

Comparative Study of Global Experiences Related to Urban Branding Process and Presenting a Solution for Mashhad Metropolis

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Abstract. Urban branding is a relatively new field which is required for cities and countries to survive in today's competitive world and retain their sustainability of competitive advantage. In the meantime, it is inevitable to use the experiences of successful cities in this field and understand their followed process. In this research which is a comparative study with equivalent conditions, branding process is investigated in three successful cities of Barcelona (Spain), Edinburgh (Scotland), and Chicago (United States of America) and their success factors are classified based on three key factors including strategic orientation, destination identity and image, and stakeholder involvement; these factors also include the comparative parameters of this study. Afterwards, using the results obtained through these globally successful experiences, some solutions are presented for the entry of Mashhad metropolis into branding process considering the three key success factors.

Keywords: Global Experiences, Key Success Factors, Mashhad Metropolis, Urban Branding Process

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization occurs in cities, especially in the large ones. Global changes in terms of economy, culture, and policy have numerous effects on restructuring cities around the world (Rennie Short and Hyun Kim 2003: 13). Also, in today's world, the term "competitive advantage" has received great attention. Competitive advantage could be regarded as the increased attraction of the recommendations of companies from the viewpoint of customers in comparison to their opponents (Mehri and Khodadad Hosseini, 2005: 192). Therefore, the best method for competitive success in global marketing is achieved via planning, improving, and promoting competitive capabilities (Cortada, 1998). Branding is one of the marketing tools and place branding is a relatively new term which includes the branding of cities, regions, nations, etc. (Mashhad Municipality, 2012: 2).

The difficult strategy of urban branding refers to creating an identity for the city that has been developed from a variety of conceptual variables such as history, anthropology, economy, politics, and policies. A city often has specific identifiable beliefs or intrinsic values which are perceived from its residents. For example, Milan is known for its architecture, New York for its diversity dynamism, and Tokyo for its modernity. Urban branding is a strategy that grants an unforgettable identity to a city and is a tool that is able to quickly transfer the core value of city (Monavarian et al., 2013: 42).

The important issue in today's cities is their attention to branding process considering the issue of globalization. Modern cities can ensure survival and stability among their competitors through complete recognition of their own assets and wealth.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Globalization is a continuous flow from the historical path of internationalization that entails increased dependence of countries on each other in the economic, political, cultural, and

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particularly environmental dimensions (Zahedi, 2011: 2). Therefore, globalization may be considered a process in which fate of humans depends on each other in different aspects and communication barriers and geographical boundaries are removed. In other words, it leads to a smaller world and, in some sense, larger humanity, and eventually society and unified global system (Keshavarz, 2013: 197).

Some experts believe that theories of competitive advantage have been primarily presented at business level, but can be generalized to the levels of industry, country, and city (Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). Also, competitive advantage cannot be acquired randomly; but, organizations should move to this end based on thinking and planning (Taleghani and Foroughifar, 2008: 5).

The term "place branding" is sometimes synonymous with marketing which refers to a competition for attracting tourists, visitors, investors, citizens, and internal sources of cities (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). In other words, urban branding presents an image and package about a place and emphasizes the unique features of the city so that it could surpass other competitors in competition. Urban branding process is continuous (Dinnie, 2011).

In this study, urban branding process is investigated based on key success factors of strategic orientation (Cai et al., 2009), destination identity and image (Kavaratzis, 2009), and stakeholder involvement (Rainisto, 2003) in Barcelona (Spain), Edinburgh (Scotland), and Chicago (United States of America). Then, this problem is investigated in Mashhad metropolis.

3. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Kavaratzis (2008), in his doctoral dissertation entitled "From Urban Marketing to Urban Branding", investigated the marketing theories of cities and their brands. This dissertation contained a complete structure of theoretical development of city, identification of its roots, and description of changes in cities with an emphasis on urban branding. This research was done in three European cities of Amsterdam, Budapest, and Athens.

