On city branding: Understanding the History, Types, and Challenges of Large-scale Events

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Abstract: City branding and identity are important aspects of understanding the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects of a locale. This study looks into the impact of large-scale events on the branding of cities. More specifically, it explores the experiences of various cities on how they develop and implement mega events and what it means for their city branding. This study employs a qualitative research approach through data analysis of existing studies and other online resources. This study examines the history of city branding relative to various events, such as sports.

Specifically, it discusses the experiences of large-scale city events, the role of stakeholders, cases of cultural events, sports events, the impact of social media, and some of the key challenges related to this. This study concludes by affirming the positive contributions of large-scale events in developing and maintaining city branding and identity. Large-scale events help boost local tourism, contribute to economic growth, strengthen citizens' sense of identity and belonging, and promotes culture worldwide.

Keywords: city branding; city identity; large-scale events; sport events; urban identity

1. Introduction

The study examines the concept of city branding and how the conduct of various large-scale events significantly impacts it. City branding refers to "differentiation strategy of entrepreneurial cities involved in competition" (Jokela 2019). This suggests how cities competing are utilizing various winning strategies. This concept has also been considered a traditional means of furthering advantage to increase financial investment, tourism activities, and economic growth (Zhang, 2019). Concerning this, having strong city branding is important for the consumers and visitors to connect in the local setting (Kavaratzis 2006). Having distinct features of the city as well as attractive events can help travelers easily choose their tourist destinations and appreciate its uniqueness. City branding initiatives also contribute to social development as it can establish strong local identity and the identity of its residents. Consequently, it can significantly contribute to a more united and harmonious society.

Understanding a city's branding also needs to recognize the influence of various contextual factors (Rodrigues and Schmidt 2021). The history of how a city developed narrates the stories, traditions, and beliefs that are embedded within the city. The geographical location and the city's infrastructure may influence city branding. This is because the environmental features and landscapes may define the key activities in the city. Interestingly, near or similar identities of other city destinations and how they position their brand affect another city's branding. Some studies consider that hosting

tourism events may not be a sustainable way of destination branding (Chen, Liu, Wang, Chen 2019). For instance, holding large sporting events may become too expensive for a city and may not yield significant economic benefits.

Aside from large-scale or mega-city events, small-scale events impact place branding. For instance, the area of Athens, during its crisis years, saw the emergence of many small self-managed art festivals (Brokalaki 2019). The Athens has allowed the citizens to participate in various artistic projects, creative programs, self-expressive events, and other participatory art activities. This has helped Athens establish its city branding. Nonetheless, this study will not cover small-scale events to identify how mega-events impact city branding.

In this regard, this study intends to look into the impact of large-scale events on city's branding. While various factors contribute to how a city develops its identity, this study only attempts to cover an aspect of it. More specifically, this study discusses the historical narratives of large-scale events, the role of various key stakeholders, examples of sporting events and cultural events, and the influence of social media and how they contribute to city branding.

2. Theoretical framework

This study employs an identity theory for framing and understanding the role of large events in the development and maintenance of city branding. In general, identity theory within the sociological perspective explains an individual's identity relative to his or her behavior associated with group memberships they have. The concept of social identity is adopted to define the identity of localities, cities, regions, and countries. The city branding or identity captures the shared understanding the image of a city or an area as a result of social construction within and external to it. The urban experience is considered a collective experience of places and spaces that preserves the long tradition of local communities (Shao, Lange, and Thwaites 2017). In relation to this, having a sense of identity closely linked to the local culture helps the citizens be proud of their local heritage and helps them identify themselves with their towns. One of the most important determinants of urban identity is its local context. It is formed by various physical and natural elements through different generations. In contrast with national and regional levels of identity, urban city identity emphasizes the interactions and relationships between the local physical environment and its residents in creating a sense of place.

Within the social constructionism perspective, a particular place is also treated as a result of the shared behavior of the community members and the cultural processes that affect and shape it (Bernardo, Almeida, and Martins 2015). Accordingly, this process is influenced by various internal and external factors. Some internal aspects include close relational ties with the neighbors or generational rootedness, culture, traditions and social events, and the perception of social homogeneity. The external factors may include the prestige and external image of the city or place. It is important to develop a distinct city identity that can be appreciated by its citizens and recognized by outsiders. This will help commemorate special events and historical places, increase the use of stamps and other branding items, designers' projects, and to encourage efforts to improve urban identity (Oktay 2002). It will significantly improve city's image and distinguish it from other cities and regions. Thus, it attracts economic development by encouraging investments, welcoming skilled people, and enhancing its citizens' sense of belonging (Shao, Lange, and Thwaites 2017).

