

NOWADAYS' QUESTIONS OF PLACE MARKETING

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The study is based on the assumption that local governments need new guidance in the current global change context. We base our assumption on the fact that the pandemic and the subsequent economic changes have radically altered the external environment of municipalities, which present new challenges, require new marketing management perspectives, and tools to respond. The aim of our research at this stage is to identify and collect the factors and questions that are deemed important by the international researchers of place marketing to discover, identify, and answer in order to provide guidance on how to manage municipalities in the face of environmental change. Building on our preliminary literature review, we conduct a systematic literature review of the questions that have been addressed by researchers in the field of municipal marketing over the past five years. The purpose of this work is to collect, complete, and group the questions so that we can build on the systematic review to develop a model for our further research and to ground our methodological engagement in the methodology of the literature we have identified. Our results show that the focus in the field of place marketing is shifting towards broader perspectives of sustainability.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the discourse surrounding place marketing has garnered increasing attention from scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. The growing significance of this topic is underscored by its intersection with various disciplines such as urban planning, economics, sociology, geography, and sustainability. Since the seminal paper published by Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), the concept of place marketing has evolved significantly from its initial focus on tourism promotion to a broader framework encompassing the branding, promotion, and management of places for multiple stakeholders. This evolution reflects the recognition of places not merely as geographical entities but as dynamic socio-economic and cultural spaces that compete for resources, investment, and attention on a global scale. Consequently, the imperative to effectively market and manage places has become paramount for local governments, economic development agencies, and destination management organisations.

The contemporary discourse on place marketing is characterized by a growing recognition of the complex challenges faced by municipalities in an era of the emergence of new economic, social, and environmental changes worldwide. Thus, the imperative to critically examine and re-evaluate the theoretical underpinnings, methodological approaches, and practical implications of place marketing has never been more pressing. This study seeks to contribute to this ongoing discourse by elucidating the key questions and factors deemed crucial for guiding municipalities in navigating the complexities of contemporary place marketing practice. Through a systematic examination of extant literature and empirical research, we aim to provide insights, recommendations, and directions for future inquiry in this evolving field.

2 Methodology

This study is the second phase of our research initiative, building upon the systematic literature review conducted in the initial phase. The first step of our methodology involved a comprehensive examination of scholarly literature in the field of marketing, with a specific focus on municipal marketing and place marketing (Reicher et al., 2023). Utilising prominent academic databases such as Clarivate Web of Science, Elsevier Scopus, and SAGE journals, we conducted a systematic database analysis spanning the period from 2000 to 2022. The purpose of this initial review

was to identify key themes, topics, and methodological approaches prevalent in the literature, thus enabling us to delineate keyword-based clusters and consequently a comprehensive concept map within the field of place marketing.

The findings of our preliminary review highlighted several salient trends and focal points within the realm of place marketing. We delineated the clusters of branding, destination, tourism, management, and sustainability as the main approaches to the study of place marketing. It also became clear that scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of integrating economic development initiatives with social welfare concerns fostering sustainability within municipalities, thereby shedding light on the multifaceted nature of place marketing endeavours. Additionally, the literature revealed a significant body of research pertaining to environmental sustainability, environmental awareness, and the impact of tourism on local ecosystems and communities. This underscores the growing recognition of the interplay between place marketing, environmental stewardship, and sustainable tourism practices.

The current phase of our research is a continuation of our inquiry through an analysis of the abstracts of relevant articles published between 2018 and 2022. Drawing upon our initial findings, we aim to identify and collate the most frequently researched topics within the field of place marketing during this timeframe. Specifically, we will focus on clustering the articles based on their primary thematic areas as defined earlier. By systematically examining the abstracts of recent publications, we seek to discern prevailing trends, emergent issues, and areas of scholarly inquiry that have garnered significant attention within the domain of place marketing and aim to formulate practical recommendations for the development of marketing strategies for localities.