Jansson and Power (2006) conducted a study entitled "The Image of the City (Urban Branding as Constructed Capabilities in Nordic City Regions)" through the selected samples and analyzed different methods and branding processes. This research was performed in European cities whose images were changed. Based on their studies on case samples and the obtained data, the researchers sought to formulate success criteria of urban branding.

In an article entitled "The Process Model of Urban Branding in Iranian Metropolises" Monavarian et al. (2013) designed a model for this purpose. The results showed defining the position of urban management in the country's planning system, planning land use to determine the division of urban tasks, changing attitudes toward brands, reducing bribery, and increasing the competitive environment as well as scientific, research, and executive capacity of cities as the causal factors of branding. Also, the financial and social sources of city, appropriate political and institutional environment, and also facilitator government were a part of interventional conditions, the support/lack of support of which had a determining role in the success/failure of urban branding. In this research, in addition to investigating the causal and intervening conditions, urban branding process of Iranian metropolises and their features during the research are extracted and presented. Also, the consequences of branding for Iranian metropolises are investigated.

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SCOPE

This work is a comparative research that studies branding process based on key success factors in the cities of Barcelona, Edinburgh, and Chicago. Then, these factors are investigated in

Mashhad and, finally, a strategy is presented for their promotion in city of Mashhad. It is tried in this study to have equivalent conditions in comparative approaches.

Nowadays, a comparative study is considered the inseparable component of research in urban sciences and its related fields and the existence of a powerful analytical structure requires this kind of approach. The mentioned approach allows for the removal of unrelated factors from the substrate of the research subject using comparable variables and criteria (Bonakdar et al. 2012: 149-150).

Comparative study refers to a kind of research which uses its special tools and methods and presents the concepts and scales derived from a broader perspective in order to increase the capability for describing and understanding working and scientific processes. Similarly, comparative study and analysis of different sciences can be practically used (Nejatbaksh Isfahani and Bagheri 2009: 220). In a comparative study, the independent variable or cause is not manipulated, because it has already happened. In fact, in a comparative research, groups are compared with each other based on a dependent variable (Khaki, 1999: 230).

Universal study is one of the most common comparative studies, which mostly seeks similarities. It starts with shallow studies and gradually becomes deeper. In this kind of study, results are more important than the process for achieving them. Thus, unusual evidence and observations are removed from the research scope. In contrast, investigating the detection of contradiction, contrary to the universal comparative study, does not remove the governing trend and process in terms of obtaining the results. Parameters of comparative study fall into four categories by Mills et al. (2006). The most important ones could be mentioned as selection of the case study and analysis scale, planning to create equivalent conditions, and variable- or case-orientation (Bonakdar et al.: 2012: 150).

5. THEORETICAL BASIS:

5.5. Globalization and competitive advantage:

The term "globalization" was for the first time used in 1961 in an American glossary (Art Schulte, 2003: 45). Waters M. analyzes the concept of globalization from the application perspective. He believes that globalization is a social process, in which geographical constraints that dominate socio-cultural relations, are removed and people are increasingly aware of the reduction of these restrictions (Akhtar Mohaqeqi, 2007: 39).

Competitive advantage consists of a set of factors or capabilities that always enables the company to show better performance than its competitors (Sadri & Lees, 2001). In other words, competitive advantage is a factor or combination of factors that makes the organization much more successful than others in a competitive environment and competitors cannot easily imitate it (Barney, 1991).

5.6. Urban brand:

In the classic definition, brand refers to determining the identity of a product and distinction from other competitors through using title, logo, design, and other visual symbols and signs. American Marketing Association has recognized brand as a title, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these cases that aim to identify the product or services of a seller or a group of sellers and differentiate them from other products and competitors (Khodad Hosseini and Rezvani 2012, 28).

Brand is a rich source of emotional, cognitive, and efficacy communications, which leads to memorable experiences from a place, a city, or a commercial name and sign. By creating a

brand for a city, its position is enhanced as a place for residence, business, or tourism destination (Braun & Zenker, 2010). The purpose of urban branding is specifically to change people's perceptions about the city (Dinnie, 2011).

