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The Creative and Cultural Industries in the US and the UK

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Place Marketing

Is marketing your country worth it?

“I Love NY” “I Amsterdam” and “What Happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” are iconic and known around the world. Branding for cities or countries is not something that is particularly new as it has been around since the early 19th century. However, “place branding and its meaning have evolved considerably over the last 40 years expanding in both breadth and focus. Sub-concepts such as regional branding, city branding, and to a less extent, town branding developed, each focusing on a different spatial scale. Place branding is currently a broad, multi-disciplinary research domain which covers a large variety of topics and disciplines, including urban planning, marketing, public policy and sociology”.ⁱ This paper will be looking at the pros and cons of place branding specifically in the United Kingdom and comparing years surrounding massive branding overhauls and if it did anything to affect tourism rates. I will primarily be looking at international tourists coming in and how locals are affected by the branding. Nation branding as a marketing and socioeconomic concept has been in existence since 1998, when a British consultant named Simon Anholt surprised the business world and the political establishment by suggesting that places and nations can be viewed as brands. Since that time the idea has gained significant recognition worldwide.ⁱⁱ Country Branding is not as simple as finding

a catch phrase or a cool logo. It's about finding what makes this place unique and what the local communities offer that people want to see and spend money on one. It's also not a simple one size fits all plan.

The success of the branding projects depends on a number of factors but mostly on the quality of the product the country is trying to sell. Some countries need more help than others. Slovenia and Croatia saw successes after their secessions and launched aggressive marketing campaigns focused on their scenic venues and a definitive culture break from Belgrade. It's also interesting to note that there was a time where there was a push to refer to the UK as “Britain” versus Great Britain or United Kingdom. There has since been a shift back to the word great which will be discussed below. There have been countries that have had disappointing campaigns such as Switzerland when it came out that several Swiss banks were accused of holding Nazi gold.

The paper will start with the possible pros and cons of place branding and how it can work if done properly or how it can be detrimental to countries' economies. I will then look at two different brand campaigns for the same country. The 2018 “I travel for...”ⁱⁱⁱ campaign and the international GREAT Britain marketing campaign that invites visitors to ‘See Things Differently’.^{iv} Both of these campaigns are specific to the UK, so it gives a control group by focusing on one country vs several. There are several factors that can affect travel, specifically COVID and Brexit, and those will be mentioned in some of the data. This paper will show the complexities of place branding and what branding can do for countries tourism.

Pros of branding:

Tourism no doubt boosts local economies and increases job opportunities for locals. Since 2010 tourism has been the fastest growing sector in the UK in employment terms. Britain is forecast to have a tourism industry worth over £257 billion by 2025.^v Viewing tourism as a service industry it can be shown that while looking at industry revenue that does not take into account other industries that are supporting elsewhere through the supply chain and consumer spending.

In an ever-connected world there is a real need to stand out above other countries when it comes to tourism. Countries are trying to become the same in terms of infrastructure and quality of life but that does not mean they have to be the same. In order to promote trade, investment and travel/tourism countries and nations need to be different. There needs to be a self-reflection on why companies would and should invest in our country versus going to others. The purpose of nation branding is to position your country in the best way possible in the world system.^{vi}

Successful branding enables people at home and abroad to view a state as legitimate and credible, thereby meriting their allegiance and support. Once thus acknowledged, states can wield influence as legitimate performers on the world stage: administering citizens, collecting taxes, drawing borders, inviting investment, soliciting tourists, attending international conventions, and so on.^{vii} Branding doesn't just attract tourists, but it also instills a sense of pride for the local communities. Especially if the branding showcases locals and local cultures.

Government should take control of its own brand and invest in it. Only the national brand knows the full agenda of the country and has the power and resources to manage and promote the brand.

Good place branding could be linked to creative placemaking as well. If you can ensure that those calling the place their home are well and happy then that will attract skilled labor, lucrative investments and visitors. Bringing these people in will add focus to the physical

location to match the branding that is being put out there. Ed Burghard of The Burghard Group says “Place branding is a strategy for making informed decisions on placemaking investment priorities and how to communicate them. It starts with a clear definition of a location’s core promise, followed by a select set of strategic actions to ensure the promise is relevant, authentic and competitive over time. Place Branding = Place Making + Place Marketing.”^{viii} Countries are made up of a mix of elements, including location, peoples, cultures, religions, traditions, industries, habits, natural resources and often complex histories. A successful brand will embody and represent the diverse positive elements that comprise a nation.^{ix}

Cons of branding:

The biggest con to come from branding is upsetting or pushing out the locals because of what the campaign does. Identities shift all the time, and not only for individuals. Nations too can change markedly in terms of their character. Often, this is a slow process, stemming from population change, technological development or long-running geopolitical factors. Sometimes, however, it occurs rapidly.^x For many places are more than marketing tools. They are homes and where family roots grow, and memories are made. “The primary focus of place branding – counterintuitively – is the place’s own residents. A good project should make them inspired, enthused, happy to belong where they are, and motivated to do more or better things. It is like stirring a whirlwind – the locals start, and the world responds.”^{xi} When you don’t take locals into consideration, and it lacks substance it can result in backlash. In Hamburg Germany in 2009 there were ongoing brand initiatives, and it received a lot of backlashes from locals. They argued that the initiatives were encouraging higher house prices and stratification of residents. Superficial campaigns may attract tourists in the short term but can run the risk of alienating residents.

