Study of Dimensions of Place Brands

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ABSTRACT: Like their colleagues in the academic arena, place brand managers frequently ignore the complexities of place brands: they repeatedly use simplistic exploratory definitions of such position brands rather than accurate measurements. This chapter therefore seeks to define and address measurement methods that may be useful in branding on the spot. We will then classify the brand and explore different options for calculating in-place branding. Finally, the different approaches to brand measurement for their use in place branding will be addressed, namely the approaches to brand measurement in the form of free brand associations of target customers with qualitative methods; in the form of attributes with quantitative methods such as structured questionnaires; and with mixed techniques that combine qualitative analysis with quantitative method In more depth, two mixed approaches are clarified, namely the network analysis and the advanced brand definition map process. In conclusion, in measuring location brands and their performance, we also outline current and potential challenges.

KEYWORDS: Brand management, placing brand, production, management, quantitative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The branding of places (and towns in particular) has gained prominence among place management officials in recent years [1]. As a consequence, in an attempt to promote their position to their current and potential target audiences, location marketers are increasingly focused on establishing the location as a brand. Unfortunately, local marketers also assume that the brand is a completely controllable and manageable instrument that can be easily specified and calculated. Yet a location brand is focused on the expectations of different consumer groups, and these perceptions of a location can vary greatly, given the myriad viewpoints and preferences of the different target groups, e.g. between residents and visitors or internal and external target groups. It is quite a challenge to fulfill these diverse requirements with the help of a suitable location brand [2].

Nevertheless, the interest in location branding is greater than ever in both practice and academia. Obviously, in order to further grow and market their brand, places are willing to attract positive comparisons in the mind of the customer. This initiative is exemplified by the launch of city brand rankings like the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index and the Saffron European City Brand Barometer [3]. The interest in this topic is also increasing in marketing scholarship, as the first meta-analyses of the field by experts indicate, but sadly, there does not seem to be a real consensus on a common concept of the place brand.

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BRAND DEFINITION

The meanings and principles of location branding and the position brand often lack a proper description and consistent use in practice as well as in theory. As a consequence, location branding is frequently incorrectly understood as location selling, focusing primarily on the advertising aspects of branding while disregarding the wider objectives and scope of location branding.

Some scholars criticize this term as being too narrow to use it in the field of business and particularly place, while others have indicated that the fundamental characteristic of a brand is "nothing more and nothing less than the good name of something offered to the public". As a network of links in the minds of clients, according to Keller, this 'good name' or reputation exists as so-called brand recognition [4]. Brand awareness (i.e. the degree to which customers are aware of all the features of a brand) and their brand image produce this brand knowledge (defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in customer memory). Consumers then analyze such associations and change their behavior accordingly; this leads to so-called brand equity, described as the differential effect of brand recognition on consumer reaction to the brand's marketing.

In line with this, Zenker and Braun note that a location brand is a network of customer associations focused on the visual, verbal, and behavioral representation of a location [5], which is expressed by the stakeholders' priorities, communication, values, and general culture of the location and the overall location design. The place brand is not, according to the writers, the conveyed expression or the physical features of the venue, but the interpretation of those expressions in the minds of the target audience (s). These expectations contribute to observable brand effects such as a desire to stay in a location, or resident satisfaction, or positive actions in a location, such as caring for the location, and therefore become remarkable when interacting with brands in the measurement location [6]. Both of these concepts, in summary, illustrate the difficulty of position branding, which only challenges the successful evaluation of place brands further.

MEASUREMENT OF A BRAND

We have three key methods to evaluating the brand from a general brand perspective: first, the advertised item itself; second, brand value drivers (such as brand image or brand awareness); and third, so-called brand equity. The conventional marketing literature, and particularly Keller's concept, shapes the broad understanding of brand equity, a highly significant brand metric. It asserts that customer-based brand equity is characterized by the distinct effect of brand recognition on consumer reaction to the brand's marketing [7]. In order to measure such a consumer response, it is necessary to know who is affected by the brand.

