Brand Development in the Public Sector:

Shaping Place Image through Marketing and Communication Strategy

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Abstract

Place branding and marketing are concepts that are still in their early stages in terms of research and development (Gertner, 2011; Hildreth, 2010). Within the last decade, there has been an increased exploration of branding, as it relates to geographical locations, in academia. Concurrently, cities and local governments have begun to develop and implement place branding strategies for their areas (Gertner, 2011; Kavaratzis, 2009). This literature review relates a three-part approach to the process of place branding: strategy, implementation, and maintenance. In each segment of the approach, specific methods and recommendations are discussed based upon qualitative and quantitative research, literature reviews, as well as professional branding advice from practitioners and researchers in the field. The synthesized research throughout this review reveals that place brand development in the public sector can be accomplished and sustained with appropriate planning, effective message development, and continual evaluation. Interpretations of the research, strengths and limitations, and future research are also discussed.
Introduction

Defining ‘Brand(s)’, ‘Branding’ and Other Terminology

An established familiarity with the terminology related to the topic of place branding and marketing is essential for understanding the concepts and processes that will be discussed throughout this literature review. Professionals in the marketing field define the concept of ‘brand’ in varying ways; thus, there is no standard definition (Dolak, 2005). There are five unifying components/characteristics of a ‘brand’ and the process of ‘branding’ that have been identified in the research process (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006; Dolak, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2009; McEachern, 2008):

- A distinctive or differentiating feature.
- Strategy.
- Culture.
- Emotion.
- Perception.

In relation to a distinctive or differentiating feature of a brand, Dolak (2005) asserts that “promises of value” (p.1) are what set brands apart from each other. Place brand is a term used to denote a brand that applies specifically to a given place or location (Zenker & Martin, 2011). Zenker and Braun (2010) relate that place brand is a multi-dimensional conception in the minds of consumers (as cited in Zenker & Martin, 2011). According to Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005) this conception can be developed through identification and differentiation of a destination, the
promise of a unique experience, and a unique selling proposition (as cited in Kostanski, 2011). *Brand awareness* is when a certain brand is associated in the mind of the consumer with its affiliated product or organization (Dolak, 2005). *Brand literacy* refers to a developed understanding of a brand that allows consumers to make it a part of their lives (Bengtsson & Firat 2006). *Strategic awareness* can be understood as a fusion between ‘brand awareness’ and ‘brand literacy’, and taking it one step further. According to Dolak (2005), strategic awareness is when consumers recognize a brand’s affiliation and understand the brand’s distinctive qualities. Keller (2002) notes the idea of *brand knowledge* (as cited in Tschirhart, 2003); whose definition is likened to that of ‘strategic awareness’. *Brand equity* encompasses all of the value people attach to a brand; the value is subjectively determined (Dolak, 2005; Rust, Zeithaml & Lemon, 2004). Bengtsson and Firat (2006) and Hildreth (2010) are in accordance that *brand image* refers to the combined perceptions of the brand in consumers’ minds.

**Brand Strategy and Impetus for Initiative**

In the beginning stages of a branding initiative, it is important to develop a strategy through which to achieve desired results. Having clarity is beneficial to strategy development; that is to say, knowing what is wanted to be achieved through the brand and why (Hildreth, 2010). As an example, Syssner (2010) notes that distinguishing between desired changes in how the public perceives a place, as opposed to an actual change in the place, is essential. The impetus or motivation for a branding initiative is dependent on the place, ranging from an absence of brand management (Dolak 2005) to a lack of customer awareness/focus (Conway & Whitelock, 2004). If a clear strategy is developed from the outset of an initiative, the place will be in a good position to reap the benefits that place branding can provide.
The Benefits of Place Branding

According to Ashcroft (2010), a marketing strategy is necessary for all types of organizations. Place branding is one specialized type of marketing strategy. A place brand consists of the characteristics of a place, along with associations that are perceived in peoples’ minds (Kostanski, 2011). Consumers of a place brand, which can in part refer to the citizens of a location, form an identity about a place based upon the aforementioned characteristics and associations (Hansen, 2010). In this way, a place brand is subjectively perceived (Hansen, 2010). Having a strategy through which it is possible to shape the perceptions about a place, so that associations are developed in accordance with a desired image, is one benefit of place branding.

