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The destination brand in the context of the “Brand Wheel” model (a case study of Saint Petersburg)

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Abstract

The present article is the first attempt to use the "Brand Wheel" model to describe the destination brand on the example of Saint Petersburg. This model is known for its multi-component structure and is widely used in branding of products and companies. To compile the model, a survey was conducted. A questionnaire was distributed among 200 tourists who visited the city. The study identified the attributes and benefits of the brand of Saint Petersburg and highlighted the key facts and symbols that form the identity of the city. Moreover, we got a clear idea of the city brand image in the eyes of consumers. The author makes a conclusion about the possibility and feasibility of using the “Brand Wheel” model in destination branding and formulates the main problems identified in the process of its creation. In conclusion, the need for further adaptation of the model to simplify the process of its creation and obtain more reliable data was emphasized.

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Keywords

Destination brand, “Brand Wheel” model, brand attributes, brand personality, brand essence.

Introduction

It was established that destinations can be branded like products, organizations and services [Keller, 1997]. In the face of intense competition between countries and their territories in the sphere of tourism, the formation and promotion of a strong destination brand is of particular relevance [Anholt, 2010]. To this end, new branding tools and models are being developed and implemented.

There are several models which are used to systematize customers' ideas about the image of a brand and assess the effectiveness of branding. The "Brand Wheel" ("Brand Essence Wheel") model is among them.

The article is aimed to consider the possibilities and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of application of the "Brand Wheel" model in destination branding on the example of Saint Petersburg.

The research was conducted into four stages. The first stage involved consideration of the concept of the "Brand Wheel" model. During the second stage, a survey was conducted to collect data on the image of the city in the eyes of tourists. At the third stage, the information obtained was systematized and presented in the form of the "Brand Wheel" model. Finally, we drew some conclusions about the feasibility of using this model in the formation and promotion of the destination brand.

The concept of the "Brand Wheel" model

The "Brand Wheel" model is primarily used for advertising in communication management of product brands [Urde, 2016, 28]. However, it has been successfully adapted to describe the essence of the brand of a higher education institution [Kapustina, Zhad'ko, Izakova, 2017, 55]. Bazhenova notes the possibility of using this model in destination branding, despite the fact that such attempts were practically not made before [Bazhenova, 2013, 121].

The model was proposed by Bates Worldwide and has been used in the practice of such leading global companies as Whiskey, Coca-Cola, Smirnoff, Zanussi, IBM and Whiskas. In this model, the brand is presented as a set of rings (concentric circles), each one represents a separate brand element [Burtseva, Kuznetsova, Vorozhtsov, 2009, 119]. The number of rings may vary depending on the selected model version.

We will use the classic version of the model, consisting of three rings. At the same time, some information may be located outside the rings. The key principle of the model is that the rings gradually move from surface level to intrinsic value. The outer ring represents external characteristics that ensure consumers' recognition and define the brand itself. It includes attributes (surface level and objective facts) and benefits (advantages that appeal to the wishes of the customer) of the brand. The middle ring is characterized by brand-related well-known facts and symbols (logos, colours). It also includes the brand personality that appeals to the consumers' respond to a brand. The inner ring represents the essence or key promise of the brand, which is often summed up in a short and memorable slogan.

To discover the brand essence and create a "Brand Wheel" model a survey is usually conducted. The sample list of survey questions includes the following ones: What does the brand do for you? How does it affect you? How would you describe the brand if it were a person? How does the brand make you look? How does the brand make you feel? What emotions does it inspire in you? Answers to each question usually consist of one-word adjectives or short phrases [Mulder, www].

By and large, with the help of the "Brand Wheel" model, all aspects of the interaction between the brand and the consumer can be described and systematized. It helps to reveal the core characteristics and values of a brand.

Saint Petersburg as a tourist destination in the context of the “Brand Wheel” model

To collect the data on the tourists' perceptions about Saint Petersburg as a tourist destination a survey was conducted. A questionnaire (Table 1) was distributed among 200 people who visited the city at least once during the last two years as tourists and spent there at least one week. The survey contained one Likert-scale question, four long-range questions and one multiple choice question.

While creating the model we moved from the outer to inner ring. Considering the attributes of the destination brand we relied on the approach proposed by Pereira, Limberger, Flores and Pereira [Pereira et al., 2019, www]. This approach involves combining Pike and Ryan's [Pike, Ryan, 2004, 337] and Carvalho's [Carvalho, Salazar, Ramos, 2015] scales of functional and psychological components and highlighting such attributes of a destination brand as “welcoming destination”, “friendly population”, “safety”, “quality of life of the population”, “modern architecture”, “diversified natural heritage and climate”, “cultural heritage”, “possibilities for adventure activities”, “places for walking or tours”, “beautiful beaches”, “good restaurants”, “hotels diversity and quality”, “differentiated gastronomy”, “nightlife/entertainment/leisure”, “tourist signage and infrastructure”. Respondents were asked to assess how fully Saint Petersburg as a tourist destination meets these parameters. Subsequently, the attributes that received the highest quantification were included in the model.

