The Significance of City Logo in City Branding Strategy

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Abstract: - City branding has been an emerging practice within last decade that applied by world’s cities councils as a strategic way to reach attention from investors, tourists, skillful workers, residents, and events. However, city branding is often mismanaged by underestimating the significance of city logo in city branding strategy as the impact of a failure in understanding city logo development within the integrated city branding process. This paper will investigate the significance of a city logo in reinforcing the positive image of a city.

Key-Words: - Destination branding, City branding, City logo, Visual identity, Branding strategy, Visual communication

1 Introduction

World cities are now in a competition with other places to reach attention of investors, visitors, skillful workers and events. City branding is a strategic way of local government to win this competition and to attain economic, politics and socio-cultural objectives. City branding as explained by Dinnie (2010, 4) is an adaptation of corporate branding strategy since city and corporate share similarity of complex dimensions and diverse stakeholders. City branding is considered as an establish practice both theoretically and practically; not only applied to world’s big cities such as Paris, London, New York or Madrid; it is also applied to many small cities in developing countries.

However, there has been a misperception over city branding strategy that limited as a marketing and advertising activities and fail to recognize the importance of integrated city branding process. Kavaratzis (2009) suggests that a city branding should work in an integrated approach that covers nine categories of; vision and strategy of city’s future and development, internal orientation of brand through city management, prioritizing local communities and residents, synergies with all relevant stakeholders, providing adequate infrastructure relates to what the city brand is projected, cityscape and gateways, opportunities to targeted individuals and integrated branding communications (Kavaratzis 2009, 34-35). Many commentators observe that city branding strategies are often partially implemented and finished at logo and slogan development stage (Ashworth & Kavaratzis 2009, 522). In fact, it is the claim of commentators that city branding strategies were imposed top down by local government and small group of people (Houghton and Stevens 2001, 46).

City governments should realize that a city branding strategy is not merely an advertising or promotional activity, but it is a part of the city strategy to gain competitive edge that leads to sustainable growth. This paper investigates the significance of city logo within an integrated city branding strategy and the importance of the logo in creating a positive city image. By examining relations of how logo can support the successful city branding strategy, this essay puts forward a number of reasons why city logo development is vital to reinforce successful and integrated city branding strategy.

“City branding is beyond the logo”

City branding strategies are common practice among world’s cities governments seek to develop their overall “city” brand. It has been asserted by Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009, 522) that most cities are only partially implementing branding strategy, by isolating city logo and slogan development towards the overall city branding strategy (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 522). Moreover, they argue that a city branding strategy is beyond logo and slogans (2009, 522), instead it needs to be managed comprehensively and continuously within integrated brand communication strategy that consists of a variety of activities such as ‘advertising, public relations,
direct marketing and promotion activity’ (Middleton 2010, 20). It is suggest that although many city branding strategies recognize the importance of city logo, they fail to recognize the significance of logos connection to a larger branding strategy.

City branding can be seen as an adaptation of corporate branding as both city and corporate share the same complexity of dimensions (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 524; Dinnie 2010, 4). These dimensions as explained by Balmer and Gray (2003), comprise of “multidisciplinary roots, multiple groups of stakeholders, high level of intangibility and complexity, obliged to account on a social responsibility, dealing with multiple identities, and both require a long-term development” (Balmer & Gray cited in Ashworth & Kavaratzis 2009, 524). These complex dimensions should be applied to any cities in order to obtain stakeholders’ and people’s expectation for the development of an appropriate city brand and to avoid the city branding failures (Middleton 2010,15). Thus, it is important to acknowledge the importance of integrated approach in building strong, successful and sustainable city brand.

It requires a huge financial investment in order for any cities to build a strong and successful city brand (in example Paris, London, New York, and Rome). Although big cities have the financial means to hire a good marketing consultant to create outstanding branding strategy for the city, rural and smaller cities often find that they have limited budget as well as low Gross Domestic Products and slow economic growth which severely limits their capacity to establish a successful branding strategy.

Despite a huge financial investment needed to develop a successful city branding strategy, the outcome of city branding will always outweigh the cost of the campaign. Evidence shows that, successful city branding strategy will bring income on tourism, business investment, and events, and hence is vital in boosting city economy. For example, the intensive and continuous branding of Wellington city in New Zealand for fifteen years resulted in Wellington as number one destination for people in New Zealand (Insch 2010, 11).

It is the claim of Hospers (2010, 32) that logo is not enough to build city identities because it may only applicable for corporates, product and services. City identities are actualized in architectural building, infrastructures, public art spaces, sculptures, facilities, monuments, and events (Hospers 2010, 32). Hospers (2010) further claims that cities will be more difficult to brand if they do not have specific and distinctive ‘physical objects’ (Hospers 2010, 32). Insch (2010, 10) asserts that city must build infrastructures in regards of city as ideal place for living, business, leisure and education.

