The City Next Door; Branding Alexandria, Egypt

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Destination branding is a process of branding a place, a product, or a city, to attract investment, people, and capital. The growing role, significance and importance of destination branding and image in tourism is being widely explored. There is a growing body of research in destination branding and specifically with relation to tourism products and brands around the world and how they can use certain elements (element mix) to develop a sense of identity to a place. Branding has become very important in travel and tourism industry since it influences tourists' decisions to visit a place or a city and therefore it affects their level of satisfaction. The main aim of destination branding is to create value and enable destination marketers to successfully use the unique characteristics and attributes associated with the city (e.g., products, services, arts, technology, location, culture, etc.) to differentiate, position their destinations and sustain a competitive advantage over other tourism brands around the globe. This paper, using case-study methodology, aims to report on a wider project with the aim to develop "*Alexandria—the city next door*" brand to be available for tourists' choices when selecting a destination to visit.

Keywords: destination branding, branding, destination image, attributes, Alexandria, case study, Egypt

Introduction

Alexandria was the influential center of the Ancient world, which established a Mecca for knowledge and academia, marked by the ancient universal Alexandria Library, the first of its kind, established 250 B.C. by Macedonian Leader, Ptolemy. Erskine (1995) explained that the Ptolemaic emphasis on Greek culture establishes the Greeks of Egypt with an identity for themselves. But the emphasis on Greek culture does even more than this—these are Greeks ruling in a foreign land. The more Greeks can indulge in their own culture, the more they can exclude non-Greeks, in other words Egyptians, the subjects whose land has been taken over. The assertion of Greek culture serves to enforce Egyptian subjection. So, the presence in Alexandria of two institutions devoted to the preservation and study of Greek culture acts as a powerful symbol of Egyptian exclusion and subjection. Texts from other cultures could be kept in the library, but only once they had been translated, that is to say Hellenized.

The library and its partner museum attracted many of the greatest Greek and Syrian scholars. After the death of Alexander, the city experienced a Mediterranean renaissance, ushering in the influence of Roman Empire. Greek and Egyptian cultures and ideas continued to flourish in a Mediterranean melting pot for the

next century. Due to these unique influences, Alexandria today is marked by the distinct cultural and architectural differences from its better-known sister of Pharaonic Cairo (Erskine, 1995).

As Dastgredi and Du Luca (2019) state it, a brand is set of images, characteristics, or feelings that consumers remember when they think of a specific symbol, product, service, organization, or place. The branding process links directly to place management, which means that all activities undertaken by the place's authorities are aiming at improving consumers' perceptions about the area that is being branded (Dastgredi & Du Luca, 2019).

This work-in-progress paper reports on a wider project with the aim to develop "*Alexandria—the city next door*" brand. Using case study methodology, the authors have used multiple resources and data collection tools to provide a comprehensive proposal of Alexandria as a brand to be available for tourists' choices when selecting a destination to visit. The following section of this paper includes a brief review of literature about city branding and presents a number of models and frameworks used to develop destinations/city brands. It also provided a review of previous research on destination branding and summarized some of the initial efforts and major findings of the research team to identify the potential and current factors that will allow for the development of the brand and explores the forthcoming tasks towards the completion of the project.

Literature Review

City Branding

City branding process involves two main components: (1) place making or city building (the process which makes a specific place more attractive) and (2) place or city branding (the process of promoting the place) (Jojic, 2018). City branding is a strategic effort of a city government to project images, shape perceptions, and create strong positioning. City branding is one of the city's efforts in projecting the image of the city's values regionally and globally (Satyagraha & Mahatmi, 2019). City branding is increasingly important because between cities within one country—or between multiple cities across nations—competition is growing fierce to attract the attention of customers, tourists, investors, and other stakeholders in order to generate economic growth and income for a city (Satyagraha & Mahatmi, 2019).

City branding is more than just a promotion of a place and its marketing; it's about constructing and reshaping the city's image from its historical architectural and street plans, the image of the city, whether heard or read, the art produced by its residents, etc., thus attracting the desirable consumers and maximizing consumers spending (Jojic, 2018). City branding is not a way to create something new from a city, but to explore the distinctive features that distinguish the city from other cities (Satyagraha & Mahatmi, 2019).