5.7. Branding process and determining parameters of comparative study:

Brand formulation is a creative process; so, it needs great expertise. Branding is the process of creating a motto from a message and then designing a symbol or pattern to deliver the image of city with its characteristics of interests and values to the potential visitors (Kolb, 2011: 283). Various factors are involved in designing and creating an effective and sustainable brand in different cities based on the identified competitive advantage. Baker M.J. and Cameron E. (2008) were able to identify a number of success and sensitive factors, all of which were associated with the development of a part of successful brand strategy (Sonnleitner, 2011). These factors include three dimensions of strategic orientation (Jansson & Power, 2006: 16; Helmy, 2008: 42; Kavaratzis, 2008: 36), destination identity and image (Hanna & Rowley, 2008: 65; Minghui, 2009: 317; Marti' nez et al., 2007: 342), and stakeholder involvement (Gaggiotti et al., 2008: 120; Karavazaki, 2013: 20; Pfefferkorn, 2005: 138). In this study, these three dimensions are assumed as comparative parameters.

Strategic orientation is the first dimension in the design and definition of brand, which is based on market research, analysis, and strategic recommendations. The second dimension is destination identity and image that includes the beliefs, ideas, and feelings of people about a place, which should be valid, acceptable, and attractive. In terms of stakeholder involvement, satisfying the purposes and needs of various stakeholders is one of the most fundamental obligations in the design of a successful brand (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

6. GLOBAL EXPERIENCES OF BRANDING PROCESS CONSIDERING THE KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

In this section, branding process in three cities of Barcelona (Spain), Edinburgh (Scotland), and Chicago (United States of America) is briefly studied. The way of looking at the experience of urban branding in these three cities is based on the key success factors (strategic orientation, identity and image, and stakeholder involvement).

6.1 Barcelona:

Barcelona is the capital and most populated city of the autonomous community of Catalonia, Spain's second most populated city after Madrid, and the most important port of this country. Barcelona is a global city in terms of finance, commerce, media, entertainment, art, international business, education, and tourism. It is the twelfth city in the world and the fourth one in Europe in terms of the number of visitors per year. Also, this city has about 5 million tourists annually (Bremner, 2008). According to the conducted research, this city is the seventh livable city and, in terms of innovation, the thirteenth city in the world. On this basis, Barcelona is one of the cities with the highest level of knowledge and the best reputation throughout the world. Along with Berlin and Amsterdam, it is the third city in Europe in terms of urban branding, after Paris and London and before Athens, Madrid, and Rome (Belloso (a), 2011).

Nowadays, Barcelona's brand (Figure 1) is one of the most famous urban brands with great reputation at the international level. Barcelona is still known as one of the European cities with the best quality of life and one of the most appropriate cities for international meetings and commerce as well as foreign investment. Every year, the number of tourists, students, and professors who want to come to this city for visit, study, and work is increased. The percentage of immigrants who are attracted to Barcelona owing to its high quality of life and open opportunities is continually rising and the city constantly welcomes visitors from other countries

and cities, who are looking for the better understanding of "Barcelona model" (Belloso (a), 2011). Belloso (2011) mentioned 6 factors as key success factors of Barcelona in urban branding process: 1) Barcelona's brand based on profound global changes in the city, 2) Vision and leadership of municipal authorities, 3) Involvement and participation of civil society, 4) Key role of 1992 Olympic Games, 5) Unique and distinctive identity of the city, and 6) Creativity, innovation, and venture (Belloso (b), 2011).



Figure 1. Barcelona's brand (Reference: Euro Cities 2012, 24).

Based on what has been said about the branding process of Barcelona, the three key success factors mentioned in this study in the identified critical factors in the urban Barcelona's brand is stated in Table 1.

