Brand Identity and Brand Image of Tourism Destinations in Lao PDR

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Business, UNITEC New Zealand

2018
Declaration

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This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: “Brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR”
is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Business

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- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2016-1020

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ABSTRACT

Ever since tourism was listed in the priority sectors for the development of Lao PDR, the country has been trying to promote its tourism destinations in order to attract more tourists to visit Laos. The government has been building on its brand “Simply beautiful” that represents the charming nature, and the unique culture of Lao PDR. The country’s destination branding has been implemented with the aim to create a brand image of Lao tourism destinations as authenticity, friendliness, harmony, relaxation, and peacefulness. Thus, it is necessary to measure the effectiveness of its destination branding in order to achieve such desired brand image.

The purpose of this research is to examine the brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR. The research first aims to identify the brand identity that the government is trying to promote, and then look at tourist perceptions toward the promoted brand identity. This is to find out if the brand image is aligned with the brand identity and see if there is a gap between them. In addition, the research intends to discover specific characteristics of the tourism destinations that attract tourists to visit Laos.

In order to achieve the aim of the research, semi-structured interview as a qualitative research method and questionnaire survey as a quantitative research method are applied in this research. A representative of Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism was interviewed and 200 tourists participated in the questionnaire survey. Also, to achieve one of the research objectives, a hypothesis has been tested and verified using different analysing techniques.

Based on the findings, the research has found different attributes of tourism destinations, promoted by the government, that make up six facets of the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations. The majority of those attributes under the six facets are highly perceived by tourists. However, because a few attributes are less perceived among tourists, the brand image perceived by tourists is not completely aligned with the brand identity promoted by the government, which results in the gap between the brand identity and brand image.

In conclusion, this research provides information for the government to have a better understanding about its brand identity and brand image in order to manage its destination branding more effectively.
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<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>The ASEAN Economic Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>The Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People's Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>MICT</td>
<td>Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism</td>
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<td>UREC</td>
<td>Unitec Research Ethics Committee</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the background, definitions, concepts, and overviews of the research study “The brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR”. The chapter first explains the background and problem of the research. Then it presents the research aim and objectives, research questions as well as the hypothesis. The research methodology and limitations are also briefly discussed in this chapter. In addition, the thesis overview outlining the structure of the thesis is presented at the end of this chapter.

1.2 Background

Traditionally, marketing plans are normally designed based on the marketing mix; however, in today’s highly competitive market, the marketing tasks have become more difficult and challenging so the traditional marketing approach is not enough as it is no longer working as effectively as it used to be. Thus, the growing competition has increased the importance of building successful branding (Baisya, 2013). A strong and successful brand can help a company to keep up with its with competitors as Kotler & Pfoertsch (2010) suggest that customers are willing to pay more for a branded product or service.

In general, brands usually refer to a unique symbol, name, design, trademark, or other association that identifies a product or a service and distinguishes it from its competitors (Miletsky & Smith, 2009; Dinnie, 2016). There are more detailed definitions of brands that go beyond the physical elements. Dinnie (2016) notes that some researchers define brands as a consumer experience, which involves both physical and emotional aspects that added value to the products or services and build up a special relationship between consumers and the products or services. Gronlund (2013) also supports the idea that branding is not only about products or service marketing but also about customer experience, satisfying customers and creating a relationship with customers. Similarly, Miletsky and Smith (2014) state that brand is the whole customer experience with products or services that creates reputation and expectations of benefit in the future. That reputation represents the brand and builds up customer trust allowing them to know what to expect and what to experience from the products and services.
In modern society, brands play a significant role in the success of a business. Besides research and development (R&D), efficient performance, and skillful human resources, brand is another important asset that can help a business to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Kapferer, 2012; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). According to Patricia (2009), brands create recognition and reputation to products and services and increases the products and the services’ value in the perception of customers. Since branding helps to build up customer trust and emotional attachment, it can influence customer purchasing decision (Keller, 2013). Chiaravalle and Schenck (2014) say that customers are more likely to purchase products or services they trust. A strong brand can create positive awareness among customers and increase their trust, making the selling of products or services easier (Chiaravalle & Schenck, 2014). Moreover, once customers choose the brand, they usually become loyal to that brand, continue purchasing it instead of other brands, and even recommend it to others. This results in brand loyalty, which protects customers from switching to competitors (Ferrell & Hartline, 2014). Therefore, branding is an essential part of building long term competitive advantage and business stability.

Branding is one of the vital marketing strategies to all types of business products and services. Likewise, the role of branding in marketing is increasingly becoming important for tourism services. Due to rapid changes happening around the world, such as market globalization, technological advances, and increased competition, tourism services have to pay more attention to their marketing strategy in order to respond to the challenges (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith, 2012). Since branding is a strategy used to differentiate products and services in order to gain a long lasting competitive advantage, it is essential for tourism services to have a better understanding of branding. Destination branding is quite a new marketing strategy for the tourism industry and is quite different and much more complex than branding a consumer product (Chauhan, Kaur, & Medury).

In the past, branding for destinations was implemented in the same way as for any other products; however, this approach does not focus and include the particular attributes of destinations regarding its geography, culture, and other unique attributes (Buhalis, 2000). Compared to consumer products, destination products are more complex as one destination is multi-functional and is comprised of various elements, thus making it challenging for destination marketers (Risitano, 2006). While consumer products are often competing on price, competitive advantage
for destination products is more about hearts and minds (Giannopoulos, Piha, & Avlonitis, 2011). Destination branding communicates the promise of pleasant memories and experience connected to the destinations (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005).

In recent years, the application of destination branding has increased in order to enhance the popularity, awareness, and image of destinations among visitors and tourists (Tsiotsou & Goldsmith, 2012). In order to implement effective destination branding, brand identity and brand image are the two important factors to take into account; it is essential that the communicated brand identity is consistent with the brand image perceived by tourists (Qu et al., 2011). The existence of gap between brand identity and brand image may result in the unsuccessful destination brand, thus it is important to identify the gap in order to take necessary corrective actions.

1.3 Problem description

Recently, Lao PDR has opened up the country considerably to encompass global integration and foreign trade and investment. With the intention to develop the country’s economy, products and services, Lao PDR joined the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997, the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2013 and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. According to the Lao PDR Economic Monitor report from World Bank, Lao PDR economy’s growth rose around 7.5 percent in 2014 resulting from the contribution of economic activity mainly construction, forestry, and services (Morgain, 2015). Tourism service is one of the major players in the Lao economy and is considered to be the fastest growing industry in the economy. In the first five months of 2015, the number of tourists to Lao PDR increased by 11% (Asian Development Bank, 2015). In 2013, Lao PDR was presented with the “World Best Tourism Destination Award for 2013” by the European Union Council on Tourism and Trade (Lao Voices, 2013).

Tourism has been listed in the eleven priority sectors to contribute to the development of a country from a socio-economic perspective (Manivong, 2011). Aiming to stimulate the tourism sector in Lao PDR, the government has been attempting to promote the country’s cultural, natural, and historical tourism. Since Lao PDR is rich in natural resources and unique cultures, ecotourism has become Laos’s unique feature which opens up an opportunity for tourists to get closer to nature and the customs of Lao’s multi-ethnic people. Community-based eco-tourism programs have been
implemented in seventeen provinces including 40 districts and 160 villages (Europeanunionnews, 2013). Thus, nature-based- tourism activities have drawn a lot of attention from tourists around the world.

Lao PDR has been building on its brand “Simply beautiful” that represents beautiful nature, and the authentic heritage and culture of Laos. The country aims to build an image of Laos as one of authenticity, friendliness, harmony, relaxation, and peacefulness (Vorarath, 2013). Recently, the country announced a new brand “Southern Laos, Charming by nature” aiming to promote the four southern provinces of Saravan, Xekong, Attapeu and Champassak as one tourism destination (Vientiane Times, 2015). However, the successfulness of the existing branding campaigns are still unknown. Tsiotsou and Ratten (2010) suggested that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of branding campaigns, it is necessary to identify and measure if the brand image is perceived by consumers or tourists in the same way the tourist services want them to.

Therefore, there is a need for further research in the destination branding of Lao PDR especially in identifying the gap between the brand identity that the government is trying to promote and brand image perceived by tourists. In this regard, the research problem is identified as “How can the government identify and measure Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and image gap?”

1.4 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this research thesis is to examine Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and image gap, and see if the brand is perceived by tourists in the same way as the brand identity. Based on the aforementioned aim, the main objectives of this research are identified as follow:

1. To identify Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity that the government is attempting to promote
2. To explore tourists’ perception towards the promoted brand identity
3. To examine Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image gap
4. To discover what specifically it is about the brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Lao PDR
1.5 Research questions

In order to address the research aim, the primary research question of this research is “How is the brand image of Lao tourism destinations perceived by tourist different from the ideal brand identity projected by the government?”

Based on the main research question and the objectives of the research, the sub-research questions were developed as follows:

1. What brand identity of Lao tourism destinations does the government want to promote?
2. How do tourists perceive the promoted brand identity?
3. Does the brand image align with the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations?
4. What is it about the brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Lao PDR?

1.6 Hypothesis

To achieve objective 3 of this research, the research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1o – There is no difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image

H1a – There is a difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image

1.7 Research methodology

Mixed method, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach (Creswell, 2011), is applied for this research. In the qualitative approach, semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2011) is conducted to gather data about the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations from the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism. The data obtained from the interview helped to form a questionnaire, which was used in the quantitative approach. In the quantitative approach, a questionnaire was used to survey 200 tourists in Lao PDR.

1.8 Research limitations

There are some limitations related to research methodology in this research. Regarding the qualitative approach, since only one representative of the Department of Tourism Promotion of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism will be interviewed, it could be criticized on the
reliability of the data. However, since the representative was appointed from the head of department for the interview, it is expected that the information provided comes from the organization as a whole. For the qualitative approach, 200 respondents were selected from the famous tourist attractions in the central and northern part of Lao PDR but the tourist sites in the southern part are not covered due to time constraints.

1.9 Thesis overview

This thesis is divided into six chapters as follows:

- Chapter One provides a general background about branding and destination branding in Lao PDR and related problems were also discussed. It also introduces a problem description, research aim and objectives as well as research questions of this research.

- Chapter Two discusses the review of literature related to destination branding, brand identity, and brand image. The theories mentioned in the literature review will be a guideline and support for the analysis and discussion of the collected data in the later chapters.

- Chapter Three covers the methodology of the research which identifies the mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) that will be applied to collect data for this research. Data collection and analysis procedures will also be discussed in this chapter.

- Chapter Four demonstrates the analysis of the collected data, from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, using relevant research analysis tools, discusses the findings of the research resulting from the analysis of the data and then tests and verifies the hypothesis.

- Chapter Five focuses on the discussion of the findings with the purpose of addressing research objectives and providing answers for research questions. The discussions are supported by relevant literature mentioned in chapter two.

- Chapter Six concludes the research by providing conclusions and recommendations suggesting possible solutions based on the research findings. Research limitations and further research areas are also discussed later in the chapter.
1.10 Conclusion

Chapter One gives the readers an overall picture of why and how this research was done and what can be expected throughout this thesis. With the discussions of the issues related to tourism branding in Lao PDR, it can be concluded that there are problems to be addressed, which refers to the aim, objectives, the main research question and the sub-research questions of this research.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provides an overview of this research, which includes background, problem description, research aim, research objectives, and research questions. General and brief information about the research methodology and research limitations are also mentioned in this chapter. At the end of the chapter, a highlight of each chapter of the research is also provided.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, focuses on the literature review, in which relevant theories will be discussed in order to be a guideline and support for the research finding.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrates an overall picture which tells what the thesis is about. This chapter first discusses literature related to destination branding including definitions, the role of destination branding in tourism, and the important factors of destination branding. The chapter then discusses the first factor, which is brand identity. Here, the concept of brand identity and different brand identity models are discussed. The chapter further highlights the Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism model, which will be applied in this research. Following that, the chapter discusses the literature regarding brand image, which is the second factor. The literature review lastly focuses on the gap between brand identity and brand image.

2.2 Destination branding

The role of branding has become more important for tourism marketing as it can help to differentiate the destinations by creating a positive image of a destination in the mind of tourists. Destination branding refers to marketing activities which have an impact on consumers’ awareness, preference, and loyalty (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Similarly, Qu et al. (2011) defined destination branding as “a way to communicate a destination’s unique identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors (p. 466).” Cai, Gartner, and Munar (2009) link destination branding to images of destination consumers have in mind and the type of relationship between the consumers and the destinations. Pawaskar and Goel (2014) explain that destination branding is similar to product branding as destination branding involves creating a brand name or slogan, logo, or symbol to identify and distinguish the destinations, thus allowing tourists to relate the symbols with the destinations.

An effective destination brand should deliver the expectations of an unforgettable experience linked to that destination (Hassan, Hamid, & Bohairy, 2010). Hoque (2016) summarizes destination brand as a set of marketing activities, which include “(1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional
connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice (p.309).

