



Analysis of users perception of place branding: A case study of Alor Setar city, Malaysia

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Abstract

The study examined the perception of place users to place branding. It analysed perception to; first, place can be branded; second, most of Malaysian cities doesn't has brand; third, place branding has some commercial values; fourth, local community should together with government agencies in branding process, and; fifth, brand should in line with place image and culture. The tool used in this study was quantitative by using the questionnaire as an instrument. The findings revealed that place users have a neutral perception that place can be branded. It also showed high agreement of the respondents on others topic. The paper concluded by recommending for further research in another place branding topic in Malaysia.

Keywords: Place Branding; Users Perception; Alor Setar; Malaysia

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1. Introduction

Competitions between places today are due to rapid development that change the trend of environments and developments. This competition makes places want to be better than their competitors and led to competition is no longer focused on the product but to the place model. It has developed into an obvious answer to the emergence of competition between the cities for the intellectual, residents, tourists, investors, and whoever that has interest in the place. Place branding is one of the models to improve image and identity of place. Place branding is used widely all around the world. But the question remains whether place users alert to that model. Mommas in Paskaleva-Shapira (2007) said place branding has become a famous and favourite model to present a place or city. It excellently functions as the source of added symbolic value and at the same time, increases the economic value of the place with a mental image and a cultural implication. Rehan (2013) said that place branding is a latest mechanism toward development of sustainable city. Also, place branding is a novel aspect of communication and improves place marketing in various ways by using place image as brand image (Rehan, 2013). Since the 80s, place managers in Europe have been using the concept of “city branding” or also known as “place branding” in accentuating the image and identity of the place.

Branding is mental images, and it centred where the images and perception installed in the middle of the designed and planned exercises to build the future of the place (Kavaratzis, 2005). Brand perception is the action of building a relationship between the product and passionate perception of the customers (Hislop, 2001). Added Hislop (2001), that relationship influenced by factors that either increase or decrease customers loyalty. Accordingly, both the customers and the supplier strengthen brand perception. Kapferer (2012) and Keller (2008) respectively defined that brand perception is the satisfaction of user’s assumption and persistence of users’ satisfaction.

According to Handley and Chapman (2012) brand is a judgment from people on the business or product. Thus, the business or product lies in the recognition and trust of a brand signature. In the aspect of place branding, branding is useful when place continually creates concomitant contemporary of place experience. Most of the cities in the European countries used branding techniques to reconstruct the place image by selling identities and activities. Stuttgart in Germany and Barcelona in Spain are model of the cities that have endured branding method. Zhang and Zhao (2009) stated that place branding is the standard method adopted by plenty of the places in the context of improving public competition for attention, opportunities, businesses, and resources.

2. Literature review

A brand is the thought of people to product or business (Handley and Chapman, 2012). It is the pattern in which other concepts of the business take. The first definition of “brand” is the name set to a product or service from a source and it is the product future and memory (Kapferer, 2012). There is person who takes the brand, not the products or services (Kornberger, 2010). According to Kotler (2000), the brand is a name, term, image or design, or a combination of them, that designed to imply the goods of one vendor and

differentiate themselves from contenders. In the context of nation branding, Anholt (2002) perception is that the reputation of nations is like the brand image of businesses and product, and similarly important. The city manager has noticed the need of strong place image. Robert Jones in Salman (2008) stated the successful branding can turn an ordinary place into a place where people want to live, work, visit, and revisit. Place branding is a common practice adopted by many cities in the context of intensified urban competition for mobile resources, markets, opportunities, and attention (Zhang and Zhao, 2009).

Rehan (2013) said place branding is a novel aspect of communication and improves the marketing image of the city in a variety of ways to change the visual image and the brand image. Kavaratzis (2005) illustrated specific branding as mental images. Branding is centred where perception and images are placed in the middle of the planned and designed activities to build the place and the future (Kavaratzis, 2005). VanAuken (2014) says place branding is sophisticated and exciting. Place branding is approaching from the place promotion coordinated towards improving the approach needed for the place by instilling peculiarity to raise the place image. Place branding is assigned to make "an amazing image and enticing signs" (Kalergis, 2008). Ashworth (2008) identified branding as not as the accepted way of thinking and takes every idea of showcasing, branding, advertising, and promoting under the same umbrella. Ashworth (2008) marked the contrast between these terms while offering a different idea of place branding.

The purpose of place branding is not the place 'itself', but its image. An image is the aftereffect of diverse, unique, and oftentimes conflicting with messages sent to end-users. Vermeulen (2002) said that it depends on preferences, desires, and memories that develop in memory of people. Thus, it is not a place that need be planned, but an image (Vermeulen, 2002). Rapid process of urbanisation nowadays seen changes is not only on the physical development, but it included the elements of social, economic, thinking, values, and the lifestyle of residents to a more modern (Mapjabil et al., 2014). The impact of the urbanisation is making demands on the good quality and place image.

