The Berlin International Economics Congress 2011:
An International Conference on the Future of Nation Branding, Tourism and International Investments in a Globalized World

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Improving the Image of Countries, Cities and Tourist Destinations, Using Media and Branding Strategies with Outstanding Crisis

Abstract

Marketing is a universal and dynamic process that can be applied to developing, promoting and improve the image of entities, including products, services, places, personalities, properties, causes, and information. In the case of marketing or branding places, as countries, cities or destinations informal marketing tasks and more evaluated communications channels has gone on for centuries. The current literature offers an extensive discourse in the field of crisis in general and the role of the marketing, branding and media strategies during crisis in particular. Following the discussion of place branding, different aspects of crises and ways of handling will be considered.

Keywords: *Places; Marketing; Branding; Communication; Media; Strategy; Crisis.*

1. Introduction

Countries, states, regions, cities and tourist destinations face increasing competition when they try to attract tourists, inhabitants, investments'. There are more than tow under and eighty countries and three under cities in the world with over a million inhabitants, and all those places want to be the most attractive. The place managers have to be able to develop their self-promotion strategies to reach the marketing level of the capital and human resources. The places need to identify the opportunities and strengths to achieve competitive advantages for efficient access to markets, natural and human resources. A clear definition of place branding, developed in a consistent and cooperative way with stakeholders and as a product of a network between local, regional and national stakeholders, can promote the production base, increasing the touristic and human resource flows. Investors, entrepreneurs, citizens of different nationalities, students and researchers take part of this flow.

Place branding is a recent trend in place marketing and a powerful tool available to academics and marketers who dedicate their research to promoting geographical units, several times improving the image with adverse conditions after climate, economic or social crisis.
Place branding is also an important concept in today's competitive world.

The economic and financial crisis had a drastic impact on the reduction of trade flows. However, it is also expected to have a medium-term impact in the flows of people. Such aspect is a challenge to countries, regions and cities. They compete globally to attract investment, new economies, companies and human capital. We observe a new balance of powers in the world economy, and this will affect migration patterns, the world tourism and the image of geographical units. Consequently, place competition asks for long-term strategies in organizations' as governments, in marketing, and media channels.
The media information indicates that many destructive events occur every day: homicide; robbery; natural disasters; corruption and other afflictions. These kinds of possible crisis as the economic and financial situation have a very high space in the broadcasting, newspapers, *World Wide Web* and in the social media network, and an impact on the places image. Avraham and Ketter (2008) reported by Glaesser (2006: 12) the crisis is "a critical change in an important variable that endangers or destroys either parts of or the entire system". In the line of the theory of Avraham and Ketter (2008: 79), the crisis is "the systemic approaches offer a general definition, emphasizing the occurrence of a change in institutions, companies, groups or places that threatens to break the current equilibrium or routine".

The aim of this paper is to understand how the marketers, the place marketers and the decision makers, as place managers should employ to change the image of a place with an «undergoing image crisis». What are the best media, marketing and branding strategies to improve their places' images and re-attracting tourists, visitors, investors and residents,

will be in focus and are the target of this qualitative research. We will use the must recent academic references and multiple searches in the *World Wide Web* concerning information about the different scenarios with correspondingly negative effect on the national and international tourism industry and on the place's economy, investments, commerce and its attractiveness to current and potential tourists and residents (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

2. Brief theoretical introduction

2.1. Place Marketing

The place marketing did not just appear a few years ago has been shaped by developments within marketing science and cognate disciplines but also by the external historical contexts at various spatial scales that determined its assumptions, goals and priorities (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008: 150). The concept of place marketing (as know as *place promotion*) became popular in European urban literature only during the 1980s and a little earlier in the United States (US) (Paddison, 1993 reported by Avraham & Ketter, 2008: 5). In the US the place marketing model was developed during the 70s crisis. In that period, places, such as the major cities, like *New York*, experienced the migration of industries to cheaper markets. The same problem occurs today in many countries, such as Portugal or Spain. In that context, the first measure of places was to launch tax incentives to attract investments. Today, the places use a variety of other strategies.