Although branding has been a popular marketing tool for a long time and the academic research about destination branding has increased, due to the complexity of the term destination, the quantity and quality of available literature about destination branding is still a lot less than that of literature about general products and services branding (Cai et al., 2009). Likewise, many researchers claimed that destination branding is more complex than product branding as a destination involves various elements such as the actual sites, culture, customs, and history. Because of this, managing brands and creating a unique brand identity is necessary for generalizing the identity and characteristics of a particular destination (Qu et al., 2011; Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). A unique brand identity of a destination will bring out the outstanding physical features and benefits of a destination, and differentiate the destination from its competitors (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010).

Several studies indicated that there are two critical elements associated with destination branding: the brand identity and the brand image (Qu et al., 2011). Branding activities involve communicating brand identity to create brand image (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). While brand identity is created from the sender’s or the destination marketer’s perspective, brand image is perceived by the receivers or the tourists (Stevens, 2012). In the process of destination branding, the brand strategists develop a brand identity from the unique characteristics of the destinations in order to create a memorable brand image in the mind of tourists. In other words, “consumers build a destination image in their minds based on the brand identity projected by the destination marketers. Then, destination marketers establish and enhance brand identity based on their knowledge about consumer’s brand image on the particular destination” (Qu et al., 2011, p. 467). Matiza and Oni (2014) developed a conceptual model of destination-brand identity and image (Figure 1), which consists of 3 steps: (1) destination-brand identity, (2) communicators of destination-brand identity, and (3) destination-brand image. The basis of this model is that a brand identity is created to represent the destination, and communicated the brand identity with marketing strategy, which then results in the development of an image of the destinations among
the consumers. Therefore, it is important for the Lao government to understand the roles of brand identity and brand image in destination branding.

**Figure 1: The conceptual model of destination-brand identity**
(Source: Matiza & Oni (2014, p. 401))

### 2.3 Destination branding in Lao PDR

Since tourism is one of the priority sectors and has played an important role in the development of Lao PDR, the country has been trying to promote its tourism sector (Manivong, 2011). The government aims for developing and growing natural, historical and cultural tourism based on its brand “Laos Simply Beautiful” (Vorarath, 2013). The Deputy Director General of Tourism Development Department, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism said that the brand “Laos Simply Beautiful” aims to (1) raise awareness and attract more tourists to visit Laos, (2) increase the quality of tourism by enhancing the depth and diversity of the country as tourism destination, (3) improve sustainability in developing Lao tourism destinations, (4) increase local pride by creating an identity that represent the values and principles of Laos (Oula, 2016). Oula (2016) also mentioned that the strategic action plans of “Laos Simply Beautiful” branding focuses on promoting the 4 beauty: (1) Beautiful in manner – representing the friendliness of Lao people, (2) Beautiful in culture – showing the uniqueness of Lao culture, (3) Beautiful in nature – presenting the charm and beauty of nature in Laos, and (4) Beautiful in food – promoting a variety and delicious tastes and of Lao food. In addition, to represent the brand “Laos Simply Beautiful”, the logo was created (Figure 2), in which the national flower “Jampa” represents the beautiful nature of the country, the image of Thatluang Stupa (Laos iconic monument) represent the authentic heritage, and the simple
but personal hand writing script “Simply Beautiful” represent the unique culture and the hospitality of Lao people (Vorarath, 2013).

Figure 2: "Lao Simply Beautiful" logo
(Source: Vorarath (2013))

According to the Lao brand strategy & culture report, the key assets of Lao tourism destinations include (1) toried history – an interesting history that can be seen in the traditions, identity and values of Laos today, (2) Fascinating nature – a great variety of natural places including mountains, caves, waterfalls, and rivers across the country, (3) Culture diversity – numerous cultural significant destinations with diverse traditions and cultures, (4) Sense of time – Lao people are laidback and very flexible regarding time, and (5) Community - community spirit or the sense of closeness is the important value of Lao people which can be seen in various social gatherings, celebrations, and religious festivals throughout the year (Ministry of Informaton, Culture, and Tourism, 2016). However, there are still a number of challenges facing Laos as a destination such as (1) Infrastructure & accessibility – the quality of tourist destinations from airport capacity to accommodations, tourist facilities and capability of human resources still need to be improved in order to increase the accessibility to Laos and to tourism destinations within the country, (2) Public – Private coordination – Public and private sectors need to collaborate more and work together towards the same objectives in order to meet the expectations of the tourists, (3) Low awareness – Laos is still a least well-known destination in Southeast Asian, and (4) Understanding demand – there is still a need to understand the tourists, their interests and their concerns of Laos as a destination to ensure that they are aligned with the tourism aims and that the aims are communicated to the audiences correctly (Ministry of Informaton, Culture, and Tourism, 2016).
For this research, it is important to know the background of the existing destination branding in Laos, and from the above literature, it can be seen that there is still a need for further research to see if the destination branding is working effectively.

2.4 Brand identity

The concept of brand identity was first mentioned by Kapferer in 1986 and since then there have been many discussions of it. Roy and Banerjee (2014) described brand identity as vision, beliefs and aims that tells what the brand stands for and its promises to consumers. Similarly, Konecnik and Go (2008) said that brand identity refers to a set of brand meanings and core values that a company wants to communicate to its consumers. It is what makes a brand unique and distinguishes the brand from others. Sääksjärvi and Samiee (2011) suggested that brand identity is created to form a relationship between the brand and the consumers.

Knowing brand identity is an important part of branding, this study focuses on identifying the elements of Lao tourism destinations that the Lao government are trying to promote in order to determine the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations.

2.3.1 Destination brand identity

In terms of destination branding, an efficient brand identity building can help to identify the destinations as well as position the destinations in the mind of visitors (Mishra, 2010). In the destination brand identity building process, the marketer projects brand identity based on the elements and characteristics of the destinations that make the destinations unique and different from other destinations (Qu et al., 2011). Brand identity creates a relationship between a destination and visitors by linking the destination characteristics to the visitors’ personality (friendly, adventure, etc). This allows visitors to identify themselves and relate to the brands, thus building up positive feelings toward the brand (Cosma, Urcan, & Bota, 2010).

When looking at brand identity models, the mostly cited brand identity models are those of Aaker, de Chernatony, and Kapferer, which have existed since the 1980’s but are still being widely applied nowadays (Petek & Ruzzier, 2013).
According to Aaker, brand identity is conceptualized into two distinctive parts, the core identity and the extended identity. Core identity refers to essence or the central values of brand that is likely to remain unchanged whereas the extended identity includes other added elements that give the brand depth and details (Knape & Lundell, 2011). Moreover, adding to brand’s identity details, Aaker’s model classified brand identity into four perspectives:

1. Brand as product (product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin)
2. Brand as organization (organizational attributes, local versus global)
3. Brand as person (brand personality, brand-customer relationships), and
4. Brand as symbol (visual imagery/metaphors and brand heritage).

Another model by de Chernatony describes brand identity as having five interrelated elements: brand’s vision and culture, positioning, personality, relationship and presentation. The process begins by considering the company’s or brand’s vision and culture, which is the central element, then functional attributes will be conveyed through positioning and emotional attributes through personality. To ensure effective brand identity, understanding both internal and external relationship with stakeholders and consumer is essential. The brand identity then is sent to stakeholders to reflect and interpret the identity as presented (Schroeder & Morling, 2006).

The model by de Chernatony was adapted from Kapferer’s brand identity prism which consists of six facets: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image (Konecnik & Go, 2008).

From the above models, it can be seen that the models share common elements of brand identity such as culture, personality and relationship. Although there are several brand identity models, Kapferer’s brand identity prism was the first to introduce the concept that captures a holistic view of brand identity from the internal and the external perspectives, and the model is widely accepted and adopted by many researchers (Ross & Harradine, 2011; Farhana, 2014; Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Therefore, Kapferer’s brand identity prism is chosen as a model for this research thesis.
2.5 Kapferer’s brand identity prism

The “brand identity prism” was developed by Kapferer for the purpose of building brand identity, and this conceptual model is comprised of six identity facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection and self-image (Kapferer, 2012). The figure below displays the model of Kapferer’s brand identity prism.

![Figure 3: Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism](source: Kapferer (2012, p. 158))

The six facets of brand identity above can be explained in two dimensions:
- First, the sender vs. the recipient. This has emerged from the communication theory, in which there is a speaker who sends a message and a listener who receives the message, thus forming a relationship. According to the model, the physique and personality facets represent the sender whereas the reflection and self-image facets represent the recipient. The relationship and culture facets then bridge the gap between the sender and the recipient (Kapferer, 2012).
- Second, externalization vs. internalization. The physique, relationship and reflection facets on the left side of the diagram define social expression while the personality, culture and self-image on the right side determine inner aspects of the brand (Kapferer, 2012).
The brand identity prism describes the brand through six different facets as follow:

1. Physique: the brand’s physical features and qualities including the backbone and tangible value of the brand
2. Personality: the brand’s attributes or characteristic perceived in the eyes of consumers and built up through communication of its products or services with its consumers
3. Culture: the brand’s set of values and principles or what the brand stands for which often influenced by its country of origin.
4. Relationship: the way brand acts toward its customers, how it communicates with customers, or how it deliver services to customers
5. Reflection: the image of the customers that the brand meant to serve. It is not the way the customers is but it is what they want to be perceived as a result of using the brand
6. Self-image: the way the brand makes the customers feel about themselves, and how customers see themselves when using the brand (Kapferer, 2012).

Kapferer (2012) states that these six facts are all interrelated and form a well-designed identity of a brand. Mishra (2010) points out that Kapferer’ Brand Identity Prism enables marketers to study and understand different aspects of the brand. Regarding destination branding, this Brand Identity Prism can help to identify different aspects of a destination that make up a brand identity of the destinations. Therefore, the above literature supports sub-question 1 as the Kapferer’ Brand Identity Prism can be used as a base to help identify the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations.

2.6 Brand image

Ashton and Scott (2012) refer to brand image as “feelings, ideas and attitudes that are given by the brand (p. 282).” To Lahap, Ramli, Said, Radzi, and Zain (2016), brand image refers to the attributes and personality traits of the customers and the benefits that customers get from the brand. Aaker adds that brand image is defined as how consumers perceive the brand, which might be different from the projected brand identity (Knape & Lundell, 2011). Similarly, Kapferer said brand image is from the receiver’s perspective. Brand image forms a set of impressions that influence the way the receiver perceive a brand (Blomkvist, Johansson, & Lindeberg, 2012). However, Lee, James, and Kim (2014) argue that brand image involves the complete perception of the brand which results from the process of cognition, affection and evaluation in the mind of customers.
Lahap et al. (2016) explains that advertisements, promotions, public relations, word-of-mouth, and consumer’s experience with the services influence the creation of brand image in the mind of consumers. Keller also notes that brand associations held in the consumer’s mind affect how brand image is perceived by consumers (Qu et al., 2011). The brand alone does not wholly affect the brand image of the destinations as brand image involves the projected brand and tourist’ interpretations (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). Brand image can occur in consumers’ minds before or after interacting with the brand and each consumer may perceive brand image differently depending on how they interpret the message based on their personality and experience (Blomkvist et al., 2012). Moreover, Qu et al. (2011) observe that “brand image plays a significant role in building brand identity whereas brand image is also a reflection of brand identity (p. 467)”, which means consumers form a brand image in their mind based on the projected identity, and brand identity is created based on the information about consumer’s brand image. This literature relates to sub-question 2 and sub-question 4, which explore the tourists’ perception towards the promoted brand identity and specific brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Lao PDR.

2.3.1 Destination brand image

Mishra (2010) points out the importance of destination brand image in decision making process and visiting experience as it influences the destination selection made by visitors. Aksari, Hede, and Burgess (2012) also suggest that it is important to build a strong brand image as it will be beneficial in terms of positive customer intentions; a brand image perceived by consumers has a direct impact on consumers’ willingness to provide word of mouth recommendations. A strong and positive brand image also helps to retain customers thus enhancing customer loyalty. Research by Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh (2016) shows that customer loyalty is increased when perceived brand image is satisfied. A strong brand image is therefore expected to strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty. This literature also relates to sub-question 2 and sub-question 4.

2.7 Brand identity and brand image gap

Költringer and Dickinger (2015) suggest that in order to evaluate the success of branding, one way is to compare the projected brand identity and the perceived brand image, and that destination branding is effective when the projected brand is similar to that from the sources of information
such as word-of-mouth, internet and social media. However, because there can be differences between the projected brand of the destinations and the source of information about the destinations, as well as other influences that can have an impact on tourists’ brand image, a gap between brand identity and brand image can occur (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015).

Aksari et al. (2012) suggest that because there is a lot of information available in the Internet such as customer experiences, feedbacks and reviews, the Internet has gradually become the main information source for tourists. As a result, how customers or tourists perceive the brand or the perceived brand images are influenced by the information on the Internet and the process or interpretation of the information can vary, thus the branding activities in the process of projecting the desired image may not be effective all the time. The consumers may perceive the images differently from what is projected, which can lead to a gap between tourists’ expectations and actual experiences (Aksari et al., 2012).

Therefore, to implement an effective destination branding, it is essential to understand the projected brand identity and the perceived brand images of a destination and their relationship in order to ensure that the image perceived by consumers is similar to the projected brand identity (Aksari et al., 2012). Qu et al. (2011) also suggests that understanding how consumers perceive the brand enables marketers to project brand identity that are suitable for the consumer, thus helping to reduce the gap between the projected and perceived image. This part of literature is related to sub-question 3, which examines Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image gap.