La Foret and Saunders (1999) suggest that the best marketing advantages can be ascertained from maintaining a singular brand (as cited in Tschirhart, 2008); reducing the chances for confusion, while simultaneously promoting consistency (Dolak, 2005) about a place. Hildreth (2010) and Causon (2004) relate one goal of branding as the communication of the societal benefit, to an identified market, of the place or organization. There are a number of other benefits that can be derived from a strong brand, some of which will be explored in greater depth throughout this literature review. These benefits include: emotional attachment to the organization or place behind the brand, establishment of trust, fostering connections between consumers, and coherent expression of the company’s values (Dolak, 2005). A review of the methodology used to develop this literature review follows.

Methods

Research for this investigation was conducted through the WorldCat databases, a global catalog of library collections, for scholarly articles related to brand development and strategy.
Exclusively peer-reviewed articles were included in the search. Branding is a multi-faceted topic; the focus here was on brand strategy and development related to place branding in general or specifically to the public sector (i.e. cities, and small scale communities). Some research concerning marketing efforts for consumer product brands and corporate brands was included. Although they are significantly different from place branding, applicable lessons can be learned from these practices. Twenty articles were identified in thirteen different journal publications; their publication dates spanned a full decade, from 2002 to 2012. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, considered to be the foremost publication on place branding and place marketing (Gertner 2011), provided seven articles (41%). Two articles (12%) were retrieved from the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*. The remaining journal article sources are as follows, with one article originating from each: *International Journal of Electronic Commerce, Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, Journal of Advertising Research, Public Management, Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing, Marketing Theory, Journal of Change Management, Brand Advice, Advances on Consumer Research, Harvard Business Review*, and *Journal of Marketing*. The reference lists of each article were reviewed for other applicable articles.

The majority of articles (7) featured literature reviews. In five studies a qualitative approach was utilized, while one article contained a quantitative study that was conducted. Four articles featured a mixed methodological approach: 1 (qualitative and quantitative), 1 (literature review and qualitative), and 2 (literature review and professional brand advice). Two articles solely related professional branding advice, while one other focused only on a case study. Key
words were identified throughout the articles and a list was compiled in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of place branding for cities.

‘Relationship marketing’, ‘marketing’, ‘public sector’, ‘stakeholder’, ‘brand’

The above terms and phrases help to address the underlying question of “What are the most effective processes through which a place with public sector organization affiliation can create a sustainable brand?” A literature review discussing effective methods of brand strategy, implementation, and maintenance follows.

**Effective Methods of Brand Strategy, Implementation, and Maintenance**

**Brand Strategy**

The first segment of brand strategy is market research. This involves market segmentation and assessments of the general market as well as specific target markets.

**Market research.** Scholarly researchers and branding professionals agree that market research is a crucial initial step when instituting a branding initiative (Ashcroft, 2010). McEachern (2008) recommends that the process of market research be carried out by an outside
branding partner, instead of by members who are a part of the organization that is undertaking the branding. The benefits of conducting research in this manner include a fresh perspective, honesty, and objectivity in results (McEachern, 2008).

**Market segmentation.** One of the purposes of market research is market segmentation. *Segmentation* involves first dividing consumers into groups based upon certain shared qualities, then categorizing some of those groups as target audiences (Ashcroft, 2010; Kelly et al., 2003). In relation to place branding specifically, there is value in assessing the overall market (comprised of varying groups) as well as the target market(s).

**General market assessment.** In looking at the market as a whole, an important factor is determining existing place narratives. Identifying these narratives can help create more focused branding strategies because they reflect the meanings and values people associate with a place (Hansen, 2010). Thus, narratives can both reflect the perceptions held about a place as well as shape those perceptions. This is where place branding initiatives can be impactful—if existing narratives do not communicate meanings and values that a place wants to be associated with, then alternative stories that do reflect the desired image(s) can be created and communicated (Hansen, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2009); in doing so, more favorable perceptions are fostered. In identifying favorable existing place narratives, brand strategists are advised to reinforce these narratives through the new place brand to increase its power and impact on consumers (Hansen, 2010). Place dependency is another important factor to analyze in the general market. Dependency refers to the perceived level of attachment that people have to a place. According to Stokols and Shumaker (1981), it is contingent upon two criteria: the nature of the place and how it compares to other places (as cited in Kostanski, 2011). While looking at the overall market,
Syssner (2010) asserts that it is important to relate the place (which is the focus of the brand) to the other geographical regions of which it is a part—a city, a region, a nation, a state, or a country. This multi-level perspective demonstrates recognition of the interaction between all connected geographic regions (Syssner, 2010).

