

# Examining the City Brand Theory and Presenting Some Solutions for Implementing of It in Iran

Mohammad Reza Sadeghi Moghaddam<sup>1,\*</sup>, Tannaz Assadollahzadeh<sup>1</sup>, Mehdi Mirmoini<sup>1</sup>, Salameh Azimi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of urban planning, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Department of Industrial Engineering, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran

\*Corresponding Author: [m.sadeghi62@gmail.com](mailto:m.sadeghi62@gmail.com)

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**Abstract** Iran is a country with great tourism potentials. Having ecological and cultural diversity, ancient history, beautiful historical and architectural urban spaces and buildings, natural resources, tourism attractions and hospitable residents could have benefited Iran in the globalization process if it had a globally positive image and sense of place. Branding cities is a tool that assists to make a region, country or city widely recognized and is studied in this paper as a means to better Iran's global reputation and image. In the end it was concluded that the key to branding Iran is in the hands of its own residents and governors.

**Keywords** City Brand, Iran, Branding cities, Tourism, Berlin, New York, Globalization

## 1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, it is essential for the cities to compete with each other to attract tourists, investments, businesses, new inhabitants and other factors which are necessary for being successful in the globalization process. Many attempts have been made to redefine urban spaces by using such terms as world cities, cultural cities, compact cities, creative cities, or endless cities [1]. In recent years cities are in search for new ways to promote themselves. Due to fast changes in technology and the shift from local to a globalized environment, cities are forced to compete with each other in order to be an attractive tourist destination, workplace, cultural rich place and much more [2].

As C.-J. Lee proposed that city branding is a new theory for showing a city as a special brand for developing mature methods of commencing traditional markets, services and applying them in region, city or country [3].

Good branding may assist in making cities desirable just as bad branding may assist in making cities undesirable. A city must have certain qualities in order to brand itself successfully, but a myriad of factors are involved. Cooperative efforts between residents and municipal government are one of the key factors in determining the

branding potential of a city [4].

Successful city branding depends greatly on the identification of distinctive and defining characteristics possessed by the city in question. Characteristics of a city are both functional and non-functional qualities, which include, among others, city appearance, history, cultural attractions, demographics, economics and governance, people's experience of the city and people's perception of the city. Consensus on the city's identity and core values, between the city authorities and the general public, is one of the key factors in achieving the success of city branding [5].

This paper focuses on the definition of a city brand and the effects of branding cities, then two cities, New York and Berlin which have a positive brand images are described.

At the end Iranian cities are compared with New York and Berlin and some applicable recommendations for improving their brand images and taking part in the competition of the globalized cities are presented.

## 2. City Branding?

Present Globalization has made it easier for newly developing cities to compete with older more established cities, simply because people can live and work almost anywhere now [4].

The fact demonstrates that, the competition between the cities is harsh, because of economical and political effects of globalization. The cities are competing to attract investments, influence, businesses, residents.

One of the challenges of urban management in its efforts to grow the performance is linked around the construction of the urban brand as a solution in the process of the cities' development [6].

In the last years, the conception that a country, a region or a city can transform in a brand won more and more partisans and started to obtain more attention both from the practitioners, and the theoreticians [6]. The city brand is gradually becoming the most precious and valuable tangible assets of the city. And its values lies not only in the fact that it can help city to set up a good image and high prestige for

the city, but also that it can unceasingly create new values[4].

This phenomenon provides, on one hand, the basis for developing policy to pursue economic development and, at the same time, it serves as a conduit for city residents to identify with their city [8]. Actually a brand is the foundation that helps to make a place desirable as a business location, visitor destination or a place to call home [9]. A successful brand is one that generally creates a powerful and unique image for the city and forgetting the strong bond between city branding and city image is unbelievable. Because of understanding the city brand functions, focusing on the effects of a good city image is necessary.

An image is the result of various; different and often conflicting messages sent by the city and are formed in the mind of each individual receiver of these messages separately [8]. The image of a city is actually the one characteristic of the city that has been highlighted throughout the years and is mostly conceived by experience. The people of the city and even the outsiders are aware of this quality and associate it with the name of the city. It plays an important role in the relief of the labor force and the students with potential to choose that place [6]. In general, people make sense of places or construct places in their minds through three processes. These are first, through planned interventions such as planning, urban design and so on; second, through the way in which they or others use specific places; and third, through various forms of place representations such as films, novels, paintings, news reports and so on. It is generally acknowledged that people encounter places through perceptions and images [10]. So it can be concluded that the first step of the branding of a city is to find this important quality and make it more tangible and distinct.

