
HOW DMO REFLECTS COMMUNITY IDENTITY IN FESTIVALS FOR DESTINATION MARKETING

SEO YEON JANG

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management
University of Surrey, UK

YEONG GUG KIM

College of Business Administration
Kangwon National University, ROK

ABSTRACT

Recently, the importance of local community identity in destination branding has been argued, but there is lack of studies about relationship between community identity and destination branding using festivals. This study aims to investigate to what extent festival identity is reflected as a way of destination branding adopting the case study approach. Content analysis using brochures, guidebooks and website, and expert interviews with practitioners from DMO was employed to confirm the findings from content analysis. The findings indicate that community identity is generally reflected as a tool of destination branding, but mere

reflection of community identity in festival does not yield optimal returns. This research identifies the importance of reflecting community identity in festivals as well as how to reflect community identity in festivals plays significant role in achieving the purpose of the festival.

Key Words: Destination Marketing, Festival, Community Identity

INTRODUCTION

Local community plays the most significant role in destination branding, for it is the local community that adds uniqueness to the festival (Dredge & Jenkinson, 2007). According to Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell (2006), festivals must reflect the genuineness and uniqueness of the local community if they are to attract tourists. From this point of views, the development of festival's brand identity should originate from the identity of the local community, because a brand is created by and emerges from the people themselves (Gilmore, 2002).

Since it is the local community that communicates with visitors and adds a unique atmosphere to the festival (Dredge & Jenkinson, 2007), it is important for DMOs (Destination Marketing Organization) to know what the community identity is and how it can be reflected in destination branding and in the festivals themselves to boost the destination's image as a tourist destination (Getz, 2005). By considering these elements, DMOs could gain the support of the local community, which is essential to the sustainability of festivals (Getz, 2005), but also the support of cultural tourists who seek authenticity in their destinations (Real, 2000). By reflecting their true identity in their brand identity, communities can also strengthen their pride, which will positively influence the communities' attitudes toward visitors (Dredge & Jenkinson, 2007; Getz, 2005).

Given the scarcity of research on community identity in festivals held for the purpose of destination branding, the current study uses a case study of the Hi! Seoul Festival in Seoul, South Korea, to provide insight into the importance of community identity in festivals held for destination branding. In addition, by assessing Seoul's strengths and weaknesses in portraying its image in festivals, the

study provides information to other DMOs that are planning or holding festivals as a way of destination branding.

DESTINATION BRANDING

There has been general agreement that concept of brand can be applied not only to products but also services and places. Increasing competition in world tourism market and growing substitutability of destinations influence today's tourists to have more destination choice. As tourists are becoming more sophisticated, and they want holiday experiences different from others as a way of displaying their identity, they want more other than simply traditional 'sand, sun and sea' type of vacation. Thus, the need of differentiation for destinations from other competitors has increased (Peirce & Ritchie, 2007).

Consequently, a brand that can help consumer to simplify the process of decisions, creating emotional appeal and exclusive value and delivering expectations, became considered as invaluable. Today's destinations need to provide the reason to choose the destination among other alternatives, answering to the question why visitors should visit the very destination (Anholt, 2007; Kolb, 2006; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). The uniqueness of destination branding compared to product branding is that destination branding needs to consider social aspects such as impact on the community, and it goes to the heart of questions of identity and social evolution. Destination branding embodies its histories and locations. In addition, destination branding includes the capital usually generated from taxes of its residents and invested futures that promise or highlight certain specific possibilities which the destination branding needs to accomplish (Donald & Gammack, 2007).

Brand is considered to consist of two components which are brand identity and brand image. While brand image represents the actual image perceived by consumers and help them to choose a destination reflecting their identity (Anholt, 2007), brand identity in destination branding is more internal focused component, representing self-image and value, and desired market image of producer such as

DMOs and stakeholders of a destination, and this affects brand image through brand positioning (Cai, 2002; Pike, 2008) (see Fig. 1).