Table 1. Critical factors of Barcelona's brand based on key success factors

Key success factors	Critical factors in Barcelona's brand
Strategic orientation	Barcelona's brand grounded in profound transformation of the city; key role of 1992 Olympic Games; creativity, innovation, and venture
Destination identity and image	Barcelona's brand grounded in profound transformation of the city; Key role of 1992 Olympic Games; unique and distinctive identity of the city; creativity, innovation, and venture
Stakeholder involvement	Key role of 1992 Olympic Games; attitude and leadership of municipality authorities; involvement and participation of civil society

6.2 Edinburgh:

Edinburgh is the second largest city and capital of Scotland with the population of 448624 people and area of 262 km². This city is regarded as a gateway to the country for foreign tourists. Edinburgh is the second city in Great Britain for attracting tourists after London and the first city in the world for festivals. In addition, its historical city center has been registered on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Site. This city is the first UNESCO World City of Literature and constantly considered the most popular city of England in the surveys for spending leisure time (Wardrop, 2011).

However, the city is not satisfied with its position in the competitive global market and has accepted that, with a focus on capital attraction and local talent and use of the brand "Edinburgh: Inspiring Capital" (Figure 2) and multi-dimensional advertising messages in tourism, investment, life, work, and education, it can invest in the widespread awareness of its brand and the fund caused by tourism brand of the city (Wardrop 2011).



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Figure 2. Edinburgh's brand (Reference: www.edinburghbrand.com)

The initial objectives of Edinburgh's branding project have been to create a brand or a family of brands that present a comprehensive commercial image of this urban area. This brand could improve the reputation of Edinburgh as a dynamic urban area at international level and intend to promote its efficiency as a place for life, work, tourism, or business and improve economic as well as social prosperity of the urban area. In sum, this brand could present a clear common vision for the urban area and guarantee a more common and effective approach for improving the urban area, which could promise a better application of resources (Wardrop, 2011).

It should be noted that the destination promoting strategy of Edinburgh includes some tactical messages that should be transferred by the city to its audience in order to ensure change of thoughts toward presenting a more contemporary identity of itself and lack of interruption in its reputation management. Eventually, the tactical messages of Edinburgh's brand that are originated from a set of measures for achieving a sustainable brand in 4 dimensions of tourism, investment, life and work, and education (Wardrop, 2011) could be stated as Table 2 as key success factors of the study.

Table 2. Important branding factors of Edinburgh based for key success factors

Key success factors	Important branding factors of Edinburgh
Strategic orientation	World's biggest scene for the largest international festivals; city of boutiques; never having the same experience in two visits; real and valid place and people; one of the financial centers of the world
Destination identity and image	Capital of innovation; creative and competitive; dynamic job in one of the most appropriate cities in the world; an active city with the first-ranking heritage, culture, and sport in the world; dense and macro; Full of green spaces with easy access to nature; a place to grow and take care of family; first-ranking academic nature in the world; business opportunities after graduation; dense and accessible; cultural diversity
Stakeholder involvement	Good relationship with the world's most successful companies; skillful and talented labor; lively and friendly student life

6.3 Chicago:

Chicago is the largest city of Illinois State. In 2010 Census, it had the population of 2700000 people. This city is the third most populated city in the United States and most populated city in the mid-west of the United States. Officially recognized as a city since 1837, Chicago is one of the major commercial, financial, transportation, and cultural centers in the United States and has a great influence on education, entertainment, and politics (Kellogg, 2012).

Results of the initial investigations about the marketing challenges of Chicago have indicated the following cases: 1) There are neutral to negative interpretations about Chicago; 2) Image of Chicago does not correspond to reality; 2) Story of Chicago has not been expressed properly; and 4) There is a need for a strategy to develop Chicago's urban brand in order to make an interesting story to attract and retain the best audience and business (Kellogg, 2012: 3). For this purpose, some studies have been conducted about Chicago's brand. The first two studies were conducted between 2001 and 2002. The first one known as "Leo Burnett and Conifer Research" was conducted to perform local, national, and international research for assessing the current understanding of Chicago among business managers and creating declaration of Chicago's brand which can make it distinctive in competition with other regions. The other known as "Fleishman-Hillard Research" was intended to create a brand with key messages and mottos. Yet, another study was conducted by Kellogg School of Management and PROPHET in 2003-2004. They followed their objective in two steps: the first one was the promotion of a research group to a group composed of business senior managers and strong media and the second was

the stabilization of brand position (www.worldbusinesschicago.com). After assessing the current situation, Kellogg School of Management and PROPHET team illustrated the brand-development path of Chicago by considering two phases of image and development strategy evaluation (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Brand-development path of Chicago (Reference: Kellogg 2012, 13).