Paris is romance, Milan is Style, New York is energy, Washington is power, Tokyo is modernity and Barcelona is culture. These are the brand of the cities that make a positive image and work as a tool that can be used by cities to define themselves and attract positive attention in the midst of an international glut [9].

Currently, there is general preference in the marketing literature that the brand is more than a name given to a product; it embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs [8] and place branding is a strategic process for developing a long-term vision for a place that is relevant and compelling to key audiences. Ultimately, it influences and shapes positive perceptions of a place [9].

### 3. The Importance of Branding Cities

There are reasons why people choose particular cities in which to live. Certain cities are making comebacks even when the industries they were built on have become obsolete. Brands evolve, and cities that survive have

managed to evolve [4]. Therefore market fundamentalists and some international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Tourism Organization, and the World Economic Forum, enthusiastically urge cities to seek competitive advantages as a means of survival and prosperity [11] since city branding is understood as the means both for achieving competitive advantage in order to increase inward investment and tourism, and also for achieving community development, reinforcing local identity and identification of the citizens with their city and activating all social forces to avoid social exclusion and unrest [8].

There are many reasons why it is critical for a place to have a brand strategy, but the most common is to stimulate economic growth. That's because a strong brand can:

- 1) Shift the perception of a place that may be suffering from a poor image among external and internal constituents.
- 2) Create a common vision for the future of the community and its potential.
- 3) Provide a consistent representation of the place.
- 4) Enhance its local, regional and/or global awareness and position.
- 5) Shed unfavorable stereotypes associated with a place and make it more appealing [9].

There are even more important reasons to study the need and potential of a place or city branding. A positive powerful image has the capacity to offer a city a competitive solid and distinctive advantage. Moreover, it can influence the decision in the process of choice of the places for direct foreign investments and affects the attitudes towards the services and products of that place, of its ability to attract tourists and entrepreneurial activities [6].

### 4. Creating a City Brand

The image of a city, in the sense of the general meaning and idea of a place, is formed not only by visual images, but also by many other elements

The building of a city brand is a huge project, involving economic, environmental, social and many other factors [12]. And in order for a city to be a good brand, it must possess defining and distinctive characteristics that can be readily identified. These are functional as well as nonfunctional qualities. These include city appearance, people's experience of the city, people's belief in the city, what the city stands for, and what kind of people inhabit the city [4].

The construction of positive and charming images is a fundamental tool for attracting global flows of tourism and investments to promote local development (Gold and Ward, 1994)[13], Florida (2002)[ 14], who has affirmed that the creative class is attracted by cool cities (more on this later), fits implicitly into this theoretical frame.

Marketing managers everywhere seem to have different views on how cities should be branded. City planners think

they understand their "city brand", but more often it is an enigma. Planners discover they cannot really define their city brand, but few are willing to admit it; and if you don't define your own brand no one else is likely to either [4]. But there is the general agreement that a powerful city brand must be created holistic, because the entire city represents a brand. In the creation process of the brand, some aspects, such as images, characteristics and experiences are usually selected, while others are eliminated [6].

In order to create a good brand for our city, we must know that a good city must have the following characteristics:

1. Offer attractive employment.
2. Not be unduly expensive in relation to wages.
3. Have reasonable public transportation
4. Have good schools and recreational/cultural attractions.
5. Have a reasonable climate.

And the way that brands work for a city is how these qualities are projected: by word-of-mouth, public relations, and in some cases, advertising [4].

As we discussed in the above sentences the first step of branding cities is to find its image and once the urban planners understand the current image of the respective city, they can deliberate regarding the type of image that can be built accordingly. One of the challenges that result from this situation is the creation of an image that determines efficient results for all the target-groups. The eligibility conditions of an urban image to the title of universally available efficiency are:

- a) Validity: If the place promotes an image being too far from the reality, the chances of success are minimum.
- b) Credibility: The exaggerated efforts of promotion become dangerous if they are practiced on long term.
- c) Simplicity: Because most of the cities do not develop promoting strategies, they tend to disseminate any information a little positive, without making a profound analysis of it; so, the priority process is usually inexistent, generating an exhaustive promotion and implicit, confusion in the target-groups.
- d) Attractiveness: The image must offer reasons to generate the wish of the individuals to visit, live, invest or work in the respective place. For this, it is based on the promotion of different attributes like the economic stability, quality of life, opening towards exterior, infrastructure etc.
- e) Distinctiveness: The image "works" most efficient when it approaches differently other common themes [6].