In the creation of a brand, the main challenge is to determine the core of brand identity and its starting point, which is a brand essence (Dastgredi & Du Luca, 2019). The process of city branding consists of three main stages: (1) to clarify the characteristics and identify the city, (2) to change the identity of the city into visual, and (3) the implementation of the identity of the city (Satyagraha & Mahatmi, 2019). Dastgredi and Du Luca (2019) added that city branding is an interdisciplinary mix of marketing, architecture, urban planning and tourism studies as a research field, and it takes place within a communication system that immediately connects the overall city image and identity. As stated by Kapherer (1999), "before we know how we are perceived, we must know who we are", that's why the brand identity must be established before considering what brand image is or ought to be.

Gad's 4D Model

A brand's essence, this mental construct, or "mind space" is reinforced through multiple channels. There are innumerable texts providing brand strategy models to describe the way this "mind space" is constituted. Using the current example (Gad's Four Dimensions), we can expand the thought in the following way: A given product or service impresses upon us a reaction based on the way it promises to fulfill four basic types of needs: functional, social, mental, and spiritual.

A car, for example, is an extension of its functional dimension, the quality of the drive and its reliability. But it also has a social dimension; it may be one kind or another of a prestige automobile, or a rugged off-road vehicle, both of which suggest their own affiliation to a specific group of owners. It may be particularly fuel efficient or electric, or may have an honest service policy, things that speak about a spiritual dimension. Finally, it may be particularly safe, or come with roadside assistance, giving peace of mind and addressing a mental dimension. Here is a diagram that expresses this idea, comparing a Hybrid vehicle (tending towards the spiritual) and an SUV (tending towards the functional). See Figure 1 Gad's branding code model (https://marcbdesign.wordpress.com/2009/04/22/digging-up-thomas-gads-4d-brand-model-cede-313/).
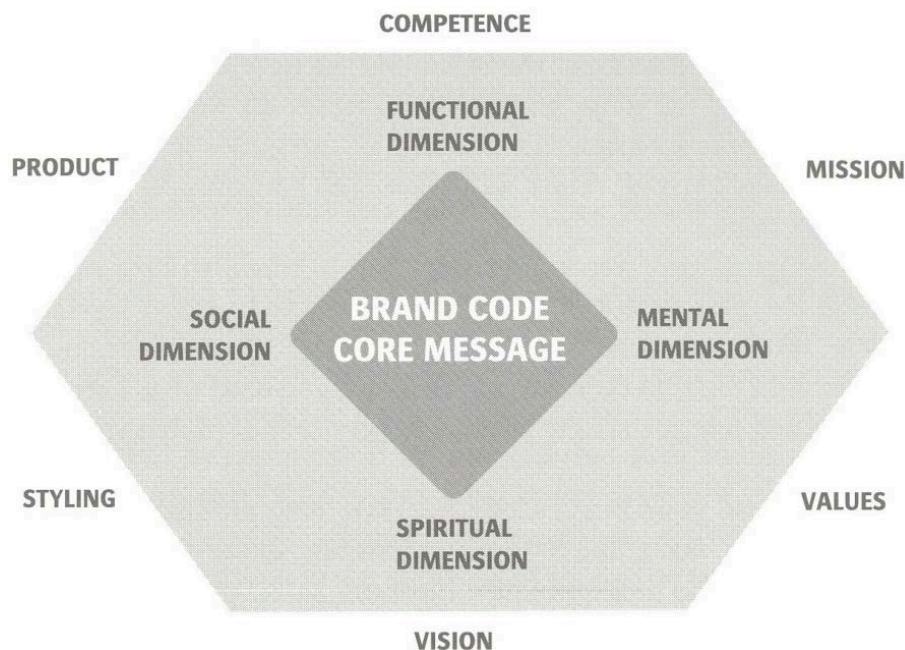

Figure 1. Gad's branding code model.

There are mainly six essential elements that form the city branding process: (1) what the city unquestionably is, (2) what the city says it is, (3) what the city feels it is, (4) whom the city seeks to serve, (5) what the city is seen to be, and (6) what is encouraged and expected. Within a three-level communication framework, the first level refers to physical and visible aspects from which a city can be understood. The second level consists of advertisement tools that a city adopts to market itself. And the third level is people's communication about a city through their voices and those of the media (Dastgredi & Du Luca, 2019).