*Target market assessment.* As previously noted, market segmentation is a means by which target market groups can be identified. Target markets are essential because through them marketers can learn consumer groups’ needs, beliefs, and values (Kelly et al., 2003). This type of research contributes to a clearer picture of consumers and which specific groups an organization wants to “target” with their branding efforts. Rust et al. (2004) recommend that brands be built around customer segments, not the opposite way. In this way, brand strategy is designed and communication is tailored to meet the needs and fulfill the desires of a place’s target population(s). Kelly et al. (2003) notes that community based marketing efforts are only as successful as the appropriate segmentation techniques employed. McEachern (2008) places great emphasis on qualitative and quantitative research as means through which market groups can be assessed; it is also essential in determining the meaning behind a brand. Research can involve conversations with stakeholders, sociographic and psychographic studies, and communication analyses (McEachern, 2008). One quantitative research technique that can be used to measure psychographics is the semantic differential scale. It consists of a series of bi-polar adjective pairs, graded along seven different points. Tsai (2007) used this scale to assess three different dimensions of attitude, regarding brand communication persuasiveness, in the message framing strategy of a consumer product.
**Marketing strategy techniques.** The second segment of brand strategy discusses specific techniques, such as brand positioning through the unique selling proposition (USP), customer perceptions, relationship marketing, and adding value to a brand.

**Strategic awareness through brand positioning.** Strategic awareness involves brand awareness and understanding (Dolak, 2005); as noted earlier, it is similar in definition to the concept of brand knowledge (Tschirhart, 2003). One effective way in which understanding is created among a target market is through differentiation. The rationale for why one brand is different from the rest of the competition is referred to as the “Unique Selling Proposition (USP)” (Dolak, 2005; Bengtsson & Firat, 2006). The USP can serve as a brand positioning tool because, according to Perreault & McCarthy (1999), the purpose of positioning is to influence how consumers think about a brand in a market (as cited in Gwin & Gwin, 2003). The USP is referred to throughout marketing and place branding literature, although it is not always explicitly stated. McEachern (2008) relates the purpose of branding as determining a singular message that communicates a place’s strengths. Bengtsson and Firat (2006) and Kavaratzis (2009) emphasize the importance of differentiating a brand based upon attributes that are connected to the emotional states of consumers. Similarly, Gwin and Gwin (2003) suggests competitive differentiation based upon product attributes that are perceived in consumers’ minds. Kostanski (2011) discusses the theory of toponymic dependence as a semantic tool that can be used to provide a distinctive representation of a place; information regarding the theory will be discussed further in this literature review.

Strategic awareness through brand positioning is achievable with the use of successful marketing strategies. Keller (2002) notes that consumers’ brand knowledge is positively
correlated to the strength of a brand (as cited in Tschirhart, 2003); the greater consumers’ knowledge, the greater the strength of a brand. Moreover, Gregory (1993) asserts that, “Brand familiarity if empirically linked to favorability” (as cited in Tschirhart, 2003, p.37). Thus, when carrying out a branding initiative, an important goal would be to foster positive brand knowledge among consumers. A USP is essential because it creates awareness of a brand’s singular distinction, which has been proven to generate strong brands (Dolak, 2005). This distinction should directly relate to the target group(s) of consumers by communicating the singular, unique benefit of the brand, thereby effectively positioning it in the target market’s mind (Causon, 2004).

Developing a unique selling proposition for a place brand requires research and place knowledge. Opportunities that are available for the target market, in the place that is being branded, should be taken into consideration when creating the USP. Hildreth (2010) notes that some cities have valuable opportunities, yet there is a failure of bringing awareness to them. Caldwell and Freire (2004) recommend that regions and cities leverage functional, as opposed to emotional, parts of a place when branding (as cited in Gertner, 2011). Kavaratzis (2009) discusses targeted opportunities in relation to services, lifestyle quality, and the job potential of a place. Knowing the target market of a place will aid in determining which opportunities should be leveraged in the creation of a USP for the brand.

Customer-centric strategy.

