



Heritage as a Key Element of Cities and Destinations Branding

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Abstract

Today, in a globalized connected world, Nations, cities, destinations are in a continuous competition with international rivals to define their place and value among others. It's no longer valid for cities to stand still in such competition, depending on their basic momentum of their resources to position themselves in such global contest. Branding is an essential part of the economic sustainable development of a city and marketing it as a destination for tourism.

Heritage plays a central role in creating destination brand, as heritage, with its tangible and intangible qualities is a prime factor in brand creation. This paper will be discussing the role of the heritage in its brand creation in its symbolic and identity inherits. This will be executed by exploring the definitions and strategies of destination branding, its elements and means to create such brand and the contemporary means the heritage is presented on the online space.

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Keywords

Branding; City Brand; Heritage; Destination image

1. Introduction

In today's consumerist society, and with the fast pace of the globalization, global societies are faced with notions of insecurity, and loss of identity and belonging. Here oscillates the tendency towards the search for markers of identification. Today, the economic and political values are in continuous change and are effected with large number of parameters that are altered with the slightest change in everyday events worldwide. The global inter connectivity has resulted in a vast culture of copy and significant loss of identity on all levels. This pushes individuals to seek their own identities and try to position themselves within this unified singular world. Earlier, social values and identities were formed by religion or nationhood, withal the accompanying cultural, political and ideological implications. Nowadays, economic consumerist values prevails and thus social individuality is defined by the branding of products, as the brands, in such economic context, is the only way to belong to a certain cluster of values. Brands bring into focus ways of identification that surpass cultural, traditional, and local differences. A brand then signifies a kind of intangible model to identify a system of values shared by bigger groups of people and societies regardless to their location, religion or nation. The stockpiled heritage of a place or a destination is already an important definer for the group of individuals living in this place and acts as the significant image that distinguishes this place in such global realm of replication. Each city or a destination stands alone depending on these values that are not to be found in others and the heritage, physical or cultural, represents these values. This

paper will be discussing the role of the heritage as a brand element that has a direct effect on the nourishment of the place or city as a branded destination, attracting visitors or residents to share these values on various levels. The paper will explore the idea of branding in general and the development of a brand position, and how the heritage fulfills the characteristics of brand element. Heritage as a brand element is directly linked to the practice of tourism. Tourism defines the main activity that impacts and gets benefit from the Heritage economically. In this context the study will not be addressing the tourism as an economic complex activity; rather it will focus on the perception of the tourist and mechanisms of how the tourist is affected by the image of a certain city or destination. In this discourse, it's important to address the effect of the information technology and the digital space on such process . The study will be exploring the online place branding process and how

2. Branding definitions and heritage as a brand element

This change on the idea of branding could be understood as the result of cultural fragmentation and pluralism coupled with a fast-paced capitalist consumerism, where developed societies are experiencing increasing insecurity that often oscillates between a desire for belonging and profound disorientation. And within pluralistic societies that signals of identification take on critical importance. Klingmann (2007) ' In a world in which social, economic, and political value systems are defined by continual change and movement, individuals are forced to create their own identities and find ways of signaling their place in the world ' Klingmann (2007)

2.1. Brand Definitions

Brands and branding have been defined variously through literature Kladou (2016) , The brand could be defined as a product or service to which human beings attach a bundle of tangible (functional) and intangible (emotional and symbolic) meanings that add value. Gordon (1999) The brand is adding to a product either rational or tangible dimensions (i.e. related to how the product performs) or symbolic, emotional and intangible dimensions (i.e. related to what the product represents) that differentiate it from other products that fulfill the same need Keller, Apeira, and Georson (2008) . Brands could be also defined as multidimensional constructs, consisting of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind'. These associations are formed in peoples' minds, and they are not necessarily the associations intended by the branding authorities Aaker (1996).

From the previous definitions, It could be understood that Branding is an act of identification in the first place, where the marketers through different branding elements and strategies try to give a distinctive identity for a product, and the consumer at the other end, try to be belonged to group of people who share the same interest in this product thus identify himself as part of a cult.

2.2. City Brands and Heritage

Cities are no different from products in terms of branding. The goal of Branding a product in the first place is to differentiate it from others and define its competitive edge, similarly, places in general including cities, adopt the concepts of destination branding to have the same distinction among other cities. Today, the world is connected like never before, and the culture of copy became the dominant feature of the era. It became a necessity for cities to highlight their differentiating qualities and promote their position via branding. In fact, cities hold the very basic elements of a brand, and they are already perceived by people, even if unconsciously, as a brand Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009) ; a city has the main 'brand identity' in form of its name, visual identity. It has 'brand symbols' in form of landmarks, heritage, significant built environment, and the 'brand image' which is the perception formulated in peoples mind towards the city.

