

DETERMINANTS OF CITY BRAND PERSONALITY. A ROMANIAN EXAMPLE

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Abstract. *The purpose of this research is to investigate the construct of city brand personality for a city in Romania. The objectives of the study are: (1) To identify the items that describe aspects of the personality of a city brand in Romania; (2) To identify the dimensions of the construct of city brand personality for a Romanian large city, except for the capital of the country. The research methodology combined qualitative and quantitative research. Four focus groups were conducted in the first qualitative research, followed by a selection made by the specialists. This research is original as there is no research to investigate the construct of city brand personality of a Romanian city, particularly of the city of Iași. The article delivers scales to measure the dimensions of city brand personality for the city of Iași: Peacefulness/Sincerity, Malignancy, and Competence. The results of this research are useful for travel agencies, in order to promote the city of Iași for offers such as city breaks, according to how it is already perceived. Also, these results are useful for the local administration managers. The research provides a clear image of the personality of this city. Local administration managers may decide either to keep the image or promote it as it is or to define a strategy to modify aspects of the perceived personality of the city. One important limitation is that the research investigated only students, as both tourist and partly inhabitants. We considered they are more familiar with the investigated city and their opinion is more reliable. Yet, this research would probably bring slightly different results if only tourists' perceptions would be investigated.*

Keywords: *city personality; factor analysis; sincerity; competence; city brand; Iasi.*

Introduction

The field of place branding is enriched with more and more studies every year, both in academic and business research (Anholt, 2010; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011; Zenker, 2011; Braun et al., 2013; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Although there is not a single accepted definition for this concept, place branding was explained by “the application of product branding to places” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006, p.185) and more specific as “a network of associations in the consumers’ mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place” (Zenker & Braun, 2010, p.3). The intense competition in international tourism market increased the necessity of building strong branding

strategies focused on creating competitive advantages and a positive image for touristic places (De Carlo et al., 2009; Lin, 2013).

In order to build and promote a city brand, it is necessary to understand the perception of the city the tourists have. To identify the aspects derived from tourists' perception of a specific city which can be grouped in latent dimensions, a distinction between tangible elements (regarding infrastructure, culture, history) and intangible elements (brand personality) is a practical tool (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004; Zenker, 2011).

Brand personality represents a "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p.347) and is described in branding literature as a component of the brand image, involving emotional aspects (Kaplan et al., 2010; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Glińska & Kilon, 2014). Brand personality groups „the personality traits generally associated with humans that consumers perceive the brand to possess" (Hosany et al., 2007, p.8).

In academic research studies, brand personality is related to trust, attachment, commitment to the brand (Louis & Lombart, 2010) and brand attitude (Merrilees, Miller & Herington, 2009). The most common scale used for measuring brand personality is the one developed by Aaker (BPS – Brand Personality Scale) that explains personality through 42 features grouped in five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Lee & Suh, 2011; Glińska & Kilon, 2014).

Studies on brand personality were expanded in the tourism field, in order to investigate the way, the tourists perceive the characteristics of a city. For identifying personality characteristics, projective techniques (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) are used more frequently during qualitative research stages. Quantitative surveys usually follow the qualitative phase for measuring personality and identify its specific dimensions.

Most of the studies use Aaker's scale as a starting point for measuring brand personality in tourism (Aaker, 1997) and extend this scale (Hosany et al., 2007; Ahmad et al., 2013; Glińska & Kilon, 2014). For instance, desired brand personality traits for Poland cities were grouped in 8 dimensions; besides the universal 5 dimensions developed by Aaker, three more were revealed: peace, neatness, and conservatism. Depending on the type of primary source of information, the studies investigate both the sender (such as managers dealing with city promotion) (Glińska & Kilon, 2014) and the recipient's perspective (the tourists) (Hosany et al., 2007). Also, the connection between tourists' self-image and perceived city brand personality was investigated and a congruity relation was found (Murphy, Benchendorff & Moscardo, 2007).