2.8 Conclusion

From the literature review, it can be seen that narrowing the gap between brand identity and brand image can ensure the effectiveness of destination branding. Therefore, it is important for the Lao government to examine brand identity and brand image of Lao tourism destinations and find out whether there is a gap between them. However, not everything discussed in this chapter would apply to the Lao context but it will surely assist the researcher to find information to support the finding later in this research.
2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the concept of destination branding and discussed related literature reviews, which point out the importance of brand identity and brand image. The literature review focuses on these two important elements and explains their relationship with each other and how they are related to destination branding. The review also delves into the six facets of the Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism, which will be used in this research to identify the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations. This chapter then pinpoints the importance of measuring the gap between brand identity and brand image in determining the successfulness of destination branding. In Chapter Three, the next chapter, the researcher covers the methodology that is used for this research.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, the literature review chapter discussed literature in relation to the research objectives and questions. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the suitable methodology for this research study. First, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are discussed, and the rationale for the use of both methods and mixed methods is also provided. The chapter further explains the process of the data collection, which includes sampling, interview and questionnaire. Then the chapter discusses different data analysis techniques that are used to analyse the collected data from the interview and the questionnaires. Lastly, the concerns related to the ethical issue of this research are also discussed.

3.2 Research methodology

Before collecting data, is it important to identify research methods that are suitable for particular research in order to get valid results (Curwin & Slater, 2008). Methodology involves selecting particular approaches and methods to be used for collecting and analysing data (Walliman, 2011a). In order to select appropriate research methods, it is essential to learn and understand the characteristics, the advantages and disadvantages of each research method. Creswell and Clark (2011) suggested that before conducting mixed methods research, it is vital to know the basic elements of both quantitative and qualitative research. In the qualitative research, the purpose is to study the opinions of the respondents about a particular issue; whereas in the quantitative research, the purpose is to look at the data provided by the respondents and see if it supports the existing explanation. Since this research will apply both qualitative and quantitative methods or mixed methods, these research methods will be discussed in more detail.

3.2.1 Qualitative research method

The qualitative approach focuses on getting an in-depth understanding of a particular subject of study, hence the data is mostly in the form of words rather than numbers (Creswell, 2012). Because of this, qualitative research is useful for theory generating, model building or exploratory studies, in which there is a need to understand or analyse special cases, social or organisational behaviours, small groups, or important individuals (Remler & Ryzin, 2011). Creswell (2013) explains
qualitative research as a study of research problems by inquiring and collecting data through analysing data, interviewing participants and observing behaviour in a natural setting. Likewise, Denscombe (2010) suggested that the methods that are frequently used in the qualitative approach are interviews, documents, and observation of a small focus group. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to interact with participants and to have some flexibility as the questions are in the form of open-ended and not restricted to specific answers, so participant can provide answers in their own words and more information can be gathered (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Because of this, these kinds of data provide a richness and deep insights of a particular issue (Walliman, 2011a).

Denscombe (2010) claims that because the data is collected from a smaller group, this may result in an outcome that does not generalize the views of a large population. However, qualitative research is more purposive, which means participants are chosen for a specific purpose, and it is more intensive and time-consuming, thus there is a limit to the number of participants (Remler & Ryzin, 2011). He also claimed that compared with quantitative research, qualitative data is more difficult to analyse (Denscombe, 2010). Because qualitative data is often in the form of words or images, it relies on human interpretation, which cannot be accurately measure in a standard way (Remler & Ryzin, 2011; Walliman, 2011a). Moreover, the researchers can guide the respondents to prevent misinterpreting the questions but at the same time, the research can influence the respondents’ answers, which can lead to a concern about the information accuracy (Flick, 2008). Therefore, some people may question the validity of qualitative research. Taylor (2010) suggests that in order to improve the validity of qualitative research, the researcher should have participants check and review the information for accuracy and try not to modify or conclude the information based on one’s own assumptions.

For this research, a qualitative approach will be applied to firstly gather information from the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism as the research requires in-depth information about the brand identity of Lao tourism destination. The gathered information will also be used later in the quantitative approach to create a questionnaire.
3.2.2 Quantitative research method

Quantitative research generally refers to a research that involves quantitative and categorical variables, which can be as simple as counting numbers of people or can be more complicated statistics such as analysing interrelationship between variables (Remler & Ryzin, 2011). O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) state that quantitative approach is used to collect numeric data from a large population to examine trends and relations, and make comparisons. Quantitative research normally involves identifying “how many” or “how often” the target group has particular attitudes or behaviors. Taylor (2010) also states that quantitative research is often used to test hypotheses and find out if there is a relationship or a difference exists between different variables in a controlled setting. Quantitative research seeks objectivity by keeping personal contacts with the participants at a lowest level in order to not let individual bias influence the analysis of the data (Taylor, 2010). The common methods used to collect data for this approach are structured questionnaires that consists of closed-ended or forced-choice questions and surveys from a large group of people, which should generalise the whole population (Thamhain, 2014). Because of this, the data collected will indicate “the overall tendency of responses from individuals and to note how this tendency varies among people” (Creswell, 2012, p. 13). Compared to qualitative research, the data gathered from quantitative research is easier to analyse as it can be counted and measured in a statistical programmes; because of this, the data is more statistical reliable and valid. Another advantage of using quantitative research is that it allows researcher to make generalizations to the larger population, which means it reflects the overall population as the data is collected from a large sample (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Some researchers claimed that the quantitative approach has a limitation in the length and depth of responses and that the outcomes may be superficial (Muijs, 2010). Taylor (2010) also claims that quantitative research cannot fully examine the whole human behavior like the qualitative research as human feelings and emotions are difficult to quantify and the tools used in collecting quantitative data often do not provide the answers for all the research questions, thus it is limited in terms of ability to prove answers.

Therefore, this research study will apply the quantitative approach as the main research method for collecting data as it will allow the information to be gathered from a large group of tourists.
from various famous tourist sites in different locations in Laos. This information can provide sufficient results to understand overall perceptions of tourists.

3.2.3 **Rationale for selecting mixed methods**

Taylor (2010) suggests that a good research should be problem driven and not methodology driven, which means deciding which method is best should not be considered as selection criteria for choosing what research method to be used, rather looking for a method that will provide best answers to the research questions and objectives; sometimes using both quantitative and qualitative methods in the research can do the job best. Similarly, Creswell and Clark (2011) note that when one research method alone cannot provide all the answers to research questions, mixed methods should be a better choice. This is because combining both qualitative and quantitative methods generates a more complete picture by providing broad as well as in-depth data.

When looking at the research objectives of this research, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will do the task best. To achieve the first objective of the research, which is to identify Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity that the government is attempting to promote, qualitative research method should be employed in order to get in-depth information about the brand identity from the Lao government. Then in order to address the remaining objectives, which involves examining the perception of the tourists about the brand identity and image of Lao tourism destinations, quantitative research method will be applied in order to get data from a large group of tourists that will help the research to make generalization to the larger tourist population in Lao PDR. Integrating the two approaches develop a complete understanding of the research problem, by which qualitative approach provide more detailed views of participants whereas quantitative approach gives the broader trends and generalisation (Creswell, 2011). Therefore, a combination of qualitative and quantitative or mixed methods will be used for this research.

3.3 **Data collection**

Data collection is often carried out under time and resource limitations, thus it is important to think of how the data can be collected effectively and efficiently, whether to get data from individual, or large numbers, or whether to observe or measure particular things or people (Walliman, 2011a). In order to manage and organize the task of data collection, it is essential to select appropriate research tool which will be the means for collecting data (Matthews & Ross, 2010).
For this research, a semi-structured interview and a questionnaire survey will be used for data collection. Before discussing these two methods in more detail, it is best to discuss the issue of sampling first. Although when collecting data, the researcher is required to specifically look at those that are relevant to this research, the amount of relevant information can still be massive. One way to help decreasing the scope of data collection is to select a sample.

### 3.3.1 Sampling

When the research requires data from a large group of people, it is generally very difficult to examine all of them as it would take a very long time and can be very costly. Walliman (2011a) suggests that the best way out is to examine some of them to get data that can a representative of the rest of the group. This way of selecting a small group out of a large group is called sampling. There are basically two types of sampling: (1) random sampling (or also called probability sampling) and (2) non-random sampling (or also called non-probability sampling) (Walliman, 2011b). Remler and Ryzin (2011) assert that random sampling uses chance to select people from the population, which means each sample is chosen randomly and has a chance of being selected, though not necessarily equal, for the sample. Because sample is selected at random, the chance of selection does not have to be equal for each group of the population, which means there may be or may not be members with specific characteristics in the same quantities (Gray, 2007). A variety of techniques can used in random sampling such as simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling, etc (Walliman, 2011a). On the other hand, non-random sampling selects sample by non-random means, which is often used when a research purpose is small-scale experimental rather than generalization (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Walliman, 2011a). There are different techniques that are used in non-random sampling such as, accidental sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, purposive sampling, etc (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Sampling plays an important role in mixed methods research as there are different sample sizes being selected for this type of research (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Since this research applies mixed methods, which include both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the data is collected for different purposes and thus requires two different sample cases. In the qualitative research, the purpose is to find out as much information as possible about a particular issue by getting detailed and in-depth data rather than numerical data, therefore purposive sampling is often applied in the qualitative research (Taylor, 2010). In purposive sampling, a sample is selected for their relevance
to the issue being studied, with the purpose to allow the researcher to examine the research in-depth, and with the belief to get sufficient data to address the research questions (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Taylor, 2010). For quantitative research, the intent of sampling is to select individuals that are representative of a population in order to make generalizations, thus random sampling is frequently used in quantitative research (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Gray (2007) notes that random sampling allows the researcher “to estimate how closely our sample results approximate what we would have found out if we had considered the total population”.

Therefore, for the qualitative research method of this research, a purposive sampling technique is applied, in which a representative of the Department of Tourism Promotion of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, Lao PDR is selected because of the works that are related tourism marketing and branding, which is the issue that the researcher is studying. Although one sample may be a very small number, with the role and responsibilities of the sample, the researcher believes that the data will be sufficient to address one of the research questions. For the quantitative research method, a simple random sampling will be used, in which 200 international tourists in Lao PDR will be selected at random at different locations in Laos. The locations are main popular tourist attractions in three different provinces in Laos namely Vientiane Capital (the capital city of Laos), Luangprabang (the world heritage site), and Vangvieng (a popular attraction for its nature and adventure activities). These cities are selected because there are a lot of famous attractions, where the majority of tourists can be found here. Since the sample of 200 tourists is selected from the main tourist attractions, the researcher believes that the sample from these famous locations can represent the tourist population in Lao PDR.

3.3.2 Interview

Interviews are used in various types of research for data collection and it is commonly applied for collecting qualitative data (Matthews & Ross, 2010). There are three types of interviews that are frequently referred to: structured interview, unstructured interview and semi-structured interview (Walliman, 2011a). A structured interview follows a set of standardised questions, which may be a closed format, for each participant, in which the interviewer ask each participant in the same way with the same question using the same words; whereas an unstructured interview focuses on a broad area for discussion and has a more flexible structure, which allow the interviewer to ask additional questions in order to get insights into the issue, thus it can seem much like a normal
conversation (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Remler & Ryzin, 2011; Walliman, 2011a). A semi-structured interview is kind of a mixed of structured and unstructured, which means it may follow a set of standardized questions but are more opened-question and the questions may be asked in a different way to make it appropriate for each participant (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Remler and Ryzin (2011) state that qualitative interviews contain open-ended questions that enable respondents to answer the questions or discuss the topic in their own words, providing more detailed and in-depth information. Because of these characteristics, qualitative interviews can either be unstructured or semi-structured rather than structured.

Wilson (2010) suggests that the advantage of interview particularly face-to-face interviews is that both verbal and non-verbal communications are engaged, which can provide extra information for the researcher. Also, the interview can be recorded in order to check and review the information when needed. The interview also provide a flexibility of asking questions as rather than just following the set of questions, the researcher can explain further when it is unclear to the participants (Wilson, 2010).

It is also recommended by Wilson (2010) that to conduct an interview, planning is needed first to make sure that the information require from the participants is clear and right for the research objective. Then, choose the suitable type of the interview, whether it is structured, unstructured, or semi-structure, for the research. Next, before arranging the appointment with the participants, conducting a pilot study is suggested to help improving the validity of the questions.

For this research, semi-structured interview will be applied as the first method of data collection. The set of open-ended questions for the interview was created (see Appendix A) and translated into Lao language (see Appendix B). Since the participant is Lao, it is better to translate the questions into Lao language to make it more understandable for the participant. The purpose of the interview is to find out the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations that the government is trying to promote, thus the interview was conducted to gather information from the Department of Tourism Promotion of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, Lao PDR. The interview was held at the office of the interviewee, who is the deputy director of the Department of Tourism Promotion, and took around one hour. The data gathered from the interview was later used to create the questionnaires.
3.3.3 Questionnaire

Questionnaires are probably the most common method of collecting data especially for quantitative data (Walliman, 2011a). A questionnaire includes a set of questions that are designed to gather structured data and a set of answers for respondents to select. This allows all the respondents to be asked the same set of questions, to have the same set of answers, and in the same format (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

As the data is collected from all the respondents in a standard form, it can be analysed as numerical data. However, this indicates that designing a questionnaire is a very essential process in order to get a valid result. As designing a questionnaire is the key to the quality of the survey research, the researcher has to make sure that a set of questions and answers will gather the data that are sufficient to answer the research questions (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Because of this, designing and developing a questionnaire can take a lot of time and skill. Walliman (2011a) suggests that the questionnaires structure should be short and simple in order to make it easy for the respondents to follow and to ensure that they can complete the questionnaires.