According with Ashworth and Voogd (1990), place marketing can be treated as an instrument of place management undertaken in pursuit of objectives that relate to the management of the place.

2.2. Brands

For a long time, brands have been the most central dynamo and the largest source of income for companies. It is the brands that drive company acquisitions, and revenue from these brands far exceeds the value of all the company's other property. Different place, states and cities can also develop brands, just as companies do, and when brands are strategically implemented they can become the most central competitive factor. A place can be branded when the right tool, the identity, has been chosen which makes it stand out from its competitors (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009).

A brand may identify one *item*, a family of *items*, or all *items* of that seller. If used for the firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name" (Blackett, 2003: 13). A brand is a consistent group of characters, images, or emotions that consumers recall or experience when they think of a specific symbol, product, service; organization or location (Simeon, 2006: 464 reported by Balakrishnan, 2009: 612).

Branding must "attract and keep customers by promoting value, image, prestige, or lifestyle" (Rooney, 1995: 48), and "It must communicate information, minimize risk or increase trust, help identify or recall key factors, differentiate from competition and facilitate recommendations" (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000 reported by Balakrishnan, 2009: 612). The brands must be able to help to identify or remember the key factors of products, services or territories (places/destinations), differentiating them from the competition and facilitate the same recommendations (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000 reported by Balakrishnan, 2009: 612).

According to Lindemann (2003: 27) the increasing recognition of the value of intangibles came with the continuous increase in the gap between companies' book values and their stock market valuations, as well as sharp increases in premiums above the stock market value that were paid in mergers and acquisitions in the late 1980s. Fundamentally, these intangibles influence consumers at the time of purchase, investors at the time of application of its financial capital and also influence governments towards the implementation of public capital in infrastructure and territorial development strategies.

Ahmad (2005: 197) cited by Balakrishnan (2009) reinforces the importance of brands, indicating that it is one of the most important indicators of economic health of organizations. As summarized Levitt (1980) cited by Ruão and Farhangmehr (2000: 5) "brands are essentially extensions of the product, which allow not only identifying it, but they incorporate a set of values and intangible attributes that are relevant to the consumer and contribute to motivate a purchase". What makes a product a brand is that the product is combined with something else, like symbols, images and feelings (Ruão & Farhangmehr, 2000: 5).

2.3. *Place Branding*

Destination branding and place branding are new concepts'; there is a general agreement among academics and practitioners, that places can be branded in much the same way as consumer goods (Caldwell & Freire, 2004:50 reported by Rainisto, 2003). Many authors agree that places, as nations, states or cities can be branded as products (Anholt, 2003; Cai, 2002; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Olins, 2002 reported by Magnússon, 2008). Since destinations effectively compete with each other for a place in the mind of consumers, a brand name could be a significant factor when consumers make a decision about which destination to choose (Tasci & Kozak, 2006 cited by Magnússon 2008).

Anholt (2006) suggest a simple six point model for evaluating any place branding strategy or creative idea - *The Nation Brand Hexagon*. Place brands are similar to corporate brands, as they act as umbrella brands for a portfolio of leisure, investment and business tourism, and

stakeholder and citizen welfare products (Trueman et al., 2004). Goodwill is created through a unique identity by considering the diversity of stakeholder needs (Hatch & Schulz, 2003).

Places like corporations are subject to increasing market complexity (globalization, internal and external government policies, foreign exchange fluctuations and natural environment) and increasing marketing costs, which warrants a corporate branding approach. Hence corporate branding strategies can be extrapolated to the destination context (Xie & Boggs 2006 reported by Trueman et al. 2004). Countries, like Greece; Australia; Malaysia; Spain and Croatia, some regions, as *Wales*; the Western Australia, and the *Algarve*, Portugal and cities, like *Edinburgh*; *Manchester*, *London* and *New York* have already adopted the place branding or destination brand building and they are now improving the strategies with the outstanding crisis, as result of the impact of the economical crises in the tourism flows and the negative image as result or terrorism attaches in some of this places. "For example, following the September Eleven terror attacks, the marketers of *New York* took advantage of national patriotic feelings to promote the city" (Avraham & Ketter, 2008: 110).

