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Steffen Wippel

Branding as a Global Phenomenon: From Theory to Practice and Vice Versa

1 Introduction

This edited volume presents and investigates the still underexplored regional expressions and manifestations of the global branding phenomenon in a more encompassing, consistent, and conceptually framed manner. This first introductory chapter situates the contributions of the authors in the global debate on the phenomenon. It points to widespread empirical developments, relates to the elaboration of practical branding toolkits, and, most importantly, explores theoretical and conceptual approaches to branding that amount to the broader framework for this book.

The chapter starts with a short global, initially mostly Western, history of branding. An overview of conceptualisations of branding follows and first contrasts application-oriented literature with more critical studies and insights. It continues by presenting attempts to clarify terminology and discussing some important elements of the branding process, from the variety of its purposes, actors, and addressees to the proposed and employed tools and strategies. Another section pertains to the global macro-contexts in which contemporary branding is said to take place, including globalisation, neoliberalisation, and postmodernisation. Subsequently, some critical considerations relate to a range of political, social, and spatial aspects and consequences of branding. All this will be carried out with a certain bias in favour of place branding, corresponding to the main focus of the articles in the present volume. Most of the references used for this conceptual chapter were published from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, when, after the initiating works, the research field consolidated and provoked critical assessment before it ramified into ever more detailed issues.

2 A Short History of Branding

In general, the branding business has soared worldwide. Yet, branding is not a recent phenomenon, but has a long history. It is an old technique to demonstrate ownership and authorship and to singularise the respective object among others,

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and it has been applied to creatures as well as artefacts.[1] Etymologically, the term goes back to an Old Germanic word root around the semantic field "to burn." In this sense, it refers to burning a mark of ownership with a hot branding iron on livestock, mostly cattle and horses, but also camels in arid Middle Eastern worlds; this practice has been proven since ancient Egyptian times.[2] Up to today, where and how to brand a camel continues to be a concern even in religious Islamic law.[3] Since ancient times, across many civilisations, hot iron branding and tattooing with indelible ink have been applied also to humans.[4] Its coercive use, as a sign of violence, shame, and domination, served the lifelong "stigmatisation" of persons, for penal but also religious, economic, or decorative reasons.[5] It monitored the ownership of slaves, punished escapees, helped to identify forced labourers, prostitutes, and prisoners of war, and served as a means to humiliate "outsiders." However, in some cultures and social groups, e. g. on Southern Pacific islands or among seamen, such body-marking, especially with tattoos, also provided ornamentation and demonstrated social belonging and pride or symbolised cultural rites of passage and these days has become re-fashioned, albeit to unprecedented degrees.

Trademarks imprinted on commodities are nearly as old. Already in China, the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, and the circum-Mediterranean cultures, signs were stamped or painted as "proto-brands" on pottery, porcelain, and bricks, sometimes also on wooden products, precious metals, paper, baked products, and other material, to guarantee recognisability and to provide buyers along translocal and transregional trade chains with information on origin, quality, and status. Such pictorial symbols, names, or other wordmarks were put on goods either on their producers' initiative or were required by state authorities and professional guilds. Beyond such utilitarian purposes, these early physical forms of branding already served to promote an imaginary of the product, including the use of religion and sex (like the reproduction of gods of fertility, love, and beauty), to better promote its sales. It also served to differentiate products from competitors and the self-promotion of individual craftsmen. Sometimes, material of specific origin, like copper from ancient Cyprus, was ascribed an inherent quality and value that assured a continuous and high demand. Sales shops and workshops were evoked by pictorial emblems, according to specialisation or owner, notably in societies of high illiteracy, and have survived until contemporary times.

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[1] On the origin and application of "branding" in early civilisations, cf. Bastos and Levy, 2012: 349–352; Rajaram and Stalin Shelly, 2012: 100–102; Moore and Raid, 2008. Cf. also Anttiroiko, 2014: 47–48; Pike, 2009: 623.

[2] The terms "character" and "cauterisation" both stem from Old Greek designations for practices of branding animals; cf. Jones, 1987.