The advantage of questionnaires is that it allows the researcher to gather the data without actually having to talk to every respondent, thus it is not costly and quite fast to manage large number of sample within large coverage area (Walliman, 2011a). A questionnaire itself also has a fixed structure format, which make it easier for the researcher to analyse the data and also make it convenient for respondents to answer. Moreover, the respondents can feel comfortable answering questions as the responses are anonymous (Walliman, 2011b).

Walliman (2011a) notes that the questionnaires can be delivered personally, by post or through the Internet. For this research’s data collection, the questionnaires are delivered personally in order to make sure that respondents can be helped when they have difficulties answering the questions. The data gathered from the interview about the Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity promoted by the government is formulated into a questionnaire format to survey 200 international tourists in Lao PDR in order to explore their perception towards the promoted brand identity, to investigate their brand image of Lao tourism destinations, and to measure the brand identity and image gap, which be addressing research question 2 to 4. The questionnaire consists of 50 closed format questions and took around 10 minutes to complete. The ‘self-completion’ questionnaire paper will
be distributed to tourists randomly at various popular tourist attractions in Laos. Since the questionnaire is used to survey international tourists, the questionnaire will be in English (see Appendix C).

### 3.3.4 Pilot study

Wilson (2010) suggests that a pilot study should be implemented before the real data collection to ensure the validity of the questions; this is to make sure that the information and the content in the survey are understandable to the participants. Therefore, for this research study, the research implemented a pilot study to test the questionnaire and the interview questions. For the questionnaire, a pilot survey was conducted on a small sample size of tourists and as a result, the feedback was taken into consideration and some changes were made to improve the questionnaire. For the interview, prior to the official interview, the information for participant’s sheet (Appendix D), which will be translated into Lao language (Appendix E) and the interview questions sheet were given the interviewee to review and necessary changes were made based on feedback.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Matthews and Ross (2010) describe data analysis as the process of analysing, explaining, interpreting and discussing the data that has been collected. The data collected is still a raw data that needs to be categorized and processed in in a way to show their meaning and interpretation, in which the processed data are used to draw inferences from (Gray, 2007). Walliman (2011b) suggests that when analysing data, the analysis must be relevant to the research problem and address the research questions or hypothesis.

For mixed methods research, the data analysis process involves analysing both qualitative data and quantitative data using different analysis methods (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand the procedures in both forms of analysis, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

#### 3.4.1 Qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data analysis usually deals with organizing and interpreting qualitative raw data which normally is in the form of documents, notes, interview transcripts, and audio or video recordings (Remler & Ryzin, 2011). Remler and Ryzin (2011) also say that qualitative data analysis consists
of three main steps: “(1) preparing and organizing the data, (2) reducing and summarizing the data, possibly through a process of coding, and (3) presenting the data, in narrative form, figures, and/or tables (p. 75)”. It is also essential to explore the data reading and reviewing through all of the data in order to get an overall understanding of the data (Creswell & Clark, 2011). There are other different specific strategies and tools used in qualitative data analysis depending on the researchers and the research topics.

For the qualitative data analysis of this research, the process is less complicated as the data is gathered from the interview of one person only, thus the researcher applies the mentioned three main steps as below:

- Preparing and organizing data: after the interview, the raw data in the form of audio recording is transcribed and translated into English script by the researcher

- Reducing and summarizing the data: normally the qualitative data which involves a number of participants are reduced by coding. However, since the qualitative data of this research involves only one participant, the data are summarised and made notes of important points that are most relevant to the research questions.

- Presenting the data in figures: to conclude the qualitative data analysis, the sum of relevant data is put together and presented in the figure, which represent the answer to one of the research questions.

3.4.2 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data analysis typically involves data in the form of numbers and applies statistical methods to analyse the data. Matthews and Ross (2010) state that statistical analysis is suitable for research that collects data from a random sample of a known population since the statistical analysis method allows the researcher to make generalization not just to the sample but the whole population. Statistical analysis method allows the researcher to come up with a set of findings that summarise the collected data and demonstrates how the data relates to the research questions in order to help answer the research questions or test a hypothesis (Matthews & Ross, 2010).
For this research, the data obtained through questionnaires will be analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). According to Gaur and Gaur (2009), SPSS is a statistical analyses software that is suitable for analyzing quantitative data and can be used to analyse various forms of data set including a simple descriptive statistics and a more complex ones such as regression and factor analysis. Using SPSS, the data can be displayed in many ways such as statistics, charts, and graphs, which make it easy for a researcher to describe the data and analyse trends and relationships (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

Walliman (2011a) notes that there are three types of data analysis, which are univariate analysis, bivariate analysis, and multivariate analysis. Univariate analysis is the simplest form of analysis among the three analyses, as it deals with only one variable, thus only descriptive test can be used in this type of analysis. Descriptive tests are mainly used to measure the frequency distribution and the central tendency. Bivariate analysis involves two variables with the purpose of examining the relationship between them in order to test hypotheses by using different bivariate statistical methods such as cross-tabulation and correlation. Multivariate analysis looks at the relationships between three or more variables. There are several methods that are used for multivariate analysis such as regression, factor analysis, and ANOVA (Walliman, 2011a).

### 3.5 Ethical concerns

To avoid causing harm or any other issues relating to privacy and confidentiality of relevant participants, it is essential to take ethical issues into account when collecting data (Oliver, 2010; Tracy, 2012). In this regard, the researcher asks for permission from the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism to conduct an interview with a representative from the tourism marketing department and to do a questionnaire survey on tourists in Laos. A formal written request letter was sent to the key contact person of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism in order to gain permission.

This research was conducted in Lao PDR and did not proceed until approval was received from the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Acknowledging the concern on ethical issues, this research only focused on studying tourists’ perceptions toward tourism destinations in Lao PDR, and the tourists’ identity remained anonymous. This research study follow UREC guidelines.
and guarantee that the participants’ rights and privacy is protected through the provision of confidentiality and ensure that they are not harmed by this research project.

3.6 Conclusion

The outline of research methodology mentioned in this chapter provides the researcher with a set of plans on how to collect and analyse data efficiently and effectively to ensure the success of this research. However, collecting data in Lao PDR is surely not an easy task as this research involves the government sector. It can take time before the researcher can get in contact with the government. A specific time frame set along with this detailed plan of research methodology can be the guideline to keep the research on track and make sure that sufficient data is collected to address the research questions.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses qualitative and quantitative research methods in terms of their characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, and pinpoints the reasons why mixed method is selected for this research methodology. For data collection, an interview was used as a tool to collect qualitative data with purposive sampling technique and questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from a random sample. Then the collected data from interview was analysed using three main steps and the data gathered from the questionnaires were analysed with SPSS software. To ensure that the research was conducted without any problem, related issues concerning research ethics are taken into consideration.

The next chapter discusses the findings from the interview and the questionnaire.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the research methods that used for data collection and analysis of this research. This chapter focuses on the analysis of the data collected for this research. Since mixed methods are applied for this research, this chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interview and the questionnaires. First, the findings from the semi-structured interview with a representative from the Department of Tourism Promotion of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism (MICT) are presented which will provide the information about brand identity of Lao tourism destinations that the government is trying to promote, which will answer objective 1 of this research; thus, the results from the interview will be used to create a brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations based on the model of Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism. Second, the chapter illustrates the findings from the questionnaires that were used to survey 200 tourists about their perception towards the brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations. The questionnaire finding section first covers the demographic information of the respondents and general information about their travelling experience, and then demonstrates the analysis of data that will also answer objective 2, 3, and 4.

4.2 Interview findings

This section discusses the data from the semi-structured interview, which focuses on generating findings to help answer the objective 1: to identify Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity that the government is attempting to promote. The semi-structured interview was conducted to interview a representative from the Department of Tourism Promotion of the MICT in order to gather information about their tourism branding, particularly the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations that they are trying to promote. The interview questions were created based on Kapferer’s brand identity prism: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image.
4.2.1 Brand identity Prism of Lao tourism destinations

Physique:

1. How do you describe Lao PDR as a destination?

*Lao PDR is a destination that can attract tourists with its nature charms, its unique culture, and its interesting history. In terms of its nature, Lao PDR is full of natural resources such as mountains and rivers, which will be great not only for sightseeing but also for adventure activities. Lao culture reflects the lifestyle style of people; as Lao people enjoy celebrations, it can be seen that there are a number of festivals happening throughout the year. Lao PDR also has a rich history, reflecting the country’s fascinating religious art and architecture, thus making it one of World Heritage sites. Because of this, the government focuses on promoting the country’s nature, culture and history, and came up with the tourism branding slogan and logo “Lao PDR simply beautiful” which can be seen in all Lao tourism advertising media such as websites, events, etc. In addition, the interviewee added that the country’s peacefulness and friendliness is another key that can attract tourists to visit Lao PDR. Not only is the country relaxed and peaceful but Lao people always welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality.*

Based on a summary of the interview, the physique facet of the identity prism of Lao tourism destinations can be identified as follows:

- “Laos simply beautiful” is well-known as the tourism slogan for Lao PDR
- “Laos simply beautiful” logo is easy to be recognized
- Lao PDR is relaxed and peaceful
- Lao PDR has a rich historic and cultural heritage including religious art and architecture
- Lao PDR is a land of festivals and celebrations
- Lao PDR is full of natural resources: mountains and rivers
- Lao people welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality
Personality:

2. If Lao tourism destination was a person, how would you describe the personality of that person?

Although Lao PDR is relatively small compared to other countries, the country is peaceful and safe. With the country’s political stability, tourists can feel safe when travelling in Lao PDR. This is probably the main characteristic of the country. Also, Lao PDR is considered as tourist friendly country as Lao people welcome tourists with smile and friendliness, and greet others with a player-like gesture. Because of this, Lao people can also be seen as sincere and gentle. Moreover, the country’s personality can be described as traditional because traditional practices can still be seen widely in the country. For example, Lao people still wear Lao traditional dress in the workplace and temples.

On the basis of this explanation, the personality facet of Lao tourism’s identity prism can be seen as a combination of:
- Stable
- Peaceful
- Safe
- Friendly
- Sincere
- Gentle
- Traditional

Culture:

3. What particular vision and values do Lao tourism destinations bring out?

In spite of globalisation, Lao culture is still greatly influenced by Buddhist traditions. This can be seen in the festivals and celebrations that are mostly related to Buddhist religious activities. Festival is another component of Lao culture as Lao people celebrate a lot of festivals such as Boat racing festival, Thatluang festival, Lao new year, etc. Also, Lao traditional culture and customs are still practiced throughout the country even in the city, and the original lifestyle of Lao people can still
be seen in the rural area; Lao people live a simple lifestyle. Moreover, Lao PDR is a home to over 200 ethnic groups, in which each ethnic group has distinct values and culture, thus making the country ethnically diverse. These characteristics make the culture of Lao PDR unique and authentic.

From this information, it can be seen that the culture facet of Lao tourism identity prism consists of:

- Authentic
- Unique
- Ethnic diversity
- Buddhist traditions
- Festivals
- Simple lifestyle

**Relationship:**

**4. What kind of relationship can be created between Lao PDR tourism destinations and tourists?**

Because Lao PDR welcomes tourists with warm and genuine service, hospitable relationship can be created between Lao PDR and its tourists. In order to build a strong hospitality, Lao people are encouraged to welcome tourists with a smile. Beside that, Lao people are helpful and supportive. For example, despite the language difficulty, when tourists are lost, Lao people would try their best to explain or show the tourists the direction. In fact, Lao people often get excited talking to tourists as it is one way for them to practice their English. By doing this, both tourists and the local people can help one another, thus creating a supportive relationship between them. Because of the hospitality and helpfulness of Lao people, tourists may find it easy to approach them. Tourists may also find that Lao people are quite open. Although, tourists may be strangers to the local people, they are always welcomed into the community and encouraged to join in the local activities, ceremonies or celebrations for special occasions. This is because Lao people like sharing and exchanging culture and experience with tourists, hence making the tourists feel connected to the locals and communities.
From the above observations, it can be established that the relationship facet of Lao tourism identity is:

- Hospitable
- Sharing
- Supportive
- Accessible
- Feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities

Reflection:

5. What does the government expect tourists to gain from travelling to Lao PDR? (What image of oneself do you think a tourist wants to achieve?)

