Place Branding through Phases of the Image

This page intentionally left blank

Place Branding through Phases of the Image

Balancing Image and Substance

Staci M. Zavattaro

palgrave
macmillan

To Mom and Dad
And to Art Sementelli

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

During 2013, I set a goal for myself to reach out to scholars whom I respected, as a sort of digital thank you for their interesting research and reading. One of those scholars was Mordecai Lee, who studies public relations from a public administration perspective. He kindly responded to my e-mail, indicating that he had actually read some of my work. A minor geek moment ensued. Several weeks later, Dr Lee wrote to me asking if I could help one of his friends and colleagues regarding literature on marketing and branding in the public sector. After enthusiastically agreeing, I then participated in two conference calls with this other professor and her doctoral student. The student was interested in conducting research in place marketing for his dissertation.

The professor started our second call by noting how few people, specifically within public administration, are studying place branding and marketing. They both had the same realization that I had several years ago: branding, marketing, and public relations communications are all happening in public-sector organizations, so it is now incumbent upon scholars in our discipline to not only begin studying *how* to create strategic and meaningful place branding strategies that can positively influence democratic governance but also to *understand the implications* of such place branding endeavors. In other words, we also need to know the consequences of place branding and not just best practices, which certainly are important. Combined, the antecedents and consequences create a powerful picture of the potentials—and also the

pitfalls—of place branding and its associated communication mechanisms within the public sector.

Place branding is a relatively new academic area of inquiry (Govers & Go, 2009; Hankinson, 2010), so scholars are still finding their footing, borrowing theories and practices from other disciplines that include, but are not limited to, urban planning, corporate branding, marketing, public relations, sociology, psychology, management, and organizational communication. Scholars are introducing many useful, yet sometimes dramatically different, theoretical frameworks to explain intricate place branding processes (see, for example, Anholt, 2007; Daspit & Zavattaro, 2014; Gaggiotti et al., 2008; Govers & Go, 2009; Hankinson, 2004; Hanna & Rowley, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2004; Zavattaro, 2012). No matter the construction of the framework, the basic underlying principles remain the same: when executed fully, place branding is a communicative, co-productive, socially constructed, often hard-to-measure strategy that, despite challenges, is becoming a critical governance tool because of increased competition between places (Eshuis et al., 2013;Klijn, et al, 2012; Tiebout, 1956).

That few people are studying place branding from a public administration perspective is neither good nor bad; place branding is naturally interdisciplinary and can benefit from viewpoints from marketing, public relations, urban planning and design, public policy, corporate relations, travel and tourism, hospitality, etc. The aim of this book is to utilize a public administration lens to converge these diverse literature streams as a mechanism to understand how city government organizations are undertaking place branding practices (or engaging in more marketing and public relations) and the related effects of these practices. In other words, what could happen to an organization-public relationship when a place branding campaign is launched?

The approach I take in this book is a bit different from some of my colleagues, as research focuses, quite necessarily, on Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs) that are the designated marketing and branding arms for most cities. The theoretical framework presented

in this book (Figure 3.1) is derived from an examination of policies and practices in 21 US cities, coupled with a thorough literature review. City governments here are taken as the lead Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in charge of developing, implementing, and evaluating brand identity. Sometimes, if a CVB also operates within the city (as in Denver, Colorado, Billings, Montana, Las Vegas, Nevada, Chicago, Illinois, for example), there could be tension between the organizations, especially if different brand identities are offered. Studying how city government entities define and shape brand identity is important, as cities are typically thought of as monopolistic service providers not often interested in promoting value added elements. Despite monopolistic intentions, city government officials (both elected and appointed) are turning toward holistic place branding strategies that are becoming critical governance components akin to human resources, budgeting and finance, and public works (Eshuis et al., 2013; Eshuis & Edwards, 2013) because of the realization that resources are scarce, so competition for those resources is often intense. Therefore, it becomes essential to understand *both* the implementation and consequences of this shift toward place branding at the local government level.

