

# **Branding Beyond Borders: A Multi-Layered Stakeholder Model for Repositioning Kurdistan In Global Tourism as a Fragile Region**

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## **Abstract:**

*Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI) faces reputational branding challenges arising from major Iraqi conflicts, political instability, economic uncertainty and negative perceptions on the security of the region from external media framing. The purpose of this research is to find out how Kurdistan can be rebuilt as a global tourist hotspot with strategic branding. Eighteen stakeholders were interviewed for this qualitative study. These included government officials, entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, Diaspora consultants, representatives of International media, cultural experts and civil society leaders. Data was collected through thematic analysis by semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders who are linked to tourism ecosystem in KRI. Research includes synthesizes five theoretical Frameworks from the following: Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon, Kavaratzis' city branding model, Baloglu and McCleary's image formation theory, Morgan et al.'s destination identity model, and Mark and Pearson's brand archetypes. The findings of the study highlight the effectiveness of a multi-layered branding approach emphasizing emotional storytelling, collaboration between stakeholder and archetypal narratives (Hero-Explorer-Caregiver). Participants emphasized the need to differentiate Kurdistan's narrative from negative national and Regional perceptions, capitalize on local cultural heritage, and strategically engage emotional-based factors to promote the region internationally. This study makes sufficient insight to destination branding strategies in fragile regions.*

**Keywords:** *Destination Branding, Kurdistan Region, Narrative Identity, Brand Archetypes, Post-Conflict.*