The physical heritage of a city the falls under what to be considered brand symbol. The brand symbol is the identifier that symbolizes the brand. The brand symbol can be a visual symbol such as sign or logo, or it can be

verbal in a form of a slogan or tagline. In all cases, the brand symbol is a tangible brand element. The heritage fits very well in this category, as the physical heritage of a city is in all cases very distinctive than any other city. Each city, even if shared the same historical and political influences, has developed its own kind of physical structure even if similar to others. Yet, when it comes to heritage site or place, it will remain a very unique symbol. This is the main characteristic of the brand symbol, distinction.

On another level, for a successful brand, developing a brand positioning is very important Keller et al. (2008) . Setting a brand positioning defines the way the marketing activities and programs should work. It involves creating a solid brand image in the minds of consumers and constructs the important associations that differentiate the brand and creates its competitive edge Keller (2005) , this includes two main areas: Brand intangibles ; which is related to the real perception of the brand in the consumer mind and his expectations, and the way this brand fulfills his desires , all affecting his decision-making in dealing with the brand, it includes the brand personality as the position or identity originally created by the marketers, the brand relationships , which evolve between the consumer and the brand and the brand experience, which deals with the experiential dimension of the brand , the way they Sense experiences involving sensory perception, Feel experiences involving affect and emotions, Think experiences which are creative and cognitive, Act experiences involving physical behavior and incorporating individual actions and lifestyles, and Relate experiences that result from connecting with a reference group or culture H (2003) .

In this context, the heritage has a stored potential of filling this area. As the heritage have the ability to create the idiosyncratic position of the city with the accumulated symbolic meaning that it carried over the years. If the consumer in this case is the city visitor, then by witnessing an encounter with a physical heritage site, it would fulfill his desires of experiencing the proximity with the heritage and meet his embedded perceptions that have been formulated about this city. If any of names of the cities of successful brands is mentioned, such as Paris, London, Cairo or Rome, a stored image of this city will evoke, including one of its heritage landmarks. The mind searches for a symbol to define this perception, which in all adds up to its intangible value.

It's then clarified that one of the important target groups that the city brand is after is the visitor or the tourist. The way this brand is conveyed to this group is merely a virtual visual one. This arouses a necessity of understanding the method the tourist encounter the city brand , not referring to obsolete ways , but taking in consideration the contemporary ways a brand city consumer deals with the city, which involves a deeper study of the effect of the information technologies and the virtual space on this. Even on a strategic level, the information induced to set the actions for the positioning and marketing the city, positioning its brand amongst others as in Anholt GFK index is dependent on the study of the virtual space, which will be looked upon closely through the rest of the paper

3. Destination image and online presence

With the rise of the mass transportation means and the appearance of low cost carriers on one hand, and the rise of the communication technologies and social media, greater masses of people are now able to be more mobile and able to experience such encounters with the heritage sites around the globe in much easier way, and the heritage sites are now much more exposed through the internet posts and imagery. Today, instead of taking a car from one of the cities in Europe or even the middle east to visit the capital, now you can easily take a flight from Dubai to Cairo or from an English village to Berlin with almost the same amount of money or at sometimes even cheaper. Websites like Booking.com or Trivago made it completely easy to plan your own vacation on a personal computer, depending on the intriguing images that one has been exposed to over the internet or via visitors reviews to various places, a stream that was not available before resulting in huge traffic of information and specially images about a place or a destination. Such a practice resulted in a furious competition between cities that are defined as tourist's destinations Selby (2004) . Cities accordingly invests more in city branding, refocusing on their stock of distinguished elements, at the top of theselements'ts comes the built environment and the physical heritage, attracting more and more of the masses. These phenomena could be understood in respect to the sociological concept of 'Tourist Gaze' that was introduced by the British sociologist John Urry.

3.1. The tourist gaze

The theory of tourist gaze discussed in his book *The Tourist Gaze* Urry (1990) tries to define the reasons behind why people in general travel for leisure and chooses to visit places more than others. The touristic travel mainly floats around moving to other places to see unusual scenes that could not be seen in the normal live/ work environments. Tourist's main activity is 'gazing at signs', whether this sign is a building, cathedral, or a famous square. Adding to Urry, another main activity of the tourist is 'taking a photo and sharing a post over a social media platform, whether sharing a selfie with 'sign' at the background, or 'checking in' at the site of such sign. Having Eiffel tower in the background of a photo or visiting the Colosseum in Rome is a tourist goal. Such places gazed upon by tourists vary according to the tourist backgrounds and culture. The choice of the place in general, then the site to gaze upon is pre-given to the visitor subconsciously through various channels, such channels would be a travel guide, advertisement, a movie or television program where this site appears, websites and blogs, and mostly through the word of mouth of previous visitors in form of stories, whether told directly or via a social media platform and photo sharing Hospers (2009) . All such channels creates a predicted image of what is to be seen at the site thus, the tourist gaze moves and searches accordingly for such element , neglecting others. An example on this, whether traveling for leisure or for work , to any city in Egypt, the visitor have to find the time and effort to go and have his own gaze at the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx. Although the Pyramids of Giza is one of the most heritage sites that have appeared and still appears on all media channels ,yet , the both the site and the visitor have been manipulated to make it a must see element.