After the conducted investigations and also developing the declaration for Chicago development strategy, the strategic requirements for achieving the unique brand which can obtain the ideal brand identity were determined. These strategic requirements were presented in 5 main groups: 1) Conversion into unique Chicago, 2) Helping visitors for complete understanding of Chicago, 3) Presenting consistent messages, 4) Proper use of opportunities for communication, and 5) Great ideas (Kellogg, 2012) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Strategic requirements to achieve the ideal brand identity of Chicago (Reference: Kellogg, 2012: 21).

According to what has been said, the five strategic requirements for achieving the ideal brand identity of Chicago could be shown in the key success factors in Table 3.

Table 3. Strategic requirements of Chicago's branding based on the key success factors.

Key success factors	Critical factors in branding of Chicago
Strategic orientation	Conversion into unique Chicago; great ideas
Destination identity	Helping visitors for complete understanding of Chicago; presenting consistent

and image	messages; great ideas
Stakeholder involvement	Proper use of opportunities for communication; great ideas

6.4 Mashhad metropolis:

Mashhad, one of the old cities in Khorasan Razavi Province, fortunately, has been less damaged by historical and natural disasters and, thanks to the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), it has been not only protected from territorial and celestial disasters, but also in spite of not having an ancient background (compared to ancient and historical cities) recognized as one of the most well-known and attractive religious, economic, and tourism cities in Iran and world within a relatively short time and is known as the second religious city (Seyedi Farkhod, 2013). Mashhad with the population of 2766258 people and area of 29580 ha (including range and border) is the second metropolis in Iran. As the center of Mashhad region and capital of Khorasan Razavi Province, this city has 78% population of the region and 35% population of the province (Afzali et al., 2013; Farnahad (a), 2009).

As formulated in Development and Construction Project (master plan) of this city, 1405 Mashhad Vision is as follows: "Holy city of Mashhad is a metropolis with unique religious-pilgrimage and cultural identity at national and global levels and the pioneer in the sustainable urban development at national level with a global approach and reliance on knowledge-based economy, advanced industries, and superior services, particularly pilgrimage services as well as cultural and nature tourism; it also has active, lively, secure, and memorable urban spaces with identity for all citizens, pilgrims, tourists, and passengers (Farnahad (b), 2009: 180-181)". Macro objectives of Development and Construction Project (master plan) in Mashhad metropolis are also derived from its vision and include 5 general objectives: 1) Promoting the unique religious-pilgrimage, historical, and cultural identity of Mashhad in national and global scale; 2) Achieving sustainable economic growth with a global approach and active participation in the development of national economy (economic stability); 3) Reducing inequalities, expanding public welfare, and equitably supplying civil rights (social stability); 4) Promoting quality of urban environment and improving access of residents and pilgrims of the city (sustainability of life quality); and 5) Sustainably protecting natural and surrounding environments (environmental sustainability) (Farnahad (b), 2009: 184-186).

To achieve 1405 Mashhad Vision, this metropolis has been divided into 7 planning zones (Figure 5); according to their characteristics, features, and capabilities, each zone welcomes a mission for achieving the objectives of master plan of Mashhad. On this basis, the main duties of the central zone: initiation and pilgrimage (Farnahad (c), 2011), mid-eastern zone: services and entry to pilgrimage zone (Farnahad (d), 2011), mid-western zone: residence and complementary pilgrimage services (Farnahad (e), 2011), north-eastern zone: increasing tolerance and improving life quality and urban infrastructures (Farnahad (f), 2011), north-western zone: new development and superior metropolitan services (centers of supreme activity) (Farnahad (g), 2011), south-eastern zone: residence development and metropolitan-leisure services and natural tourism (Farnahad (h), 2011), and south-western zone: residence quality and sustainable utilization of natural values (Farnahad (i), 2011) are determined.



