations

In order to reveal brand associations, the imagery projective technique was employed in this stage by showing 20 different pictures to tourists [79]. Informants were asked to choose three pictures representing the destination and then rank them. Informants were also asked to link these pictures to their traveling and leisure activities. The meaning of each picture was described in depth by tourists. During this stage, transcripts from 123 interviews were read, and codes were applied until the iterative analysis process was complete.

In this stage, rather than focusing on tangible aspects, intangible aspects of meaning were mainly analyzed for each destination. However, there were tangible aspects found in this stage, i.e., gastronomy, undersea scene, and diving, which were prominent and explicitly mentioned by tourists. Informants also reported tangible aspects in their answers. The following quotes are examples of how a tangible aspect—gastronomy—was considered in this stage:

> " . . . *Phuket has many choices of seafood for tourists, and when I see this picture, it represents the Phuket with plenty of seafood. The seafood here is fresh and delicious . . .* "

S (India, 23 Female)

> " . . . *gastronomy in Phuket when you walk through the market or walking street, you will see a lot of food. Furthermore, the food here is good taste."*

C (Germany, 24, Female)

As mentioned by S, an Indian tourist, and C, a German tourist, gastronomy is a prominent aspect, and these tourists do not create symbolic meaning from food. This differs from Pongsakornrungsilp et al.'s (2021) [61] Krabi Green Tourism Brand, in which tourists constructed meaning from having a meal in Krabi. Tourists feel relaxed when eating seafood and other meals. This method allows researchers to understand tourists' perspectives naturally. An interpretive technique was applied to the data from this stage to develop codes and their meaning. Table 5 presents the top three tourists' brand associations for each province, i.e., Aesthetic, Gastronomy, and Leisure for Phuket; Undersea scene, Relaxation, and Peace for Phang Nga; Varieties, Beach, and Romantic for Krabi; Leisure, Diving, and Pleasure for Satun; and Nature, Relaxation, and Peace for Trang.

Table 5. Tourists' brand associations.

Province	First	Second	Third
Phuket	Aesthetic	Gastronomy	Leisure
Phang Nga	Undersea Scene	Relaxation	Peace
Krabi	Varieties	Beach	Romantic
Satun	Leisure	Diving	Pleasure
Trang	Nature	Relaxation	Peace

4.2. Developing Sub-Brand Identities

Multi-method research provides an opportunity for brand scholars to develop sub-brand identities by integrating quantitative and qualitative data. At this stage, tourists' values, images, and brand associations were synthesized in order to clearly develop tourist insights about their travelling and leisure activities. As mentioned by Schroeder (2009) [5], a brand plays an important role as a means of communication to attract customers, and he also argued that, in the traditional branding process, brand managers tend to overlook customers' participation and their active role. This results in the failure of many brands in communicating the right messages to their customers. Therefore, to attract tourists, sub-brand identities should correspond to their values.

4.2.1. Navigating Politics within the Regional Brand

Due to the complexity and dynamism of place branding, the aim of this stage is to analyze the focal point for the regional brand identity by integrating qualitative and quantitative data, i.e., tourists' perceived images and values for each province. Similar codes were grouped into one theme, integrating quantitative data and eliminating the drawbacks of both methods. All codes and themes were reread and edited until completing the iterative process, i.e., until there were no additional codes or themes. This stage reveals tourists' belief systems toward the brand image and their values. Given the politics within the provinces and regions and the multiple stakeholders, among which there are different communications and goals, all data were presented to stakeholders in each province—the Provincial Governor, the Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), and the Provincial Sport and Tourism, and tourism businesses—in order to let them discuss and co-create the provincial brand identity or sub-brand community. This also enabled data triangulation. In each province, two meetings were conducted to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and the co-creation of the brand identity. Additionally, a draft brand identity for each province was presented at the ATC meeting in order to triangulate all data with tourism stakeholders from the five provinces. Thus, multi-method research facilitated brand management to navigate the politics from different authorized offices of the five sub-brands.