To get an insight into the brand personality and identify its benefits, respondents were asked a number of standard questions such as: How would you describe Saint Petersburg if it were a person? What emotions does this city inspire in you? How do you feel and how do you look when you visit this city? How does the city affect you? What does it do for you? The most frequent response options were included in the model.

As for the facts related to the brand, we selected the year of the foundation of St. Petersburg (1703), the average annual growth rate of the tourist flow over the past few years, excluding 2020 (16%), the fact that Saint Petersburg is the second largest city in Russia and the number of museums that are available for tourists. Drawbridges serve as a symbol of the city in the model, as they were mentioned by the majority of respondents.

Paradoxically, such a large tourist center as St. Petersburg does not have a single idea of brand positioning [Chechulin, 2015, 88-90]. Among the most common options such as “Northern Venice”, “Cultural capital”, “The second capital of Russia”, “City of talents” and “Cradle of the revolution”, the “Cultural capital” turned out to be the most popular one, according to the majority of the respondents. Therefore, this idea was used as the essence of the brand.

Figure 1 presents the final version of the model, compiled after the systematization of the survey results.

Thus, we can draw a number of conclusions about the peculiarities of using the “Brand Wheel” model in destination branding. Firstly, it is quite easy to fill in the outer ring because it is not a problem for tourists who have visited a destination to assess it according to the specified parameters and formulate the benefits obtained from the trip. The situation with the middle ring is similar. The facts and symbols of popular tourist destinations are widely known, and their choice is usually evident. Moreover, judging by our observations, respondents easily describe the city, imagining that it is a person.

Please help us find out about your preferences by taking a few moments to fill out this survey form.

1. Rate Saint Petersburg as a tourist center according to these parameters from 1 to 4 (where 1 is the lowest rating, and 4 is the highest one).

	1	2	3	4
Welcoming destination	10%	43%	41%	6%
Friendly population	17%	42%	36%	5%
Safety	0%	2%	7%	91%
Quality of life of the population	4%	55%	45%	6%
Modern architecture	0%	12%	21%	67%
Diversified natural heritage and climate	21%	53%	26%	0%
Cultural heritage	0%	0%	12%	88%
Possibilities for adventure activities	6%	73%	21%	0%
Places for walking or tours	0%	0%	3%	97%
Beautiful beaches	16%	71%	12%	1%
Good restaurants	4%	20%	65%	11%
Hotels diversity and quality	7%	8%	71%	14%
Differentiated gastronomy	5%	44%	41%	5%
Nightlife/entertainment/leisure	0%	3%	9%	88%
Tourist signage and infrastructure	0%	0%	7%	93%

2. How would you describe Saint Petersburg if it were a person?

3. What emotions does this city inspire in you? How do you feel and how do you look when you visit this city?

4. How does the city affect you? What does it do for you?

5. Choose the phrase that, in your opinion, characterizes Saint Petersburg most accurately.

a. "Northern Venice" (25%)	d. "City of talents" (2%)
b. "Cultural capital" (58%)	e. "Cradle of the revolution" (8%)
c. "The second capital of Russia" (7%)	

6. What object could you suggest as a symbol Saint Petersburg?

Thank you!

Figure 1 - The questionnaire to reveal tourists' perceptions about Saint Petersburg as a tourist destination