Brand personality for three cities in the United Kingdom was investigated, using Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis and the following dimensions were identified: sincerity (with items like sincere, intelligent, reliable), excitement (including items like exciting or original) and conviviality (friendly or charming) (Hosany et al., 2007, p.21). Ahmad et al. (2013) propose a City Personality Scale with 17 characteristics and 4 dimensions: peacefulness (with items like strong, sincere or clever), malignancy (with items like nervous, determined), sophistication (with items like leader, charming) and uniqueness (with items like unique, popular or attractive).

The study of De Carlo et al. (2009) focused on identifying both negative and positive perception of an Italian city, using qualitative and quantitative analysis. The sample consisted in actual and potential tourists and the major positive characteristic of Milan's personality was an active lifestyle ("stylish", "energetic"). Regarding the negative aspects, the authors were identified elements concerning pollution ("grey city"), safety level ("unsafe") and communication ("not very communicative"). The study of Toldos Romero (2012, p.42) makes an exploratory investigation of brand personality in Mexico and identifies seven dimensions of this construct: Sincerity, Sophistication, Ruggedness, Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Domesticity/ Emotionality, and Professionalism.

In this context, our research is focused on identifying the dimensions of a Romanian city brand personality. A study of personality portrait for a specific Romanian city is necessary due to the lack of city promotion campaigns focused on competitive advantages and brand image.

Research objectives

The purpose of this research is to investigate the construct of city brand personality for a city in Romania. The aim of the study is to identify the dimensions for the construct of city brand personality in the Romanian cultural context. The research has two main objectives. The first one is to identify the items that describe aspects of the personality of a city brand in Romania. The second objective is to identify the dimensions for the construct of city brand personality for a Romanian large city, except for the capital of the country.

The analysis of the past research reveals that competence, sincerity, and excitement are dimensions commonly identified in various constructs of city brand personality (Aaker et al., 2001; Austin et al., 2003; Kaplan et al., 2010; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Hee-Jung & Yong-Gu, 2011). Also, Aaker's (1997) BPS (Brand Personality Scale) consists of five dimensions, among which are also competence, sincerity, and excitement.

Methodology research

The present research used both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first stage, four focus groups were organized in order to collect a large list of items that would be used to describe the personality of a large Romanian city, no matter which city that is, except Bucharest. As a research instrument, we used a focus group guide with open-ended questions. The second qualitative research involved specialists that refined the items list generated based on respondents' answers. In the second stage of the research, a quantitative survey was conducted. The final refined item list was included in the questionnaire applied in the quantitative research.

The research instrument consisted of 53 items. The questionnaire was tested on 20 subjects before running the extensive data collection. Exploratory factor analysis was used to extract dimensions, Maximum Likelihood Method with an oblique rotation of Direct Oblimin in SPSS 13 version.

Population and sample

The population was represented by the students that study at the University "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" of Iași, Romania, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. Only students that don't live in Iași (the investigated city) were included in this research because they are more familiar with the city than tourists are but still, they are not totally familiar with the city. Their perception of the city is more accurate than that of a tourist visiting the city for 2-3 days only. Students from bachelor, master and doctoral studies are representative of this type of survey.

For the qualitative research based on focus groups, the sample was represented by 28 students with the requested characteristics. The survey based on a questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 325 respondents.

Research results

Our first objective was *to identify the items that describe aspects of the personality of a city brand in Romania*. Four focus groups were conducted in the first qualitative research (Țugulea & Bobalca, 2014). The discussion was guided around the city brand personality subject. The respondents were encouraged to imagine what a city is a person and to describe the personality traits of that person. Also, the participants explained how they understand the concept of "personality". The data were analyzed with content analysis and an extensive list of 102 items resulted from this stage of research. The identified aspects of the personality had both positive and negative connotations. The list was refined during the second stage of the qualitative research. Nine specialists in psychology, tourism and marketing and two foreign Erasmus students were involved. The task of the specialists was to eliminate the items that are not associated with the concept of personality. Involving experts from more fields, we covered a large perspective of the personality characteristics.

