


Chapter 14

The Usage of Digital Marketing Tools in City Branding

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to assess and compare the differences in the approach of European and Slovak cities to city branding with focus on utilisation of digital tools of marketing communication tools. The concept of city branding has developed through several stages and nowadays, it is strongly affected by utilization of digital tools. The empirical research verifies the current approaches to urban branding in 13 European and eight Slovak cities which are the administrative and cultural centres of the regions and have the best potential for applying the concept of city branding in Slovakia. By questionnaire survey, the authors have verified in depth the defined approaches to city branding in eight Slovak cities. For inspiration, the process of city branding in one of the best ranked European cities—Amsterdam—is presented. In the conclusion, the chapter defines the measures that should be taken to implement city branding as a comprehensive, systematic and targeted process aimed at shaping the positive image of the city in order to promote it on the market and to ensure comprehensive city development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1975, when the concept of city branding began to develop, society has also been shaped and developed in a significant way. Progressive changes in society and the functioning of cities have occurred mainly as a result of globalisation, in which local traditions and differences have gradually disappeared

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and a homogenised society has been created, which has also brought uniformity to the territorial market. During this period, the importance of city branding as a tool of achieving sustainable development by building a competitive advantage through a differentiation strategy grew. Although it is a qualitative, intangible, and more or less subjective attribute of the territory, it offers some potential to differentiate cities against the increasing degree of similarity of many traditional localisation factors. In recent decades, the development of digital communication has had significant impact on the tools used to brand cities. In this chapter, we focus on the role and use of digital communication in the concept of city branding in the context of achieving sustainable city development. The work is divided into three chapters. The theoretical section defines the approaches in the development of the concept of city branding and digital tools of marketing communication. In the Material and methodology section, we explain how the research was conducted and what material was used. In the fourth chapter, we present the results of the empirical research conducted to map the approaches of European and Slovak cities to city branding with using digital forms of marketing communication and we characterise in a form of best practice the branding process in one of these cities – Amsterdam. In the conclusion of the paper, we formulate recommendations for the application of the concept of branding in the conditions of Slovak cities.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO CITY BRANDING

In the context of increasing competition between cities that are subject to comparison and competition, the city brand has become one of the most important elements of their differentiation and recognition (Nogué, 1999; Anholt, 2007; Zenker et al., 2017; Lucarelli, 2018; Ma, 2019; Rinaldi et al., 2021; Oliva et al., 2022).

Cities should focus on branding for three main reasons. The first reason is the importance of connecting the city with the external environment and communicating the city with this environment in a clear, unambiguous, coordinated way so that the general perception of the city among the target groups coincides with the perception of the city itself. The second reason is the fact that the city brand is a relatively significant factor influencing the sustainable development and competitiveness of the city. The third reason is related to the value of the city brand, which has recently become crucial. The city brand is an asset to be managed, valued, and protected in a focused and coordinated way (Anholt, 2007; McCabe, 2017; Frig, Sorsa, 2018; Alexander et al, 2020).

In today's rapidly changing and uncertain times, city branding has become essential for the sustainable development and success of a city in a competitive environment and provides several advantages. The advantages include connecting and developing economic, business, sport and cultural activities, promoting the city's economic and political interests in the internal and external environment, stimulating stronger partnership relations, attracting talent, students and skilled labour, strengthening investor confidence, attracting inward investment, decreasing unemployment and increasing the standard of living of the population and, last but not least, the overall competitiveness of the city (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Anholt, 2007, 2014; Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011; Vaňová et al., 2017; Giobanardi et al, 2018; Alexander, 2020).

Moreover, the current broad international debate on city branding is not about seeking these advantages, but about answering the question of how to make branding deliver the aforementioned advantages.

Cities have been building their brands for several decades, but this area has long been associated mainly with marketing communication (Olins, 2002; Anholt, 2007; Dzureková, 2009). Anholt (2008)

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