Figure 5. Planning areas of Mashhad metropolis.

Spatial differences and inequalities in terms of content (social, economic, etc.) and form (physical development) in urban zones are among the most serious challenges in Mashhad metropolis. In fact, dense concentration of population, residence, and activity in different social, political, and economic fields in some parts of the city has occupied all the resources and facilities for their own development and challenged the issue of social justice. Therefore, the most important issues and problems associated with three factors of strategic orientation, identity and image, and stakeholder involvement that Mashhad metropolis will face and 1405 Mashhad metropolis tries to resolve are as follows:

- Lack of appropriate facilities to attract maximum national and trans-national capitals
- Excessive expansion of the city's physical development
- Existence of social, economic, and cultural inequalities in the city
- Lack of coordination between physical planning of land use and transportation network
- Imbalance of life quality in different neighborhoods
- Inappropriateness of adaptation in socio-economic, physical-spatial, and cultural structures of Mashhad metropolis with its unique religious-pilgrimage characteristics and identity
- Lack of a unified, efficient, and coordinated urban management system based on participation

The significant issue about Mashhad metropolis is that, due to the mentioned problems, this city has not been able to enter the urban branding process, like the three studied cities of Barcelona, Edinburgh, and Chicago.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As far as branding is concerned, successful cities of the world including Barcelona, Edinburgh, and Chicago which were mentioned in the previous section, have tried to introduce themselves in the competitive market of cities and gain sustainability in the blue ocean via, first, accurately recognizing their assets and resources to be applied for promoting their city's brand.

In recent years, metropolises in Iran have faced major issues and challenges such as excessive growth of population and migration, inharmonious physical development, increased socio-economic inequalities, inefficiency of urban management, and lack of natural resources. In case

the current procedures are continued and no unified will exists for the strategic resolution of these problems, the position and role of metropolises will be undermined; since these cities play a pioneering role in sustainable and national development processes, such negligence may have negative effects on the sustainable development of other cities in Iran and also cause the underdevelopment of the country compared with other countries in the region and world. Therefore, one of the essential steps in this regard is entry into branding process.

Like other metropolises of Iran, Mashhad metropolis has faced a set of social, economic, physical, and environmental problems. Meanwhile, due to its geopolitical position, important pilgrimage and tourism functions, special geographical position, and different economic structure, this metropolis has its own problems and difficulties. To enter this issue, first, Mashhad metropolis requires a complete understanding of its strengths and opportunities, after which it could design and develop an effective and sustainable brand based on appropriate planning and management. Below, some strategies are recommended in three dimensions of strategic orientation, identity and image, and stakeholder involvement in order to achieve brand of Mashhad metropolis.

Strategies of this study for improving strategic orientation dimension are as follows: promoting position and role of Mashhad metropolis as an important cultural-historical, religious-pilgrimage identifying and unifying center in the Muslim world, Central Asia, and neighboring countries; urban management policy-making within the vision objectives and general model of development and construction of Mashhad metropolis and its urban area; and promoting and stabilizing the regional, national, and international role and function of Mashhad in the national development process.

The recommended strategies of identity and image dimension for Mashhad metropolis are as follows: promoting a physical-spatial structure which is balanced, moderate, and proportionate to the religious-cultural identity of Mashhad; establishing appropriate facilities to attract more national and trans-national capitals; promoting human development criteria; providing and developing safe and appropriate urban infrastructures, particularly advanced and efficient transportation network, with an emphasis on public transpiration; creating a safe social environment; active protection and sustainable utilization of the city's natural environment; and promoting health and safety levels of citizens and pilgrims.

The recommended strategies for stakeholder involvement dimension in terms of creating urban brand in this study are as follows: purposeful and continuous cooperation of Astan Quds Razavi Organization and urban management toward realizing the vision objectives of development and construction of Mashhad metropolis; management of conflicts between the organizations involved in urban management; and reducing administrative bureaucracies.

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