Perception. Brands are perceived subjectively (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006; Hansen, 2010; Hildreth, 2010). Thus, careful consideration of the subjective nature of a brand is critical when undertaking a branding initiative. Researchers acknowledge the fluidity of brand perception,
noting that how people view it is dependent on context and time (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006; Hansen, 2010). The process of branding is all about shaping perceptions (Dolak, 2005; Hildreth, 2010; Kavaratzis, 2009; Kostanski, 2011; Rust et al., 2004; Syssner, 2010; Tschirhart, 2008). Kavaratzis (2009) states that peoples’ communication and interactions with an organization are what shape their perceptions of the place. Anholt (2008) asserts that it is mainly a place’s actions that form perceptions among the public (as cited in Kostanski, 2011). Regardless of the source(s) of perceptions, Hildreth (2010) holds that a brand’s image must be genuine and once perceptions are formed they cannot be expunged. This is why branding as a shaping tool is important—the perceptions that an organization/place wants to be associated with can be created; thereby positioning the brand in the minds of consumers. Message framing strategy (Tsai, 2007) is based off of the idea of brand perception. It is used to generate positive or negative frames for advertised messages (Tsai, 2007). The strategy incorporates three different components of consumers’ strategic awareness of a brand, in order to persuasively frame messages.

Communication. In order to be effective, all communication about a brand and coming from a brand must be tailored to fit the target market. According to Ashcroft (2010), communication should be developed from the perspective of the consumer. People need to be able to understand what is being communicated and feel like they can relate to a brand. A city’s brand is developed based upon the collective communication from all of the city’s different facets (Kavaratzis, 2009). Since this collective communication shapes the public’s perceptions, a brand is literally conceptualized in the minds of consumers. This reinforces the need for thorough market research and the tailoring of all brand messages.
Synergy. Synergy in a place branding initiative would involve all of the people behind a brand working together toward common goals. Kavaratzis (2009) defines *synergies* as, “Gaining agreement and support of all relevant stakeholders and providing for balanced participation” (p. 33). Synergy is not easily attainable. As Conway and Whitelock (2004) note, public sector organizations experience less synergy between their stakeholders, than do for-profit businesses. Specific problems can arise such as stakeholders who have conflicting interests, and people outside of the actual organization who try to influence consumers’ brand knowledge (Tschirhart, 2008). Alternatively, Hildreth (2010) says that stakeholders who vary in nature can serve as benefit because place branding problems may be resolved with the aid of alternative viewpoints and values.

The brand relationship. The fostering of stakeholder relationships is a vital aspect of marketing and place branding (Conway & Whitelock, 2004; Rust et al., 2004). Relationship marketing is the enduring process of engaging in relationships with stakeholders (Conway & Whitelock, 2004). Stakeholders include all those who either have an effect on, or are affected by, an organization’s strategies (Conway & Whitelock, 2004). As Rust et al. (2004) mentions, maintaining customer relationships should be a priority. Customers are only one stakeholder group, however, their role is essential because their feelings and actions can determine the success or failure of a brand. Conway and Whitelock (2004) and Rees and Gardner (2002) agree that communication is a required component of relationship marketing; Rees and Gardner (2002) and Morgan and Hunt (as cited in Rees & Gardner, 2002) add that trust is another important component. Overall, the success of a place brand is dependent on the connection between stakeholder relationships and a brand’s essence (Kavaratzis, 2009).
Adding value is an important aspect of relationship marketing (Ashcroft, 2010; Rees & Gardner, 2002). There is a shift in focus within the relationship marketing field toward what can be done for the customer—in order to enhance the relationship (Rees & Gardner, 2002) and build brand equity. Adding value (or equity) is one technique that can enhance stakeholder relationships (Rust et al., 2004). One benefit is that it can aid in differentiating a place, thereby positioning it in the target market’s mind (Gwin & Gwin, 2003). Perceived added value can take a number of forms; one such form is through brand associations. Brand associations (Tschirhart, 2008) is a similar concept to strategic awareness. It concerns three different types of associations: attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Tschirhart, 2008). Syssner (2010) discusses the topic of spatial anchorage—a technique in which the brand of a geographical area is “anchored” (or focused around) at a location within the overall area. For example, it is noted that the most common points of anchorage in places are recreation locations (Syssner, 2010). Leveraging the attributes and benefits of a recreation ground could serve as a means of adding perceived value to a place brand.