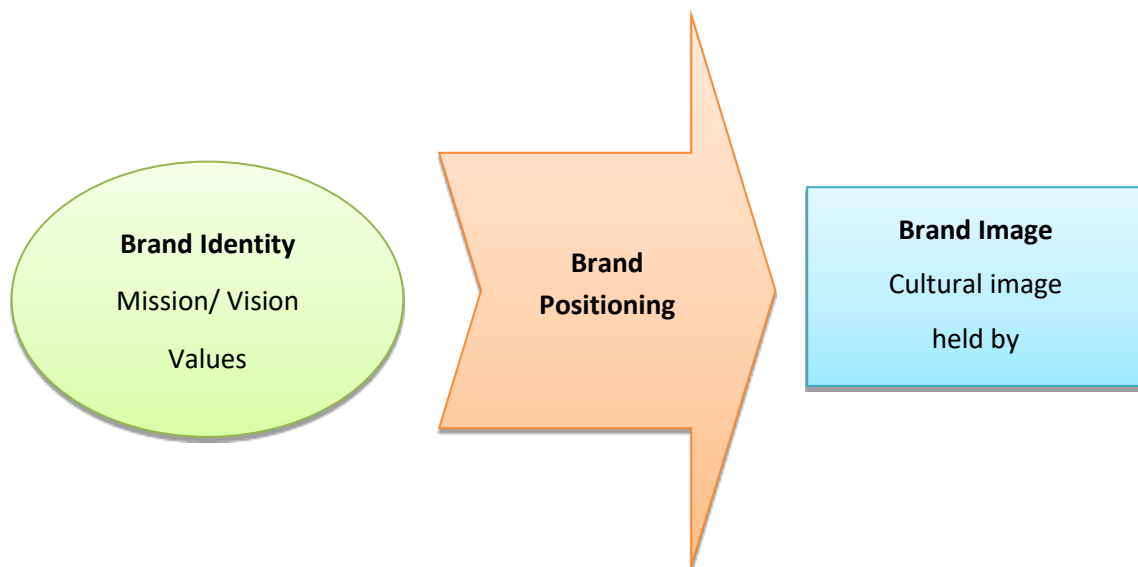


Figure 1: Branding identity, branding positioning, and brand image

Source: Pike, 2008:179

Inter-connectedness of destination image and destination brand identity in the minds of tourists and mechanics of marketing has been stressed in recent studies (Henderson, 2006). Though studies of brand image which focus on customers' point of view have been conducted increasingly, there is sparse published research regarding destination brand identity (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Pike, 2008). Besides, it is recently argued that the key point in destination branding is that brand identity has to be rooted in community and their value of the destination, for in many places a brand is created by or emerges from the people in the destination (Donald & Gammack 2007; Gilmore, 2002; Pike, 2008). This would imply that more attention to be placed on the concepts of identity and community.

FESTIVAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY IN DESTINATION BRANDING

Successful festivals make a contribution to travelers' favorable perception of a destination and recognition of a place as a potential tourist destination on the tourism map and help a place to gain a lively and cheery image (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). With their implications of joyfulness, sociability, and cheerfulness, festivals provide a ready-made set of positive images (Quinn, 2005). Therefore, festivals are often used to give people a sense the cultural atmosphere of a local destination and to deliver the impression of variety, activity, and sophistication (Getz, 1991). Destination managers use festivals because of the image associated with festivals, which could be transferred to the image of the host community and destination (Getz, 2005). Therefore, major festivals and events have become a standard destination-branding strategy (Getz, 2005; Richards and Wilson, 2006). However, perhaps because festivals are considered 'quick fix' solutions (Quinn, 2005, p.927) for shaping destinations' images, they run the risk of duplicating other festivals (Richards & Wilson, 2004; Richards & Wilson, 2006) and lacking any real connection with the destination, especially with the local residents (Quinn, 2005).

Festivals enhance local continuity by creating opportunities to share histories of community, cultural customs, and ideas, and by building settings for social interactions (Quinn, 2005). Previous studies (Getz, 1997; Quinn, 2005) indicated that festival increases community pride and spirit as well as enables the residents to create new vision of the place they live, and strengthens the community's tradition and values. Local residents play an important role in terms of human resources in festivals, as community involvement and its management are key factors in festivals and their planning processes. Community involvement encourages variation and local flavor in the nature of the tourist destination and reflects the attitude and identity of local residents (Steynberg & Saayman, 2004). From this respect, Donald & Gammack (2007) emphasized that every local resident is an ambassador, and if they do not believe in what the destination tries to represent as a brand, that disbelief will be reflected in the destination's image. If festivals are to be effective for branding tourist destinations, they must reflect genuineness and express the uniqueness of local residents (Bowdin et al., 2006), including their sense of community, identity, and place (Derrett, 2003). It is often

the case that the local people's attitude toward tourism, their intangible qualities (e.g., their culture), recreational attractions like local festivals, and the atmosphere of the destination are what attract tourists (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Donald & Gammack, 2007). Therefore, festivals provide the opportunity to help in creating, changing, or reinforcing the destination brand by reflecting those community identities (Bowdin et al., 2006).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: HI! SEOUL FESTIVAL