The theory of the tourist gaze is applicable with the rise of the mass tourism that evolved since the second half of the 19th century; this is closely aligned with the development of the photography industry, as photos of the touristic sites became available by travelers and on tourist guides, advertisements then through various media. By taking pictures of places that were no longer used, 'sites' were turned into 'sights': tourists started to visit churches, not to pray, but to photograph them MacCannell (1999) . Tourists travel to see on real what they have seen in the photograph, expecting a similar experience like that they have heard about or a different unique one of their own yet involves the same site. The photography industry has developed in an unprecedented magnitude during the last two decades. With the rise of digital photography, the number of photographs taken has expanded to be tenth or maybe hundred times compared to those produced on regular films. In year 2000, Kodak, the leading company in the photography production and film making announced that 80 million photographs were taken that year. Today, according to estimates, at least 1.3 trillion photographs were taken via digital means, which 85 percent is taken by smartphones, which means more flow over the web platforms and a greater exposure of their objects to unlimited number of people (info trends 2017). The theory of the tourist gaze was developed by a sociologist before the rise of the notions of place branding. Taking in consideration that the base of the tourism activity is directly connected to visit places that we have seen on a photograph, place branding exhibiting images of well-known heritage sites would have a direct influence in the nourishment of such activity. It's very important to consider in this context the means of how these photographs and images are being distributed.

3.2. The destination image and the Cyber space

Today, we cannot neglect or oversee the internet governance over the flow of information and how our decisions are taken, whether forming a political view, or buying a product, or aspiring to visit a city or a place. The virtual world on the different internet platforms , social media, websites and blogs not even competes the physical real one, but exceeds it in affecting branding of products and specially places , since branding, as previously explained is intended to construct this mental association between the consumer and the product (place) based on the perception that is dependent on the distinctiveness of such product exhibited through symbols, images as tangible elements of branding and intangible ones like word of mouth, resulting in a kind of a desire of belonging to a certain idea around the product. The place branding specifically is to a great extent could be dependent on the virtuality of this place over the cyber space, as the mainly the images of such places are almost completely virtual. The main source of information about such places now comes through the word of mouth on social media or peer reviews

on travel websites Beerli, JD, et al. (2004) .thus, the usual advertisement on which many places and cities mainly depend on for their branding would be considered a waste of efforts Hildreth (2010) . Advertising is a generic mean of branding that may not reach the right audience compared to the opportunities provided via social media on which the target audience has the choice of searching the needed information that will affect their decisions, in a posted photo or in shared stories about experiences with places. The internet suites very well the virtual properties a place carries and reusing it not in an autonomous way would have a great contribution to place branding and would improve and develop the ways we deal with cities and underline the potential of physical built heritage as a possible image for branding cities.

The stated above does not mean that advisement is an obsolete mean of place branding. Advertisement would still act as the catalyst agent that ignites the hype from which the virtual means stated would take over. To understand such mechanism, first we have to acknowledge that place branding is an image influenced practice Govers (2011) . There are various ways in which image are transferred and influence the perception of people about the product (place). Such ways are referred to as image formation agents' Gartner (1993) . On the top of this list comes the peoples own experiences (organic agents), followed by the shared stories and word of mouth of others experiences referred to as social agents. Below these agents comes the information transferred via media and news and media ('autonomous agents'). Lastly comes the direct means of marketing communications as commercial advertisement (induced agents), which have the least influence on people in the practice of branding. In such context, the autonomous and induced agents have relatively a certain importance in place branding, due to the various ways a place could be presented in media and news, and due to the different types of image forming elements of place, whether it's a heritage site, or an experience, or even a unique physical quality of such place. The experiential nature of the place makes people more tending to share their stories about it and make it more appealing as a location for directed stories as in movies and documentaries. Such experiences are intrigued and moved in the first place through induced agents as advertisements which initiate the interest in the place and then it's followed by mass experiential sharing on the web medium buzz (email forwards, blogs, and mentions of social networking sites). Such buzz is then recovered on the news and media (autonomous agents) and the content is created by the consumer himself, and the cycle goes on. The medium on which all of this occurs today is the virtual medium, as the induced agents as advertisement starts the spark, the organic and social agents in form of self-experiences and shared stories sparks on the web medium in form of social platforms, review websites, blogs, emails, etc. and recycled through autonomous agents as media and news to keep the process going on. The digital and virtual space here acts as the perfect medium for all above stated agents; induced (push ads), organic and social (social media platforms, emails and blogs), and autonomous (news websites and pages). Thus, the virtual space becomes a dominator in place branding practice.

