PLACE BRANDING: OVERVIEW OF AN EMERGING LITERATURE

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Introduction

There is a small but rapidly growing body of literature pertaining to place branding. Many streams of research have provided input to the creation of knowledge in the domain of place branding. This diversity of sources encompasses many disciplines that rarely, if ever, attract attention in the marketing and branding literature. For example, the fields of sociology, history, national identity, and politics may be regarded as having a potentially important contribution to make to the practice of place branding. Practitioners and academics involved in place branding should therefore be prepared to scan horizons far wider than those associated purely with conventional brand management and brand strategy.

The country-of-origin literature offers valuable insights into the effect on consumer behaviour that the provenance of a product or service can have. However, it has traditionally been beyond the scope of the country-of-origin literature to analyse the historical and cultural dimensions of which nations are constituted. It is this breadth of scope that characterises place branding. This overview of the literature highlights the multifaceted nature of place branding and identifies some of the landmark texts and emerging avenues in the place branding literature.

Landmark texts

Three landmark texts have made a major contribution to the place branding literature. First, *Destination Branding: Creating the unique destination proposition* (eds. Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride, 2002). This collection of articles includes papers on topics such as the politics of branding cities and regions (Ryan, 2002); branding and national identity (Hall, 2002); and, destination branding and the web (Palmer, 2002). Second, the special issue on nation branding that appeared in the April 2002 edition of the *Journal of Brand Management*, comprising groundbreaking articles on nation

branding by some of the world's most eminent academics and practitioners. Third, Simon Anholt's (2003) seminal text *Brand New Justice: The Upside of Global Branding*, in which the author addresses the issue of how emerging market economies can brand both their exports and their countries in order to compete more effectively in the global economy and escape from the impoverished status of being a mere supplier nation to richer more developed countries.

The application of branding techniques to nations and places

The application of branding techniques to nations and places is growing in frequency given the increasingly global competition which nations and places now face in both their domestic and external markets. Today there are more reasons why nations must manage and control their branding, including the need to attract tourists, factories, companies and talented people and to find markets for their exports. This requires countries to adopt conscious branding if they are to compete effectively on the global stage (Kotler and Gertner, 2002), a view shared by Olins (1999), who asserts that within a few years, identity management will be seen as a perfectly normal manifestation of what is now called joined-up government in that a successful brand will be seen as a key national asset. Van Ham (2001) claims that the unbranded state has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention, and that image and reputation are becoming essential parts of the state's strategic equity.

From the field of sociology, Bond, McCrone and Brown (2003) assume a perspective that has implications for nation branding when they declare their intention to move beyond assumptions that nationalism is essentially cultural and/or narrowly political and that it is primarily past-oriented and defensive. The authors do this by examining evidence relating to the creative (re)construction of the nation from a contemporary economic perspective. Bond, McCrone and Brown's research was conducted primarily in the context of Scotland and Wales and is conceptually close to much research carried out with a more explicit brand-focused intent.

Place brand image

The national identity literature has rarely been drawn upon by country-of-origin or place branding researchers. This is surprising, in that many of the determinants of origin image perceptions are grounded in cultural, social and political contexts. A simplistic and unsubstantiated assumption frequently prevalent in country-of-origin research is that consumers construct their perceptions of a particular country-of-origin purely on their experience of product purchase from the country in question. However, as Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2001) point out in an important contribution to the place branding literature, there are many more determinants of country image perceptions than merely the purchase of a product such as a washing machine or a video cassette recorder from a certain country. The personal experience of visiting a country as a tourist, for example, may contribute far more strongly to a consumer's perceptions of a country than the purchase of a consumer durable from that country.

Such personal experience may have an impact on the consumer's subsequent purchase of products from that country, which needs to be understood. Gnoth (2002), for instance, acknowledges the power of tourism as a determinant of country image perceptions and attempts theoretically to develop a model of leveraging a country brand through a tourism destination brand, whereby the services facilitating the tourism experience at a destination would be employed to develop the country brand across different industries. Gnoth's article represents one of the first attempts to develop theoretical models or frameworks specific to place branding.

However, it is a central concern of the emerging marketing construct of place branding that the diverse and complex nature of a place-brand transcends the narrow confines of any single industry sector, including that of tourism. In many cases, too tight a link between tourism and the nation-brand, for example, may actually prove detrimental, particularly for countries whose tourism industry is founded upon rural and traditional imagery. Controversy was sparked, for example, when the Chief Executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland announced that the company was dropping the word 'Scotland' from some of its branding because the country was associated with whisky, tartan, bagpipes, and golf, all of which are traditional icons heavily used in Scottish tourism marketing (Hope, 2003).