Nature is one of the main elements of Lao tourism destinations that the government expects tourists would appreciate it when travelling in Lao PDR. Tourists who travel to Lao PDR are seen as those who want to explore the greenery and beautiful nature scenery as they would find the country surrounded with mountains and rivers. With the existence of nature, most tourists in Lao PDR are also seen as those who look forward to adventure activities such as kayaking, hiking, ziplining, tubing, etc. Another thing that the government expect tourists to gain from travelling in Lao PDR is experiencing authentic culture and historic heritage. Lao culture is well preserved and passed on from generation to generation, thus tourists who travel to Lao PDR are seen as those who want to experience the uniqueness of Lao culture. Also, tourists get to learn about the history of Lao through historical and heritage sites. For example, a heritage site in the northern part and another one in the southern part of Lao PDR were recognised as the World Heritage sites. The splendid nature and cultural heritage makes Lao ecotourism special and unique. Therefore, tourists who travel to Lao PDR may be interested in Ecotourism as it allows them to get closer to the community and not only that they can help the community to generate income but also minimize environmental impact.

From these observations about Lao tourism, it can be understood that the reflection facet of Lao tourism identity is as followed:

- Want to explore natural charms
- Want to discover authentic cultures
- Are interested in historic heritage
- Want to experience eco-tourism
- Look for adventure

Self-image:

6. What does the government want Lao PDR tourism destinations to make people feel about themselves when visiting Lao PDR? (What feelings do you think tourists want to have/did have during and after visiting Lao PDR?)

As mentioned before that Lao PDR is peaceful and full of nature, this being the case tourists in Lao PDR will develop their self-image as “I feel relaxed and chill-out” and “I feel attached to nature”. Also, as tourists are encouraged to be involved in the local activities, they will be feeling close and connected to the community. Moreover, the richness of diverse ethnicity, unique culture, and interesting history will make tourists feel that they are more curious about culture and history, so that they will be learning and experience a lot of new things when travelling in Lao PDR.

Based on these observations, it can be said that the self-image facet of Lao tourism identity is:
- I feel relaxed and chill-out
- I feel attached to nature
- I feel close and connected to the community
- I learn and experience a lot of new things
- I am curious about culture and history

4.2.2 Summary of key interview findings

1. How do you describe Lao PDR as a destination? (Physique facet)

   - “Laos simply beautiful” is well-known as the tourism slogan for Lao PDR
   - “Laos simply beautiful” logo is easy to be recognized
   - Lao PDR is relaxed and peaceful
Lao PDR has a rich historic and cultural heritage including religious art and architecture.
- Lao PDR is a land of festivals and celebrations.
- Lao PDR is full of natural resources: mountains and rivers.
- Lao people welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality.

2. If Lao PDR tourism destination was a person, how would you describe the personality of that person?
(Personality facet)
- Stable
- Peaceful
- Safe
- Friendly
- Sincere
- Gentle
- Traditional

3. What particular vision and values do Lao PDR tourism destinations bring out?
(Culture facet)
- Authentic
- Unique
- Ethnic diversity
- Buddhist traditions
- Festivals
- Simple lifestyle

4. What kind of relationship can be created between Lao PDR tourism destinations and tourists?
(Relationship facet)
- Hospitable
- Sharing
- Supportive
- Accessible
- Feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities
5. What does the government expect tourists to gain from travelling to Lao PDR? (What image of oneself do you think a tourist wants to achieve?) (Reflection facet)
- Want to explore natural charms
- Want to discover authentic cultures
- Are interested in historic heritage
- Want to experience eco-tourism
- Look for adventures

6. What does the government want Lao PDR tourism destinations to make people feel about themselves when visiting Lao PDR? (What feelings do you think tourists want to have/did have during and after visiting Lao PDR?) (Self-image facet)
- I feel relaxed and chill-out
- I feel attached to nature
- I feel close and connected to the community
- I learn and experience a lot of new things
- I am curious about culture and history

Table 1: Summary of key interview findings

The answers above represent the six facets (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image) of brand identity of Lao tourism destination that the government is trying to promote, which helps to answer sub-question 1 (what brand identity of Lao tourism destinations does the government want to promote?) and address objective 1 (to identify Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity that the government is attempting to promote).

4.3 Questionnaire findings

This section discusses the analysis of the data collected from 200 respondents who participated in the questionnaire survey. The collected data was analysed by using SPSS software to generate statistical results in order to support the explanation of the findings. The analysis of questionnaire data covers demographic information of respondents, their travelling experience, their perceptions towards the brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations and specific brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attract tourists.
4.3.1 Demographic information

This section focuses on relevant demographic information of respondents such as gender, age groups, occupations, and region of residence. The findings of this data allow the researcher to understand the background of the respondents and develop an overall picture of them. This section covers question 1 to 4, and each question is analysed as follow:

**Question 1:** The respondents were asked about their gender, and the findings are shown in figure 3

![Gender of Respondents](image)

**Figure 4: Gender of Respondents**

According to figure 3, the pie chart shows that there are more female respondents than male respondents participated in this survey. Out of 200 respondents, the number of female respondents is 124, which accounts for 62% of total respondents, and the number of male respondents is 76, which covers 38% of total respondents.

**Question 2:** The respondents were asked about their age groups, and the findings can be seen in table 2
Table 2: Age group of Respondents

The table 2 shows that out of 200 respondents, there were 83 people who are in the age group 16-25 years old, which covers 41.5% of total respondents; 77 people are in the age group 26-35 years, which represent 38.5%; 16 people are in the age group of 36-45 years old and also another 16 people are in the age group of 46-55 years old, which means each group represent 8%; The remaining 8 people are in the age group of over 55 years old, which account for 4%. The finding shows there is higher number of young people travelling to Lao PDR than older age group.

Question 3: The respondents were asked about their occupations, and the findings are shown in figure 4

Figure 5: Occupations of respondents

According to figure 4, the bar chart demonstrates that the majority of respondents are workers, which covers 54% of total respondents; following by students, which account for 33%;
respondents who are retired represent 3%; and other occupations cover 9.5%. The findings indicate that tourists who travel to Lao PDR are mostly workers and students.

**Question 4:** The respondents were asked about their regions of residence, and the findings are shown in figure 5

![Figure 6: Regions of residence of respondents](image)

According to figure 5, the highest number of respondents were from Europe, which accounts for 39.5%; 28.5% of respondents are from Asia; 24% are from North America; 5% are from Oceania; and 3% are from South America. The findings demonstrate that there are more tourists from Europe, Asia, and North America than other regions.

**4.3.2 General travel experience**

The purpose of this part of the research is to find out general information about the respondents’ travel experience. It includes their purpose of travelling to Lao PDR, their interests in selecting a destination, their number of visit to Lao PDR, their source of travel information, and their overall satisfaction of Lao PDR visit. Question 5-8, and 50 will be analysed in this section.

**Question 5:** The respondents were asked about their purpose of travelling to Lao PDR, and the findings are shown in table 3
### Table 3: The purpose of travel

According to table 3, the majority of respondents travel to Lao PDR for leisure, which covers 86.5% of total respondents; 7% of respondents travel to Lao PDR to visit friends and relatives; 5.5% of respondents travel to Lao PDR for business; and the remaining 1% travel to Lao PDR for other purposes.

**Question 6:** The respondents were asked about their main interests in selecting a destination, and the findings are shown in table 4

### Table 4: Main interests in selecting a destination

In table 4, the statistics show the mean, median, and mode of each different interests selected by respondents, by which 1 refers to “Yes” and 2 refers to “No”. The most important factor in selecting a destination is culture with the mean, median and mode of 1.16, 1.00, and 1 respectively; following by nature with the mean, median, and mode of 1.23, 1.00, and 1 respectively; then adventure with the mean, median, and mode of 1.38, 1.00, and 1 respectively. The remaining factors are less interesting to respondents as the mode or most often ticked by respondents is 2, which means “No”. The results indicate that tourists are more interested in culture, nature, and adventure than other aspects when it comes to destination selection.
**Question 7:** The respondents were asked whether it is their first visit to Lao PDR, and the findings are shown in figure 6

![Pie chart showing 84.5% first visit and 15.5% not first visit.]

**Figure 7: Respondent’s first visits to Lao PDR or not**

According to figure 6, the pie chart presents that it is the first visit to Lao PDR for 84.5% of total respondents where as 15.5% said it’s not their first visit. It can be seen that most of the tourists in Lao PDR have never been to Lao PDR before.

**Question 8:** The respondents were asked where they get the information about Lao tourism destinations, and the findings are shown in table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Travel Agent</th>
<th>The internet</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Brochure</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Travel Guide</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: The sources of information about Lao tourism destinations**

The table 5 shows the mean, median, and mode of the information sources selected by respondents. Here, 1 was set for “Yes” and 2 was set for “No”. The statistics demonstrate that respondents get the information about Lao tourism destinations mostly from the internet with the mean, median, and mode of 1.27, 1.00, and 1 respectively; followed by friends with the mean, median, mode of
1.55, 2.00, and 2 respectively, and travel guide with the mean, median, and mode of 1.63, 2.00, and 2 respectively. The remaining sources of information are accessed less by the respondents with the mean ranging from 1.81 to 2.00. The results indicate that internet is the main source of information about Lao tourism destinations.

**Question 50:** The respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction with their visit to Lao PDR, and the findings are shown in figure 7

![Figure 8: Respondents’ overall satisfaction with their visit to Lao PDR](image)

According to figure 7, the majority of respondents are satisfied with their visit to Lao PDR as 70% of total respondents rated their overall satisfaction as 90 out of 100; 29% of respondents gave 80 out of 100 for their overall satisfaction; 27% of respondents put 100 out of 100, which means they are completely satisfied with their visit to Lao PDR. It can be seen that none of the respondents rate their overall satisfaction lower than 60. This indicates that most tourists are satisfied with their visit to Lao PDR.
4.3.3 Tourists’ brand image towards brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations

The purpose of this part is to find out how tourists perceived the brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations promoted by the government. This part covers all six facets of the brand identity prism which are physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image. Question 9-43 will be analysed in this part. In each question, participants were asked to rate their disagreement or agreement on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means disagree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree, and 5 means strongly agree. The findings are shown in the tables below, which are categorized into different facets. Under each identity facet, there are several statements that make up that identity facet.

Question 9-15: The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards the physique facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physique:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Neutral 3</th>
<th>Agree 4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. “Laos simply beautiful” is well-known as the tourism slogan for Laos</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. “Laos simply beautiful” logo is easy to be recognized</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Laos is relaxed and peaceful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Laos has a rich historic and cultural heritage including religious art and architecture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Laos is a land of festivals and celebrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Laos is full of natural resources: mountains and rivers</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Lao people welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Tourists' perception towards physique
According to Table 6, it can be seen that out of the 7 statements under the physique facet, 4 statements have shown at least 80% of the respondents who agree and strong agree with those statements. The statement that “Laos is full of natural resources” has the highest positive rating (96.5%, made up of 61% of respondents who strongly agree and 35.5% who agree with that statement); followed by "Laos is relaxed and peaceful" (94%, of which 39.5% strongly agree and 47.5% agree), "Lao people welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality" (90%, of which 44.5% strongly agree and 45.5% agree), and "Laos has a rich historic and cultural heritage including religious art and architecture" (87%, of which 39.5% strongly agree and 47.5% agree).

The statements that have lower agree percentage are ““Laos simply beautiful” logo is easy to be recognized” (54%, of which 13% strong agree and 41% agree), ““Laos simply beautiful” is well-known as the tourism slogan for Laos” (52.5%, of which 20% strongly agree and 32.5% agree), and "Laos is a land of festivals and celebrations" (45%, of which 11% strongly agree and 34% agree).

**Question 16-22:** The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards personality facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laos’s personality is</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Neutral 3</th>
<th>Agree 4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Stable</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Peaceful</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Safe</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Friendly</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sincere</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Gentle</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Traditional</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7: Tourists’ perceptions towards personality**
According to Table 7, the majority of the respondents (over 90%) agree that Laos’s personality is peaceful (93%, of which 42.5% strongly agree and 50.5% agree), traditional (92%, of which 43% strongly agree and 49% agree), and friendly (90.5%, of which 46% strongly agree and 44.5% agree).

Laos’s personality is gentle, safe, and sincere received a slightly lower agree percentage (83.5%, 79%, and 70.5% respectively). Laos’s personality is stable has the lowest agreement rate (56.5%, of which 10.5% strongly agree and 46% agree).

**Question 23-27:** The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards relationship facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The relationship that Laos forms with tourists is</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Neutral 3</th>
<th>Agree 4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Hospitable</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Sharing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Supportive</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Accessible</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8: Tourists’ perceptions towards relationship**

Table 8 shows that only one item has over 80% agreement rate, which is the perception that the type of relationship that Laos forms with tourists is hospitable (81.5%, of which 24.5% strongly agree and 57% agree). Sharing, feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities, and supportive received a relative lower agreement (70.5%, 65.5%, and 65% respectively). The lowest rating is accessible with 59.5% of respondents agreeing (16.5% strongly agree and 43% agree).

**Question 28-33:** The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards culture facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 9
### Table 9: Tourists’ perceptions towards culture

As can be seen in table 9, most of respondents (more than 80%) agree that the culture and value of Laos are shown in Buddhist traditions (88.5%, of which 40.5% strongly agree and 48% agree), authentic (88%, of which 38.5% strongly agree and 49.5% agree), simple lifestyle (84.5%, of which 41% strongly agree and 43.5% agree), and unique (81.5%, of which 38.5% strongly agree and 43% agree). 64% of respondents agree (22.5% strongly agree and 39% agree) that ethnic diversity is culture and value of Laos, whereas less than half of respondents think of festivals as culture and value of Laos (45%, of which 9% strongly agree and 36% agree).