Seoul was chosen as a subject of the case study. Seoul is employing the Hi! Seoul Festival as a way of destination branding to create an image of Seoul as a tourist destination (Hi Seoul Festival, 2012). The capital city of South Korea, Seoul is one of the fastest-growing tourist destinations in East Asia. While the Korea National Tourism Board is in charge of the national tourism industry and marketing, Seoul City Council is in charge of tourism in Seoul. According to the annual report of the Korea National Tourism Board (KNTB, 2013), the number of foreign tourists who visited South Korea in 2012 was 11.1 million, an increase of 13.7 per cent over 2011. Seoul City Council has been holding the Hi! Seoul Festival since 2003, with the purpose of boosting the image of Seoul as a festival city (Hi Seoul Festival, 2012).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was conducted using a qualitative approach, as its purpose is to examine how community identity is reflected in the brand identity that DMO portrays through a festival as a way of destination branding. A qualitative approach was used to explore brand identity, which represents the value and essence of the destination community, and the image drawn by destination marketers. Brochures and tourist guidebooks published by Seoul City Council and the electronic brochure that is the official website of the Hi! Seoul Festival (Hi Seoul Festival, 2012) were used for content analysis (Pike, 2008). The findings of the content analysis were confirmed by three semi-structured interviews: one with a practitioner from the festival division and two with practitioners from the division of city marketing of Seoul City Council.

COHESIVENESS AS A SPIRIT OF CITIZENS OF SEOUL

The first image Seoul City Council tries to portray seems cohesiveness of the citizens of Seoul. In explaining the history of the festival, the organization states, "The huge red wave that engulfed the downtown Seoul area during the 2002 FIFA World Cup Games showed the possibility of a festival that would attract citizen's participation." By putting emphasis on the "red wave" as the origin of the festival to depict unified citizens and their spirit, the website portrays an image of the unifying power and cohesiveness of Seoul's citizens. Seoul City Council explains that, because of the memory of this "red wave," representing cohesiveness, Seoul decided to hold the first Hi! Seoul Festival in May 2003 in place of the Seoul Citizens' Day event. The Seoul Citizens' Day event had been hold in October, but to remember the spirits of the citizens shown during the 2002 FIFA World Cup, Seoul City Council transformed that event into a new festival (Hi Seoul Festival, 2012) and moved it to May. Pictures of the "red wave" taken during the World Cup are found in every guidebook published by Seoul City Council introducing the Hi! Seoul Festival, so this image, representing the unity of the citizens, is a significant image in the festival.

CULTURALLY INTERNATIONAL AND DIVERSE

Another image that Seoul City tries to portray in reflecting the identity of citizens is "international." In the festivals held in 2010, 2011, and 2012, more than half of the performances in the festivals were by international artists (e.g., artists from France, Mongolia, China, Indonesia, Spain, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic). As the festival defines itself as an 'international festival', the content of the festival includes diverse genres of music, from western music like jazz to Korean traditional classic music, rather than focusing on a specific genre, such as jazz (Montreal, New Orleans), rock (Woodstock), techno (Detroit, Istanbul), or classical (Wien) music. It also includes all forms of dance, from break dancing to ballet and traditional dance, fashion, theatre, street performances, exhibitions and paintings, with no focus on any one place of origin or genre.

This content of the festival reflects the image of Seoul in terms of culture. In the brochure and guidebooks for tourists, Seoul is described as a place where “you can have it all”—whatever you hope for, whatever you want. The variety of content in the festival also reflects the diverse cultures of the citizens of Seoul, which is too diverse to focus on or collect as one.

One interviewee from the festival division of Seoul City council explained that it is difficult to collect the tastes of Seoul’s citizens as one.

