Chapter 10

Place Consumption: Interrogating the Relationship Between Nation Brand and City Brand

Sanya Ojo
University of East London, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the influence of country of origin’s reputation on the notion of place brand and vice versa. Employing a case study methodology, cases of Lagos (Nigeria) and Dubai (UAE) are examined to generate a model of place brand/branding. This model highlights the flow of causality between a nation brand and a city brand. Four themes are highlighted as matters of interest to focus on when recommending a way forward for Lagos city to generate and improve its global reputation in order to increase the footfalls of visitors and expats.

INTRODUCTION

In the crowded and complex global marketplace, people loosely assess cities mostly through a few simple clichés. For example, Tokyo is modernity, Paris is love, New York is energy, Washington is power, Milano is fashion, Lagos is lawlessness, Rio and Las Vegas are fun, and Barcelona is culture (Ozer, 2016). Typecasts and cliché could dominate perceptions of some cities as external audiences are indisposed to process vast amounts of information about a city and its nation’s history, culture, society. Accordingly, an effective branding should be able to break down negative stereotypes and clichés that are usually ascribed to places/nations.

From this standpoint, this chapter explores the concept of place brand through the interrogation of the relationships between nation brand and place brand to contribute a better understanding of city brand/branding. Most of the literatures on brand marketing assume the flow of causality from nation (country) brand to place (city) brand. In essence, the status, prestige, and standing of a country are presumed to rub off on the city brand, for instance, cities like London, Paris, and New York do well on most brand indicators because of the international standings of their respective countries on the world stage.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7906-9.ch010
However, from this study’s perspective, city brands do not necessarily have to align with nation brands to be effective and successful. Whilst it is likely a city’s reputation is impacted by the reputation of its country, the Reputation Institute (2017) research demonstrates that sometimes the cities reputations do not correspond to that of their countries. Hence, there seem to be instances when a city’s brand will be more successful than that of its constituent country and may, in fact, propel the nation brand to higher levels such that the flow of causality is from the city’s brand to the nation brand rather than the opposite. This reverse relationship is interrogated using a case study of two different cities, Dubai (UAE) and Lagos (Nigeria). The branding activities of both cities are evaluated and a model of city brand is formulated to guide the attention of academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the direction of a strategically oriented approach to city branding.

Brand Consumption

The practice of branding nations and places is growing in intensity since nations and places are competing fiercely in the global marketplace. Miletsky and Smith (2009: 2) contend that “brand is the sum total of all user experiences with a particular product or services, building both reputation and future expectations of benefit”. Many cities, regions, and countries invested huge resources in producing brands to attract bigger investments and recognition. According to Kearn and Philo (1993: 11): “Places become to be consumed, advertised and marketed much as any product”. Though a relatively new concept, place brand/branding has been assessed as important to consumers and investors who make their economic decisions based on countries’ images. Successful place branding helps to reinforce positive images and reduces the effect of negative images and can be effective in differentiation strategies. Thus, branding has a huge impact on cities/countries’ competitiveness since effective branding can confer a competitive advantage to a place or nation especially in the developing parts of the world (Mihailovich, 2006). Place branding not only applies to cities, regions, and countries but also applies lower down the spatial scale (Ashworth & Voogt, 1994) to places such as shopping destinations and leisure parks. However, this study focus is on cities, and place brand/city brand will be used interchangeably. In addition, contiguous terms such as nation brand, country brand, and country reputation will be applied interchangeably for ease of presentation/analysis.

To achieve its objectives, some pertinent questions needed investigation; such as what effects do a country’s reputation and attributes have on a city’s brand/branding outcomes? Can a city’s brand be isolated from the negative reputation/image of the country within which it is situated? Under what conditions can a city’s brand thrive irrespective of its country’s poor reputation/image in the world? Two cities, Dubai and Lagos, were selected to generate a model of place/city brand. The paper is arranged into six sections including contextual and research settings; conceptual framework; methodology; findings; discussion; conclusions and policy implications.

CONTEXTUAL AND RESEARCH SETTINGS

Given the absence of rigorous academic research on interactions between nation and city brands, this study analysed two cities, one in the Middle-East (Dubai) and the other in West Africa (Lagos). The cities were selected because they typify good examples of the causality flows from place brand to nation brand and from nation brand to place brand. For instance, Dubai demonstrates the positive impact of a place