4.2.2. Collaborating to Develop Sub-Brand Identity

To co-create the five sub-brand identities with stakeholders, focus group interviews with stakeholders were conducted in order to facilitate their collaboration and congruence. Theoretically, with the active role of consumers, brand managers have no chance to communicate, and consumers receive numerous messages [5]. If the perceived image is tourists' belief about the destination, then brand identity is the stakeholders' belief about their potential. Stakeholders in each province were persuaded to discuss with their peers in the tourism industry in order to establish a congruent identity. It is worth noting that brand management should be aware of alliance competitors—that is, competing but remaining friends; therefore, the brand identity of the regional brand or each sub-brand should not be based on a specific destination, which might lead to conflicts. As mentioned earlier, in order to create only one message for the destination and the region, brand management requires collaboration among stakeholders and the prevention of conflict among them. Several meetings were conducted to allow stakeholders to discuss and share knowledge, experience, and resources in order to synthesize the different identities. The data in Tables 1–3 were synthesized and discussed to develop the sub-brand identity of each province. The sub-brand identity of each province

was presented to stakeholders, and the developed sub-brand identities are demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Sub-brand identities of destinations.

Province	Brand Identity
Phuket	Luxurious Phuket, with impressive and aesthetic tourism that allows tourists to derive happiness and pleasure from new gastronomic experiences. Phuket tourism can enable tourists to co-create fun, a true holiday, and experience.
Phang Nga	Happiness in Phung Nga, with an aesthetic and new tourism experience of the undersea scene that can provide happiness, pleasure, and new experiences while on a peaceful and a true holiday.
Krabi	Amazing Krabi, with various experiences and fun on a peaceful and romantic beach, where tourists can be fulfilled by a true holiday, happiness, and pleasure.
Satun	Satun: The Real Paradise on Earth, where tourism can provide peace and a true holiday with new experiences and aesthetic tourism through diving activities.
Trang	Slow Lifestyle Trang, where tourists can have new experiences and fun in nature. Tourists can derive happiness and pleasure from a peaceful and true holiday.

4.3. Developing the Regional Brand Identity through Collaboration between Tourist Brand Associations and Sub-Brand Identities

In this stage, the data in Table 5 were brought to each province to discuss these identities and to then form the brand identity of the ATC. The aim was to derive a regional brand identity from the complexity and variety of travel destinations in the five provinces so that tourists can choose to visit and participate in tourism activities. However, it is worth noting that the regional brand identity is what stakeholders are confident that they are able to achieve, not the current situation of the brand.

To develop the regional brand identity, EFA was conducted from 36 variables with 5-scale items. For the factor analysis, the Kaiser's criteria greater than 0.50 was satisfied, with KMO = 0.963 [90], and the eigenvalues were greater than 1. Six factors were extracted with total variance explained at 54.33%. Hair et al. (2010) [91] demonstrated that total variance explained in human science about 50–60% is eligible for further analysis. The primary factor loading cutoff as good factor loading is 0.4, but in practicality, the cutoff at 0.3 is acceptable [91,92], and each factor should contain two or three variables in order to be able to provide meaning to the factor [93]. The data in Table 7 demonstrate six factors and the reliability of each factor with Cronbach's alpha. To ensure the validity and reliability, the internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 is a high-reliability standard and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.6 or greater is reliable [91].

Table 7. Factor loadings and the internal consistency reliability.

