

BRANDING A CITY WITH FILM FESTIVALS

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Abstract

The research aims to explore the potential film festivals can offer to create their city brand. Film festivals are special events of shared experience, which combine the production and consumption of culture. They gather various participants such as producers, film studios, media representatives as well as spectators. The festival and the place where it happens become the attraction point for internal and international high-value tourism. It also offers a unique opportunity to a city to build its brand as a place of culture. Thus, to become a nationally and internationally recognizable, a must-visit cultural place, which could attract business and create job opportunities. Furthermore, some cities outperform national economies and become a vital driver of social, economic, technological, and cultural development. Such cities motivate more qualified and culturally conscious people to move to live in them.

Keywords: film festivals; city branding

JEL Codes: D83, M31, M37

Introduction

One of the various challenges and benefits that globalization offers the world has to do with the power-gaining cities worldwide. Namely, it is expected that cities will replace countries in the framework of economics and international trade due to the blurring country borders (Shah, 2004). By 2030 more than half of the global population will live in cities. Given such tendency, cities of both developed and developing countries face the necessity of developing strategies to reach and sustain the leading position in both the national and international arena. This worldwide competition implies various measures being taken by state and regional governors, offering branding a city on a national and international scale (Nordström, 2007).

City branding is crucial. The simple understanding of branding refers to a name, logo, slogan, corporate livery, which identity a company, product or service. Advanced

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brand theory expands this understanding as a sustainable advantage of an organization or corporation in the marketplace. It is tightly related to the shared beliefs about the product or service and motivate a degree of consistent behaviour. Consequently, the (corporate) branding provides an organization with an approach and critical strategies in managing the business, becoming its most valuable asset (Anholt, 2005).

Place branding and destination branding are two similar but yet different terms. In their review of place branding, Kasapi and Cela (2017) address the distinction between these two terms. Destination branding deals with national aspects of touristic promotion. Place branding refers to as a marketing strategy applied to the development of places, such as countries, regions or cities, from the perspectives of economics, politics, social and cultural aspects. Finally, the term city branding is developed based on corporate, place and destination branding. It is defined as economically driven promotion of a city aimed to (re)establish a positive image of a city. Its goal is to differentiate a city as a place to visit, live, and work. At the same time, city branding adopts corporate branding elements, such as the abovementioned name, logo, slogan, symbols, that function as essential branding factors of a specific city (Cai, 2002, cited in Kasapi & Cela, 2017). The importance of city branding leads to the value of special events (cultural, sport, and business) in facilitating building a city brand. Special events such as concerts, festivals, exhibitions, meetings, fairs are widely used to form a confident attitude of consumers towards the corporate brand. Their distinctive features help people to escape from their daily routine and generate celebration and bring the sense of social belonging and interaction. Special events evoke emotions and psychological arousal in their consumers. Such emotional excitement builds a positive connection with event organizers and sponsors (Karpinska-Krakowiak, 2015).

Entertainment and culture provide significant opportunities for city branding. Culture and entertainment elements facilitate city branding in commerce, touristic flows, economic power, and social attractiveness. There are two essential facets of culture that link them to city branding. First, the city image requires special consideration as it shapes the perception of the city's potential. Second, the way city is identified on regional or global scale, significantly influences its brand. The tourism's role in shaping a city's identity also need to be considered because the brand transfers meanings from a corporate to city context. However, it is important to note that is not so much about the degree and amount of tourists, but the image of the given city and the associations about it in the minds of current and prospective tourists (Kavaratzis, 2005).

Cultural festivals and film festivals in particular are the types of events that help shape, maintain, and strengthen a city's brand. In the context of event studies, Cudny (2016)

extends Getz's classical definitions of a festival as a themed public celebration and Falassi's conceptualization (1987, cited in Cudny, 2016) "a periodically recurrent social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees all members of the whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview" (p. 18) to the modern realities. As a result of this, Cudny (2016) claims that festivals nowadays refer not to specific national and social groups but global culture and that festival is also referenced to their impact on economics and the environment.

Film festivals vastly contribute to city branding. Focusing on art festivals and film festivals, in particular, Waterman distinguishes art festivals as contributory to both production and consumption of culture (1998, cited in Cudny, 2016), which involve and contact different actors, such as performers, entrepreneurs, media representatives, visitors and volunteers. At the same time, art festivals contribute to popularizing a given art – either film, music, theatre, literature, architecture or any other type of art. In their turn, film festivals contribute to the art and industry of cinema, becoming essential and must-visit cultural events for the abovementioned men of art, businesspersons, media representatives, spectators, and volunteers specifically involved in the cinema industry (Cudny, 2016). Elsaesser (2005) refers to festivals and film festivals as "the moments of self-celebration of a community" (p. 85). Three conditions define a festival, an occasion, a place and the presence of large numbers of people. Besides that, several characteristic features of film festivals distinguish them from other types of special events and festivals:

- It is common for film festivals to be held during the slow tourist times of the year (Grunwell & Ha, 2008);
- One of the general functions of film films festivals is the gathering of people for reflection and regeneration
- In some way, films festivals can be referred to as rituals and ceremonies. Depending on the involvement of the audience, the reference changes. For instance, a film festival is characterized as a carnival if the audience is active. It can be characterized as a ceremony if the audience is passive.
- There are pre-defined scripts that film festival follow in terms of performances taking place during the event, or every act follows its intuitive sequence.
- A place where a film festival takes places and a film festival itself is self-referencing.