Nevertheless, branding destinations is a relatively new development and academic research and is a important field in order to offers an entire set of response strategies for altering the image of a country, a city or a tourist destination (Caldwell & Freire 2004: 51 reported by Rainisto 2003).

2.4. Media Images of Places

As we write, the growing competition between places over attracting investment, tourists, capital, national and international status, means that, today, a negative image is more harmful than ever. Countries, cities and tourist destinations intensified the competition for attention, influence, markets, investments, businesses, entrepreneurs, high-class residents, tourists, conventions and sporting events. But, this global competition is no longer limited to the leading countries, or big cities, as *London*, United Kingdom or *Amsterdam*, Netherlands. With technological advances (e.g. social media) and market deregulations, even small places can compete in the *world wide arena*, as *Penang State* in Malaysia or *Ljubljana* in Slovenia. The competitors are now global. For example, today, we assist the rising of the Asiatic Continent, especially East Asia, as the most dynamic geographic area of the planet. As we have seen as some players fall, other economic and social actors' emerge and the place marketers need be prepare to change the image in order to don't loose place competitiveness.

Successfully changing a place's public image requires analysis of the factors that construct the image. Many researchers have addressed this issue and found numerous factors to be involved, as the geographical size, the political and public diplomacy power, crime rate, socioeconomic status and employment situation. The number and character of national

institutions located in the place, (e.g. universities); heritage and historical background; advertisements and brochures about the place, movies and television recording in different places, tourist or cultural value, physical appearance, takes part on the building image place process (Avraham, 2003 and Kunczik, 1997 reported by Avraham & Ketter, 2008: 28).

3. The nature of crisis
3.1.   Crisis, what is it?

As Mansfeld & Pizam (2006) suggests, we identify a list of five possible crises in the places: i) crime-related events; ii) terror-related events; iii) political unrest events; iv) natural disaster events; v) epidemic-related events. Local decision makers should be prepared for all these descriptions and should accumulate knowledge for managing them, with a necessary perception of the Coombs (1999) dichotomies – "whether the crisis is internal or external and whether the crisis is intentional or unintentional". If one or more events occurs, and if the consist in a crisis, many *spokespeople* try to decide how their place or organization should react. Decision makers, place marketers, politicians, citizens send their suggestions to change a place image after the crisis. The choice of the most suitable communication response strategy depends on the type of crisis, the place's characteristics, the target audience and other circumstances. Glaesser (2006) suggests a comprehensive definition for crisis. He wrote "a crisis is an undesired, extraordinary, often unexpected and timely limited process with ambivalent development possibilities". It demands immediate decisions and countermeasures in order to influence the further development again positively for the organization/destination and to limit the negative consequences as much as possible. A crisis situation is determined by evaluating the seriousness of the occurring negative events, which threaten, weaken or destroy competitive advantages or important goals of the organization/ destination.

Glaesser (2006) combines different variables relevant to crises in a country, city or tourist destination: i) unexpectedness; ii) time limits; iii) unpredictable future, and the iv) risk of losing the place's competitive position and cause a negative impact in place image. What are the contemporary examples of a crisis in the places? To take some recent examples, *Hong Kong* suffered a crisis caused by epidemics; *New York* suffered a crisis as a result of terrorism; *Croatia* due to war; *Nepal* because of political unrest and *New Orleans* through natural disaster. Recently, the earthquake in *Haiti*, is another example of outstanding crisis. The main problem is the continual broadcast of the catastrophes, and the possible impact in the place image. The spreading of negative events in the media has a several negative impact in the image of geographical units and asks for new marketing and branding strategies.

3.2. The marketer and the crisis, what they can do?

What the place marketers should plan, in order to manage the crisis and how can they prevent potential place image damage?