## 5. International Experiences

In this paper the branding process of New York and Paris is studied in order to use the planners' experiences in these

cities to set a benchmark for the Iranian cities.

### 5.1. New York

New York is the most populous city in the United States which is in the center of New York Metropolitan area. Nowadays it has a significant impact upon commerce, finance, media, art, fashion, technology, education, and entertainment and also as the home of the United Nations Headquarters, it is an important center for international diplomacy and has been described as the cultural capital of the world. The story of the branding of the New York City is the story of the way a city in crisis was sold to the world. Although New York has had many attractions both for the tourists and the citizens including the Central Park, the Empire State building, Greenwich Village, the MET, the Museum of Modern Art, the Statue of Liberty, Times Square, the United Nations Building, the New York Public Library, the Guggenheim and others throughout the years; but as Pfefferkorn [4] includes it has not always been successful attracting and maintaining a population base. This was especially true in the early 70's through the mid-80 when riding the subway became a means of survival rather than a means of transportation. Between 1970 and 1980, the city lost nearly 825,000 residents, by far the largest loss ever sustained over a 10 year period by a major U.S. city. This was primarily due to crime, high housing costs, and density of living [4].

As the New York State was in a deep economic slump and New York City was crime-ridden and bankrupt at the year of 1977 they decided to spend an amount of money to see what they could do to make the terrified tourists reconsider. There were two major branding efforts in the New York City, the first one is the creation of a campaign with the slogan of "I Love New York" that was created along with the campaign which is still one of the most recognized and successful campaigns in the history of great emotional branding. The goal of this campaign was to share all the hidden treasures that New York State hold. They actually reached to their goal by the means of advertisement like creating a logo for their slogan, selling T-shirts which the slogan was written on, media and other means of advertisement. I LOVE NEW YORK is the official State of New York slogan, and is still used to promote New York today.

The second effort was to decrease the amount of crime, because crime was the most important reason the population was moving out of the city. They came to this agreement by the "Broken windows" theory that Pfefferkorn [4] describes as the following: if a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street, sending the signal that 'anything goes'. This is the epidemic theory of crime. It says that crime is contagious, just as a fashion trend is contagious [4]. Therefore they attacked the heart of the New York City's crime which was

the subways and as a symbolic gesture wiped out any sign of the graffiti off the faces of the trains to send out a message to the vandals that disorder would not be tolerated.

It was the efforts in the branding of the New York City that made it what it is today, a prosperous city with a powerful economy and a tourist destination.

## 5.2. Berlin

According to Berlin's origin in the 12th century, it is one of Europe's younger cities, which was emerged by the union of Berlin and Cölln.

For the first time on 28 October 1237 Cölln was mentioned in documents and so was Berlin in 1244. Unfortunately, most documents about those days were damaged by town center fire in 1830. The cities formed a union in 1307, and at last Berlin and Cölln joined and were named as Berlin in 1709. Before that Berlin- Cölln was in trouble with its population, after Bubonic killed some 4000 people and during thirty years war the population reduced to 6000 from 10000. In 1640 during Frederick's government, Berlin reached 20000 inhabitants for the first time and then in 1701 king Frederick made Berlin the capital of Prussia. In 1709 Berlin had 60000 inhabitants. Berlin's population did not change until 1871, after that Adolf Hitler came and had so many plans to transform Berlin, because he thought that Berlin was one of the ugliest cities in the world. Berlin was to be renamed as "Germania" and hold 170000 people. But the construction never started because of the war.

By the end of the Second World War, up to 70% of Berlin had been destroyed [4]. In 1994 Berlin was divided into west-Berlin and east-Berlin and when the Berlin wall was constructed it physically separated them up to 1989 that it was destroyed. By the time of German reunification on 3 October 1990, the wall had been almost completely demolished, with only small sections remaining [4], and once again Berlin became the capital of Germany.