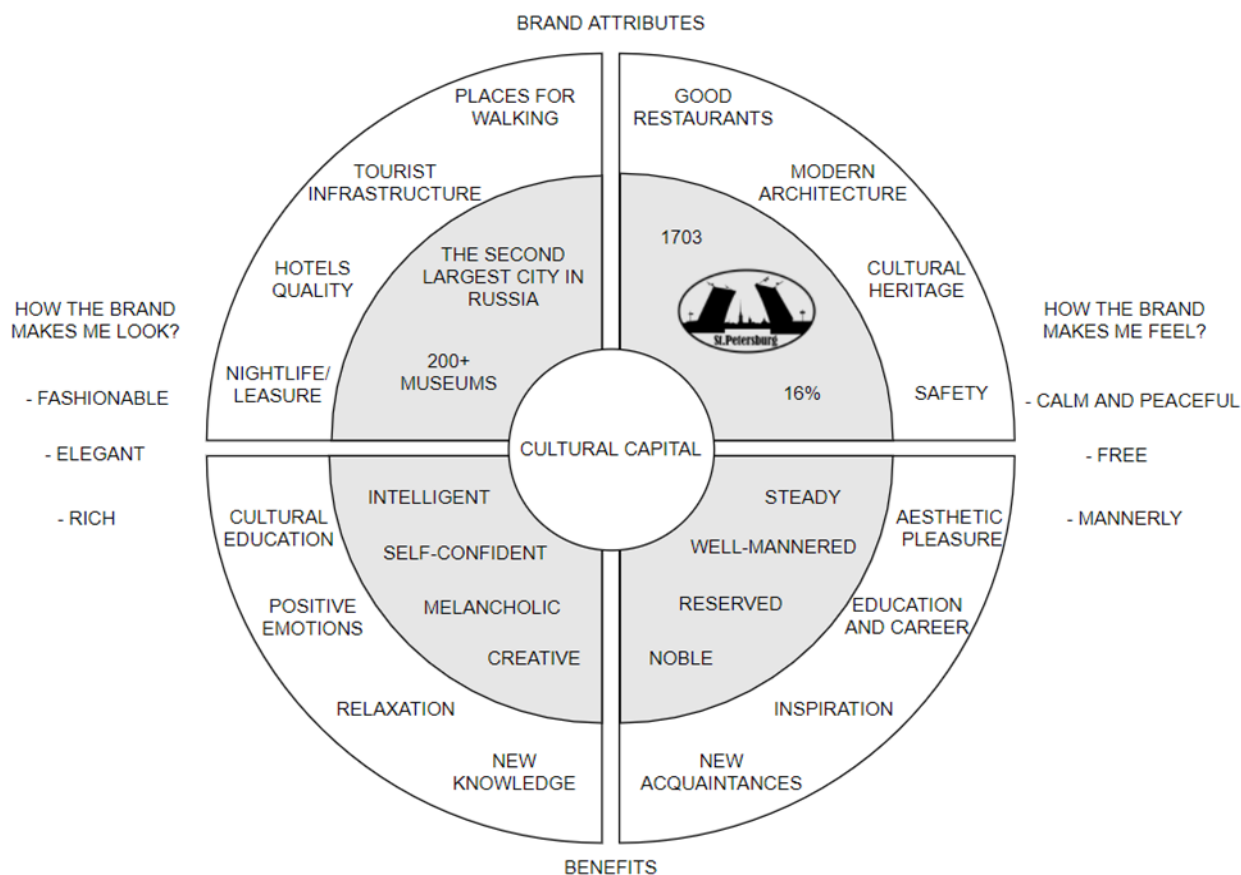


Figure 2 - Saint Petersburg's brand essence

The main problem in filling in the inner ring and identifying the essence of the brand is that tourist destinations, especially in Russia, often do not have a special slogan or single idea of brand positioning, like product brands and large companies. In our case, there were several options available, but for less popular tourist destinations, they may not exist at all. In addition, respondents had some difficulties while answering the questions: What emotions does this city inspire in you? How do you feel and how do you look when you visit this city? The third question was often skipped, and the final list of answers turned out to be much shorter than while compiling the product brand model. Destination brand is a quite broad concept, so it is challenging for people to clearly assess its impact on themselves.

In general, the use of the "Brand Wheel" model in destination branding is reasonable since it helps to identify and demonstrate the key features, strengths and weaknesses of the destination. Thanks to the multi-component structure of the model, it is possible to get a clear idea of brand image in the eyes of consumers. However, while filling in the model, there may be some difficulties due to the specific features of the destination brand that distinguish it from the product and company brands.

Conclusion

Thus, we considered the concept of the "Brand Wheel" model and tried to apply it to describe the destination brand. The main principle of this model is a consistent movement from the external characteristics to the essence of the brand. While creating the model, we got an idea of the image of Saint Petersburg in the eyes of tourists, its strengths as a tourist destination, and formulated the main

essence of the city brand.

Despite some difficulties in filling out the model, its use in destination branding is reasonable due to the possibility of a deep analysis of the brand essence. Changing the wording of some of the questions asked to consumers and adding or removing some elements of the model in order to adapt it to the destination brand may be directions for further research.

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Бренд территории в контексте модели «Колесо бренда» (на примере Санкт-Петербурга)

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Аннотация

В данной статье впервые предпринимается попытка применения модели «Колесо бренда» для описания бренда территории на примере Санкт-Петербурга. Данная модель известна благодаря своей многокомпонентной структуре и находит широкое применение в брендинге товаров и компаний. Для составления модели был проведен социологический опрос. В исследовании приняли участие 200 туристов, посетивших город. В ходе исследования были идентифицированы атрибуты и преимущества бренда Санкт-Петербурга, ключевые факты и

символы, формирующие индивидуальность города. Более того, было получено четкое представление об образе города в глазах туристов. Автор делает вывод о возможности и целесообразности применения модели «Колесо бренда» в брендинге территорий, формулирует основные проблемы, выявленные в процессе ее создания, и подчеркивает необходимость дальнейшей адаптации модели для упрощения процесса ее создания и получения более достоверных данных.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Бренд территории, модель «Колесо бренда», атрибуты бренда, индивидуальность бренда, суть бренда.

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