Analysis of Brand Knowledge by Diverse Target Groups

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Abstract: Increasingly, cities compete with each other to draw visitors, developers, businesses, or people. Therefore, advertisers concentrate on establishing the city as a brand, disregarding that a city's understanding and awareness vary drastically among the target audiences. Place branding should therefore focus the expectations of the various target audiences even more and build techniques for advanced location brand management. The goal of this paper is to analyze the major differences between the perceptions of the city brand of different target groups using network analysis. It highlights the structural variations between the perceptions of the city brand of two separate target groups and the differences between the perceptions of the external and internal target groups. It explores the outcomes and managerial consequences for location marketers. In urban management, place branding is increasingly common. In this phase, this paper illustrates the challenge of multiple target markets and explores implications for brand management in an advanced area.

Keywords: Place branding, City brands, Brand knowledge, Brand perception, Network analysis, Target groups, Place brand management.

INTRODUCTION

Place officials focus more and more on creating the place as a brand in their effort to sell their place to its various target groups [1]. This approach is most often focused on the idea that a location brand is a manageable and entirely manageable communication tool and that one location brand "fits all" target audiences. Yet, by definition, a brand is a network of connections in the mind of the individual consumer and is thus dependent on the views of the various customer groups on an aggregate basis [2]. Given the diverse viewpoints and desires of the various target audiences, these impressions of a location will vary significantly (e.g. between residents and tourists). Consequently, this poses a major challenge for local brand communication as various connections need to be communicated to fulfill the needs of consumers.

In this regard, the current academic debate still shows limitations, as it focuses largely on the exploratory definition of a certain location brand without adequately distinguishing between target groups. From our point of view, location branding research should concentrate more on the perceptions of the location brand among its various stakeholders and establish strategies for how places should cope with the perceptions of the particular location brand. The goal of this paper is to show the substantial differences between the perceptions of the location brand in the mental representations of different target groups using the city of Hamburg as an example [3].

PLACE BRANDING AND ITS TARGET GROUPS

Many scholars note that there is currently no single agreed definition of place branding and some have suggested that a place brand is "nothing more and nothing less than the good name of something on offer to the public." Essentially, in terms of so-called brand awareness, this brand reputation occurs as a network of connections in the minds of customers [4]. Likewise, Zenker and Braun (2010) concentrate on a place brand as a network of customer mind connections focused on the visual, verbal, and behavioral representation of a place, which is represented by the stakeholders' goals, communication, beliefs, actions and general culture of the place and the overall location design [5]. These definitions illustrate that, due to the varying levels of

awareness possessed by these groups and the various demands for a location, brand perception may differ strongly between target groups.

In recent branding activities, however, the audiences specifically targeted are far more nuanced and complex. For example, tourists can be divided into business and leisure time visitors, as well as skilled visitors such as archaeologists and architects, while residents can be divided into an internal and an external target category. Unique target demographic categories are contained among these classes, such as students or the so-called artistic class. Public services, private businesses, and non-governmental organisations such as environmental groups or grass-roots organisations form a third generic group of stakeholders [6]. Again, all these classes may be both internal and external, with the exception of the civil service. In a broad sense, a final stakeholder community is made up of advertising, covering everything from travel books to in-flight magazines, TV, daily newspapers, etc.

We concentrated on the inner point of view of the so-called creative class and students for our research, as well as a general study of perception between an internal and external target audience. In Florida's social and economic theory, this creative class is believed to represent a new economic force and the so-called creative capital of a society [7], which is seen as the most important capital for economic growth in general. We have chosen these groups because they are the most targeted groups in existing branding practice.

Florida explains the desire to produce meaningful new innovations and goods, and to transform this innovation into economic growth, with a "creative core" generating ideas and creative practitioners using them, as common for members of the creative class. While the definition of Florida is debated controversially in the local marketing academy, the interest among practitioners in this target community remains unchanged. It is paramount to consider how the location brand is viewed, which connections are the strongest, and what discrepancies exist in comparison with other significant target groups for places intended for successful location brand communication [8]. It is also important for academics to gain new insights into the creative class in order to address the real questions from local marketing practice, in line with the debate about the engaged scholarship of theory and practice.

Hence, this study focuses on the place perception of the creative class and compares it to another important place marketing target group: students or so-called future talents. As already mentioned, these groups do not only differ in their perceptions of a place, but foremost in their place needs and demands [9]. Leisure time tourists, for example, are searching for leisure time activities like shopping malls or cultural events; business visitors, however, are more interested in logistics and facilities for their business meetings, while residents search for an attractive living environment.

At the same time, several locations are concurrently important to many groups; thus, the offering of the place is not a single location but a package of locations. As a result, an offering for visitors, such as a local shopping street, for example, overlaps to some degree with the offer for residents of the place. This simple example shows that, while brand communication can differentiate between different consumer groups, it must also be incorporated into brand communication to some degree, as local consumers can not necessarily be differentiated from each other.

INTRODUCING THE CASE OF HAMBURG

With 1.8 million inhabitants, Hamburg is the second largest town in Germany. 755 km2 of the city centre, including 75 km2 of harbour (second largest European harbor). With 4,700 hectares of wooded area, Hamburg calls itself the green metropolis of Europe and is also a city on the waterfront, as 8% of the metropolitan area is surrounded by water from three rivers and some smaller canals. Additionally, with over

8.95 million overnight stays in 2010, Hamburg is a very touristic city [10]. The harbour with its "fish market," the "Reeperbahn" (the former red light district that is now more popular for clubbing), the lively restaurant and bar scene, and the very varied cultural offerings such as theatres, musicals and museums are the favorite tourist attractions. Hamburg, which hosts various headquarters of the top 500 German firms, is also an important economic centre. The gross domestic product rose to e85.76 billion in 2009 when combined with foreign trade.

DISCUSSION

In recent years, place marketing in general and place branding in particular have become more and more common. The target for practitioners is primarily to attract young, talented residents for the positive growth of one location. However, this emphasis also leads to limited place brand communication and ignores the complexity of the target audience of the place marketing as well as the different brand perceptions among the different target groups. As the studies illustrate, in the minds of various resident groups as well as between residents and non-residents, the understanding of place brands varies.

In the case of the city of Hamburg, associations relating to leisure activities are more important to students than to innovative class members. The affiliation of "diversity" or the historical "Hanse" trade union is better for the latter party. Some comparisons, on the other hand, are identical, such as the "city at the waterfront" or "harbour" image dimension. The image of the city of Hamburg was much more focused on assumptions for the external target group than for the internal target group. Finally, Hamburg residents have a far more heterogeneous picture of their area (brand). Such findings clearly call for a more differentiated brand engagement that specifically takes into account target group differences.

CONCLUSION

The latest studies, considering their merits, have some limitations: qualitative research, for example, still poses the issue of the consistency of the participants interviewed. Do in-depth interviews with 20 innovative class members and 20 master's students really show all the Hamburg brand's related associations? In addition, were the interviews for members of the artistic centre and creative professionals with the creative class separated? A balancing act between research costs and information gains is often qualitative research. The proposed method of interviewing 20 respondents per group and using three independent raters is therefore consistent with common practices. The second analysis also reveals some limitations: since the online sample is not a student sample, the German population could not be seen as completely representative, which limits the generalization of the findings.

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