“The taste of the citizens is intricate, so Seoul City Council has changed the content and the themes of the festival every year in an effort to please the citizens of Seoul.”

Clearly, Seoul City Council tries to reflect the cultural characteristic of the citizens in the festival by considering the cultural flavors of the community in the festival’s content. Derrett (2003) stated that characteristics of a community are among the elements in constructing community identity. Therefore, by reflecting the characteristics of citizens of Seoul in composing the festival’s content, Seoul City Council tries to reflect community identity in the festival.

OPEN-MINDNESS AND FRIENDLINESS

The next image Seoul City tries to portray reflecting community identity in Hi! Seoul Festival is open-mindness and friendliness. The symbolic building of the Hi! Seoul festival in 2008 and 2009, “May Palace” which was built on Seoul Square during the festival symbolizes open-mindness and broad horizon of the festival in its design. According to Seoul City Council, traditional palaces are in the form of building, where contains space confined by walls and doors, but May palace does not have doors or walls, but a splendid roof and pillars created by light, meaning that it is wide open to all visitors and citizens providing them with space to be together and dance together (www.hiseoulfest.org). This symbolic building represents the attitude of citizens of Seoul towards visitors as well. In the guide book introducing Hi! Seoul Festival, Seoul City Council also clarifies that citizens’ gracious welcoming attitude towards visitors shown in 2002 FIFA World Cup is reproduced in Hi! Seoul Festival. Also, most of the programs and events are held

in open-air places, including major parks and squares of Seoul (e.g. Hangang (River) public park, Seoul square, Cheonggyecheon square).

Moreover, the brand name “Hi! Seoul” itself and the symbol of Seoul “Haechi” represent friendliness as the interviewee from the city marketing division of Seoul City Council remarked.

“Hi! Seoul” expresses friendliness. ‘Hi’ is an informal greeting used worldwide, so this brand is intended as a friendly approach to people, as well as to imply the will to expand the city to the world, since ‘hi’ is homophone of ‘high’.”

“It is not just enough to have infrastructure and tourist attractions; the hospitality of citizens is what gives visitors a good impression so they want to come again. Besides, ‘Haechi,’ the new symbolic icon of Seoul, is designed to express friendliness.”

This image of hospitality and friendliness with open-mindedness is one of the themes that can be interpreted from the brand of City of Seoul reflected in Hi! Seoul Festival.

CONCLUSION

The current study was undertaken in the context of rise of employing festivals as a way of destination branding and how well it reflects community identity for the genuineness and sustainability of festival, since many festivals merely created for destination branding has not been yielding optimal returns recently as expected (Quinn, 2005). Overall, how Seoul City Council tries to portray community identity in destination branding through festival is identified. It could be said that Seoul City Council reflects the community identity considerably well in brand identity, in the themes “cohesiveness” “culturally international and diverse” and “open-mindedness,” as recent study argues that the brand identity should reflect the community identity. Hi! Seoul Festival has shortcoming that it is not originated from the community but strategically created by Seoul City Council for the purpose of boosting image of Seoul as a tourist destination, but Seoul City Council seems to try to find justification of the festival by putting its origin in a significant event of citizen of Seoul and boosting image of “cohesiveness” at the same time.

When reflecting community identity in festivals as a destination branding, the most important thing seem to consider how to reflect the community identity in festivals. Even though it is hard to collect tastes of citizens as one, careful consideration needs to be given about including too many aspects in the festival, since it could give impression of festival as just a 'collection of everything' which does not really help to give uniqueness to the festival. This could prevent people from perceiving the contents in detail which is important to induce them to participate in, even though it was an attempt for the community. Regarding contents, it would be necessary for organization to distinguish between what the community generally likes and what the community wants to do "in festival." Although some parts of festival are composed of voluntary staffs and performers of the community, it is general people of the place who spice the unique atmosphere of the festival which is significant factor in creating image of the destination. They are not guests of the festival, but host to visitors. Therefore, it would be necessary to have more programs that require active participation of general citizens, rather than make them spectators.

There is a limitation that should be considered. The limitation comes from the nature of case study. This study is mere basis for other case studies and research, and findings of this research is confined to the festival in Seoul, thus it needs more case studies of other festivals in other regions to lead deeper understanding of identities and destination branding using festivals.

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