Infrastructures, public art spaces, monuments and events are the tangible assets of cities that will proclaim city strength. Urry (cited in Hospers, 2010, 28) argues that people visit a place to experience something that could not be found at home or workplace. Tourists who went to Sydney may not watch any performances on Sydney Opera House, but they would love to take pictures of Sydney Opera House as their memento of their visits. A picture of couples kissing with the Eiffel Tower background portray romantic image of Paris. The F1 Grand Prix in city streets of Monaco has been a great attraction and sparks the ambience of glamorous auto sports. The annual Rio de Janeiro Carnival in Brazil is one of famous carnival in the world and more than 750.000 performers and visitors were participated in year the 2011 (Rio de Janeiro Carnival 2011: The world's biggest party! 2011). Sydney Mardi Gras parade in Sydney, Australia has been the biggest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) gathering and attended by more than 75.000 GLBT supporters from around the world every year (Mardi Gras: History 2011).

However, as a city branding is operating in the similar concept of a corporate branding, therefore, city logo can be considered as the tangible asset of city. It is one of the most appealing elements that are possible to reinforcing a city brand by creating a positive image and emotive impression in people’s mind. City logo stands as a brand identity that symbolizes a city’s assets to its targeted audiences.

Dowling further explains that a visual identity such as a logo can generate awareness, create recognition, and evoke perceptions of the brand in people’s minds (Dowling cited in Warnaby and Medway 2010, 211). Moreover, in the context of a city logo, the logo is a representation of places in the references to the built and natural environment (Burgess, Barke and Harrop, Warnaby and Bennison cited in Warnaby and Medway 2010, 211). Thus, identity of brand that is manifested in a logo can distinguish a city from others, and symbolizes the intangible features of the city.

City Brand Management Frameworks

Many city governments have been mistaken about a city branding strategy by often isolating it as an advertising campaign or a marketing activity. As
discussed by Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009, 522), city marketing and city branding efforts were undertaken only partially and fail to recognize the importance of a city logo to reinforce the positive image of a city branding by simply attaching it to promotional and advertising media. However, to maximize the impact of city logo within a city branding; city branding strategy should be managed in a thorough and punctilious framework in order to attain successful and sustainable city brand outcomes. In this matter, Ashworth and Kavaratzis suggested some frameworks that could be used to manage city brands.

Anholt’s City Branding GfK Index by Simon Anholt is a tool to measure the effectiveness of current city branding of 50 world cities from 25 countries (Anholt cited in Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 526-527). Anholt uses dimensions in what he called the city brand hexagon that consists of 1) Presence (city’s international status, and its familiarity with people); 2) Place (Physical aspects of a city); 3) Potential (economic and education sectors); 4) Pulse (urban lifestyle, how exciting the city is); 5) People (hospitality and safety issues); 6) Pre-requisites (living cost and price of accommodation). The Anholt’s City Branding GMI Index is published annually and Paris has been in the top of the index for three consecutive years.

Tourism scholar, Liping Cai, sees city as a tourism destination that needs to be manage in branding process in regards of brand element mix, brand identity and brand image building. Brand elements will help to identify city’s brand association that reinforces attributes, affective and attitudes components of an image (Cai cited in Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 527). Cai also suggests that image building can work in the process of ‘marketing programs, marketing communications and managing secondary associations’ (Cai cited in Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 527). In other frameworks, Kavaratzis (2004) argues that brand communication should be conduct in three types of communication: Primary (the customer experience of products and services), Secondary (advertising, Public Relations) and Tertiary (word of mouth).

Other explanation why city marketing has been partially implemented is that the city branding strategy was one-sidedly imposed from the top down by local government along with small groups of people that lack an understanding of city branding strategy (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009, 522; Houghton and Stevens 2010, 46). They fail to recognize the importance of local communities and residents’ engagement to support the brand establishment and refinement. Houghton and Stevens (2010, 48) claim that the more people, organizations, local business, communities, groups and stakeholders engage with the city brand development process, will create a strong brand that reflects different aspects of city in a holistic and distinctive way (Houghton and Stevens 2010, 48). Hence, a strong brand concept may leads to the development of an impactful city logo.

It could also be assert that city logo has been undervalued to support a city branding strategy. The Anholt’s GfK Roper City Brands Index 2011 in the table below shows that Paris, London and Sydney are in the top three of this index since those cities are world’s “alfa cities”. However, according to Bonigala (2010), these three cities’ logos cannot visually to be recalled by people.

New York City that possesses a great logo since 35 years ago and it has been claimed as the most ubiquitous city logo; is only in 4th rank. Despite that, New York City’s I Love New York logo is recognized by www.logodesignworks.com as the most top city tourism logo. However, the failure to understand fascinating logo as the main element that guarantee a successful city branding will lead to an ineffective city branding strategy. Evidence of this position is, Belfast in Ireland has a well-developed logo but it does not significantly help the city to be in the top 10 city branding index as the place has persistent history of conflicts that happened in decades.