The elements of this process could be analyzed against the framework suggested by Simon Anholt regarding the Competitive identity of "Strategy, Substance and Symbolic Actions" Anholt (2007) . In this frame work, the "Strategy" can be understood as first the basic analysis and assessments of the place as a branded product, understanding its potentials and properties, points of distinction and accordingly, formulating a general vision of the brand, it's goals, position and equity. A general strategic design of the brand is then formulated. The points of action, including the changing policies, involving stakeholders, and other related activities are to be understood in this framework as the "Substance". The next step would be defining the means of building the brand reputation and engaging the consumer with the brand. This is referred to as brand communication; the brand communication includes the different image formation agents (organic, autonomous, or induced). This communication stands for the "Symbolic" actions in the framework. These three elements of the framework are directly affected by the information technology medium. The Strategic part which involves the research and analysis is now directly moderated via the internet platforms. One of the most acknowledged survey based indicators of the place and city branding is the Anholt-GMI City brands index, which is based on the stated framework and depends on the online surveys, questionnaires and interviews. New ways of information gathering about the place identity and the image of the place in the preceptors minds includes monitoring the number and the way places as destinations or as understood as brands are mentioned, this monitoring includes what the word of mouth in the mentions is about,

what types of images in a visual term is accompanied in these mentions and posts. The online presence on social media does not only help in data collection and building the strategy, it also provides an opportunity of fostering the required place identity and the sense of the public of the distinctive potentials of the place. For the substance part, action points as policy changes or engaging stakeholders as investors and residents or even governmental officials is introduced, discussed and promoted online

3.3. Heritage as online symbol

The Heritage as clarified before is an image based element of branding. Its presence on the cyber space and how it's exhibited would affect completely the city brand. Although the information technologies and internet social platforms might offer a wider understanding of the city experience, yet, a heritage landmark still holds a prominent position when it comes to the general brand of the city. As an example, Paris has one brand asset which is uniquely valuable: the Eiffel Tower. This landmark is one of the few truly global mega brands in the Anholt GMI City Brands Index, a landmark of iconic status which is spontaneously associated with Paris by nearly 80 per cent of all respondents worldwide . The presence of such a prominent and distinctive visual symbol is certainly one reason why Paris does so well in the rankings Anholt (2010) . The appearance of heritage site on the cyber space changes the value and the perception of the heritage as a city symbol thus affecting its brand positioning , as first poses this heritage site in a new view, how it is viewed and how it is referred to, unveiling new opportunities for marketing such site. Second, the re occurrence of appearance of such heritage online increase the reach out to the target groups which results in two effects; the more it appears in stories and post and even in news threads, the more the desire off having a physical encounter increases. Second, this re occurrence fosters the brand image of the city in the minds of the stakeholders first and in the minds of the visitors second. This online appearance kind of dictates the way people should see the city and its brand in a very democratic word of mouth based way not in an induced way as earlier advertisements did.

4. Conclusion

Today, in a globalized connected world, Nations, cities, destinations and corporates are in a continuous competition with international rivals to define their place and value among others. In case of cities and destinations , which stand as the platform where the economic and cultural interactions occurs, it's no longer valid to stand still in such competition , depending on their basic momentum of their resources to position themselves in such global contest. From here the importance of adopting more intent "Branding" strategies appears. Branding is an essential and integral part of the economic sustainable development of a city and marketing it as a destination for visiting and residing.

Heritage plays a central role in creating place or destination brand, as heritage, with its physical tangible and intangible qualities is considered a prime factor in brand creation from a marketing point of view. Branding depends on creating a unique character of the commodity or the destination, with a powerful symbol or logo to define it. Thus, heritage could be treated as that symbol which is a main component in the brand formation and it represents one of the main factors of forming the identity both physically and mentally of the city or the community. This is the competitive edge in making a city or destination stand out between its global competitors. Understanding the new methods the image of this heritage is exhibited in various means and on the top of the list the web space becomes a necessity to keep up in the competition, opening new opportunities for the heritage to stand out again as city symbols.

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