3 Results

3.1 Terminology, Comprehensive Strategic Vision

At the outset, it is imperative to clarify the terms central to our discourse: place marketing, place branding, and place promotion. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they connote distinct yet interconnected processes in the realm of place governance. Place marketing encompasses a broad set of activities aimed at

enhancing the market position and appeal of a place focusing on the management of its image and offerings to meet the needs of its target markets (Khomenko et al., 2021). These may involve strategic planning, positioning, and communication efforts directed towards shaping the perceptions, experiences, and behaviours of stakeholders towards a place. Place branding, on the other hand, delves deeper into the creation and communication of a distinctive identity, imbuing the place with a unique character that resonates with its stakeholders fostering positive perceptions (Kumar and Panda, 2019). The systematic management of this identity crafting is fundamental, as it not only differentiates the place in a crowded market but also fosters a sense of belonging and pride among its residents. Place promotion denotes the communicative aspect of above strategies in the dissemination of information that articulates the attributes, offerings, and brand identity of the place to the outside world (Boisen et al., 2018a). It is the mechanism through which the place's brand is broadcasted, seeking to inform, persuade, and attract visitors, investment, businesses or even residents by promoting distinctive experiences.

3.2 Communicational Consistency

Distinguishing between the overarching strategy (marketing), the identity and values embodied (branding), and the communication of these elements (promotion) aligns theoretical frameworks with practical applications thus bridging gaps between academia and practice. As such, an integrated approach enables the development of a comprehensive strategic vision and communicational consistency in the holistic development of places, which is essential for the coherent development of places that are both resonant and resilient (Hospers, 2019). This, in turn, heightens the effectiveness of place-related initiatives by maximising the place's appeal and competitiveness in an increasingly globalized world (Honcharenko et al., 2018). For these ends, the communicational consistency across these strategies is vital, as it not only solidifies the image of the place in the minds of the target audience but also ensures that the messaging is clear, persuasive, and reflective of the place's brand identity (Boisen et al., 2018a).

In the digital era, utilising digital and social media in place marketing transcends traditional methods, leveraging user-generated content (UGC) to serve as dynamic conduits for word-of-mouth, empowering residents as active place-brand ambassadors and thus reshaping place marketing (Uchinaka, 2019). This paradigm

shift underscores the necessity for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to acknowledge and harness the power of residents' online activities, recognising their diverse roles from contributors and photographers to retweeters and hobbyists, each contributing uniquely to the place's narrative and appeal. The emotional resonance and authenticity conveyed through social media significantly impact place brand love and the intention to share place brand messages, emphasising digital narratives' role in fostering a deep connection with the place (Strandberg and Styvén, 2020). Analysis of hashtags related to place brands reveals predominantly positive associations, indicating social media's potential to amplify a place's environmental, cultural, and symbolic values and engage a broader network of stakeholders (Lima et al., 2022). Therefore, a strategic approach to digital- and social media in place marketing contributes to sustainable development and positioning of the place brand, integrating the perspectives of residents and visitors (Sulistyaningsih et al., 2022).

3.3 Stakeholder Participation

The essence of stakeholder participation in place marketing is intricately tied to the concepts of co-creation of value through participation of locals as well as authenticity and unique identity. Literature commonly recognises stakeholders as central to the creation, development, and ownership of place brands and essential co-creators and legitimisers of the brand, fostering genuine connections with target audiences (Correia and Brito, 2020). This participatory approach is vital for harnessing the authentic narratives, cultural heritage, and local stories that ensure that the place brand resonates with the intrinsic values and expectations of the community (Donner and Fort, 2018) fostering a shared identity and a sense of belonging (Eletxigerra et al., 2018). The strategic integration of stakeholder participation in place marketing, through co-creation of authentic value with the participation of locals, forms the cornerstone of effective place branding as it not only elevates the place brand in the eyes of external audiences but also strengthens the internal community's bond to the place, ensuring a sustainable and resonant branding strategy (Sadeque et al., 2020).