The significance of sport as a determinant of country image perceptions has been massively underestimated in existing country-of-origin research and it is through the emerging field of nation and place branding that sport's role in country image perceptions is beginning to be acknowledged. Brown, Chalip, Jago, and Mules (2001), for example, state that it has been estimated that the exposure gained by Australia through hosting the 2000 Olympic Games accelerated Australia's marketing by ten years and will generate an additional AUS$6.1bn in foreign exchange earnings between 1997 and 2004. The similarly beneficial way in which the hosting of the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona helped Spain to reintegrate itself into the European community as an outward-looking, modern democracy is discussed by Gilmore (2002) in an article that explores the scope for repositioning a country in terms of its brand.

In a similar way to tourism, a country's sporting achievements can project an extremely powerful image upon which nations may partly construct a nation-brand. The New Zealand rugby team, for instance, represents a symbol of national pride that is recognised throughout much of the rest of the world (Motion, Leitch, and Brodie, 2003). The Brazilian football team enjoys similar iconic status throughout the world. The important role of sport as a key facet of place branding can be expected to increase in prominence, driven largely by the blanket coverage of sport that is now delivered through satellite and digital media.

Cultural products such as films, books and music also have a major part to play in determining a country's reputation and image, although this is surprisingly ignored in the vast majority of country-of-origin and place branding research. The image effects of cultural products can have great longevity. Martine (2002) touches on the nostalgic longings of the Scottish diaspora and observes that 'whenever an expatriate bonds with a bottle of Scotch, Brigadoon rises'. The film 'Brigadoon' was originally released in 1954, a lavish adaptation of the Lerner and Loewe Broadway musical starring Gene Kelly as an American tourist who stumbles upon an enchanted Scottish village. Every 100 years, the people of Brigadoon awaken for a 24-hour-period, then go back to sleep for another century, while Brigadoon itself vanishes in the mists. For filmgoers of that generation, Brigadoon may influence perceptions of Scotland as much as the more recent Mel Gibson historical epic, 'Braveheart'. It is important for

place-brand strategists to be aware of such determinants of place image perceptions when developing place-brand strategy.

Further determinants of country image, some of a cultural nature, are noted by Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), whose belief is that whether positive or negative, focused or diffuse, held widely or by only a few, developed deliberately or by default, and formed from education, the media, travel, immigration, product purchases, business experiences or any combination of sources, every place has an image, and that more importantly from the marketing perspective, unlike brand or corporate images, those of nations and other places are not directly under the marketer's control. Place branding can therefore be seen to pose considerably complex challenges in terms of strategy development and implementation (O'Shaughnessy and Jackson, 2000).

Other notable contributions to the place branding literature to have emerged from the country-of-origin paradigm include those by Thakor and Kohli (1996), who introduced the concept of brand origin, defined as the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers; Askegaard and Ger (1998), who argue that analyses of images attached to a product and its place(s) of origin must use a richer set of connotations and stereotypes than is used in standard approaches, and who acknowledge the cultural context in consumers' product evaluations by proposing the concept of contextualised product-place image; and, Chisik (2003), who moves country-of-origin research towards nation branding through focusing on country-of-origin reputational advantage.

Parallels between corporate and country brands

From a corporate strategy perspective, the parallels between corporate and country brands are placed in a historical context by Olins ('The Nation as a Brand', http://www.dba.org.uk/pdf/nation.pdf), who states that companies and countries learn from each other as we gradually see a mutation of corporations into national institutions and of nations into brands. Because both seek stability and prosperity, the interests of the global company and nation state are in some respects similar and increasingly they overlap, collaborate and derive strength from each other. Olins goes

on to assert that the relationship between a corporation, its brands and the nation from which it originates remains in many ways very close. Some national brands or companies are flag carriers, a source of national confidence and self-esteem; Nokia's global technological and marketing success helps Finns feel good about themselves and their country, whilst Q8's penetration of petrol retailing in some of the world's toughest markets does the same thing for Kuwaitis. To these examples cited by Olins could be added the national pride that Scots may feel with regard to the global success of Scotch whisky exports, a source of pride that may be more deep-rooted than the ephemeral satisfaction of attracting inward investment.

A major originality of Olins' approach to nation branding is the elaboration of a historical perspective. Olins maintains that we think of changes of corporate name to reflect a new positioning and personality as a modern corporate phenomenon but an early and powerful national example is the relaunching of the British House of Saxe Coburg Gotha as the House of Windsor during the First World War. This activity is not usually perceived to be about branding, says Olins, it falls into a quite different and rather grander category, to do with marking out or defining the nation, but beneath the veneer it is very much the same thing; in reality, the commercial and national traditions of brand-building are not quite as separate or different from each other as they appear at first sight.

Summary

To summarise, place branding may be characterised as a domain that is currently very much practitioner-led and where academic research has been slow to follow, although high levels of academic interest in the topic are now beginning to materialise. The creation of the journal *Place Branding* may well accelerate the pace of research in the field by providing a platform and forum for the presentation and discussion of research into the increasingly high profile practice of place branding.

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