![Figure 1. 2011 Anholt-GfK Roper City Brands Index Overall Brand Ranking.](image-url)
Based on two tables above, it is possible to argue that an attractive city logo will not work effectively if it is not engaged with the city branding strategy. City logo is vital to build ambience towards a city and it has capability to connect people. From this point of view, a city logo does work as brand identity, and it is not merely a meaningless graphic. Wheeler (2009) states that, “Brand identity fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation, and makes big ideas and meaning accessible” (Wheeler 2009, 4). For example, the New York City logo has been duplicated in various ways and it also has been adopted for different purposes. Many people wear this symbol on their t-shirts, jackets, pin-ups, or hats even though they have never visited the city. People identify themselves to something that they are feeling related to or belong to.

### Creating Impactful City Logo

As a brand identity, a conceptual city logo has an impact in a successful city branding as it reinforces brand equity through increased awareness, acknowledgement, and ‘customer royalty’ (Wheeler 2009, 11). A city logo helps to direct people’s perceptions and it effectively invigorates a positive image towards the city. An impactful city logo should be able to resonate the city to its stakeholders and help people belong to the city. Therefore, city logo development needs to be taken as an exercise in participatory design by involving stakeholders and people in design decisions. (Lau and Leung 2010, 134).

In 1976, New York City suffered from social and economic crisis, and nearly falling into bankruptcy as The New York Stock Exchange was affected by national recession (Roberts 2006). The Federal government rejected bail out proposal from New York City principal. People were homeless and losing their jobs, crimes were happening everyday that made one million people leave the city. The New York State Government considered tourism as a strategy to recover the city economy and to attract people to come. Wells Rich Greene advertising agency was conducting campaign strategy based on their research that people had a big admiration and affection over the city. Milton Glaser was appointed to design the city logo, and his aim was to create a visual that correlated to the slogan. He came up with the final result of I ♥ NY logo that initiated adoration and deep emotion with the people that experienced New York City. The logo has been so successful it remains in existence now for 35 years.

According to I ♥ NY case study, acknowledging how its stakeholders and residents have perceived the city is vital to develop a strong and sustainable city brand. Insch (2010, 8) explains that residents are an elements in to generate city brand identity as they ‘live and breathe’ the city’s brand identity (Insch 2010, 9). Furthermore, Insch (2010) states the importance of residents to cities as, “cities depend on their residents for economic, social, cultural and environmental vibrancy” (Insch 2010, 9). Other significance is, skillful and talented residents are upholding city economic growth and enable it to thrive.

An integrated city branding that supported by a conceptual city logo may boost city’s index rank. In 2009, the City of Melbourne was introducing their new brand identity that cost more than AU$250.000 for design fee only; in order to attain international competitiveness. Jason Little, a Creative Director of Landors; the agency that developed campaign strategy and brand identity for Melbourne, explains that the proposition of the project was to portray Melbourne as sophisticated world city with its diverse components and features, in the respect of its stakeholders, community, residents and even political culture (Behind the scenes: Rebranding the City of Melbourne 2010).

The outcomes of the campaign, Melbourne accomplishes its global recognition by achieving the 2nd most livable city in the EIU’s 2011 Global Liveability Report and ninth in Monocle Magazine’s Liveable Cities Index 2010. Melbourne’s Anholt’s GfK City Brand Index has risen from 15th place to rank 8th.

The crucial aspect that should be deliberated upon in city branding practice is synchronizing the city logo development with city branding strategy. City logo development should be adopted as an integral component on city branding strategy. Little (Behind

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**Figure 2. Top 10 Most Recalled City Tourism Logo by www.logodesignworks.com**
the scenes: Rebranding the City of Melbourne 2010) explains that a city logo must be able to answer four key challenges: 1) uniqueness that differentiates the city from others, 2) ability to build awareness in regards of political, cultural and educational issues, 3) get an insightful opinion of global audiences 4) sustainable, fresh, discern identity. Thus, a city logo should work as brand identity that is ‘sustainable, distinguishing and attractive’.

Conclusions
This essay has discussed how a city logo as brand identity of a city symbolizes a city’s assets and positive features in people’s minds and plays a significant role to reinforce the city branding strategy. However, as discussed in first section of this essay, the city branding strategy practices are mismanaged by isolating the city logo merely as advertising and marketing activities. A city logo should be engage in a city branding strategy that manage within certain branding communication frameworks in order to make it sustainable. Regarding to City of Melbourne city branding, a strategic investment of city logo development will boost city’s international recognitions. Furthermore, participatory design in city logo development should be conducted by engaging residents and stakeholders. Hence, it will create a strong and impactful city logo. As shown by I ♥ NY case, a city logo is able to evoke emotional appeal that connects people to the city and even more, people adopt the logo as their self identity.

It would be interesting to examine further the discussion of city logo development methods within creative contexts. This further research would possibly create a better understanding about the role of city logo in city branding strategy.

References