Utilizing emotion. According to Dolak (2005), a strong brand should solicit an emotional response from the target market and create an attachment. One of the ways in which emotion factors into a place brand can be exemplified through the concept of place identity (Kostanski, 2011). Williams and Vaske (2003) state that place identity is an emotional attachment to a place that is developed over time (as cited in Kostanski, 2011). Emotion can also be evoked through memories (Hansen, 2010). Creating locations or structures that serve as memorials is one way to preserve place memories and perhaps enhance emotional attachment.
**Message formulation.** Message formulation, the third segment of brand strategy, outlines several types of messages that may be utilized during a branding initiative as a means of communicating the brand to the public. These categories include: mission statement, tagline/slogan, logo, the brand “narrative”, and web-based media.

**Mission statement.** The essence of a place can be communicated through a mission statement. It should be a concise description of the organization’s (or place’s) values (Dolak, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2009) and distinction from the competition (Dolak, 2005). It can also include expectations and promises from the brand to the various stakeholders (Kavaratzis, 2009).

**Tagline or slogan.** Dolak (2005) notes the importance of a brand message being communicated in a singular word or phrase. The researcher also recommends that a brand’s unique selling proposition be captured within its tagline or slogan. In Kostanski’s (2011) research on toponymic dependence (place name attachment), it was found “that dependencies can be formed with toponyms” (p.20). Thus people can form attachments, both emotional and functional (Kostanski, 2011), with places based upon their linguistic labels. This underscores the value of taglines/slogans as an opportunity to shape place brand perception, and thereby attachment. Taglines/slogans can also serve the purpose of clarity for a place brand (Syssner, 2010). Syssner (2010) explains that when lesser known places are branded, their slogans often identify their geographical location. As a general note, McEachern (2008) and Tschirhart (2008) both recommend conducting trademark searches on potential taglines/slogans, to ensure that no other place is using the same or a similar one.

**Logo.** A logo can serve as a valuable symbolic tool, however, Hildreth (2010) and McEachern (2008) caution that it should not be used as the focal point of the brand. A logo’s
purpose is to symbolically distinguish the brand from other brands (Tschirhart, 2008); because of this differentiating quality, it can relate to the unique selling proposition. Good brand logos should represent valuable qualities (Hildreth, 2010). Haig and Harper (1997) add that a symbol should, be recognizable, memorable, and convey attitude (as cited in Tschirhart, 2008).

**Constructing a brand “narrative”**. The term *place narratives* refers to the stories that are constructed and exist within a particular place (Hansen, 2010). The true essence of a place is embedded in the narratives that people assign to it (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006; Hansen, 2010). According to McEachern (2008), “A brand is found in the spirit and heritage of a community” (p.18). When undertaking a branding initiative, according to Hansen (2009), the narratives about a place must be analyzed to determine if they communicate the values and meanings that the place wants to be associated with (as cited in Hansen, 2010, p.271). If the narratives are favorable, then the brand should reinforce those stories to strengthen its connection with the target audience. Given the existence of unfavorable narratives, a place brand should construct more favorable ones and embody their meanings and values within the brand (Hansen, 2010). Hildreth (2010) also recommends utilizing narratives in the process of place branding. The researcher’s four-step model is similar in methodology to that of Hansen (2010) because both propose identifying current stories and then shaping/creating stories. It is important to note that stories cannot simply be made up about a place. Narratives must be truthful in that they accurately reflect the nature of a place and the essence of a brand (Hansen, 2010).

**Web-based media.** According to Means and Schneider (2000), web-based media is being increasingly utilized by organizations and places as a branding tool because it provides distinct advantages when it comes to reaching out and connecting with target markets (as cited in
Tschirhart, 2008). Bergstrom (2000) supports this by noting that the presence of a brand online offers opportunities such as facilitating a connection with the target market, interaction, and the incorporation of sound and motion (as cited in Tschirhart, 2008). Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim (2008), also cite the importance and benefits of online branding tools. The researchers conducted a study looking specifically at online brand communities via websites. It was found that promoting member interaction and providing rewards for activities are two techniques that increase community commitment (Jang et al., 2008). This is important because community commitment is positively correlated to brand loyalty (Jang et al., 2008).

**Brand Implementation**

Brand implementation is the second step in the three-part brand development process, which itself is threefold: channels of distribution, visibility, and delivering on the brand promise.