To carry out this exploration, I relied upon critical philosophy from Jean Baudrillard (1994) as the overall organizing structure to showcase how cities, based on a combination of governance system, communications style, and promotional tactics used (Zavattaro, 2010, 2013a), can proceed through, or stop within, four phases of the image, which have been adapted herein to provide another theoretical framework to explain place branding practices. Detailed further in Chapter 2, phases of the image traces how objects move from a connection to reality (phase one) all the way to a simulation for reality (phase four), whereby objects become, in Baudrillard's view, entirely detached from their original intent. The combination of governance structure, communication style, and promotional tactics used shows where cities progress or stop in phases of the image. Again, placement in a certain

phase of the image is neither good nor bad, though there are democratic governance implications for each, as noted in Chapter 5.

Though there is a critical philosophical underpinning to the book, I believe it is still user friendly to academicians in myriad disciplines, as well as street-level practitioners implementing place branding strategies. To wit, I include quotations from practitioners at CVBs throughout a Southern state to illustrate points being made. One may ask why I quote CVB practitioners after having explained above that this book examines city public administrators rather than those working for a CVB? The answer is because practitioners in any sector can learn from each other, and place branding and public administration are perfect examples of such interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fields. Simply because I take city government entities as the units of analysis in this book does not dismiss the insights that CVB employees (who themselves are public administrators) have regarding place branding, which is their main job.

Day in and day out, CVB managers concentrate on developing a place's overall identity (branding) and then communicating that identity (marketing) through the best channels possible. Local government place brand managers might not have the luxury of strictly devoting time to shaping, promoting, and measuring the brand, as they probably have other communications-related duties that are of equal importance. Therefore, city government employees who are lead brand managers can learn tips and tricks regarding topics such as brand development, dissemination, and evaluation from their CVB counterparts because of their vast place branding experience. That is why, throughout the book, readers will see quotations and insights from place brand managers working in various CVBs throughout a Southern state to shed light upon their challenges as *public managers* and *brand developers*; hence the synergies between CVB administrators and local government brand managers. CVB managers' knowledge can aid lead DMO officials, no matter the organization, with myriad aspects of the place branding process outlined herein and faced in the field every day.

Acknowledgments

As with any project, this is truly a collaborative effort. This work started as a "long" six-page paper for a course in my doctoral program with Dr Art Sementelli. I pitched the idea while chatting with him in the parking lot after class one night. He got quite animated and I hoped that was a good thing. From that paper, the research expanded into not only a dissertation that Art chaired but an entire research agenda as I moved into academia. For Art's support, then and now, I am grateful. I also want to thank Dr Donald Cooper and Dr Terence Garrett, instrumental members of my research committee, who shaped this work. I completed this project while on faculty at Mississippi State University, so I owe thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration, as well as the College of Arts & Sciences and university community as a whole, for their support of this endeavor.

Tremendous thanks to my friend and colleague Dr Josh Daspit for providing me with wonderful, thoughtful feedback on Chapter 6. He never flinched as I sent revision after revision to his inbox, and he always delivered instrumental critique that helped shape the chapter. Thank you to my colleague and friend Dr Frank Adams who also gave valuable input into elements of Chapter 6, as did Mrs Paige Hunt, the former Executive Director of the CVB at Greenwood, Mississippi, who looked with a practitioner's eye at my recommendations. My colleague and friend Leslie Baker also deserves thanks for

helping me brainstorm portions of the manuscript—and bringing cake when I needed it! Thank you to Hannah Carlan for assistance compiling the index.

Figure 3.1 depicting the book's core theoretical framework is reprinted with permission from Emerald Publishing. I also want to thank Margaret Shalley, the Public Information Specialist with the City of Phoenix, for helping secure permissions to use the images that appear in Chapter 4. The use of the City of Phoenix logo is by permission granted from the City of Phoenix, all rights reserved. Use of the Phoenix logo is not an endorsement of any material herein.

A special thank you to my parents, Nancy and Richard, for their unwavering support. They are always there for me, and I love them dearly.

Finally, a thank you to my Palgrave Macmillan editor, Casie Vogel, and to Sarah Lawrence, an amazing editorial assistant. Thanks for all their time, help, and effort into making this project come to life. I also want to thank Swathi Padmanabhan and her SPi Global team for tremendous copyediting to the manuscript. Thank you to the entire Palgrave Macmillan team for their tremendous effort and support of this project, including the anonymous reviewers for their guidance and belief in this project and in me.