3.4 Sustainability, Responsible Tourism Development, and Economic Impact of Firms

Sustainability in place marketing is increasingly recognised as a pivotal component of economic impact, responsible tourism development, and attracting investment. The economic viability of cities, regions, and countries is significantly influenced by resource endowments, necessitating government policies that stimulate economic development by spurring the active participation of firms in crafting and sustaining the place brand, highlighting the essential interplay between supply-side, demand-side, and environmental strategies (Zhou et al. 2022). Responsible tourism development further underscores the importance of sustainability, with a focus on creating tourism strategies that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and cultural preservation (Pasquinelli and Vuignier 2020). The sustainable development of tourism destinations, especially in rural areas, demands a nuanced understanding of market segmentation and the promotion of community and local resource-based experiences to attract sustainable travel behaviour potentially enhancing destination loyalty (Kastenholz et al., 2018). Thus, the incorporation of sustainability into place marketing strategies necessitates a collaborative effort among all stakeholders to foster a sustainable and competitive place brand.

3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation of Marketing Efforts

Place marketing is a complex, multidisciplinary, and ambiguous milieu. This complexity is further compounded when it comes to the monitoring and evaluation of marketing efforts, where the historical reliance on qualitative research methodologies has dominated with empirical, quantitative insights significantly less explored (Kumar and Panda, 2019). Studies such as the exploration of marketing metrics in transitional economies by Melovic et al. (2021) reveal the nuanced challenges and complexities inherent in quantifying marketing efforts. Collectively, however, they mark the imperative for a paradigm shift toward a more rigorous examination of place branding and marketing efforts employing both qualitative and quantitative lenses to dissect and understand the intricacies of this field. By bridging the gap between qualitative richness and quantitative rigor, they pave the way for a more nuanced, empirical, and comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of place branding and marketing strategies. This evolution is crucial not only for the

substantiation of theoretical frameworks but also for informing practical, strategic decision-making in the dynamic landscape of place marketing.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the abstracts of relevant articles on place marketing published between 2018 and 2022, the five thematic focal points were terminology, comprehensive strategy, brand communication, stakeholder participation, sustainable tourism development, and monitoring and evaluation of marketing efforts. While development of a comprehensive place marketing strategy is at the forefront primarily of only branding-related papers, stakeholder participation is avidly discussed across the clusters. With sustainability rapidly gaining prominence in all but branding clusters, analyses of the measurement of place marketing success are seemingly also on the rise across clusters. The scholarly trend appears to be for management studies to focus on the economic side of the issue, branding predominantly on the social aspects, sustainability to be self-contained, while destination-related inquiries taking on an interdisciplinary nature in incorporating all aspects of the topic.

Our broad practical recommendations for the development of marketing strategies for localities in line with the above are to understand the distinction between place marketing, branding, and promotion thoroughly as this will help develop a comprehensive strategy with clear and measurable key performance indicators (KPI)s. Understanding their place's unique and authentic identity through delving into its cultural heritage and local stories with the involvement of local stakeholders ought illuminate a differentiation strategy, the institutionalisation of which is the key to effective place marketing. Boisen, et al. (2018a) appears particularly enlightening in this latter regard. Furthermore, as sustainability is gaining prominence not only in academic discussion but as an economic incentive in place development, municipalities should aim to harness the advantages of such investments along with potential collaborations with local firms or the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI). Concerning micro-strategies for place marketing, we suggest a creative approach based on best practices from a wide range of initiatives ranging from slum projects as a social marketing initiative (Sulistyaningsih et al., 2022) through place-based loyalty scheme concepts (Rybackowska and Sparks, 2020) to development of a local mascot. (Radomskaya and Pearce, 2021).

As evidenced by the wide dispersion of thematic clusters, themes, and ongoing debates about fundamental terminologies, place marketing is a delicately multidisciplinary and rapidly evolving field of study. In an increasingly competitive and thoroughly globalised world, where the activities of socioeconomic entities are dynamically interwoven, place marketing represents a significant opportunity for municipalities to spark engagement and solidify their social network, collaborate with local firms or effectively attract FDI for tourism development, and lay the groundwork for establishing a sustainable future for their stakeholder communities.

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