For this study, the theory of urban/ local identity or place identity is utilized in examining various stories and case studies of city branding. Accordingly, this will also

help explain how city branding is shaped and maintained by large-scale events and other factors.

3. Methodology

As its methodological framework, this study employs a qualitative research approach using a data analysis strategy to examine the impact of large-scale city events on city branding. In contrast with a quantitative research, the qualitative research focuses on an in-depth inquiry about a particular social phenomenon or issue. These studies focus on significant thematic explanations for the selected topic at hand. For this study, qualitative research design provides narratives and explanations on the concept of city branding and how it has been formed, maintained, or shifted by large-scale city events.

For this purpose, data analysis was conducted for this topic. Given the nature of the current study, it was considered a reliable data-gathering technique that is convenient and efficient. Accordingly, the study was only conducted online for a limited period. The data analysis looks into available documents such as published journal articles, reports, and news articles. The articles were collated, organized, and analyzed with Mendeley. Consequently, the selected studies were analyzed and discussed by focusing on key themes. For its ethical consideration, the study ensures that all the data are only utilized for academic purposes. This study makes sure that all the articles are properly cited. The key methodological limitation of this study is the lack of other forms of data, such as surveys and interviews, which can provide more context and a holistic view of the issue.

4. Results and Discussion

This section summarizes the key findings and insights regarding the experiences of large-scale city events and city branding. This study gives attention to the following key themes. First, it traces the history of how large-scale city events came about, including some actual city case experiences. Second, it also recognizes the role of various relevant stakeholders in developing and implementing such mega-events. Third, it focuses on the case studies of large cultural events and how they particularly contributed to city branding. Fourth, it also discusses various sporting events and their distinctive features impacting place identity. Fifth, it also points out the influence of the internet, especially social media, on how the world views such large city events. Lastly, it explains some key challenges in developing and implementing mega events and what it means for city branding.

4.1 On the experiences of large-scale city events

This study investigates the experiences of large-scale city events and their correlation to city branding development. It has long been established that city branding contributes to various socio-economic, cultural, and political aspects. Huang et. al., observed that some tourists' considerations in selecting destinations include hopping opportunities as the most important attribute. It is followed by food, culture and festivals, sports, nature-based attractions, and the city brand (Huang et al., 2013). However, it is found that the length of tourism events has an inverted U-shaped relationship with economic development. An analysis of the spatial distribution of events reported that locating the large-scale events in provincial areas had significantly more positive effects on the city's economic development, identity, and attractiveness (Lu, Zhu, & Wei 2019).

In terms of political aspects, a study involving city branding in Seoul, South Korea, explained the role of the government as the owner and sponsor of the city festivals and the effects of the changes in city brand slogan (Lim 2016). The changes made

significantly contributed to attracting more tourists and establishing branding. They also acknowledged that consistency in festival identity had been a significant factor in establishing city branding.

A concrete example of the effects of city branding is the transformation of the city of Milan. The said transformation is attributed to expo events such as the planning process of Universal Exhibition 2015. Additionally, the improvements of historical places in the city and the region significantly contributed to the transformation and repositioning of Milan (Di Vita 2021).

4.2 On the significant role of key stakeholders

The conduct of large-scale events is made possible with the help of various stakeholders. Strong leadership and stakeholders' cooperation were also identified as necessary for the consistent management of the festivals (Lim 2016). Similarly, Maheshwari, Lodorfus, & Vandewalle (2014) observed that place branding is highly shaped by the stakeholders' influence, interactions, and objectives. The study also reported strong evidence suggesting the link between businesses' development and place branding. Hence, the business's success is vital for the place and its stakeholders.

In addition to businesses, the host city's residents are considered important ambassadors and spectators of a city's event (Oshimi & Harada, 2018). Another study revealed that the creative class is an important enactment stakeholder in the identity formation process of a place, destination marketing organizations (DMOs), and other stakeholders. More interestingly, it asserts the significant role of creative class co-creation of a city's brand identity by bringing new rhythms and forms of expression to the cityscape (Rodrigues & Schmidt 2021). These DMOs are also responsible for enacting a city's brand identity. The representatives of these organizations are usually the ones to initiate and analyze the "official" brand management process. In terms of tourists and guests, a study identified four types of tourists–alternative, cultural, emotional, and heritage. Alternative tourists are those without any association with the intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The cultural tourists are those with high cultural motivation but without a deep emotional experience in the ICH. The emotional tourists have low cultural motivation but high associations with historical heritage value. Lastly, heritage tourists have cultural and emotional associations with the heritage visited.