[3] Cf. the legal opinions issued on the electronic *fatwā* site, Islamic fatwas, 2022.

[4] Cf. also Ditchey, 2016.

[5] From the Greek term *στίγμα* (etymologically close to "stick," "stitch") for such body-marking practices; cf. Jones, 1987.

Not only personal, associational, or regional origins of goods served as "brands"; places and spaces themselves were also "sold" and made distinguishable and attractive already very early in history for a broader public for economic, political, and sociocultural purposes.[6] Some authors refer to "Green"-Land as an early episode of place branding by name, which according to legend was deliberately coined by its explorer Leifur Eiríksson at the very beginning of the second millennium to attract the first settlers, whereas the country name for previously discovered "Ice"-Land can be considered a misnomer from a marketing perspective.[7] City branding, too, has distant historical roots, from competition among cities in ancient Greece to religious pilgrim destinations, among members of the Hanseatic League and medieval Italian city-states[8] or absolutist town foundations. We only have to recall that seats of rulership and power, in particular, were turned into impressive brands, notably with representative, highly symbolic buildings like cathedrals, palaces, and castles. Political and military powers and (proto-)nations branded themselves very early, especially on medieval battlefields, e. g. with heraldic banners and coats of arms, cravats, uniforms, and other signs of belonging to a certain rule.

According to Matthieu Adam, modern place branding resulted from the combination of emerging capitalism and imperialism.[9] That process started, when, from the 16th century onwards, global trading centres like Amsterdam and Antwerp and colonial trading societies, like the East India Company, developed strategies to attract settlers and merchants to the newly discovered and subjugated lands. The consolidation of the modern nation state since the 18th century provides a particular historical precedent to contemporary nation-branding practices.[10] As social artefacts and spatial containers, nation states have since sought to create distinct identities and loyalties and have always paid attention to matters of image policy in their relations with others. For this, they relied on manifold symbols and sophisticated strategies – e.g., by using national flags, anthems, and constitutions, imposing new state names, and mobilising historical motifs – to mark their claim to sovereignty, to form a national citizenship, and to establish themselves as a kind of "brand," even if this terminology did not yet exist.[11] They staged national culture through artistic (re-)creations and other material and symbolic representations to impress international observers and gain recognition as equal members of the international community. Driven by a variety of objectives, they resorted to "state propaganda," "information policies," or "public diplomacy" as practices to influence their image and reputation.[12]

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[6] Cf. Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 506, and 2008: 151.

[7] See, e. g., Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 151; Ward, 1998b: 2; Pálsdottír, 2008: 183. In fact, it was Leifur's father Eiríkur Þorvaldsson, who is said to have named the country in the 980s. According to the sagas, it was his son who then, on his expeditions to North America, gave his most distant discoveries, probably Newfoundland, the likewise appealing name of "wine" or "pasture" lands (Vinland or Vínland).

[8] Cf. Anttiroiko, 2014: 14; Ward, 1998b: 2; Harvey, 1989: 15.

[9] Cf. Adam, 2020: 213.

[10] On early nation branding, cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 483, 488–489. Cf. also Aronczyk, 2013: 3–5.

The phenomenon of modern commodity branding also goes back to the 18th century, based on the commercialisation of luxury goods, which were marked with signs of origin and quality.[13] Yet, it developed mainly in the liberal industrial age, in particular in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. It was propelled by the rapid expansion of mass markets for daily consumer goods, in combination with new production, transport, and communication technologies and the establishment of the modern nation states.[14] Industrial products, packaged in consumable quantities, were increasingly displacing traditional, locally grown or manufactured daily commodities, sold as bulk ware, especially in the sectors of food and household goods. The use of catchy labels, names, signs, and slogans helped to make these new products, fabricated in unprecedentedly great quantities, known and recognisable across great distances; they made it possible to distinguish them from similar ones in increasingly differentiated and competitive markets, in order to create confidence in their continuous quality and thereby to induce reliable product loyalty among consumers. For this, it was not enough to be merely informative; creating emotional bonds also seemed necessary.