The selected items in the final questionnaire were underlined by at least five of the specialists, including the Erasmus students (which represent half of the specialists from the sample) or by all the specialist of a certain type (five marketing specialist, three tourism specialist or two foreign Erasmus students). After the testing procedure, the final questionnaire included 53 items. The items included in the study are: *artistic, wise, altruist, attractive, backbit, calm, charismatic, conservator, honest, changeable, communicative, curious, creative, emotional, courageous, opened, dynamic, enigmatic, familiar, charming, determined, hardworking, forgiving, independent, envious, ironic, understanding, confident, encouraging, entrepreneur, jovial, relaxing, fighter, proud, monotonous, modest, patriot, nostalgic, hospitable, passionate, perceptive, profound, optimist, helpful, sensitive, sociable, solidary, powerful, protector, stylish, resistant, romantic and tolerant*.

The second objective was *to identify the dimensions of the construct of city brand personality for a Romanian large city, except for the capital of the country*. This research was conducted only for a city in Romania, Iași in particular. The literature review reveals that for various cities, various dimensions are identified in the construct of city brand personality. Some dimensions are common within different

constructs which others are unique, distinctive (Kaplan et al., 2010; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Hee-Jung & Yong-Gu, 2011).

Iași is a specific city in Romania. It is often associated with education, as in this city the first University was built in Romania. Also, it is considered as the cultural capital of the region of Moldavia, as many well-known writers lived and studied in this city. In this context, we expect to identify dimensions that are frequently identified, such as competence and sincerity.

The 5-point scale was used in order to evaluate the match of each of the 53 features for the city of Iași. For each feature, 1 represented Not at all a match and 5 represented a very good match. Factor analysis was conducted on the 53 items, with Maximum Likelihood Method and the oblique rotation Direct Oblimin, in order to identify the dimensions of the construct of city brand personality for the city of Iași. There were 12 factors with Eigenvalues > 1, but the Scree Plot revealed that only 3-5 factors are significant.

Items that loaded at least 0.3 on at least two factors were eliminated from the analysis (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Successive runs of the factor analysis with three, four and five factors led to a clear structure of three factors, with 18 items. The factors structure is represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure Matrix - Factor Analysis

	Factor		
	1	2	3
protector	,731		-,573
sociable	,672		-,525
solidary	,665		-,443
opened	,622		-,516
helpful	,607		-,527
tolerant	,577		
perceptive	,565		-,507
attractive	,523		-,471
romantic	,474		-,326
familiar	,409		
envious		,715	
ironic		,622	
proud		,602	
backbit		,494	
hardworking	,504		-,772
determined	,525		-,748
independent	,373		-,571
entrepreneur	,379		-,465

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization

As Table 1 indicates, the first factor has 10 items, with loadings between 0.4 and 0.74: *protector, sociable, solidary, opened, helpful, tolerant, perceptive, attractive, romantic and familiar*. The second factor is composed of 4 items, with loadings between 0.49 and 0.72: *envious, ironic, proud and backbit*. The last factor has also 4 items: *hardworking, determined, independent and entrepreneur*.

KMO and Bartlett's Test is well over 0.7 (with a value of 0,876) indicating that the items are suitable to be combined in a factor analysis. The rule of reliability of a scale, as George and Mallery (2003) state, is: 0.9 – excellent reliability; > 0.8 – good reliability; > 0.7 – acceptable reliability; > 0.6 – doubtful reliability; > 0.5 – weak reliability; < 0.5 – unacceptable.

The first dimension consists of 10 items and was named *Peacefulness /Sincerity*. The internal consistency measured with Cronbach-alpha is 0.844. This value of Cronbach-alpha indicates that the scale has a good reliability. The second dimension we have identified consists of 4 items and was named *Malignancy*. The internal consistency measured with Cronbach-alpha is 0.691. The scale has an acceptable reliability, as the Cronbach-alpha value is very close to 0.7. The third dimension grouped the items about *Competence* and consists of 4 items. The internal consistency measured with Cronbach-alpha is 0.717. This value of Cronbach-alpha indicates that the scale has an acceptable reliability.

The final items and their corresponding dimensions are presented in Figure 1.