**Channels of distribution.** Channels of distribution refer to the means through which a brand’s messages will be communicated to the target market. Effective channels must be chosen (Ashcroft, 2010) and then used consistently (Kostanski, 2011). With regard to effective channels, information ascertained from market research can be analyzed to determine which media would be most effective to connect with the target audience (Ashcroft, 2010). The consistency of brand communication across all channels is emphasized throughout the literature on place branding and marketing (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006; Dolak, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2009; Kostanski, 2011; Tschirhart, 2008). Brand effectiveness and success are contingent, in part, upon message consistency (Dolak, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2009; Kostanski, 2011; Tschirhart, 2008). Dolak (2005) relates that there should be consistency among all marketing communications materials. Tschirhart (2008) cites that consistency aids in building brand awareness because
recognition and recall are enhanced. Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) also argue that a branding initiative for a place will be unsuccessful if there is an absence of consistency.

**Visibility.** Visibility establishes a brand (Dolak, 2005), and it needs to be viewed from both internal and external stakeholder perspectives. Publicity of a brand is created through media attention, with the purpose being to attract and retain consumers (Ashcroft, 2010). Ashcroft (2002) states that coordinated timing, and appropriate resources and channels all play a role in visibility (as cited in Ashcroft, 2010). Kelly et al. (2003) and McEachern (2008) emphasize the importance of building support among stakeholders prior to a brand’s introduction. These stakeholders include local media (McEachern, 2008), community members, and community leaders (Kelly et al., 2003). McEachern (2008) states, “The more support you have garnered for the brand prior to rolling it out to the public, the more successful it will be” (p. 18).

The concept of internal branding is an additionally important aspect (Ashcroft 2010; Hildreth, 2010) of visibility. A new brand should not only be introduced to the external target market, but also internally to an organization’s members. Kavaratzis (2009) argues that a brand should be built from the inside-out by first intertwining the values and meanings, to be communicated by a brand, within the culture of the organization. Every member of an organization should hold accurate perceptions of the brand and its values (Dolak, 2005; Tschirhart, 2008); this will ensure their appropriate knowledge base and heighten efficiency (Causon, 2004).

**Delivering on the brand promise.** A final aspect of brand implementation is ensuring deliverance of the brand promise. Possessing the appropriate types and quantities of resources
within an organization is key to brand success (Ashcroft, 2010). Indeed, the strategy for a brand, as well as its intended channels/modes of implementation and maintenance need to be backed by all of the required resources. Kelly et al. (2003) includes ‘resources’ as a dimension in the community readiness model noting the importance of analyzing a community’s resources while implementing a brand initiative. Resources encompass a broad spectrum of items, including, but not limited to the following: employees of the organization, external consultants/specialists, press contacts, research, budget/funding, investors, technology, and social media.

**Brand Maintenance**

Brand maintenance is the final step in the brand development process. Brand maintenance involves continuous courses of action regarding advertising efforts, evaluation, and looking at success. Dolak (2005) asserts that a brand is maintained through advertising. Advertising generates awareness and can even reinforce a target audiences’ beliefs and perceptions by reflecting place ‘narratives’ (Hildreth, 2010).

**Continual evaluation.** Continually evaluating a brand is critical to its long term success (Ashcroft, 2010; Dolak, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2009; Kelly et al., 2003). Through evaluation an organization can determine whether its branding efforts are meeting established goals and how it is faring against competitors in the market (Ashcroft, 2010; Dolak, 2005). Conducting market research during the brand strategy phase is equally important in the brand maintenance phase. Ashcroft (2010), Dolak (2005), and Kavaratzis (2009) are in agreement that research and analysis are critical to maintaining and developing a brand’s image in the marketplace. If a projected image becomes distorted or a brand falls into decline, then the strategy must be reworked (Dolak, 2005). When facing challenges, Hildreth (2010) suggests that original
solutions need to be implemented for the place brand. Even if a brand is successful, evaluation is required for its continual development; or else it will become stagnant and eventually decline (Ashcroft, 2010). Managing brand knowledge and brand image will help ensure that favorable perceptions are held by target groups (Ashcroft, 2010; Tschirhart, 2008).