### Question 34-38: The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards reflection facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 10

### Table 10: Tourists’ perceptions towards reflection
Table 10 shows that 92.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree that tourists visiting Laos are those who want to explore the natural charms of the country. A slightly fewer of respondents agree with the perception that tourists visiting Laos are those who want to discover authentic cultures (89%), who look for adventures (84.5%), and who are interested in historic heritage (78.5%). The least only 67.5% agree that the perception that tourists visiting Laos are those who want to experience eco-tourism.

**Question 39-43:** The respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement towards self-image facet of Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity, and the findings are shown in table 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As being a tourist in Laos,</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Neutral 3</th>
<th>Agree 4</th>
<th>Strongly Agree 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. I feel relaxed and chill-out</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I feel attached to nature</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. I feel close and connected to the community</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. I learn and experience a lot of new things</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. I am curious about culture and history</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: Tourists’ perceptions towards self-image**

According to table 11, 93% of respondents agree or strongly agree that as a tourist in Laos, they feel relaxed and chill-out. 87% agree or strongly agree that they feel attached to nature. 86.5% think that they are curious about culture and history and 74.5% see themselves learning and experiencing a lot of new things from travelling in Laos. However, only 55.5% of respondents feel close and connected to the community while they are in Laos.

**4.3.4 Lao tourism destinations’ brand image that attract tourists**

This part of the questionnaire is designed to identify what it is specifically about Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Laos. It includes questions 44 to 49, so these questions will be analysed in this part.
**Question 44-49:** The respondents were asked to rate the attractiveness of each Lao tourism destinations’ brand image to them, and the findings are shown in table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Least attractive</th>
<th>Less attractive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>More attractive</th>
<th>Most attractive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Nature (rivers, mountains, etc.)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Culture (cuisine, traditions, etc.)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>History &amp; heritage (monuments, heritage sites, etc.)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Local events (cultural festivals, religious events, etc.)</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Attitude towards tourists (local friendliness, hospitality)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Eco-tourism (homestay)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 12: The attractiveness of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image**

According to table 12, to the respondents, nature (rivers, mountains, etc.) is the most attractive brand image of the Lao tourism destinations; 37% rated its attractiveness as more attractive and 52% rated it as the most attractive. The next most attractive feature is culture (cuisine, traditions, etc.), of which 51.5% think it’s more attractive and 34.5% think it’s the most attractive. History & heritage (monuments, heritage sites, etc.) and attitude towards tourists (local friendliness, hospitality) seem to have a slightly lower attractiveness to respondents (45% more attractive and 33% most attractive for history & heritage and 55.5% more attractive and 16% most attractive for attitude towards tourists). Eco-tourism (homestay), and local events (cultural festivals, religious events, etc.) are less attractive to respondents as they have the lowest attractive percentage (Eco-tourism got 38% for more attractive and 19.5% for most attractive and local event got only 34.5% for more attractive and 11.5% for most attractive).

- The ANOVA method is used to analyse the difference in respondents’ regions towards the attractiveness of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image, and the findings are shown in table 13 and table 14.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature (rivers, mountain)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.743</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.837</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (cuisine, traditions)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>4.24</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.821</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.753</td>
<td>.307</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.167</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.735</td>
<td>.052</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History &amp; Heritage</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.061</td>
<td>3.93</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local events and festivals</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>.098</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>.224</td>
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<td>.516</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude towards tourists</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
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<td>.582</td>
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<td>3.83</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>.767</td>
<td>.111</td>
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<td>.516</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.10</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.180</td>
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<td>.697</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>3.76</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-tourism (homestay)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Maximum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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<td>3.36</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>North America</td>
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<td>.898</td>
<td>.130</td>
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<td>South America</td>
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<td>3.83</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>.401</td>
<td>2.80</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>.925</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Mean scores of group of regions towards brand image
Table 14: Mean scores of group of regions towards brand image

According to Table 4.3.12, the mean scores of each region show a very similar trend and only a slight difference in each brand image attributes. For nature, the mean scores of Oceania (4.60) and South America (4.50) are higher than that of other regions. For culture, the mean scores of Oceania (4.50) and Europe (4.24) are higher than that of other regions. For history & heritage, the mean scores of Oceania (4.40) and Europe (4.11) are also higher than that of other regions. For local events and festival, the mean score of Oceania (3.60) and Asia (3.56) are higher than that of other regions. For attitude towards tourists, the mean scores of Oceania (4.10) and Asia (3.98) are higher than that of other regions. For Eco-tourism, the mean scores of South America (3.83) and Asia (3.75) are higher than that of other regions. In addition, it can also be seen that Nature, Culture, and History have higher mean scores whereas local events and festival, attitude towards tourists, and eco-tourism have a relatively lower mean scores across all regions.

Table 4.3.13: ANOVA – Attractiveness of brand image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature (rivers, mountain)</td>
<td>2.139</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>101.656</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103.795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (cuisine, traditions)</td>
<td>1.949</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>195</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>History &amp; Heritage</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>170.220</td>
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</table>
According to Table 13, the mean scores of each region show a very similar trend and only a slight difference in each brand image attributes. For nature, the mean scores of Oceania (4.60) and South America (4.50) are higher than that of other regions. For culture, the mean scores of Oceania (4.50) and Europe (4.24) are higher than that of other regions. For history & heritage, the mean scores of Oceania (4.40) and Europe (4.11) are also higher than that of other regions. For local events and festival, the mean score of Oceania (3.60) and Asia (3.56) are higher than that of other regions. For attitude towards tourists, the mean scores of Oceania (4.10) and Asia (3.98) are higher than that of other regions. For Eco-tourism, the mean scores of South America (3.83) and Asia (3.75) are higher than that of other regions. In addition, it can also be seen that Nature, Culture, and History have higher mean scores whereas local events and festival, attitude towards tourists, and eco-tourism have a relatively lower mean scores across all regions. From the findings, it can be interpreted that comparing to other brand image attributes, Nature, Culture, and History are more attractive to tourists from all regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature (rivers, mountain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2.139</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td>.521</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture (cuisine, traditions)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.949</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.487</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>105.571</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.541</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107.520</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History &amp; Heritage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2.716</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td>.915</td>
<td>.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>144.784</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147.500</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local events and festivals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>131.150</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.673</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131.980</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards tourists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3.609</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>1.888</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>93.186</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96.795</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-tourism (homestay)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.371</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>168.849</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170.220</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: ANOVA – Attractiveness of brand image
According to the information Table 14, the significant values of ANOVA of every brand image attributes are all greater than 0.05. Therefore, there is no difference in respondents’ regions towards the attractiveness of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image. This indicates that tourists from any region have the same or similar interests regarding the tourism destinations in Laos.

4.4 Hypothesis

This section discusses the hypothesis that is related to objective three of the research. It aims at generating findings and evidences to support the discussion in order to achieve objective three, which is the main objective that will help to answer the primary research question and address the research aim.

According to objective 3, which is “To examine Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image gap”, the following hypothesis has developed:

**H1o** – There is no difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image

**H1a** – There is a difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image

To test and verify the hypothesis, a t-test method in SPSS programme will be used to analyse the difference between brand identity and brand image of Lao tourism destinations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Value = 5</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BrandImage</td>
<td>-35.718</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 15: One-Sample Test, test value of 5 for brand image**

According to table 15, 5 is used as test value for brand image because ideally, Lao tourism destinations’ brand image should score 5 if brand image aligns with brand identity. Sig. (2-tailed) shows that the statistical significance or p-value is less than .05, which suggests that there is a statistical significant difference. Therefore, **H1o** – There is no difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image is rejected and **H1a** – There is a difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image is accepted, which means that there is a gap
between Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image. The gap in each facet is further analysed and the findings are shown in below tables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physique</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.0057</td>
<td>.44045</td>
<td>.03114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.1136</td>
<td>.47871</td>
<td>.03385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3.8330</td>
<td>.55011</td>
<td>.03890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3.9810</td>
<td>.49014</td>
<td>.03466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.1540</td>
<td>.51264</td>
<td>.03625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>4.1230</td>
<td>.49345</td>
<td>.03489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: One-Sample Statistics of each facet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physique</td>
<td>-31.925</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.0557</td>
<td>-.9329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>-26.187</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.2437</td>
<td>-.8197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>-30.001</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.0873</td>
<td>-.9507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>-29.401</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.0903</td>
<td>-.8745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>-23.339</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.0557</td>
<td>-.9329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image</td>
<td>-25.135</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-1.0557</td>
<td>-.9329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: One-Sample Test of each facet

According table 16, it can be seen that none of the means of the facet has the score that reaches 5. Table 17 also shows that the p-values of each facet are all less than 0.05, which indicates that there is a significant difference in every facet. Relationship facet has the largest mean difference (-1.16700), suggesting the widest gap exists in this facet. Culture has the second largest gap with the mean difference of -1.01900; followed by physique, personality, and self-image with the mean difference of -.99429, -.88643, and -.87700 respectively. Reflection has the smallest gap with the mean difference of -.84600.
4.5 Conclusion

The findings have shown that the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations that the government is attempting to promote focuses on nature, history, culture, and people of the country. Although tourists do not perceive the brand identity in completely the same way as the government wants them to, tourists mostly agree with brand identity that is promoted. However, because it is important that the brand image aligns with brand identity, the gap that lies in between the promoted brand identity and the perceived brand image needs to be addressed.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings of the analysis of data collected from the interview with government official and the questionnaires completed by 200 tourists. In the interview section, the findings are interpreted and categorized into different facets of brand identity based on Kapferer’s brand identity prism model. As a result, the ideal brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations is created, which will address objective 1. In the questionnaire section, the quantitative data is analysed using SPSS program and then the results shown in figures and tables are interpreted. The first part of this section demonstrates the findings about demographic information and general travel experience of the respondents. The middle part focuses on the respondents’ perception towards the brand identity and the brand image that attracts the respondents; this part will help to answer objective 2 and 4. The last part concentrates on testing the hypothesis using relevant quantitative analysis methods, which aims at achieving objective 3 of the research. The next chapter discusses the findings from this chapter in relation to the literature review, the research questions, and objectives.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the data collected from the questionnaires and interview were analysed and the findings were interpreted. As this chapter aims to answer the research question and respond to the research objective, it is divided into four sections based on the four objectives of the research. First, the chapter discusses the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations based on the findings from the interview. Second, it looks at the tourists’ perception towards the brand identity prism. Third, it further examines the gap between the perceived brand image and the promoted brand identity. Lastly, the chapter discusses the different attributes of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image that attract tourists to visit Laos. The discussion of this chapter is supported by the findings in the previous chapter and the literature review in chapter two.

5.1 Brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations

The first objective of this research is to identify the brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations that the government is attempting to promote. It is important to build up brand identity in order to tell the audience what the brand stands for (Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Likewise, brand identity is essential for destination branding to ensure that the attributes of the destinations are communicated to the tourists in a way that attract tourists to visit the destinations (Mishra, 2010). Qu et al. (2011) suggested that brand identity of a particular destination is created based on the characteristics of that destination. Kapferer introduced the brand identity prism model that includes the elements that best describe the characteristics of the brand (Ross & Harradine, 2011; Farhana, 2014; Roy & Banerjee, 2014). Therefore, Kapferer’s brand identity prism is applied in this research to create the ideal brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations.

Based on the interview outcome and the model of Kapferer Brand Identity Prism, the six facets (Physique, Personality, Culture, Relationship, Reflection, and Self-image) can be combined to form a brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations as indicated on the next page:
Figure 9: Brand Identity Prism of Lao tourism destinations

(Source: Adapted from Kapferer’s Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer 2012, p. 158))

The proposed brand identity prism provides an answer to research sub-question 1- what brand identity of Lao tourism destinations does the government want to promote? Just as Mishra (2010) stated, each facet of brand identity prism describes different elements of the destinations that make up a complete brand identity prism that capture a holistic view of the brand. The interview findings show how these different facets apply in case of the Laos tourism destinations brand, which result in the proposed brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations in figure 8. The physique facet describes the physical features of Lao tourism destinations and includes the Lao tourism logo and slogan, and natural, cultural and historical artifacts of a destination. The personality facet explains how the country is similar to a person with terms such as stable, peaceful, safe, friendly, sincere, gentle, and traditional. Such personality influence how tourists are treated, also called hospitality, sharing, supportive relationship between the tourists and the community, which made it easier for the tourists to approach the local people and have a feeling of closeness to the community. The
culture facet includes the values and lifestyles such as ethnic diversity, Buddhist traditions, and festivals. The reflection facet describes an image of the tourists who travel to Laos, who are people who want to explore the natural charms, authentic cultures, historic heritage and those who look for eco-tourism and adventures. The self-image facet also explains what the brand makes the tourists feel about themselves, for instance, “I feel relaxed and chilled out”, “I feel attached to nature”.