Distilling a location's essence is not easy. These locations are not just sections on a map, but they arouse emotions and invoke a sense of belonging. Not everyone is going to agree on what makes a place unique, even locals, so you need to try to nail down an area's identity to create and deliver an effective place brand. You need to find a way to identify the character or spirit and then manage it. Cities can be easier to market than countries because there is a smaller pool of people and cultures to portray. So, you run the risk of leaving over communities in the final marketing. Countries, regions and cities want to show off their best and conceal what they view as their worst or what might deter tourists from visiting. By doing so they run the risk of sugar coating and turning their campaign into a form of propaganda. The rise of interest in national branding can be a potentially dangerous situation. There is an allure for countries and leaders to feel like they can simply pay someone to fix their problems when they might actually be caused by bad policy.

There is a real risk of depending on tourism and tourism branding. There is a risk that that marketing will be too narrow or limited and that would decrease the amount of tourists to that area. If a brand markets a certain infrastructure or environmental attraction and something happens to it either because of natural disaster, government cutbacks or over exposure then you lose that resource, and the marketing no longer fits with the country you are branding. Speaking in terms of Covid as well, there was a sharp decline in tourism during that time and many countries and areas are still trying to recover from it. If you focus all of your worth and economy on tourism, then when there is a situation that tourists can't visit then your country or area crumbles and the locals are no longer taken care of, and nothing is put in place to protect them if that happens. In 2019 the UK saw about 40.9 million visitors and inbound tourists spending £28.4 billion that year.^{xii} In 2020 that was drastically reduced they saw a total of 11.1 million

visitors and £6,210 million spent.^{xiii} For somewhere like the UK they aren't heavily dependent on tourism compared to other markets. But the most extreme example is Macau, where net revenues from international travel and tourism were around 68 percent of GDP during 2015-19.^{xiv} Macau was hit intensely for about 3 years because of the Chinese covid-zero lockdown protocols. So early this year that they started to lax they were hoping for tourism to resume. They offered subsidies to residents to spend money on local tourism facilities and worked with local firms to develop new tour routes along their unique history and culture. The government also engaged local enterprises and casinos to come up with incentives to attract tourists such as transportation and accommodation subsidies.^{xv} For them it appears it will pay off given the withdrawal of China's zero-covid policies since a majority of their visitors come from China and Hong Kong. There is a chance going forward that tourism-dependent countries and nations won't survive if something of this scale happens again that keeps tourists from travelling.

Compare travel years surrounding campaigns:

To start with the comparative aspect, we will look at the years leading up to each major branding campaign and the year of the launch of the campaign. For the newest campaign we will look at what they hope this campaign will accomplish.

In 2016 there were a record 37.3 million inbound visits to the UK, up 3% on 2015 with visitors spending £22.2 billion, matching 2015's record spending.^{xvi} From 2010-2016 they saw an increase of 7.5 million more visits which was an increase of 25%. The increase appeared to come from holiday visitors as well as people coming to visit friends and family.

The UK then achieved a record £24.5 billion in overseas visitor spend, up 9% on 2016 and well above the long-term, average growth rate. The total overseas visits to the UK rose by

4%, reaching 39.2 million in 2017.^{xvii} Holiday visitors led the increase again this year and their spending increased at a rate of 22%. In 2017 the UK was ranked as the 6th most aspirational destination to visit if money was no object.

In 2018 VisitBritain, the national tourism agency launched a new campaign “I Travel for...”. It was a series of videos that shined a light on unexpected experiences and less-explored destinations as well as the globally renowned and iconic landmarks and attractions. The focus was to align the passions that motivate people to travel with experiences that can only happen in Britain. The digital campaign is focused on Britain’s largest and most valuable markets such as Australia, France, Germany and the US. It also focused on the high-spending markets such as China, the GCC and India. They forecasted Overseas visits to the UK to break through the 40 million mark for the first time in 2018, reaching 41.7 million, up 4.4% on 2017. Spending by overseas visitors to the UK is forecast to reach £26.9 billion in 2018, up 6.8% on 2017.^{xviii}

There was actually a decrease of about 3% in 2018 compared to 2017. A total of 37.9 million visits were made by overseas residents to the UK in 2018. The spending of overseas residents on visits to the UK also decreased by about 7% or around £22.9 billion.^{xix} The drop in tourism numbers is being argued as being attributable to the Brexit referendum because there was a decrease in interest and visitors from Europe. While there are probably other things that contribute to the decline Brexit was probably the largest reason given the uncertainty surrounding the Brexit decision. They predicted that visitors from Europe would continue to fall in 2019. In response, VisitBritain launched a campaign called Friends of Europe, aimed at reassuring Europeans that they will receive a warm welcome and that Britain represents good value. With the Brexit decision there was also the fall in value of the pound and the UK was still

seen as an expensive destination.^{xx} There were increases in tourists from other areas of the world, but it wasn't enough to offset the decline in Europe.