However, city branding aims to (1) develop new ways of communicating the city's image, (2) achieve competitive advantage, and (3) strengthen the reputation of a city, improving its essential performance (Johic, 2018). As stated by Dastgredi and Du Luca (2019), one of the objectives of city branding is to create

uniqueness, which makes the city differentiable from other cities. It also aims at attracting resources to the city, in a way that ensures the quality of the place and the wellbeing of the citizen and this is what this paper is attempting to address with a focus on the city of Alexandria

Many cities in the world had successfully implemented city branding, such as the city of Paris, with its "romance", Hong Kong as a "trading place", and New York with "I Love NY" (Satyagraha & Mahatmi, 2019).

Destination Image

Destination image is the concept, referring to an idea that is created in the traveler's mind, which mainly involves a mental representation or a number of various attributes (Lopes, 2011) or a set of existing perceptions in a traveler's memory (Keller, 1993). Destination image can also be defined as the sum of beliefs and ideas, as well as the people's impressions that are associated with a destination (Crompton, 1979; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1994). As suggested by Tasci and Gartner (2007), the concept of destination image is considered very closely related to that of "destination branding", which—in turn—builds a positive destination image, that aims to identify and differentiate a destination from other places, via the process of selecting a consistent brand element mix (Cai et al., 2003). The image of a destination, that tourists have, is very important (Hunt, 1975; Chon, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Laws, Scott, & Parfitt, 2002; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Destination image influences the tourist's final choice or behavioral intention (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

A range of specific destination attributes has a highly important impact on tourists' travel decisions (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; O'Leary & Deegan, 2003; Lopes, 2011) before, during, and after the visit (Ross, 1993; Schroeder, 1996; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Chen & Hsu, 2000), including intentions to revisit (Mechinda, Serirat, Anuwichanont, & Gulid, 2010). Many scholars aimed to develop a conceptual framework of creating a destination image (Fakeye & Crompton, 1992; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; 1993; 2003; Gartner, 1993; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998; Pike, 2002; 2010; O'Leary, & Deegan, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). For example, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggested that the destination image can be both very specific and holistic, including functional characteristics (such as: price, accommodation facilities, or attractions) and psychological traits (e.g., friendliness of local people, quality of services or safety) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Gartner (1993) suggested that destination image is composed of three interrelated components: (1) cognitive (how travelers perceive a destination); (2) affective (how travelers feel about it); and (3) conative or behavioral (how cognitive and affective image influences and predicts travelers' buying behavior). The cognitive component reflects the traveler's knowledge, beliefs, recognition, thoughts, and awareness of each attribute of a tourism destination. It can be evaluated by the attributes of destination resources and attractions (Stabler, 1995), which help motivate tourists to visit that destination (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996, Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Beerli & Martin, 2004). The affective component refers to both feelings and emotions raised by tourism destinations (Keller, 1993; Boubeta, Carrera, & Mallou, 2008) as well as the sentimental impressions that travelers experience during their visit to the destination, throughout the journey (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to Anand, Holbrook, and Stephens (1988), Stern and Krakover (1993), and Lin, Duarte, Kerstetter, and Hou (2007), the cognitive component of the image has a remarkable impact on the affective component. The emotional component is strongly affected by tourist motivation (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Both the cognitive and affective components of the image are greatly influenced by socio-demographic characteristics as well (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

As both Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) and Stern and Krakover (1993) put it, the overall image of the destination is combined of cognitive and affective components, and the actual experience of being on vacation at a tourist destination has a significant effect on the destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Both the cognitive and affective component is likely to differ when the journey ends, thus changing into the conative component that reflects action, bias causing to act or willingness to behave in a certain way (Yüksel, Yüksel, & Bilim, 2010; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). The conative component is mainly linked to recommending the destination or the will to revisiting it (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010). The cognitive, affective, and conative components of the destination image basically develop in a hierarchical order. The cognitive component leads the emotional component in the overall image structure (Holdbrook, 1978; Anand et al., 1988; Stern & Krakover, 1993), thus, initiating the image. The affective component occurs in response to the cognitive image, while the behavioral component evolves from these two (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013). Ajzen and Fishbein (2005), citing Ostrom (1969) and Kothandapani (1971), suggested that the conative component provides better predictions of consumer behavior than the other two.

Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is an ongoing/in process case study of branding Alexandria, in Egypt. The main goal is not only to attract potential visitors and increase the number of tourists and visitors, but also to market the region to potential residents and businesses (Panchapakesen, Rosa, & Carvalho, 2015). The research reports on a project that was started about a year ago by the researchers, and with the help of a five students at the hotel studies department at faculty of tourism and hotels in Alexandria-Egypt, and two students from other faculties in the same university. The team became very interested in the idea of branding Alexandria and agreed to initiate the project. After a few sessions of brainstorming, the team decided to use a number of integrated tools and techniques that are considered as important and can be accomplished according to recent interest in helping cities to build their own personality and brand.

The research aims to explore how a city can design a strategy by using various visual concepts, representing unique and attractive visuals that relate to and inform city branding.

How It All Began

The researchers have already started an initiative at the beginning of 2019, named: "The City Next Door; Branding Alexandria, Egypt". The idea started when the researchers noted that most of the souvenirs sold in Alexandria are not related to the city's historical background. Additionally, the tour packages sold only included one-day-visits to the city, not offering enough time for tourists/visitors to see an exhaustive overview of Alexandria. Coming from a family of many artists, the researcher set out to seek branding solutions. The researchers posted an advertisement for students, calling for certain skills and inviting participation by proud Alexandrians. Students with skills such as Graphic designing, photography, handicrafts, and mobile programming, to mention few, responded to the post and came to meet and know what they are about to achieve.

"*Alexandria, The City Next Door*" was the slogan chosen, reflecting the fact that people consider Alexandria the city that many would consider visiting to change mood or pace, even if they actually live a bit far from it, but Alexandria is thought to be the city closer to the hearts of people, that they consider it, The City Next Door. Alexandria is the second largest city in Egypt, often overlooked in the shadows of Cairo. Being about a 2-hour-drive from Cairo, it's a relatively close destination sister city with a vastly different history and atmosphere, all within Egyptian borders.

A Logo and a Slogan

A logo is part of the visualization of city branding that plays a role in strengthening brand identity (Dastgredi & Du Luca, 2019). The second step was to design a logo that can be used everywhere in the city. It took much iteration to reach its final look. See Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for phases taken to choose a design of the logo. Figure 7 shows the towers of Stanley Bridge and how they are a repeated copy of the tower of Montazah Palace.

The development of the logo undergone many phases and ideas started with the Ancient Lighthouse of Alexandria, which was destroyed in an earthquake many years ago, but then the survey we conducted to know people's opinions showed that visitors would preferably come visit a city that has an existing attraction that they can see and visit. So, the second option to follow was to try to have a lighthouse of today that reflects both the nature of the coastal city and people would find existing and can see. The responses showed that many cities around the world do have lighthouses with various designs, and this will not make the logo expressing any uniqueness.

The recent logo represents the towers of Stanley Bridge, which is an architectural design that can be seen in many of the buildings of Alexandria, taken as a well-known part of the famous Palace of Montazah Gardens, which is one of the Royal buildings that was constructed in 1892 at the far end of the eastern cost of Alexandria by Abbas Helmy.

Figure 2. The Royal Montazah Palace in Alexandria.

Figure 3. Examples of logo & its changing designs.

Figure 4. Example of logo design.

Figure 5. Example of logo design.

Figure 6. Recent logo design.

Figure 7. Towers of Stanley Bridge.

Methodology

The research is an in-progress project—a case study of Alexandria city—that is applying quantitative analytical data method, based on bibliographic research concerning the definition and content of city branding and existing successful examples of branded cities. The research aims to devise novel metrics such as surveys and scales to be employed in the field research to be distributed among residents, stakeholders, and visitors of the destination host city. Results will be gathered online via returned surveys for. I as the researcher will aim to collect additional public data via visitors' bureaus, tourism agencies, and by conducting interviews. The results of the surveys will help orient "The City Next Door, Alexandria, Egypt" initiative by informing the city branding campaign with observed best practices. The project is being supported by the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University. Having taken the initiative, the project can involve more specializations and disciplines, potentially gaining traction as a nationally backed initiative.

Conclusions

The work on this paper reported on an initial stage of the city next door project in a way to set the scene for coming stage. The researchers have reported the work that have been done over the last few months and suggested the methodology that will be followed to complement the case study and motivates the coming phase of data collection. This paper is considered work in progress and the researchers hope that the findings of this work will be presented soon in another conference venue or published in a peer-reviewed journal.

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