4.3 On the cases of cultural events and city branding

Since the concept of place identity is closely linked to the influence of traditions, beliefs, and other cultural aspects, it is important to look into some examples of large cultural events in different cities. Three festivals in Sweden (Festspel i Pite Älvdal), Norway (Festspillene i Nord-Norge), and Finland (Jutajaiset Folklorefestivaali) were investigated using the modernity theory (Karlsen 2008). The results showed that all these three festivals had extensive cooperation and a wide selection of local agents and stakeholders. On the other hand, it was observed that the range and profoundness of such cooperation seemed to correlate with the festival management's awareness of and focus on building and maintaining stakeholder relationships.

Similarly, a study conducted in Fredericton and Saint John, New Brunswick in Canada, showed some examples of events that reflected local cultural heritage and arts. They are considered effective as local destination marketing organizations employ them for place branding (Jolliffe & Chesworth 2019). Similarly, a study on the Dutch city of 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch) was observed to illustrate the emergence of a more holistic approach to using events as placemaking tools. The city developed a multiannual program to produce economic, image, socio-cultural, and network effects.

The approach became a success as it raised the international profile of the city and, at the same time, stimulated increased visitation and visitor spending (Richards 2017).

Commonly, cultural events happen in the form of cultural festivals in various places worldwide. These usually occur in public places, parks, sidewalks, or community centers. They celebrate a city's culture in terms of its music, crafts, games, sports, and production and consumption of food (Yeoman & Robertson 2004). The visitors can create meaningful experiences based on the physical location, types of events, and overall social environment. One main feature of these festivals is that they tend to bridge a gap between leisure and tourism as they are usually short (McClinchey & Carmichael 2010).

Three festivals in rural areas in Finnmark Norway, were observed to provide core activities centered on local culture and heritage. The study concluded that the festivals influenced the identities of people and places in one way or the other. Furthermore, all processes related to festivals were noted to influence the need of individuals to belong (Kari 2013). A study investigated the role of festivals in challenging the perception of local identity by observing the Rollin' Down the River Festival held in the autumn of 1997 in the Kansas River (Bres & Davis 2001). The study concluded that despite being an example of tourist commodification, the event provides a positive self-identification for the local community.

Since 1995, festivals in South Korea have been growing phenomenally. The JinjuNamgangYudeung Festival (JNYF) has been a leading event that attracts many visitors every year. Held in October, the JNYF represents the city's cultural heritage and identity which are considered to be the crucial elements of the festival (Bae, Hsu & Chen 2015). In Taiwan, one of the largest traditional cultural festivals with the longest history is the Lugang Dragon Boat Festival. A prominent feature of this festival is that it affects visitors' satisfaction through festival image and value. Moreover, it strengthens the attendee's perception of festival and place identity (Lin & Lee 2020).

4.4 On the cases of sports events and city branding
Apart from cultural events, some city events like sports events, have benefited both organizers and residents. These events benefit the organizers through the development of residents' behavioral intentions. It also impacts the host city as it enhances residents' place attachment (Oshimi & Harada 2018). A comparative study exploring sports events in Canada and Norway revealed similarities in leaders' skills, induced event experiences, and institutional experiences and differences in their marketing efforts, recognition of sports, and nature of events (Parent, Eskerud, & Hanstad 2011). In a similar example, the European Football Championship 2012 (EURO 2012) hosted by Ukraine paved the way to change the negative perceptions of the country. The step has been regarded as a significant step toward brand creation (Klonova 2012).

In a Europan study, two strategies are considered effective in improving city branding, including large-scale events and iconic architecture (e.g., the Olympic Games and the European Capital of Culture) (Riza 2015). Similar to small-scale events, these mega-events are planned as temporary actions intended for visitors and participants for a limited time during the year, wherein the host city could gain a positive reputation for such activities. More specifically, the "European Capital of Culture" is prestigious for most European cities.

Rio de Janeiro in Brazil hosted the 2016 Olympic Games. The event positively impacted Brazil's tourist destination image. According to a study, Brazil's destination image was predicted by both cognitive and affective image dimensions of Rio as a host city (Ferreira et al. 2022). Another study reported that sports events are frequently used to build the brand of their host cities (Chalip & Acosta 2006). These events can take

different roles, such as co-branding partners, extensions, or features of the destination brands.