Physical Characteristics:

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One frequently described alternative in place branding includes measuring or defining the place itself in terms of 'actual' or physical location characteristics. Using secondary data such as number of visitors, demographic information of inhabitants, domestic growth rates, or percentage of forested land, these definitions were also developed through case studies. This approach exercises unquestionable usability, but remains constrained in two main ways: first, like most approaches used in place branding so far, it generally suffers from inadequate comprehensiveness because they usually rely on data accessibility rather than a theoretical model that defines elements or dimensions that are part of a brand. Secondly, a narrow emphasis on the measurement of 'truth' may prove to be deceptive [7], as facts can emerge that the target audience may not understand. Berlin, for instance, is actually much greener than Hamburg, with 18.1 percent of the forested area compared to 16.8 percent of the latter, but the target audience perceives this fact as the complete opposite. Therefore, one should not be limited to these metrics for a more systematic approach; one also needs to take expectations into account [8].

Brand Value Driver:

The second method is the brand value engine calculation (s). The brand value driver influences the response of consumers to a brand and generates useful information, calculated on a non-monetary basis, about the brand awareness structure of the customers. Related drivers, such as brand recognition and brand image, provide an overview of the knowledge structure of clients and provide important brand management information [9]. In this regard, in this particular context, the identification and quantification of the brand value driver plays an important role for local brand management, especially when evaluating driver changes over time and identifying driver interdependencies.

By more closely examining place marketing practice, it can be observed that non-monetary place brand equity metrics are already common for place brand measurement. For example, De Carlo et al. (2009) try to understand the brand of Milan in terms of brand personality, how the city smells tastes or looks like by using questionnaires and qualitative interviews to measure this. Some experts said that by asking city users [7], they look for a city's positive and negative properties, using open and closed questions to expose the perception of the location. In order to define central brand value drivers for each target group and capture some of the variability of a location, place brand measurement requires an improvement in its tracking systems, however.

Place Brand Equity:

We also need to examine the effect of a brand (and its value drivers) on outcome variables of the consumer brand relationship in order to handle location branding activities (e.g., the willingness of a resident to pay more in terms of living expenses and/or accept a lower wage for the perceived benefits of a chosen location choice). Research has only begun to address the connection between

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a position brand and the various outcome variables of the customer-brand relationship from the point of view of place branding literature [9].

Further research needs to build a better image of how to bring brand value into practise with current research work and position branding practice as a backdrop. While place brand equity is a future-oriented performance metric that offers valuable information on marketing spending efficiency and effectiveness, it is currently unused by local marketers and seldom used in general by businesses. The key explanation for the lack of use is that a standard for brand equity assessment has yet to be designed for branding literature. As such, the meaning of places often needs study. Related customer-brand outcome variables (including monetary perspectives) for each target group need to be explained in order to estimate brand equity. This is particularly important given that monetary brand equity estimation implies that certain details must be calculated, such as potential brand-specific cash flows [10], costs and brand-specific risk factors. In addition, the wide range of different location target groups makes it difficult to quantify the 'actual' effect of a location brand, as a location brand also affects the various groups simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The expectations of the audience are a strong determinant of positive or negative performance, as previously seen in the location brand perception model, and so measuring these perceptions instead of 'true' physical characteristics seems to be more valuable and meaningful, even though physical attributes are certainly a key driver of location perception. For example, measuring hard facts such as census data can only reveal the physical measurements of the area, but will not lead to a satisfactory interpretation of a location brand (based on the concept of a brand as a mental representation in the mind of the individual person). The general understanding of a place brand can also be improved by a case study of the physical dimensions of the place, as these dimensions have a significant impact on the interpretation of a place brand. Nevertheless, the latest measurement metrics usually provide very insufficient knowledge from our point of view. One point becomes clear: in order to quantify a location brand, a combination of different approaches is needed.

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