5.2 Tourist’s perception towards the brand identity

Beside brand identity, brand image is another important factor for destination branding (Qu et al., 2011). Brand identity is created and communicated to the audience in order to form a memorable brand image (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). While brand identity is created and communicated by the marketer, brand image is perceived by the audience (Stevens, 2012). In the case of Lao tourism destination branding, brand image refers to how tourists perceive the brand identity promoted by the government or the MICT. To address objective 2 – to explore tourists’ perception towards the promoted brand identity of Lao tourism destinations, the level of agreement towards all the six facets is analysed. The findings from the analysis of question 9-43 demonstrate how tourists perceive each facet of the Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity.

- According to Table 6 (Q9-15) in chapter 4, the results show that physique facet is highly perceived by the tourists as the majority of respondents agree to more than half of the statements under physique facet. In addition, the statement that “Laos is full of natural resources” has the highest agree percentage within the physique facet and also among all the sub-items of all the facets. However, the statements that are related to Lao tourism destinations logo and slogan, and the statement that “Laos is a land of festivals and celebrations” have a relatively lower agreement rate, which indicates that these statements are agreed to by a smaller number of tourists. It can be seen that the statements that have higher agreement rates are about what the tourists can see and experience more obviously when they visit Laos such as the peacefulness of the country, the richness of nature, and the uniqueness of culture, whereas the statements that have lower agreement rate are related to the logo and slogan, which might not be clearly noticeable if it is not communicated widely. In the case of the statement relating to festivals and celebrations that has a lower response rate, it can be
explained that the tourists visit the country during the time of the year that there are less festivals happening.

- The findings from Table 7 (Q16-22) show that personality facet is also highly perceived by tourists as more than 90% of respondents agree to the statement that Laos’s personality traits are “peaceful”, “traditional” and “friendly”, and more than 70% perceive “gentle”, “safe”, and “sincere” as the other traits. This means that the tourists strongly agree with almost every trait listed in the personality facet. The only trait listed in the personality facet that is least perceived by the tourists is “stable”, which indicates that it may not belong to the set of personality.

- The results from Table 8 (Q23-27) demonstrate that relationship facet is less highly perceived compared to other facets. More than half of the items listed in the relationship facet got a relatively low perception rating; “hospitable” and “sharing”, are the only types of relationship that have higher agree response while the rest received rating of no more than 65%. The findings also reveal that “feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities”, “supportive”, and “accessible” have low agreement rates because 31%-36.5% of respondents still feel neutral about these types of relationships.

- The findings from table 9 (Q28-33) show that culture facet is favourably perceived by tourists. More than 80% of respondents agree to 4 out of 6 items listed in the culture facet; “Buddhist traditions”, “authentic”, “simple lifestyle” and “unique” are highly perceived whereas “ethnic diversity” and “festivals” are less perceived as value and culture of Laos. It is not surprising that these two items received a lower rate as they are relatively less apparent unless there is a successful communication and promotion.

- From the findings display in table 10 (Q34-38), it can be seen that reflection facet is one of the highly perceived facets since 4 out of 5 reflection statements appear to be highly perceived. The majority of respondents agree that the expected image of tourists who visits Laos are those who “want to explore nature charm”, “discover authentic culture”, “look for adventures”, and “interest in historic heritage”. On the other hand, there are fewer tourists who see themselves as those who want to experience eco-tourism, which indicates the government has not been successful in promoting eco-tourism.
Based on the results from Table 11 (Q39-43), self-image facet appears to be highly perceived by tourists. All of the self-image statements except one got a high perception level. 74%-93% of respondents agree with the statement that being a tourist in Laos, they feel “relaxed and chilled out, “attached to nature”, and they are “curious about culture and history”, and “learn and experience a lot of new things”. Nevertheless, the only statement that is noticeably less perceived by tourists is the statement that “I feel close and connected to the community”. This is actually understandable as there is also a low perception level in one of relationship facet sub-items – “feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities”, which can be related and have an influence on the low perception level of that self-image sub-item. It is can be explained that if that type of relationship is not formed between tourists and community, they probably would not see themselves feeling that.

The analysis above aims at answering the research sub-question 2 – how do tourists perceive the promoted brand identity? The results demonstrate that the majority of the respondents have a positive perception towards the brand identity. However, there are a few of the sub-items in each facet that are less perceived than others. The government should focus on promoting those brand identity sub-items in order to reach the tourists more widely and achieve the desired brand image. Advertisements and promotions influence the development of an image of the destinations in the mind of audience and affect how brand image is perceived (Lahap et al., 2016). Therefore, a more effective marketing strategy is needed for the government to ensure the successful communication of the brand identity.

5.3 Promoted brand identity and perceived brand image gap

The perception of tourists is one of the factors that evaluate the success of branding; branding is successful when the tourists’ brand image is the same or similar to the brand identity (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). The differences between brand identity and brand image indicates that the gap exists between brand identity and brand image (Költringer & Dickinger, 2015). Therefore, to achieve objective 3 - to examine Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image gap, the promoted brand identity will be compared with the perceived brand image to see if there are differences between them.
The frequency analysis of Q9-43 shows that the majority of respondents perceive the promoted brand identity highly but there are still differences between the brand image and brand identity especially in the relationship facet of the brand identity, which indicates that tourists do not completely perceive the brand as Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity. To further examine the gap, the hypothesis is developed and the results support H1a – There is a difference between the promoted brand identity and perceived brand image, which means there is a gap between the brand identity and the brand image. The results are obtained from the t-test analysis of Q9-43, and also demonstrate the total gap with the mean difference of -.96495 (see table 15). It can be seen that the total gap existing is not that apparent. Also, Table 17 demonstrates that the overall gap appearing in each facet does not seem to be wide as well. The widest gap is -1.16700, which is the gap that appears in the relationship facet while the smallest gap is 0.84600, which is the gap that exists in the reflection facet.

The analysis aims to answer the research sub-question 3 - Does the brand image align with the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations? The findings show that there is a difference between the promoted brand identity and the perceived brand image, which indicates that the brand image does not completely align with the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations. A difference between tourists’ expectations and actual experience can lead to a difference in the way they perceive the brand, and tourists’ expectations are influenced by the source of information (Aksari et al., 2012). Therefore, if the government does not have an effective marketing strategy to communicate the brand, and there is not enough information about the brand available, then it is undeniable that there will be a gap between the brand identity and brand image.

5.4 Lao tourism destinations’ brand image that attracts tourists

From the analysis of questions 44-49, the findings show that the majority of respondents think that “nature”, “culture”, “history & heritage” are more attractive brand image attributes of Lao tourism destinations whereas “attitude towards tourists” and “eco-tourism” are less attractive. “Local events” are the least attractive among others. This may have been because “nature”, “culture”, and “history & heritage” have been widely promoted as key assets of Lao tourism destinations and are probably what the tourists may have perceive from promotional communications prior to arriving in Lao PDR. When looking at other attributes such as “eco-tourism” that are less attractive, it can be seen that eco-tourism has only been recently implemented as part of the tourism programs,
therefore, it might have not been widely known by the tourists, whereas “attitude towards tourists”, another attribute that less attractive, can only be felt when the tourists are interacting with the local people when they visit the country, and therefore, this attribute may not be something they are familiar with unless they have experienced it before. Similarly, “local events”, the least attractive attribute, can be experienced only when tourists visit during the time when the local events and festivals are happening, thus not all tourists will get to experience and know about this. These may be the reasons why these attributes are less attractive comparing to nature, culture, and history & heritage.

In addition, table 13 demonstrates similar results as the mean scores of nature, culture, and history & heritage are higher than the mean scores of attitude towards tourists, eco-tourism, and local events across all regions. This indicates that tourists from any regions all find nature, culture, and history & heritage more attractive for them.

Besides, the study of the difference in respondents’ regions towards the attractiveness of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image shows that the significant values of ANOVA analysis of every brand image attributes are all greater than 0.05 (see Table 14). Therefore, the findings imply that there is no difference in tourists’ regions towards the attractiveness of Lao tourism destinations’ brand image.

The analysis aims at answering research sub-question 4 - What is it about the brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Lao PDR? The results illustrate that the majority of tourists from all regions think that nature, culture, and history & heritage are the brand image attributes of Lao tourism destinations that attract them to visit Laos. Destination brand image has an impact on the visitor’s decision making process in destination selection (Mishra, 2010). Therefore, it is important that the government focus on building positive brand image around the brand image attributes that can attract more tourists to visit Laos.

5.5 Conclusion

The proposed brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations provides an overall picture of brand identity that the government is trying to promote and also acts as a tool to evaluate the successfulness of the current branding strategy. The results from comparing the brand identity and
brand image allow the government to see whether there is a gap so corrective actions can be taken to maximize the branding strategy and increase positive brand image among tourists.

5.6 Chapter summary

Chapter five discussed and elaborates the findings of chapter four. The discussions are supported by the findings and relevant literature and hypothesis in order to deliver the conclusions to the research. In addition, this chapter provides answers to the research sub-questions in order to achieve research objectives.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Research conclusions

Lao PDR is a country that is rich in natural resources with unique culture and because of this tourism has been the sector that the country is focusing on. The government is trying to promote the country’s nature and culture to the world in order to attract more tourists to visit Laos. To promote the country, the government has been building the country’s brand by creating a brand identity of Laos. However, it was still unknown if the branding is effective.

Therefore, this research was created with the aim of investigating the effectiveness of the branding. While the brand identity of Lao tourism destinations is created, there is a need to understand how the tourists perceive the brand identity, and to see if they perceive it in the same way as intended in order to find out if there is a gap between the brand identity and the brand image. In order to achieve this aim, the research needs to answer the research questions. The answers to the research questions are explained as follows:

The first sub-research question is to identify Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity that the government is attempting to promote. The finding shows that characteristics of Lao tourism destinations that can be categorized into six different facets of the brand identity prism (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image), which has become the brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations (figure 8).

The second sub-research question is to explore tourists’ perception towards the promoted brand identity. The findings demonstrate that brand identity of Lao tourism destinations is widely perceived among tourists. However, the relationship facet of the brand identity is less well perceived compared to other facets. This is because under the relationship facet, there are elements such as “feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities” and “accessible” that are less perceived by tourists. It is understandable that tourists may not feel it if they have not interacted much with the local people. They may see that local people are friendly but to feel connected with them, they will have to spend a certain amount of time together. This may be the reason why the relation facet is less well perceived among tourists. In addition, when looking into different facets specifically, it can be seen that there are a few elements under each facet that are
less well perceived among tourists especially the elements that are related to festivals. Although, it is claimed that Laos is a land of festivals, and festival is seen to be one of tourism’s brand identity elements, festivals that occurred in Laos have not been widely promoted and communicated compared to other elements like nature, history and culture. Therefore, not all tourists who visit Laos know about Lao festivals unless they get to experience it themselves if they come at the right time when the festivals are held in Laos.

The third sub-question is to examine Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and brand image gap. The results from testing and verifying the hypothesis show that the brand image perceived by tourists does not completely align with the brand identity promoted by the government, which indicates that there is a gap between the Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and the brand image. The answers in the previous sub-question also provide answers to this sub-question since not all facets of the brand identity are widely perceived by tourists and thus gap between brand identity and brand image exist. Also, because the relationship facet of the brand identity is least well perceived among tourists, this explains why the widest gap exists in the relationship facet.

The last sub-question is to discover what specifically it is about the brand image of Lao tourism destinations that attracts tourists to visit Lao PDR. The results show that “nature”, “culture”, and “history & heritage” are the brand image attributes of Lao tourism destinations that attract them to come to Lao PDR. It can be seen that these attributes are more apparent to tourists in terms of tourism destinations or probably are what tourists perceive as the main attributes of Lao tourism destination since these attributes have been broadly promoted for a long time and therefore making tourists feel that these attributes can attract them more. On the other hand, “attitude towards tourists”, “eco-tourism”, and “local events” are less attractive since tourists may have felt that these attributes are less important in terms of elements that they look for in tourism destinations or these may be something that they have not yet experience like local events for example; tourists may have not known how unique the local events in Laos unless they have been to one, thus they may found it less attractive to them.

From the discussions above, the findings can help to answer the main research question: “How is the brand image of Lao tourism destinations perceived by tourist different from the ideal brand identity projected by the government?” The answer to this is that the brand image of Lao tourism
destinations perceived by tourists is different to some extent from the ideal brand identity projected by the government as the findings showed that the way the tourists perceive the brand identity is not completely the same as expected by the government and that there is still a gap between the brand identity and brand image.

In conclusion, the research has addressed all the research sub-questions as well as answering the main question of the research, which also helps to achieve the objectives and aim of the research. In addition, the findings also help to address the research problem “How can the government identify and measure Lao tourism destinations’ brand identity and image gap?” By determining the brand identity promoted by the government and examining the brand image perceived by tourists, the gap between the brand identity and image can be identified and measured, thus allowing the government to see if its destination branding is applied effectively.

6.2 Recommendations:

From the results of the study, there are some recommendations for the government to consider to help improve its branding strategies regarding tourism destinations in Lao PDR, which are as follows:

- This research has developed a brand identity prism of Lao tourism destinations (figure 8), which the researcher thinks will be useful for the government. The government should use the developed model as a reference to improve its effectiveness in promoting its brand identity.