The number of countries taking part in the global economy and global tourism is increasing, accompanied by a parallel process whereby worldwide transportation and communication have grown. They are speedier, easier and the barriers between East and West are fading and getting cheaper (e.g. low cost airlines companies). However, if some place grows in terms of attractions, another can decreases in the attraction cycle and place image.

For example, today *Paris*, France does not compete just with other cities in Europe, but with other global cities, trying to win international tourism and important conferences. Global competition for tourism and investment has always existed, but today visiting foreign parts or investing abroad is much simpler, cheaper and safer, thanks to the communication progress.

Avraham & Ketter (2008) and White (2006), indicate the best strategies, in particular communication and promotion strategies, to improve the place's image in the crisis' context and what the marketers should do to keep the competitiveness level.

Avraham & Ketter (2008: 4) according to Felsenstein (1994), identifies four economic strategies that can be used by marketers, decision makers and government bodies to improve their image: i) "developing local economy by attracting large-scale industries"; ii) "attracting small-scale businesses in the fields of private or public services"; iii) "political participation in the line for national budgets", and iv) "encouraging local businesses to expand their activities, essentially try increase your external products flows".

3.3. The role of the media?

The literature extensively refers to crises in general and, in particular, the role of the media in such context. White (2006) states that the, "media effect on crisis situations is so marked that it has been claimed that the crisis was actually created by the media", the media amplifies the perception of the crisis emerge. In related literature (Avraham & Ketter, 2008) we will find two concepts (figure 1):

| Crisis management | Crisis communication |

Figure 1: The two crisis concepts, reported by Avraham and Ketter (2008).

The contribution of Avraham and Ketter (2008), help us to gain a better understanding of what is the best media strategies for territories,

such as, countries, regions, cities and other destinations in a crisis context to prepare in advance for a crisis situation. Coombs (1999: 92) identifies six communication strategies for the place in crisis (figure 2):
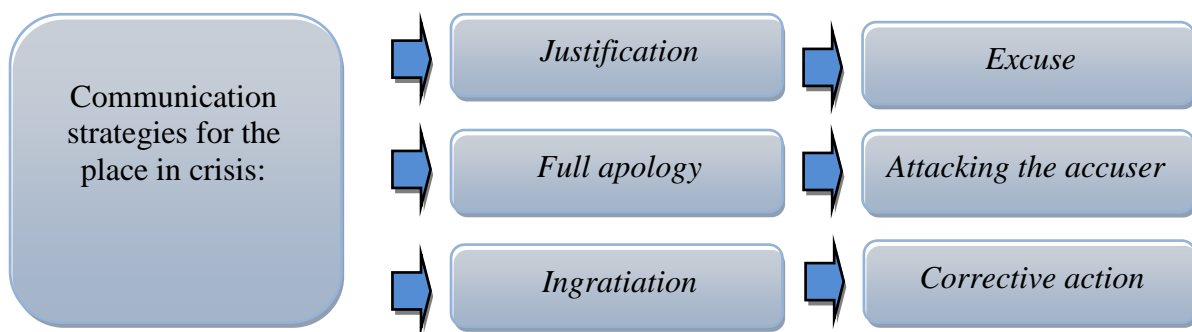

Figure 2: Six communication strategies reported by Coombs (1999).

As Coombs (1999: 92) suggests that effective use of *crisis communication* should include two key elements: i) information and ii) compassion. According to Glaesser (2006) reported by Avraham and Ketter (2008), *crisis management* is the constant practice of avoiding and containing crisis. In terms of consumer behaviour and perceptions *crisis management* is a means to control, run and operate a sudden extraordinary event.

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, in the age of the *World Wide Web*, satellites, global TV networks and the global economy, crises such as these are widely covered in the international media and can empty out hotels, cancel flights and leave tourist attractions deserted overnight (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). The challenge to the place marketers, place marketing researchers and decision makers are pro-active management approaches, in an ethically and environmentally sustainable perspective with creative media strategies. All these «place stakeholders» needs to find the best strategies, with *inspiration and innovation* to minimize the consequence caused by an unstable financial system, the economic instability and the natural events in the place's image and in the decrease in the flow of people and capital.

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