Chapter 7

City Branding and the Role of the City Websites in Building City Brands

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ABSTRACT

In today’s globalized world, the competition experienced intensively in many fields is being experienced amongst cities as well. Competition is taking place not only in the traditional environment, but in the online environment as well. In order to differentiate their cities from the rest and build an image and identity for themselves in this atmosphere of intensive competition, city administrators are taking advantage of the branding techniques used by private sector companies. At this point, the city websites have a key role for building and communicating the city brand. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the role of the city websites in building city brands and promoting their brands. In order to fulfill the aim, the city branding, related concepts, and the role of the city websites in building city brands are introduced in the background section. Then, randomly selected city websites from the City Brands Index are evaluated using content analysis, and the results of this analysis are presented and discussed respectively.

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INTRODUCTION

In today’s globalizing world, competition is an intensively hot issue not only between businesses but also amongst the countries or even between the cities that are the centers creating the wealth for the economies of those countries. The competition between the cities varies around such issues as the city being an important centre of tourism attraction, attracting investments into the city, the headquarters of important institutions and businesses being located in the city, organizing important porting events in the city, the city being the center of economical and cultural activities, the city being an important center of education for students (Gordon, 1999; Lever & Turok, 1999; Muñiz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009; Mishra & Rolland, 2009; Zhang & Zhao, 2009). One of the most important consequences of economical change is the fierce competition between the cities for both public and private sector investments (Berg & Braun, 1999; Short et al., 1993). The cities especially compete with one another for the market share likely to be obtained from those investments. The fact that investment in today’s world is active and moving makes this competition all the more severe (Waitt, 1999).

The emergence a number of relations termed as a network society as a result of globalization that has intensified the competition for investments between the countries and regions (Huerta-Carvajal & Luna-Reyes, 2009), and the internationalization of markets cause confusion about the identities of the cities as well. The cities as the places or centers where these countless trends of change are joined make attempts to establish their own special identities in order to become different from the others. Some cities have their own specific identities due to their well-known or unique characteristics. The identities of some other cities, on the other hand, may also be impacted by the works and efforts of the public sector. Therefore, many city administrations make efforts to establish new structures that will form new city icons and symbols, and promote their cities (Muñiz-Martínez & Cervantes-Blanco, 2009).

City branding is attracting the attention of public administrators and the other stakeholders more and more everyday. The reputation of a city is a very important factor in attracting financial and other resources into the city and retaining them there. Therefore, the brand of a city also needs to be managed just like that of a company brand. If one does not pay enough care to it, the brand of a city may be damaged due to the information circulated around through the modern channels of communication (Kerr & Johnson, 2005). Using branding techniques for the cities is increasing more and more because of the global competition faced by the countries and cities in today’s local and international markets. Countries and cities need to adopt informed branding practices in order to be able to compete more effectively on the global scale (Dinnie, 2004). In addition, the great changes in the social and political texture of the modern society require the city branding as a prerequisite in the 21st century to be implemented over the cities through a public-oriented approach (Adult, 2005). The commonly accepted duty of city administrations is to constitute (to reconstitute, if necessary) conditions of the city in the most effective way in order to be able to attract the potential investments into the city (Rogerson, 1999).

In this day and age when the whole world is becoming globalized in terms of social, economical and cultural aspects, the city administrations try to become branded cities in order to get ahead in competition. The concept of brand and branding, which is an important concept in marketing are now being applied to cities as well. Many benefits of the internet such as communication and interaction which it provides thanks to its globalization feature has helped city administrations, just like the private sector companies, to get involved in the efforts of online city branding. Online environment provide important opportunities to the cities using different communication strategies to contribute.