Berlin was once a city with beautiful architecture and culture, an unusual mix of architecture that after all the difficult history in the 20th century, showed all the darkness of its past. And nowadays has many attractive places to visit from earlier centuries, like opera houses, theaters, museums, galleries and film festivals.

Although Berlin was a beautiful and historical city, it did not have the proper brand image that other European cities like London, Rome and Paris had. So it was in the middle of a harsh competition with the other European cities to play a role in the globalization process.

It could be said that the biggest branding problem that Berlin must have had faced was the effects of Nazi crimes during Second World War and the Berlin wall. Berlin's branding process was the question of how to use its both positive and negative qualities to save it from its dark past towards a promising future. One of the biggest branding efforts in Berlin was the creation of a campaign with the slogan "be Berlin".

Be Berlin was called to life in the spring of 2008. In the first year, the campaign to market Berlin primarily addressed a regional audience with its signature features, the red frame and the three-part phrases, "be..., be..., be Berlin". Since 2009, the campaign has used the slogan "the place to be" Internationally and promotes Berlin in particular via the "Berlin Days" as an attractive location for art and culture, for business and science, and also to live and work. The "be Berlin" brand has been successfully established. Individual, successful projects will be further developed as part of the brand campaign for distinguishing the capital and the location [15].

## 6. Case Study of Iran

As it was discussed in this paper, city branding is essential to attract tourists and foreign investors. In the last 3 decades the importance of tourism has gained the attention of many experts in Iran and the government and the private sectors have contributed a lot to the process of tourism development. Although Iran has diverse climate and environment and also prosperous historical and cultural background, hasn't taken a part in the globalization process.

Not only tourism is a problem for Islamic culture and beliefs but also can play an important role for economic development. Such as, some Islamic countries, Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, Tunisia and the UAE, especially the ones that are based on oil trade. But in spite of all the efforts made to use this as an advantage no progress has been made, and even most of Iranians spend their time and money in the foreign countries. Some important reasons of false Iran's brand could be as follows:

- [1] The false impression that foreign people have about Iran.
- [2] The negative publicity that has been made through foreign media about Iran.
- [3] Since a bad advertisement against Iran, few foreigners know Iran truly.
- [4] The middle-east's unstable situation has kept away tourists from traveling to the most of the region.
- [5] Bad Iran intra-urban public transportations.
- [6] The lack of quality in the recreational facilities.

## 7. Results

After studying the definition of city brand, the way it is created and the branding efforts of New York and Berlin the reasons to their successful branding efforts became clear. The first lesson that is learned by studying the branding stories of New York and Berlin is that planners should focus on cities' strengths and improving their weaknesses. New York wouldn't be a successful branded city, if its crime problem hadn't been solved or neither would Berlin, if the effects of the Second World War hadn't been wiped out. These cities are distinctive, have values that are not

available anywhere else, and there is no confusion about as what the city stands for. These values and qualities are spread by the word-of-mouth, advertising, graphic design, etc. However it shouldn't be neglected that cities must also offer what they claim to; otherwise, they wouldn't achieve their goal.

Identifying Iran's city branding problems, and having studied the branding stories of New York and Berlin some good and applicable suggestions are presented as follows:

- i. Increasing in the government's awareness of the importance of branding cities.
- ii. Establishing campaigns to promote Iran's brand.
- iii. Choosing the perfect slogan for the brand of Iran and advertising it by the means of graphic design, logos and internet advertisements.
- iv. Introducing Iranian prosperous history and culture and also its climate and environmental diversity.
- v. Focusing on the Iranian hospitality in the advertisement programs.
- vi. Designing new tourism websites and optimizing the existing.
- vii. Optimizing the intra-urban public transportations and developing the traveling agencies to facilitate travels between tourist destinations.
- viii. Making the historical and architectural places more distinct and popular like the Milad tower in Tehran.
- ix. Developing the infrastructures to hold sport mega events to demonstrate Iran's brand.

## 8. Conclusion and Discussion

Brands are the names given to products or places showing their unique qualities and characteristics, created as a consequence of growing competitiveness and globalization. This research discusses the importance of considering this phenomenon in the comprehensive plans of the cities of countries like Iran, which have a false brand image and thus, couldn't have attracted tourism, businesses and investments to develop their economy, then identifies that increasing in the Iranian people and city planners' awareness of the importance of city brand and improving Iran's image and publicity are the first steps towards a more promising future.

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