Factors	Internal Consistency Reliability	Factor Loading
Factor 1 Pleasure Experience	0.865	
Once-in-a-lifetime experience		0.590
Worth of Money		0.591
Pleasure and happiness		0.678
True holiday		0.682
Peace		0.626
Fun		0.707
Impressive tourism atmosphere		0.673
Getting new experience		0.656
Factor 2 Way of Life	0.819	
Gastronomic Tourism Destination		0.511
Excellent Service Destination		0.675

Table 7. *Cont.*

Factors	Internal Consistency Reliability	Factor Loading
Community Based Tourism Destination		0.668
Multi-Cultural Tourism Destination		0.697
Value for Money Destination		0.537
Cultural Tourism Destination		0.399
Factor 3 Aesthetic	0.814	
Wellness Destination		0.496
High Quality Destination		0.470
Eco-tourism Destination		0.647
World Class Destination		0.645
Aesthetic of Tourism		0.431
Friendship from new friends		0.401
Getting recognition		0.334
Exclusive customized services for each tourist		0.335
Factor 4 Leisure	0.793	
Destination with good climate and low pollution		0.685
Destination with less/ no traffic jam		0.752
Convenience, Comfortable, and Safety Transportation		0.428
Eco-Friendly Destination		0.517
Destination with Fair Business and Do Not Exploit Tourists		0.454
Factor 5 Holidays	0.773	
Destination for Shopping		0.587
Elder Destination		0.692
Adventure Destination		0.513
High Safety Destination		0.333
Family Destination		0.600
Sport Destination		0.542
Factor 6 Dream Destination	0.669	
Marine and Beach Destination		0.671
Nature Based Tourism Destination		0.487
The Most Beautiful Diving Destination		0.454

The first factor is labelled as 'Pleasure Experience' with a internal consistency reliability of 0.865 that relates to the experience and hedonistic aspects from tourism. 'The Way of Life' is a label of the second factor with the internal consistency reliability of 0.819 that consists of local tourism activities, and the third factor is labelled 'Aesthetic' as it consists of high-value tourism activities and emotional aspects of tourism with the internal consistency reliability of 0.814. The fourth factor contains the internal consistency reliability of 0.793 and provides tourists with slow life tourism activities, labelled as leisure. The fifth factor is labelled as 'Holidays', which relates to tourism activities for the family, e.g., shopping, family destination, and so on (with the internal consistency reliability of 0.773). The last factor is labelled as 'Dream Destination' with the internal consistency reliability of 0.669, which consists of the strong tourism identity of the ATC.

In order to co-create the brand, the regional brand identity needs to be developed by synthesizing tourist brand associations (see also Table 5), stakeholders' sub-brand identities (see also Table 6), and tourism factors (see also Table 7). The regional brand identity of the ATC was classified into three groups—'happiness and pleasure', 'true holiday', and 'exploring new experience' as shown in Figure 3. Firstly, 'happiness and pleasure' consist of aesthetic, peace, beach, romantic, and pleasure associations within the Aesthetic and Pleasure Experience factors. Secondly, 'true holiday' consists of leisure, relaxation, and gastronomy within the Leisure and Way of Life factors. Thirdly, 'exploring new experience' consists of varieties, undersea scene, diving, and nature within the Holidays and Dream Destination factors. These data were employed to collaborate with stakeholders indirectly by discussing how brand identity can correspond to the brand associations of