The emergence of national newspapers and later communications media like radio and TV allowed for even more effective, far-radiating advertisement of products and their producers, which, in the globalisation phase of that time, soon also started to cross state borders and rapidly grew into multinational corporations.

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[11] Cf. van Ham, 2002: 259. Cf. also Jansen, 2008: 122; Dinnie, 2008: 20. On flags as the "real country logos," cf. Markessinis, 2011.

[12] Cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 488–489. Yet, the differences from nation branding are not always really clear.

[13] Cf. Hellmann 2005: 8.

[14] On historical product branding, cf. Bastos and Levy, 2012: 354–355; Rajaram and Stalin Shelly, 2012: 102–103. Cf. also Anttiroiko, 2014: 48.

For international trade, "Made in" labels and "country-of-origin"[15] markings developed to promote national provenance linked with a positive country image based on seriousness, quality, reliability, industriousness, and ingenuity. At that time, many nationally and internationally renowned brands were created that still exist today and are highly valued in financial and emotional terms. Some brand names even turned into colloquial generic names for entire product categories (such as "Scotch," or "Tesa" in German, for adhesive tape).[16] With that, marketing that had long focused mainly on distribution techniques, slowly started to develop into a broader mix that included more sophisticated sales and logistics strategies, but also invested substantial advertising, promoting, and other sales efforts as essential dimensions in the attempt to individualise products against competitors.[17] Since the 1930s, psychological findings have informed marketing practices, while the market segmentation for mass products advanced further. However, the branding of single products, firms, and nations was still mostly oriented towards specific audiences along the value chain, mainly to particular groups of end consumers, whom it was hoped would buy the final product.

Similarly, several phases of modern place branding can be distinguished since at least the 19th century. Starting approximately in the 1840s with agricultural colonisation, it quickly spread in North America (but also in other settler colonies like Australia and South Africa), where "selling the frontier" became an interesting business, and new, relatively "empty" agricultural lands were described in glowing terms to lure potential settlers, workers, and investors.[18] This was particularly true of advancing railroad tracks, when railway companies promoted the newly created towns that were established partly as objects and arenas of speculation and were designed to keep their rail lines profitable. Growing urban functional differentiation pushed the marketing of specific sites and sectors further; "city boosterism" reacted to growing competition among places, caused by the nationalisation and globalisation of markets.[19] Thus, at the same time, health, mountain, and seaside resorts emerged, some of which were founded as completely new settlements, and also underwent targeted destination marketing in Europe and North America.

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[15] Country-of-origin designations spread particularly with post-World War II internationalisation and the definition of rules of origin in EU trade agreements in the 1970s and 1980s; cf. Pike, 2009: 625.

[16] Cf. Bastos and Levy, 2012: 354.

[17] Cf. especially Bastos and Levy, 2012: 354–355. On the distinction between marketing and branding, cf. below.

[18] On place branding in the 19th to mid-20th century, cf. Ward, 1998a and 1998b; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 154–155, 160; Adam, 2020: 213.

[19] Cf. Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 506.

With the beginning of secular tourism, first for a limited social class but later as a growing mass phenomenon, stylish placards appeared, often designed by well-reputed artists.[20] While in the UK such place promotion was undertaken primarily by municipalities, in the USA and other countries, real estate, transport, and tourism business companies (hotels, casinos, etc.) were the main drivers; world exhibitions already helped to put their hosting towns on the map. In North America, the late 1870s saw the beginnings of the marketing of residential suburbs built outside polluted and crowded city centres. That development spread to the UK, where is peaked around the 1930s, while especially from the Great Depression until the 1970s, "Fordist" industrial towns were promoted with manifold incentives for a comparatively small number of investors to attract industrial companies and generate manufacturing jobs. But according to critics, place marketing remained superficial and ineffective, because it was restricted to pure sales promotion and image advertising.[21]