In 2019 there was a slight increase in inbound visits at 40.9 million or about 1% from 2018. The value of spending saw an increase of £28.4 billion or 7% compared to 2018.^{xxi} Going into 2020 there was an obvious decline in visits and spending because of Covid-19. About a 73% decline from 2019 at 11.1 million visits.^{xxii} A majority of those visits came between January and March before travel restrictions were put in place. While the decrease in tourism is tied to covid and not to the branding it does lead to coming out of the pandemic and a need to increase tourism back to pre-covid numbers. 2021 remained low at 6.4 million visits and £5.6 billion spent.^{xxiii} 2022 saw a large increase of visits at 29.7 million.^{xxiv}

This leads to 2023 when most travel restrictions due to covid have been removed and travel around the world is increasing. VisitBritain then moves to launch a new tourism campaign. The international GREAT Britain marketing campaign invites visitors to "See Things Differently". They aim to showcase Britain as a dynamic, diverse and exciting destination, packed full of activities. They also want to focus on a warm British welcome at the heart to combat Brexit and other social issues surrounding the opinion of the UK. 'Spilling the Tea on Great Britain' - uses a play on Britain's love of tea, through destination images and short films to tell a fresh and exciting story about the experiences on offer, showing visitors that 'whatever your cup of tea, we've got it.' From a 'Festival' tea theme that gives a taste of Britain's live music scene to a 'Graffi-tea' that celebrates its vibrant cities and cultural attractions. A 'Surf' theme shows the adventurous side of Britain and '#nofilter' its natural beauty. A 'Monster Hunting' tea draws inspiration from myths and legends including the world-famous Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster. A limited release of the themed teas, blended by British tea company

Tregothnan, will also be available for tastings at VisitBritain promotional and trade events. In Canada and the USA the campaign, called 'Fake (Br)it Till You Make It' highlights the richness of Britain's regional diversity. The phased advertising campaign gets underway with a variety of local phrases alongside destination images from across Britain. Later in March, a series of short films sees Brits sharing a warm welcome in local accents and dialects promoting their destinations, encouraging visitors to come and explore for themselves. Also from late March, a new online game on VisitBritain's consumer website, using machine learning, goes live where players can have a fun go at mastering the accents with links to destination information to drive bookings.^{xxv}

VisitBritain forecasts that inbound tourism will continue a strong recovery in overseas visitor spending this year. Its latest forecast for 2023 is for overseas visitor spending in the UK of £29.5 billion, up 4% on the all-time spending high of £28.4 billion in 2019. It estimates 35.1 million inbound visits to the UK, 86% of 2019 levels.^{xxvi}

With growing tensions around the world concerning Russia and the war in Ukraine and the China and the US it will be interesting to see if this campaign is successful in bringing in tourists despite the fear some have. There is a growing restlessness that people are feeling after having to give up travel for a few years due to covid so we will be seeing tourism rise on account of that. The real marker will be how much they spend. There is a real cost of living crisis people are dealing with around the world so it will be an interesting study to see if people still take trips but decrease their spending or if they stop doing trips all together.

Conclusion:

Place branding is a complicated and delicate task that is starting to feel more and more necessary in this ever-connected world. There is a real challenge to compete for tourists' time and money when almost the whole world is available to them. While in recent years the numbers have been hard to measure in terms of marketing when the decline has been due to policy changes and a pandemic it will be interesting to study the 2023 numbers and beyond to see how much this campaign affects tourism rates. Place marketing and placemaking are both important for the growth and survival of cities and countries if done correctly. There is a real threat that marketing will be done by a hired company that doesn't fully understand the area they are marketing and hurts the local communities and cultures. When doing place marketing the government needs to take control and look towards the community to help make decisions. I believe that place marketing is one of the main factors that get visitors to come. They can't visit a place they haven't heard of before or don't see themselves enjoying. The need for experiences and travel is rooted in society and people but the marketing is telling people that these specific experiences and locations are what they need. "Destination branding is about identifying the destination's strongest and most competitively appealing assets in the eyes of its prospective visitors, building a story from these that makes the destination stand out above its competitors, and running this narrative consistently through all marketing communications."^{xxvii} So while this strategy isn't about creating new experiences it's about lifting up what these countries already have.

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