tourists and act as the strongest possible message for communicating with and persuading them. For example, tourists are concerned with sustainability and eco-friendly products and services; therefore, brand managers should deliver a message about green activities and sustainability to tourists. Based on the brand identity of the ATC, 'Irresistible Andaman' was co-created as the regional brand of the ATC: a place where tourists cannot resist co-creating happiness and pleasure, enjoying a true holiday, and exploring new experiences. Importantly, this regional brand identity was accepted by the ATC board of committees, on which the Phuket Governor is the president and governors from other provinces are the vice presidents, including tourism stakeholders from the five provinces. This is one of the most important processes for creating the regional brand because the Governor is the highest official authority in each province and the cluster. Discussions among committees contribute to the regional brand congruence and are able to reduce political tension within the region. The ATC brand identity, 'Irresistible Andaman', will be employed by tourism stakeholders in each province to develop a marketing strategy corresponding to the ATC brand. As illustrated in Figure 3, 5 of the 12 aspects, i.e., Varieties, Beach, Undersea Scene, Diving, and Nature, are related to natural resources, especially marine resources. Sustainable tourism management was addressed during discussions about a regional brand, and a sustainable tourism management plan was included in the action plan of the ATC and the five provinces.
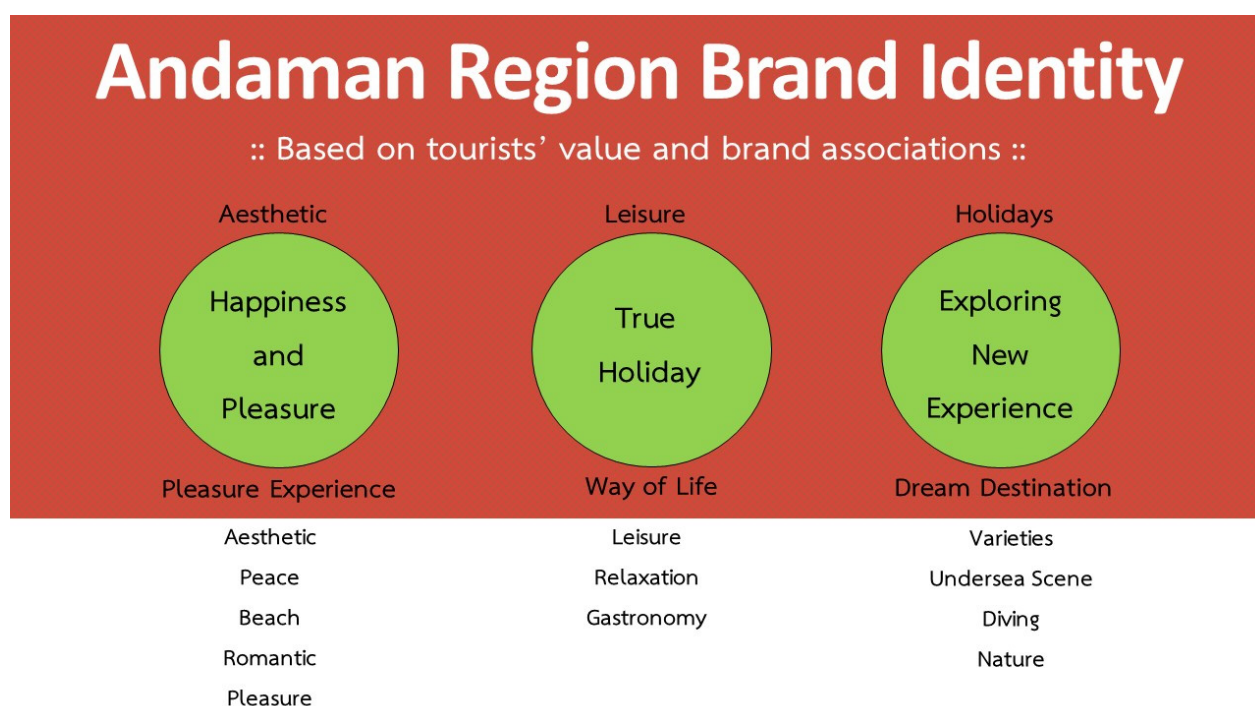

Figure 3. Andaman regional brand identity.