Furthermore, sports happenings such as visibility benefits, establishing emotional heat between cities and markets, attracting investors, tourists, and residents are among the important areas of innovation sports events bring (Rein & Shields 2007). Countries also tend to capitalize on the appeal of sports teams, events, and stars in favor of their brands. In terms of small-scale sports activities, community-based recreational and physical activities serve various purposes. These encourage citizens to engage within the community and stimulate branding via word-of-mouth communication. Since it appeals to individual experiences and emotions, the transmission of information is more personal and relatable. Moreover, the notion of positive living could be used to actively promote the city to different social groups, from corporate organizations to individual audiences (Pan 2019).

On the bottom line, sporting events present a very special meaning and impact in molding city brands and building urban awareness. These events also allow cities to acquire the necessary resources to aid city development. Better facilities and enhanced urban environments are a few examples of such developments. Additionally, the publicity and promotion of city brands, greater urban renown, tourism, investment, and the formation of urban sports culture are among the notable developments of city-wide sports events (Dong & Duysters 2015).

4.5 On the use of social media in city branding

The study also recognized the influence of digital technology, particularly social media, in establishing city branding. Currently, social media is vastly being used to disseminate information and efficient communication. Thus, it also became an effective tool for promoting city events, which helps in attracting tourists from all over the world and making their city culture known. In particular, a study looked into the participatory city branding in the city of Izmir and how the social media campaign and influential users contributed to communicating with its citizens and the rest of the world (Uzunoglu 2017). At the same time, it helps engage in dialogue to identify brand-related reviews and messages. Concerning this, another study examined the creation of destination images based on the content posted on social media, such as Instagram (Taberner and Junca 2021).

In addition, a study looked into the impact of the cancellation of the 2018 Margaret River Pro surfing event (Morgan 2021). It found that the cancellation of such a large international and professional sports event caused an increase in negative sentiments against the city destination rather than just the event itself. Interestingly, government-initiated city branding campaigns are also utilizing social media initiatives. Specifically, a comparative study of three local governments in the United States provides comparisons and best practices through social media presence (Sevin 2016). Furthermore, another study highlighted the importance of social media platforms and how the credibility of influential users can help influence the perception of other users about city brands (Muinonen and Kumar 2016).

4.6 On the challenges of city branding and large-scale events

This study also examines the challenges of conducting large-scale events and establishing city branding. One of its fundamental challenges is identifying and delimiting the city's identity and its core values (Zhang and Zhao 2009). City identities should be established to be widely acceptable, marketable, and presentable. For example, a comparative study on the city branding practices among ten cities in Europe revealed various challenges in sustaining their respective city brands, such as a large number of

stakeholders, limited understanding of branding, difficulties in securing adequate funding, organizational issues, and difficulties in marketing communication campaigns among others (Moilanen 2015).

In terms of the hosting of annual cultural events, one study identified key challenges. Miscommunication, political instability, consistent neglect of pressing cultural demands of tourists and its citizens, are the reasons why the Seoul Design Olympiad failed to sustain itself as an annual cultural event (Lee 2014). Although international sports events contribute to place branding, the expansion may pose economic and social problems in a city. This is particularly challenging among cities with limited resources and capacity to conduct such events. In another study, constraints regarding the funding of the events and potential conflicts with other tourist destinations across the country, are among the things that have been identified as examples of challenges of city branding (Emerald Publishing 2018).

5. Conclusion

This study concludes by affirming the positive contributions of large-scale events in developing and maintaining city branding and identity. Using a place identity theoretical framework, this qualitative study examines the various cases and narratives of city branding worldwide. First, this study traced the history of how large-scale city events came about, which also includes some actual city case experiences. Second, it also recognized the role of various relevant stakeholders in developing and implementing of such mega-events. Third, it focused on the case studies of large cultural events and how they contributed to city branding. Fourth, it discussed various sporting events and their distinctive features in impacting place identity. Fifth, this study has also pointed out the internet's influence on how the world views such large city events, especially social media. Lastly, it explained some of the key challenges in developing and implementing mega events and what it means for city branding.

This study recommends further analysis of the different case studies of large-scale city events, especially those types that were not covered in this study. This may also include comparative analyses between different cities and events better explain this phenomenon.

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