**Looking at success.** There is no clear conceptualization of ‘success’ because it is a subjective benchmark. In a study conducted by Conway and Whitelock (2004), perceptions of success were garnered from individuals holding managerial positions. One manager defined success as when people in a target audience are excited about the services of an organization. Another manager viewed success as the establishment of relationships with stakeholders. Rust et al. (2004) holds that success rests on customer lifetime value—the benefits a company or organization receives as the result of a loyal customer base; this can relate to the concept of relationship marketing. The strengths and limitations of this literature review, as well as of the research utilized, will now be discussed.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The quality and selection of journal articles are strengths of this literature review. Information and research from twenty peer reviewed journal articles, derived from thirteen different journal publications, was synthesized; providing a comprehensive overview of the place branding process. Substantive connections were identified throughout the review among researchers and marketing professionals. Additionally, the organization of the review is strong because it clearly outlines a three-part process with labeled concepts/processes, covering branding from the strategy stage, through implementation, and into maintenance. Although there
are a number of significant strengths to this review, some noteworthy limitations should be acknowledged as well.

Several limitations of this literature review and the collective research were identified. The vast majority of articles were based on qualitative research (Gertner, 2011); two articles, out of the twenty utilized, included quantitative studies. The disadvantage of qualitative research is that the interpretations, conclusions, and advice, within qualitative studies and literature reviews, are derived from/exposed to researchers’ subjectivity and potential bias (Gertner, 2011). This subjective nature of research information raises the question of accuracy. It is difficult to ascertain whether information provided in the articles can be considered accurate if it is related by one researcher/professional, yet not directly supported by others in the field. This is an important consideration because some concepts within the literature review are supported by only one researcher/professional.

Another possible limitation is the fact that thirteen articles (65%) were written by researchers from institutes outside of the United States. Since place branding is a subjective process, conclusions and recommendations from these articles may not be generalized or applicable to geographic regions within the United States. Looking at the scope of the review, a shortcoming is that the concepts and strategies within the place branding process were not able to be researched and analyzed in depth. This was not possible given the comprehensive nature of the review and the limited range of existing research. A final limitation is that the majority of existing research concerns corporate-level marketing and product branding, with a noticeable absence of research relating specifically to place branding and marketing. The limitations outlined here may all serve as impetuses and inspiration for future research. Two categories for
Future research will now be reviewed—the development of standards of measurement and the concept of integration.

**Future Research**

Future research with regard to place branding is important because there is a lack of noted direction for future development within the literature (Gertner, 2011). The place branding/marketing field as a whole should be developed further; there is a marked need for research on branding specifically in relation to places. Two additional categories of future research have been identified based upon an analysis of the existing research.

The first category concerns standards of measurement. A comprehensive performance measurement for the success of place branding needs to be developed for the discipline (Zenker & Martin, 2011). Bengtsson and Firat (2006) also recommend the development of measuring standards; however, specifically in relation to the concept of brand literacy. This highlights the importance of and need for more quantitative research in the field of place branding.

The second category involves integration among disciplines, stakeholders, and marketing communications. In order to comprehensively understand place branding, Kavaratzis (2009) asserts that the disciplines of marketing, urban studies, policy-making, and cultural and economic geography need to be integrated. Hildreth (2010) notes that there are benefits to be ascertained from encouraging multiple groups of stakeholders’ participation in discussing a place brand image. Finally, Tschirhart (2008) states the importance of integrating all marketing communications within a city, with a focus on the inclusion of website content.
Conclusion

Although place branding initiatives have been carried out by nations, states, cities, regions, and communities around the world in recent decades (Gertner, 2011), the field has yet to be fully developed and comprehended in academia (Hildreth, 2010). The undertaking of a branding initiative is an ongoing, long-term commitment (Ashcroft, 2010; Causon, 2004). The three-part brand development process related in this literature review includes brand strategy, implementation, and maintenance. Several significant categories of information emerged among the articles analyzed for this literature review.

First, market research is imperative throughout all stages of the branding process. Second, it is important to position a brand through its distinction from other competing brands in the market. This can be accomplished by identifying and leveraging a place’s unique qualities through the brand—relating to the unique selling proposition. Additionally, toponymic dependence (place name attachment) is a semantic tool that can be used to provide a distinct representation of a place through its tagline or slogan. A third category is that branding is all about perception. As such, it comes down to the stakeholders and the public being in control of a brand; they interpret its meaning subjectively and they create its success or cause it to fail.

Perception in effect underscores the importance of continually fostering relationships with all of a brand’s stakeholders. This involves communication, trust, and adding value to the brand. A final essential concept is that of identifying, and either reinforcing or constructing brand narratives. Stories serve as valuable connections between people and places. Shaping the stories about a place can help develop strategic awareness and foster favorable perceptions of a place.
brand. Overall, brand development in the public sector can be accomplished and sustained by strategically shaping place image through marketing and communication strategy.
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