- The government should make sure that its promoted brand identity is consistently communicated through the intermediary to the audience. The government should inform the related sectors such as relevant departments and tour companies about the brand identity that the government is trying to promote, to make sure that they are on the same page and will convey the same information to the tourists.

- In order for the promoted brand identity to be widely perceived by tourists, the government should improve its destination branding by using digital marketing. Promoting its tourism destinations through the internet and social media can help reach a larger number of tourists.
The findings showed that there are certain attributes of tourism destinations that attract tourists. Knowing this, the government should focus more on promoting these attributes in order to attract more tourists to visit Laos.

6.3 Further research:

This research was conducted on a small sample size. Therefore, in order to increase the accuracy of the findings, the research should be conducted on a larger sample size. There is also further research for consideration. Research could be conducted to measure the effectiveness of the communicators of destinations’ brand identity. Related government sectors and tour companies could be examined to find out how they communicate the brand identity and to see if they are communicating correct information.

6.4 Closing statement:

The research provides useful information about brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR. The government can use this information as a reference and guide to improve the effectiveness of its destination branding. It is undeniable that the perception of tourists is an important factor in determining the success of destination branding. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to understand tourists’ perceptions, which can help the government to develop an ideal brand identity and implement effective communication methods, thus getting a desired brand image.
REFERENCES


Chauhan, A., Kaur, A., & Medury, Y. Destination branding and architecture: Review and critique. India: Jaypee University of Information Technology


Oliver, P. (2010). *Student's guide to research ethics (2nd ed.)*. Maidenhead, GBR: Open University Press.


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Interview questions (English)

Identifying Lao tourism destination’s brand identity based on Kapferer’s brand identity prism: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image.

Physique:
1. How do you describe Lao PDR as a destination?

Personality:
2. If Lao tourism destination was a person, how would you describe the personality?

Culture:
3. What particular vision and values do Lao tourism destinations bring out?

Relationship:
4. What kind of relationship can be created between Lao tourism destination and tourists?

Reflection:
5. What does the government think tourists expect to gain from traveling to Lao PDR? (What image of oneself do you think a tourist wants to achieve? how a customer should be reflected as he/she wishes to be seen as the result of using a brand)

Self-image:
6. What does the government want Lao PDR tourism destination to make people feel about themselves when visiting Lao PDR? (What feelings do you think tourists have/did have during and after visiting Lao PDR? How tourists view themselves)
Appendix B: Interview questions (Lao)

ສຶກສາເອກະລັກແບຣນຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວໂດຍນັກໃຊ້ໂຕແບບໂຄງສ້າງເອກະລັກແບຣນຂອງ Kapferer ເຊັນແຈ້ງ.

ສ່າຍສວຍຂອງນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ.

ລັກສະນະພາຍນອກ:

1. ເອກະລັກແບຣນຂອງນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ

ບຸຄະລິດ:

2. ບູນປຽບແຫ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວເຂົ້າເຂົ້າໃດໃຫ້ລັກຕົວຕົນຂອງນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ?

ວັດທະນະທັດ:

3. ບູນປຽບແຫ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວປະກອບມີສ່ວນໃດ?

ຄວາມສາມາດໃນການສະທ້ອນຕົວຕົນຂອງນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ:

4. ບູນປຽບແຫ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວໄດ້ຮັບຫຍັງໃຫ້ຮັບໃຫ້ນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ?

ຄວາມສາມາດໃນການສະທ້ອນຕົວຕົນຂອງນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ:

5. ບູນປຽບແຫ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວໄດ້ຮັບຫຍັງໃຫ້ຮັບໃຫ້ນັກທ່ອງທ່ຽວ?

ມາທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ:

6. ບູນປຽບແຫ່ງທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວໄດ້ຮັບສ່ວນໃດໜໍາຖະວາຍທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ?
Appendix C: Questionnaire

This survey is a part of my course’s research project, which is to study brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Laos. I would greatly appreciate it if you could help me answer this questionnaire.

I. General information

1. Gender: □ Male □ Female

2. Age group: □ 16-25 □ Over 55
   □ 26-35 □ Over 55
   □ 36-45

3. Are you? □ Student □ Retired
   □ Worker □ Others ____________________

4. Region of residence: □ Asia □ South America
   □ Europe □ Africa
   □ North America □ Oceania

5. You are travelling to Laos for: □ Leisure
   □ Business
   □ Visiting friends and relatives
   □ Others ________________________________

6. What are your main interests in selecting a destination? (More than one answer allowed)

   □ Adventure □ Night life □ Culture/History □ Nature □ Sport
   □ Religion □ Shopping □ Others ________________________________
7. Is this your first visit to Laos?

☐ Yes        ☐ No

8. How did you get information about this destination? (More than one answer allowed)

☐ Travel agency  ☐ Internet  ☐ Family/friends  ☐ Travel brochures
☐ Newspapers/magazines  ☐ Travel guides  ☐ TV  ☐ Radio  ☐ Exhibitions/Fairs  ☐ Others: .................................................................

II. Laos tourism destination’s brand identity

1. Physique

Please indicate (√) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physique:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. “Laos simply beautiful” is well-known as the tourism slogan for Laos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. “Laos simply beautiful” logo is easy to be recognized</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Laos is relaxed and peaceful</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Laos has a rich historic and cultural heritage with religious art and architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Laos is a land of festivals and celebrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Laos is full of natural resources: mountains and rivers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Lao people welcome tourists with friendliness and hospitality</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Personality

Please indicate (✓) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laos’s personality is</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Stable</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Peaceful</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Safe</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Friendly</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sincere</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Gentle</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Traditional</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Relationship

Please indicate (✓) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The relationship that Laos forms with tourists is</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Hospitality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Sharing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Supportive</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Feeling of attachment and connection with locals and communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Culture

Please indicate (✓) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The culture and value of Laos are</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28. Authentic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Unique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Ethnic diversity</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Buddhist traditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Festivals</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Simple lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Reflection

Please indicate (✓) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourists visiting Laos are those who</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34. want to explore natural charms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>35. want to discover authentic cultures</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. are interested in historic heritage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. want to experience eco-tourism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. look for adventures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. **Self-image**

Please indicate (✓) how strongly you agree / disagree with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As being a tourist in Laos,</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. I feel relaxed and chill-out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I feel attached to nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>41. I feel closed and connected to the community</td>
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<tr>
<td>42. I learn and experience a lot of new things</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. I am curious about culture and history</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. **What is it about Lao tourism destination that attracts you to visit Laos?** Please indicate (✓) how attractive is the following attributes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature (rivers, mountains, etc.)</th>
<th>Least attractive</th>
<th>Less attractive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>More attractive</th>
<th>Most attractive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture (cuisine, traditions, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History &amp; heritage (monuments, heritage sites, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local events (cultural festivals, religious events, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude towards tourists (local friendliness, hospitality)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco-tourism (homestay)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
50. **What is your overall satisfaction with your visit to Laos?** Please circle on the scale from 0-100 based on your satisfaction level.
Appendix D: Participant Information form (English)

Participant Information Form

My name is Valaphone Sisouvong. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Business in the Business Practice Pathway at Unitec New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is:

To first identify brand identity of Lao tourism destination that the government is attempting to promote in order to construct an ideal brand identity model and then this information will also be formulated into questionnaire to survey tourists’ perception toward the projected brand identity. This study can help the researcher to discover the brand image of Lao tourism in the perspective of tourists and see if the brand image is consistent with the brand identity.

I request your participation in the following way:

The researcher would like to request an interview for the research project in order to ask some questions related to the marketing and promotion of tourism in Lao PDR, particularly regarding the development promotion of Lao tourism’s brand identity. The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour, which can be arranged according to the participant’s time convenience between late of April, 2016 to late of May, 2016.

The results of the research activity will not be seen by any other person in your organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the Thesis before it is submitted for examination.
I hope that you find this invitation to be of interest. If you have any queries about this research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is: Dr. Helen J Mitchell, phone: 815-4321 ext. 5171 or email: hmitchell@unitec.ac.nz

Researcher: Valaphone Sisouvong, phone (New Zealand): +64223922349/ (Lao): 020 54555533 or 020 99997797, email: tai_valaphone@hotmail.com

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016-1020

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 28.04.2016 to 28.04.2017. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix E: Participant Information form (Lao)

ລົງທີມສູນລັບຜ້ອຍໃຫ້ສາມາດ:

ອາລາຈີ່ ໂພງ ເອກະສາດ ເຫຼືອງ ເປັນບົດຄົ້ນຄວ້າງານໃຫ້ຖາດຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງສະຕາລົງຂອງ ໄດ້ຮຽງຮ້ອຍຂອງຄວາມສະດວກແລະເຫັນສົມຄວນຂອງຜ້ອຍໃຫ້ສາມາດໃນຊ່ວງເວລາລະຫວ່າງທ້າຍເດັດນາພຶດສະພາ 2016 ຫາທ້າຍເດັດນາພຶດສະພາ 2016.

ແຂກຂະໜາ//ຜ້ອຍກະສາດນີ້ ຫ້ອງການຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຕ້ອງຮູ້ອໍາເນາຂ້າພະເຈົ້າບໍ່ເຄີຍໄດ້ແມ່ນດີສຶກສາວ່າເອກະລັກແບຣນຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວທີ່ໄດ້ລັດຖະບານໄດ້ວາງໄວ້ເພື່ອໂຄສະນາມຄວນນາວ່າຈະໄດ້ສອບຖາມກ່ຽວກັບການໂຄສະນາການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ ເຊິ່ງການພັດທະນາແລະໂຄສະນາເອກະລັກແບຣນຂອງການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຢ່າງລາວ ການສາມາດຄາດວ່າຈະໃຊ້ເວລາຢ່າງປະມານໜຸອ ເຊິ່ງຈະມາການນັດໝາຍລ່ວງໜ້າຕາມຄວາມສະດວກແລະເຫັນສົມຄວນຂອງຜ້ອຍໃຫ້ສາມາດໃນຊ່ວງເວລາລະຫວ່າງທ້າຍເດັດນາພຶດສະພາ 2016 ຫາທ້າຍເດັດນາພຶດສະພາ 2016.
នៅពេលព្រឹត្តិការណ៍ជាតិបានបញ្ចប់អំពីការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយ ក្នុងប្រព័ន្ធផ្សេងទៀតយ៉ាងតឹក្រាក់ សម្រាប់សាលារៀន និងក្រុមប្រឹក្សារក្នុងពាក្យសម្រាប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយ ត្រូវបានការពាររាល់កំណត់។ មួយចំនួនអតិថិជន មានការធ្វើការជាតិបានបញ្ចប់ និងមានបញ្ហារបស់ពួកគេ ក្នុងការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយ។ ក្នុងបង្ហាញទៀត ប្រឆាំងជាច្រើនអតិថិជន បានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយនេះ និងមានការធ្វើការជាតិបានបញ្ចប់។

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន ដើម្បីប្រការការងារជាតិក្នុងប្រព័ន្ធរបស់រួសនិងក្រុមប្រឹក្សារក្នុងពាក្យសម្រាប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយ ត្រូវបានការពាររាល់កំណត់។

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

អ្នកចុងក្រោយបានបញ្ចប់ការសិក្សាចុងក្រោយបាន

រាជធានីមួយអំណាចល្បាញ

នូវរូបមន្តរបស់សាលារៀនឬក្រុមប្រឹក្សារ</ref>
Appendix F: Organisational Consent

Organisational Consent

Saly Phimphinith

Director General of Tourism Marketing Department

of Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism give consent for Valaphone Sisouvong to undertake research in this organisation as discussed with the researcher.

This consent is granted subject to the approval of research ethics application no. 2016-1020 by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee and a copy of the application approval letter being forwarded to the organisation as soon as possible.

Signature:

Date: Saly Phimphinith
Appendix G: Participant Consent

Participant Consent Form
Research Project Title:

"The brand identity and image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR"

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that participation in this project is voluntary. Furthermore, I have the right to withdraw from the project within two weeks of receipt of the interview transcript.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and his primary supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: Sengsoda Vanthanong

Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: May 20, 2016

Researcher Name: Valaphone Sisouvong

Researcher Signature: ___________________________ Date: May 20, 2016

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016-1020
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 28.04.2016 to 28.04.2017. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Declaration

Name of candidate: Valaphone Sisouvong

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: “Brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR”
is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Business

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

• This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
• The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
• Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2016-1020

Candidate Signature: Date: 04/04/18

Student number: 1440295
Full name of author: Valaphone Sisouvong

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project: Brand identity and brand image of tourism destinations in Lao PDR

Department of Management and Marketing

Degree: Master of Business Year of presentation 2018

Principal Supervisor: Prof Pieter Nel  Associate Supervisor: Kenneth Newlands

EITHER:

(1) I agree to my thesis/dissertation/research project being lodged in the Unitec Library

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and

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Reason for embargo: ...........................................................................................................................................

Supervisor Approval: ...........................................................................................................................................

Dean, Research Approval: ....................................................................................................................................

Embargo Time Period: .........................................................................................................................................

______________________________________________________________________________________________

Signature of author: ____________________________________________

Date: 04/04/2018