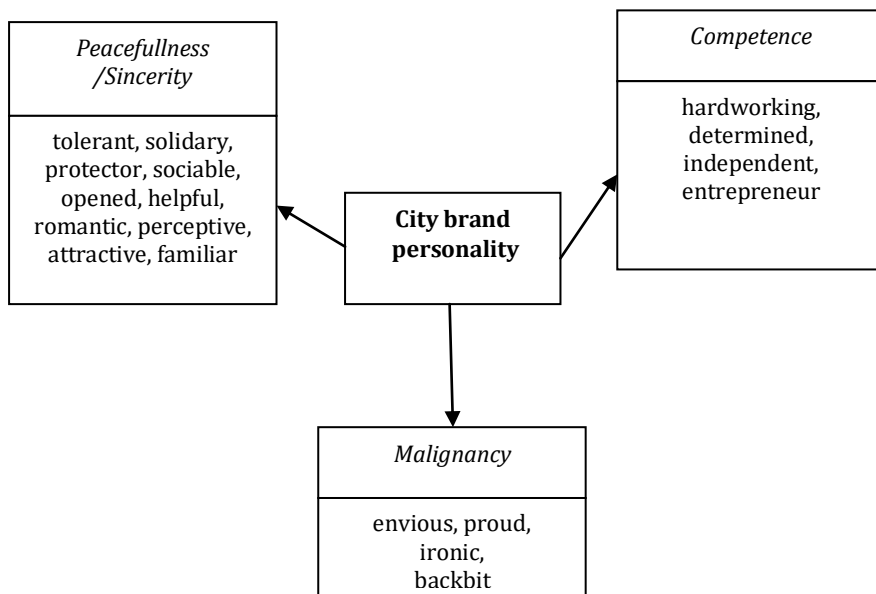


Figure 1. Dimensions of city brand personality

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to present a structure of the construct of city brand personality for a city in Romania.

Three dimensions were identified in the Exploratory Factor Analysis. First dimension – *Competence* – is also a dimension of the construct of Brand Personality measured by Aaker with BPS – Brand Personality Scale (Aaker, 1997; Lee & Suh, 2011; Glińska & Kilon, 2014). One other dimension was previously identified in past researches (*Malignancy*) and one dimension is specific (*Peacefulness/Sincerity*).

Research implications. This research is original as there is no research to investigate the construct of city brand personality of a Romanian city, particularly for the city of Iași. The article delivers scales to measure the dimensions of city brand personality of the city of Iași: *Peacefulness/Sincerity*, *Malignancy*, and *Competence*.

Managerial implications. The results of this research are useful for travel agencies, in order to promote the city of Iași for offers such as city breaks according to how it is already perceived. Also, these results are useful for the local administration managers. The research provides a clear image of the personality of this city. Local administration managers may decide either to keep the image or promote it as it is or to define a strategy to modify aspects of the perceived personality of the city. Using this city brand personality scale, created for a Romanian city, more studies can be performed in different Romanian places. Comparing these results, appropriate marketing strategies can be implemented for branding and differentiation of the cities, with an effective use of the resources. A touristic destination with a strongly defined personality generates emotional ties with the tourists, leading to trust (Bobâlcă, 2011) and loyalty (Bobâlcă, 2013; Bobâlcă, 2014).

Limitations of the research. One important limitation is that the research investigated only students, as both tourist and partly inhabitants. We considered they are more familiar with the investigated city and their opinion is more reliable. Yet, this research would probably bring slightly different results if only tourists' perceptions would be investigated. One hypothesis would be that the dimension of *Malignancy* is not relevant for weekend tourists. The aspects composing this dimension might be revealed only to those people spending more time in the city, interacting frequently with inhabitants and local administration.

Another limitation is that two scales have an acceptable reliability, with an internal consistency measured with Cronbach's Alpha of approximate 0.7. Although these values are acceptable, they are too low to the hypothesis that these dimensions would be validated in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Future research. A future direction is to conduct the Exploratory Factor Analysis on a larger sample (over 600 respondents). This research would probably reshape the resulted dimensions, with an internal consistency measured with Cronbach's Alpha over 0.8. Another future direction is to conduct a Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the resulted dimensions, in order to validate them.

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