Freire (2009) discussed the role of residents in place branding. It showed that local people are an important factor in the creation of place brands. Freire (2009) explored users of the Algarve and Costa del Sol place brands. The results stated that local people are used as a brand for the assessment of place brands. Besides (2008) perceiving that local people as one of the creative image of Turin city. Mattingly (1995) stated that government agencies tended to see the local community and private sectors as no big role in operating urban areas. However, local community and private sectors have begun playing the roles shaped the urban life. Accordingly, government agencies should guide or join the local community and private sectors rather than more often sought to regulate their activities (Mattingly, 1995). The best way to control the community is to engage them in every activity and program. How to control the residents if authority did not get along with local?

3. Methodology

The paper aims to identify the perception of place users on place branding. The data were obtained through quantitative methods. The primary data of this study is questionnaire to the respondent. The respondents consist of the diverse background in aspects of gender, age, race, level of education, occupation, and origin.

The questionnaire guide consists in questions about the general knowledge of place branding. It also included questions about their perception about branding that can make a place as a centre of economy and tourism attention. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 respondents who were randomly selected around Alor Setar City Centre. The data collection was conducted face to face and lasted about fifth teen minutes.

The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A contains the background information of respondents. Section B contains five related questions of perception to: (i) place can branded; (ii) most of Malaysian cities doesn't has brand; (iii) place branding has some commercial values; (iv) local community must together with government agencies in brand development process, and; (v) brand should in line with place image and culture.

4. Findings

Analysis performed in the paper is to defined perception of place user about place branding. Also, the study is finding out the relationship between respondent background and their perception. One of place branding goals is to know and meet the need of different groups of stakeholders (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). Assumed, that the process of place branding is success when the product of branding meets expectations of user's. Contrariety between user's perceptions and brand may disentangle a brand from receivers, then finally, threaten the productiveness of branding program.

The purpose of this study is to determine the perception of place users on place branding. The result of analysis display 52.0% of the respondents is women, while male respondents are 48.0%. There show the gender apportionments of the respondents well balanced. The age group of 30-39 years recorded the highest number of respondents with 32% and lowest age group was 60 years and above. Findings shows Malay race has highest number compared to the other races. That because of the majority population in the study area and the Siamese was minority.

Majority of respondents graduated degree level and work with government agencies. Larger numbers of respondent origin were Alor Setar origin. The total numbers of respondents came from other districts are 22% and the rest came from other places besides Kedah. Analysis of data revealed that the values of the variable under study were indeed normally distributed.

The discrepancy between the reality of the place image and the perceptions of the users may disengage the brand from the recipients, and undermine the effectiveness of the branding activity. The study examines the distribution of the perception of city users to place branding. The resulting frequency revealed that most of respondents likely to agree with the mean value 2.94 to 3.78 (Table 3).

Findings show that place users have neutral perception that place can be branded with mean value of 2.94 ($\sigma=0.763$). Respondents' perception that most of Malaysian cities don't have a brand generated high mean value (3.74). It was revealed that most of respondents agreeing that most of Malaysian cities don't have a brand. High mean value also shows on the perception that place branding has some commercial values.

Table 1. Demographics of respondents

Demography Aspect	Percent
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	48
Female	52
<i>Age</i>	
20-29	20
30-39	32
40-49	17
50-59	19
>60	12
<i>Race</i>	
Malay	47
Chinese	23
Indian	24
Siamese	6
<i>Education Level</i>	
SPM	28
Diploma	17
Degree	29
Master/PhD	7
Others	19
<i>Areas of Work</i>	
Government Agencies	27
Services	23
Business Related	14
Self-employed	5
Retired	11
Unemployed	12
Others	8
<i>Origin</i>	
Alor Setar	67
Another District in Kedah	22
Others	11

Source: Field Work, 2017

Table 2. Perception to place branding

Perception to Place Branding	Mean	Std. Deviation
Place can be branded	2.94	.763
Most of Malaysian cities doesn't has brand	3.74	.676
Place branding has some commercial values	3.78	.561
Local community must together with government agencies in brand development process	3.67	.842
Brand should in line with place image and culture.	3.47	.540

Source: Field Work, 2017

Preliminary analysis of the data showed that the Malay is having the highest perception that place can be branded followed by the Indian, Chinese, and Siamese.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis that place can branded among ethnic groups

Ethnic Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Malay	47	2.81	0.741
Chinese	23	2.96	0.767
Indian	24	3.04	0.751
Siamese	6	3.50	0.837
Total	100	-	-

Source: Field Work, 2017

Additional analysis using one-way ANOVA technique showed that the difference was significant at least at the 0.05 level, but the analysis did not show which ethnic group differed from the other. Then, to identify that, the post hoc test was carried and result shown in the table below. The mean difference of perception that place branding has a commercial between Malays and the Chinese was -0.353, and this was not significant at 0.05 ($p=0.065$). But, the mean differences between Malay and Indian were -0.411, and were significant at 0.05 with the probabilities of error (p) being 0.187.