Branding experienced another boom after World War II, when the "consumer revolution" and the development of the welfare state increased demand, so that competition on commodity markets intensified and new brands challenged established ones.[22] From the consumer market, branding was extended to intermediate and investment goods; with services, it also reached immaterial commodities.[23] But since the late 1980s, and in particular after the turn to the third millennium, many consider branding is to have become a rapidly expanding, and in fact, all-pervasive and ubiquitous method and business.[24] According to Andy Pike, branding now seems to be a central feature of economic life and a core activity of contemporary capitalism, and he observes the development of an all-encompassing "brand-space."[25] Similarly, João Freire stated that, in the 1980s, the economy experienced a shift from the production of products to the production of brands.[26]

The branding concept has been strategically transferred to almost all spheres of human life. Concomitantly, the complexity of the branded objects and branding practices has increased. Hence, traditional practices evolved from branding material and immaterial products to branding corporations; the idea of brands was also extended to non-economic and non-profit sectors, including political and cultural realms. Also, individuals, including political leaders and artists, who have always been stylised as icons, are meanwhile increasingly turned into personal brands. The background to this was increased globalisation and neoliberalisation of the economy, which made inroads also into manifold social and cultural life spheres, which has led to the perception of fast-growing overall competition.[27] This intersected with a shift from modern to postmodern branding conditions and practices, which increasingly have emphasised service orientation, experiential qualities, simulations, and hyperrealities, as well as with a rapidly growing medialisation.

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[20] Cf. Vuignier, 2018: 21.

[21] Cf. Kavaratzis, 2004: 59; Vanolo, 2017: 29.

[22] Cf. Bastos and Levy, 2012: 355. On the post-WWII booms, cf. also Anttiroiko, 2014: 49.

[23] Cf. Hellmann 2005: 8.

[24] Many authors point to the 1970s/1980s boost; cf. also, for instance, Dinnie, 2008: 20; Pike, 2011: 4; Freire, 2005: 347; on place branding, Ward, 1998a: 48, and 1998b: 1.

[25] Cf. Pike, 2011: 4.

[26] Cf. Freire, 2005: 347.

Advertising and branding places likewise received general acceptance and found systematic application in the last quarter of the 20th century.[28] Cities and regional entities also perceived tightened interurban, interregional, and international competition and felt the need to position themselves as attractive brands for potential investors, visitors, inhabitants, and workers. The beginning of contemporary city branding is often dated back to the famous 1977 “I ♥ NY” logo and campaign.[29] Its widespread popularity has been attributed to the new urban entrepreneurialism inspired by neoliberal ideologies and programmes, starting in the UK as a response to structural decline and the deindustrialisation of traditional economic centres.[30] In postmodern city branding, post-Fordist cities reinvented themselves as places of leisure and consumption and strategically developed into tourist and lifestyle destinations. At the same time, they experienced urban restructuring and regeneration – starting with the exemplary Boston case of waterfront refurbishment – that was enabled by the dislocation of former inner-city ports and industrial areas to the urban peripheries. Hence, those in charge built attractive museums and other urban flagship developments and organised festivals and other mass events.[31]

The same is true of nations, which are said to use branding primarily to pursue commercial ambitions, i. e. to support their exports and to compete for investment and tourism.[32] Moreover, in political terms, they strive for a good global reputation, based on images of political and social stability, peacefulness, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of sustainability; they do this in regard to other nations and international organisations, in order to realise political goals, create goodwill, obtain concessions, receive aid and credits under favourable conditions, etc. The end of the Cold War gave nation branding another push, when a considerable number of new nations, namely Central European countries and successor states of the Soviet Union, began to position themselves in the global arena.[33] The most recent example, at the time of writing, is Ukraine, which turned branding into a weapon to fight a war, with “bravery” as its new core image.[34]

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[27] For details on these macro-conditions, cf. below.

[28] Cf. Kavaratzis, 2004: 59; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 506.

[29] Cf., e. g., Ward, 1998a: 31, and 1998b: 191; Govers 2013: 74; Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 7.

[30] Cf. especially Ward, 1998a.

[31] Cf. Ward, 1998a: 46–48, and 1998b: 7, 186–208. Cf. also Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 155, 160; on waterfront development, e. g. Hoyle, 2000.

[32] Cf., e. g., Jansen 2008: 122; and many others. For more on the purposes of nation branding, cf. below.

