

Chapter 61

Do Places Have a Personality?

A Perspective from Place Branding

Sonya Hanna

Bangor University, UK

Jennifer Rowley

Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter contributes to the understanding of the essence and representation of places by considering the personification of places and their relationship to the notion of place brand personality. More specifically, the chapter reviews the personification of places and its link to place representations in place marketing and branding. The theme of place brand personality is further developed and critiqued with reference to traditional theories associated with brand personality. A review of the existing body of theory and research on place brand personality demonstrates the need for further research into place and destination brand personality. The chapter culminates with proposals for further research in this area and suggestions for further embedding the notion of personality in place branding practice.

INTRODUCTION

To respond to the question ‘Do places have a personality?’ this chapter discusses two inter-related areas of endeavor, place personification and place branding. This question forms a focus for exploring and analyzing the literature that argues for the personification of places and that place personality can be articulated through place branding. Moreover, through brand personification, self-congruity theory suggests that people will develop a stronger representation of a place, be it a town, city, region or a country.

Brown and Campelo (2014) and Paxson (2009) refer to the long tradition of the personification of places with examples such as naming streets and buildings after famous people, and describing the essence of a place using adjectives normally ascribed to people (e.g. ‘smart’ cities, ‘happy’ cities). According to Lakoff and Johnson (2008), personification refers to situations where inanimate objects, institutions, abstractions, or substance are regarded as people, and have human characteristics attributed to them. Brown and Campelo (2014) suggest that people are inveterate personifiers, and interpret the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1793-1.ch061

Do Places Have a Personality?

world in human terms, citing phrases such as ‘the walls have ears’, and ‘the hills have eyes’ and offering examples of marketing campaigns like ‘Be Berlin’ and ‘I Amsterdam’, which feature life stories of the city’s inhabitants. Although it is evident that such initiatives are associated with the building of the place image and identity, the literature on place personification does not elaborate to any extent on the wider potential for the application of personification in place marketing and branding.

With globalization leading to increased competition between places (Hanna & Rowley, 2008), there has been an escalation of interest in place branding. Building on earlier work by Aaker (1997) on brand personality, place branding commentators and researchers have started to investigate the ‘personality’ of places, and its articulation and representation in place branding (Kaplan et al., 2010; Murphy et al., 2007c). The personality-based approach to place branding seeks to represent place identities in terms of personality traits, as an alternative to the more commonly used attributes, benefits or values-based approaches. Various authors have suggested that if the unique traits of a place can be captured in brand communications, they can be used to differentiate places from one another (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005; Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Murphy et al., 2007b; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011). Furthermore, there is some evidence that in the context of destination branding, place brand personality has the potential to exert a positive influence on intention to return and intention to recommend (Ekinici et al., 2007; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), provided that the place brand personality is congruent with the tourist’s self-image (Ekinici, 2003; Sirgy & Su, 2005). However, research on place brand personality is limited and scattered, and the link between the personification of a place and the articulation of the place’s identity through personality-based branding deserves further exploration.

Hence, this chapter acknowledges the theoretical foundations provided by concepts such as personification and self-congruity, and by drawing on the empirical research in the realm of place branding, the chapter seeks to explore the creation and measurement of place brand personalities in its pursuit of an answer to the question: ‘Do places have a personality?’ More specifically the objectives of this chapter are to:

- Review the theoretical contexts that inform the debate concerning the personality of places, including personification, self-congruity theory, place branding, and brand personality.
- Evaluate and critique place brand personality research.
- Discuss the limitations of the current knowledge and theory associated with places and their personality.
- Offer an agenda for future research.

BACKGROUND

Personification of Places and Self-Congruity

Brown and Campelo (2014) construct a convincing and multi-level argument to demonstrate that human beings are prone to personify inanimate objects, including cities. They, for example, refer to Peter Ackroyd’s (2001) characterization of London as a person. Ackroyd (2001, p.2) suggests that: the streets of London remind him of veins; its parks are like lungs; its rain-soaked streets look as if they are bleeding; and, although London’s heart beats warm, the conurbation is fleshy, flaccid, flabby, eating and excreting with gusto. Brown and Campelo (2014) also point to the extensive use of celebrities such as local

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/do-places-have-a-personality/175277

Related Content

Global Marketing of Higher Education E-Learning

Evan G. Mense, Christopher J. Garretson, Pamela A. Lemoine and Michael D. Richardson (2018).

International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing (pp. 59-74).

www.irma-international.org/article/global-marketing-of-higher-education-e-learning/216829

You Name It: Comparing Holistic and Analytical Rating Methods of Eliciting Preferences in Naming an Online Program Using Ranks as a Concurrent Validity Criterion

Michael J. Roszkowski and Scott Spreat (2012). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing* (pp. 59-79).

www.irma-international.org/article/you-name-comparing-holistic-analytical/65727

A New Systems Perspective in Retail Service Marketing

Sergio Barile and Marialuisa Saviano (2015). *Marketing and Consumer Behavior: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 2079-2101).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-new-systems-perspective-in-retail-service-marketing/123052

Marketing to and Developing Faculty Members to Create High Quality, Highly Interactive Online Courses

Jace Hargis (2011). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing* (pp. 62-71).

www.irma-international.org/article/marketing-developing-faculty-members-create/58332

The Automated Generation and Further Application of Tree-Structure Outline for Lecture Videos with Synchronized Slides

Xiaoyin Che, Haojin Yang and Christoph Meinel (2014). *International Journal of Technology and Educational Marketing* (pp. 34-50).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-automated-generation-and-further-application-of-tree-structure-outline-for-lecture-videos-with-synchronized-slides/106041