- Films festivals generate distinctive audiences with specific roles, which include self-celebration and performance of authority and sovereignty.

- Some of the constituents of a successful film festivals organization include total experience (including good experience for filmmakers and visitors, hospitality, food services), quality programming and optimal destination for journalists, sponsors, various facilities, marketing and PR (Grunwell & Ha, 2008). For the international film festivals, there are some specific characteristics as well:

- Some of the functions of international film festivals are categorization, classification, sorting out, and selecting annual film productions from all over the world.

- Compared to local, international film festivals are considered more cost-effective in facilitating infrastructure and facilities development and attracting both local and foreign audiences.

- The scale and the nature of competition among festivals are more “vigorous” – first, there is a competition of host cities of different countries to attract a bigger audience to the location; second, there is a competition for the most desirable dates of the event, which is particularly important for annual festivals (Elsaesser, 2005).

Films festivals have both advantages and disadvantages in their organization and management and impact various aspects (such as environment, economy). Therefore, they are considered as contributing to the cultural and economic benefits of the industry. Grunwell and Ha (2008) list film festivals’ positive aspects:

- Well-established and well-organized film festivals significantly contribute to local communities and governments in investing in economic well-being and activity (touristic flows, workplaces).

- Film festivals positively affect the image and identity of a given community, having a widespread and notable impact on society.

- From a long-term perspective, film festivals can be used to build the image of a host city and improve its attractiveness.

- Compared to other street festivals, film festivals negatively impact such factors as traffic, security, and ground maintenance.

- From the perspective of environmental effects, festivals cause less negative environmental impacts than other types of events, one explanation of the built environment (rather than the natural environment) in which the festival is set (Negrusa, Toader, Rus & Cosma, 2016).

- Within the organization of festivals, film festivals hold several advantages as well. For instance, compared to music festivals in time and space management, film events are less concentrated and cause less noise (mainly when held in closed venues), traffic congestion, and crowding.

Besides having positive impacts on environmental, socio-economic, and other aspects, festivals and film festivals, particularly, possess several adverse effects. However, most festivals' effects argue that festivals' positive impacts and benefits outweigh their adverse outcomes and costs (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). Based on the study of Negrusa, Toader, Rus and Cosma (2016), some of the disadvantages of (film) festivals include:

- In terms of socio-cultural impacts, there is a possibility of alienating groups of host populations who do not participate (actively or passively) in the event or do not have a particular interest in cinema.

- Although considered insignificant, there is a probability of causing interruption of city residents' commercial activities and temporal migration.

- In terms of environmental effects, film festivals are considered less harmful than other festivals. Still, there are potential effects, such as tourist attraction destruction and increased pollution and waste generation.

- The inconvenience of traffic within the city, near the event's location, can be caused by blocking off or closing the streets, particularly for the residents and city visitors.

Conclusion

A city brand is not expected to communicate a complete picture but aim to create positive images in the minds of audiences. It frames the location selectively and aesthetically. Branding inadvertently frames and packages the place into a relatively well-defined and commercially attractive product, which focuses on images, attractions and activities that are considered significant and relevant to the brand values (Zlateva, 2020). Therefore, highlighting the glamour and excitement of a film festival, gossips about celebrities and the screening of new exciting movies will not only draw attention to the city, it also suggests that it is an (exciting enough) playground for the famous and rich. The active night life and city attractions are backdrops to the stars. Thus, place branding allows for guiding people's experiences of the location by first shaping their preconceptions. It helps to develop a coherent, consistent and meaningful sense of place, and offers a memorable brand experience and connection with a place.

Films and film festivals contribute to the place brand by generating awareness of the place and showcasing its ability to successfully stage events. They become a fertile ground

for city brand storytelling. A film festival also gives the city a cinematic identity. Sundance is known as the independent film festival. In many countries, a film festival suggests that there is a – fledging or mature – film industry in the city; a celebration of local movies is also a celebration and reminder of the movie industry in the city. Promotion and getting people to pay closer attention to experimental and independent movies affirms the brand story of a city. Successful examples are early adopters as Cannes International Film Festival (Cannes, France), Venice International Film Festival (Venice, Italy), or later adopters as Copenhagen International Film Festival (Copenhagen, Denmark), Rome Film Fest (Rome, Italy). They are exemplars of integrated marketing marketing strategies that have turned a film festival from a simple cultural and entertainment event into a whole image-making and city branding strategy.

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