5. Summary and Discussions

To create a regional brand, brand scholars should be able to mitigate tensions among different authorities of sub-brands. The concepts of place branding and brand culture are synthesized in order to develop the regional brand from the five sub-brands within the ATC. With the complexity and multiple stakeholders in the branding process, place branding is the balancing process between tourism stakeholders and tourists related to multi-dimensions of place, e.g., business, transportation, food, destination, and so on [48]. With the tensions of politics from different agencies, place branding needs to be synthesized with the brand culture [5] in order to co-create the collaboration and brand congruent among the stakeholders [23,24]. This study supports Zenker et al. (2017) [1] and Kotsi et al. (2016) [2] by demonstrating how a multi-method research can drive the

collaboration among the five sub-brands, which was able to strengthen the regional brand as a strategic tool in the world tourism market, where tourists play an active role in their traveling behavior. The ideal brand identity is able to activate tourists' desires to travel and co-create new experiences. However, sustainability is a fundamental aspect of tourism management in all sub-brands, including the regional brand, because natural resources are tourism attractions or products that can persuade tourists to visit the destination. Therefore, tourists' values and brand associations need to be obtained to synthesize them with stakeholders' tourism identity. As shown in Tables 3–7, all data were integrated through focus group interviews in order to facilitate participation and collaboration among all stakeholders. The theoretical and practical implications, including limitations and future research, are discussed in the next section.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study sheds light on how multiple sub-brands with different stakeholders can be integrated into a single regional brand. This study demonstrates how the bottom-up process of place branding mentioned by Rodrigues et al. (2020) [38] can be integrated with the network of associations in tourists' minds [1]. In response to Proposition 1, this study also demonstrates how Multi-Method Research is employed to develop the regional brand, whereby tourists play an active role in the branding process. It also supports Schroeder's (2009) [5] claim that a specific tool is required to explore and develop a brand. This study confirms that regional branding requires collaboration between tourists and stakeholders [12,38,94,95]. It also provides an interview process to explore regional branding components and to develop a regional brand. In this process, multi-method research plays an important role in supporting brand management by providing brand data from different perspectives, e.g., tourists' values, tourist perceptions, and sub-brand identities from stakeholders. The advantages of quantitative and qualitative research allow brand scholars to balance branding processes through interpretive and constructive lenses required for regional branding [31]. Additionally, in support of Proposition 2, regional branding requires collaboration and congruence among different participants in order to navigate the politics within the region. Quantitative and qualitative data allow the brand manager to synthesize both demand and supply perspectives that support the harmonization of branding. Additionally, this study also responds to Kotsi et al.'s (2016) [2] call for a theory-building study to develop place branding, as demonstrated in Figure 4.
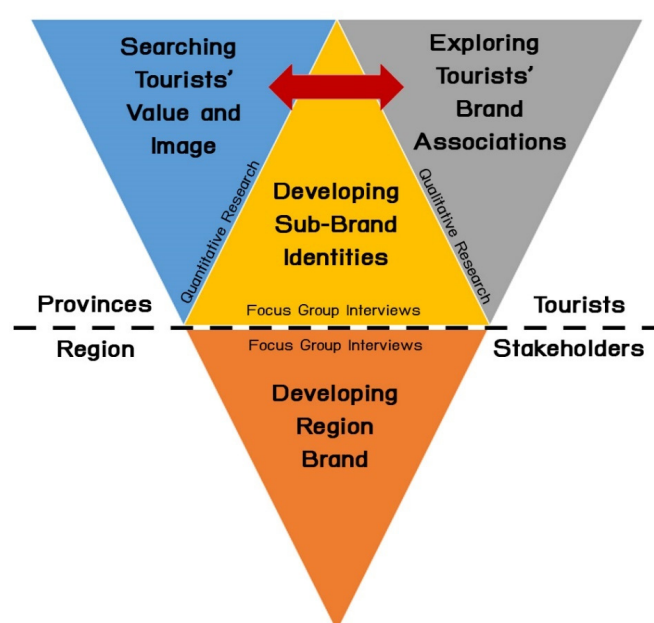

Figure 4. Regional branding process.