Table 4. Perception that place branding has commercial values among ethnic groups

Respondent's Race		Mean Difference	Significant Level
Malay	Chinese	-0.353	0.065
	Indian	-0.411*	0.030
	Siamese	-0.411	0.205
Chinese	Malay	0.353	0.065
	Indian	-0.058	0.790
	Siamese	-0.058	0.865
Indian	Malay	0.411*	0.030
	Chinese	0.058	0.790
	Siamese	0.000	1.000
Siamese	Malay	0.411	0.205
	Chinese	0.058	0.865
	Indian	0.000	1.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.
Source: Field Work, 2017

The post hoc test reveals that the mean differences between Chinese and Indian were -0.058, and this was not significant at 0.05 ($p=0.790$). Also, there are no significant between Chinese, Malay, and Indian. At the 0.05 level, the Siamese respondents do not have signed with Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Finding shows the perception that place branding has a commercial among ethnic groups does not influenced by ethnic factor.

This analysis was made to learn connection and find the signification relationship between the respondent education level and their agreement that a place can branded. Spearman correlation test revealed a positive but weak relationship with a correlation coefficient of 0.061. The significant level between these two variables was at 0.544 which indicates not statistically significant correlation. Therefore, this study can conclude that agreement that a place can branded are no significant relationship with respondent's education level.

Next, correlation test between respondent's area of work and age, and their perception that most of cities in Malaysia do not have a brand. In every study area, the correlation coefficient was less than 0.5, either positive or negative which means a fragile relationship. Using the Spearman correlation method, analysis of respondents revealed that there were no significant and weak negative relationship between respondents work and perception that most of Malaysian cities does not have a brand ($p=-0.341$). Also, finding shows weak negative relationship between age and perception that most of Malaysian cities do not have a brand. The significant level of age between perceptions that most of Malaysian cities has no brand shows no significant correlation.

Table 5. The relationship between education level and agreement that place can be branded

Spearman Correlation		
Respondent education level and their agreement that place can be brand	Correlation Coefficient	0.061
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.544
	N	100

Source: Field Work, 2017

Table 6. The relationship between work and age and perception of Malaysian cities brand

Spearman Correlation		Most of cities in Malaysia does not have a brand
Respondents Age	Correlation Coefficient	-0.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.415
	N	100
Respondents Work	Correlation Coefficient	-0.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.341
	N	100

Source: Field Work, 2017

Table 7. The relationship between respondent's gender and origin and local community must together with government agencies in brand development process and brand should in line with place image and culture

Pearson Correlation		Local community must together with government agencies in brand development process	Brand should in line with place image and culture
Respondents Gender	Pearson Correlation	-0.020	0.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.843	0.566
	N	100	100
Respondents Origin	Pearson Correlation	-0.008	0.172
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.934	0.087
	N	100	100

Source: Field Work, 2017

Pearson Correlation analysis was made to determine the relationship between respondent's gender and origin and the perception that local community must together with government agencies in brand development process. Also, the analysis was determined respondents gender and origin between the perception that a brand should in line with place image and culture.

Analysis using the Pearson Correlation between respondent's gender and perception that local community must together with government agencies in brand development process revealed that there was weak and negative, also has no significant relationship with correlation coefficient. Respondents' origin shows the correlation was negative and weak with a coefficient of -0.087. Pearson correlation test for respondent's gender and perception that brand should in line with place image and culture was positive with a correlation coefficient of 0.058. Test on respondent's origin also positive with a correlation coefficient of 0.172.

5. Conclusion

Recently, place branding has become increasingly popular. This paper focused on the perception of local people toward place branding. As the findings showed, the place users have high perception to the topics discussed. From this study, perception of users gained and there are three important ideas that described further; explore others field in place branding; involvement of residents in branding process, and; collaboration between places in branding. Place branding is seen as an effective method to enhance the existing potential of a place without destroying physical and social-cultural conditions.

The results of this study at least have given the situation on the user's view of the place branding. Therefore, residents will be aware of any activities or programs related to branding that will be implemented by the agency in charge. Hence, place branding needs to be considered as a tool in restoring place image. If the place in Malaysia not adopt new approach and do not innovate, our city will become a sick place. World have changed, adapt it, or left behind.

Although the study has reached its aims, there were some unavoidable limitations. Because of the time limit, this study examines the perception of place branding from place user's perspective only. It did not verify other views such as weaknesses in policies and strategy of the local authority or other agencies and weaknesses in policy and strategy implementation by agencies.

A future study could be undertaken to verify perception of place branding from other stakeholders such as government agencies and private sectors. Also, a study could be made on weaknesses in policy and strategy implementation by agencies.

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