The regional branding process in Figure 4 requires compromise and collaboration within the province and the region in order to facilitate the cooperation of all stakeholders. With the different resources of different stakeholders, participants of focus group interviews may misunderstand brand identity, as mentioned by Lusch et al. (2010) [96], as a service offering. This can generate controversial discussions about brand identity because some stakeholders tend to focus on the current situation and tourism problems. Additionally, some of them view a brand as a logo, ownership, or the name of a product or service. Therefore, the branding process also contributes to the learning process [96], and thus, focus group interviews not only play an important role as a data collection method but also act as a resource-sharing process about regional branding among stakeholders. This process can drive the development of a sustainable regional brand because understanding the definition of a regional brand and the brand identity can increase collaboration among stakeholders within the province and the region.

It is interesting that the 'experiential aspect of the brand', which Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) [89] defined as fun, feeling, and fantasy, is a major focus among tourists. It allows consumers to co-create the brand through their active role. Tourists have overlooked functional brand components (see also Amjad, 2013 [34]) by focusing on the experience brand component, as evident from the tourist value 'exploring new experience', and the symbolic brand component. Moreover, tourist experience is one of the branding processes that tourists can co-create by sharing with other people, such as their social network peers. To co-create a regional brand, brand managers should be able to identify tourists' values and experiences by interpreting the symbolic meaning that they derive from their travels. These data serve as resources for developing a regional brand identity and as a value proposition for communicating with tourists. This study also supports Maheshwari et al. (2014) [12], who mentioned that typical strategies do not enable different stakeholders to collaborate in a brand co-creation process. Although Dressler and Paunovic (2001) [56] presented a brand co-creation model, they focused on communication through social networks. However, they viewed the brand creator and brand driver separately, in spite of the fact that branding should involve collaboration between tourists and tourism stakeholders. Therefore, multi-method research contributes to increasing collaboration in brand creation. Additionally, as mentioned by Yusof and Ismail (2014) [95], integrating both demand and supply data can develop a regional brand identity that corresponds to each party's value.

5.2. Practical Implications

The results of this study can be employed by brand managers to co-create the tourism brand of a region, city, or destination. First, stakeholders need to recognize that tourists play an active and important role in the branding process by co-creating the brand [23]. As mentioned by Rodrigues et al. (2020) [38] and Botschen et al. (2017) [60], brand scholars need to address the sociocultural aspects of the brand. Co-creating a regional brand is to co-create a plot to persuade tourists to visit the region. Therefore, synthesizing a tourism image and value allows us to understand tourists' insights and to develop a regional brand identity as a value proposition [42].

Second, developing a brand identity is not the final process. It is a process in which all stakeholders co-create the cultural code of the brand. This is in line with Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder's (2017) [23] assertion that brand creation responsibility is not solely attributed to the management, but tourists and other stakeholders also play an important role in brand co-creation. Brand managers need collaboration and understanding from all stakeholders within the region (e.g., the ATC), especially local people. On the other hand, theoretically, all stakeholders should understand and speak the same language. Therefore, the brand manager needs to focus on internal branding after developing the regional brand identity. In the branding process, we require collaboration from all sectors within the cluster or within the province [95]. Furthermore, the parties responsible for

brand management must be determined. For the branding process, co-creation of the brand with tourists and brand evaluation need to be continual.

Third, to develop the regional brand, brand managers require interpretive and constructive skills because branding materials (e.g., tourists' insights, images, and values and tourism identity) cannot be obtained through individual interview techniques [30]. Brand managers can employ the process of regional branding to develop place or regional branding, and different techniques should be applied depending on the context of branding. In a word, brand managers should design the branding process and develop brand materials that are appropriate to the business environment.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This study employed multi-method research by conducting both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. However, in this study, quantitative data were only statistically analyzed by factor analysis without testing hypotheses. Therefore, future research may include hypothesis testing or model development in order to characterize the population of the study. Structural equation modelling (SEM) might be able to provide brand managers with additional perspectives on brand associations. Furthermore, the findings of the brand identity and tourist value for the ATC may not be generalizable to other contexts or tourism clusters, depending on tourist behaviors and tourism destination resources.

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