3 From Application-Oriented to Critical Research

The rising importance of branding is reflected, and reciprocally strengthened, by a growing amount of literature. Yet, compared with the practical evolution of modern branding, thorough conceptualisation has lagged, on the part of both practitioners and academic scholars. First seminal work had already been published in the 1960s, but approaches have developed further since the late 1980s.[35] Marketing was long understood, first of all, as a logistical tool for providers and traders. Branding became part of a hands-on marketing mix, before it increasingly became conceived as a transcending strategy that needs closer reflection on its own. Under varying terms and designations, the conceptualisation of product branding initially prevailed and was only gradually extended to other objects. Likewise, place branding had already been put into practice before academic attention increased relatively late, particularly since the 1990s, and more nuanced theoretical concepts have been elaborated.[36] In both fields, the founding of special associations and topical journals contributed to the intensification of research. Today, the literature on branding is broad, fragmented, and multidisciplinary, so that publications often display conceptual vagueness and diverging definitions. Several authors have established literature surveys[37] and tried to categorise the different approaches.[38] For our purpose, we shall distinguish among three broad perspectives, which, however, largely overlap in practice.

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[33] Cf. van Ham, 2001: 5–6; van Ham, 2002 and Jansen, 2008 on Estonia; Aronczyk, 2013: 142, also on Georgia.

[34] Cf. Kaneva, 2022.

[35] Cf. Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 67.

[36] Cf. Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 12; Gertner, 2011: 91; Pike, 2011: 5.

[37] Like Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Gertner, 2011; Vuignier, 2017; Andersson, 2014. However, most of these studies are disciplinarily biased, limited to a few journals, and, in particular, restricted to English publications.

[38] Cf. in the following, Lucarelli and Berg, 2011; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013; Eggeling, 2020: 7–16, 37–40. Cf. also Vanolo, 2017: 21, 28–37; Vuignier, 2018: 33–34; Ward, 1998b: 4–6.

Most of the existing literature has been *application-oriented*, written mainly by and for professionals in marketing, business, administration, and consultancy or people coming from management and organisational studies or public diplomacy.[39] Protagonists who laid foundational work, such as Philip Kotler for branding in general since the 1960s and Wally Olins and Simon Anholt especially for nation branding in the 1990s, stimulated even further the exercise of branding in practice. Their contributions are primarily normative, advisory, and prescriptive, sometimes even "celebrative"[40] and still essentialist. Such "problem-solving" literature[41] postulates the need for branding in view of given macro-conditions, including rules, norms, and social and power relations, which lead to increasing complexity and competition. Such publications are primarily about how to create and manage a brand, and authors endeavour to develop general solutions to improve strategic communication, the marketing mix, and brand management and to provide toolboxes to optimise effects, for example on a country's international image, in order to "sell" their respective objects successfully and create the most positive overall impression possible by using a broad spectrum of instruments and historical, geographical, and sociocultural motifs.[42] As a rule, this literature advocates a consistent package of measures to be followed by all relevant actors to develop, manage, and communicate an image that is as homogeneous as possible; this approach is often still based on a rather deterministic understanding of human behaviour. Others plead in favour of a more participative approach that integrates different perspectives and varying interests, reflecting a multifaced reality.

Second, much of the literature consists of *descriptive and explanatory analyses*, mostly empirical studies of single cases, less often ones based on comparative research; the bulk of these writings seems to be predominantly qualitative. Such perspectives overlap in both directions: on the one hand, they want to assess the success of implemented branding strategies on the basis of predefined criteria and to support the development of new strategies and recommendations. On the other hand, such empirical studies are integrated parts of an increasing number of more critical studies in the broader field of social and cultural research.

Such a variety of academic *alternative and critical approaches* started to develop in the 1980s, associated with authors like David Harvey. They have proliferated since the late 1990s, but have still remained underrepresented far into the 2010s. As will be detailed in the following subchapters, these studies mirror a critical understanding of branding processes and ponder their time- and place-specific societal contexts. In particular, they investigate the social production of brands, identify their producers, ask how they find and address their audiences, and explore which mechanisms and ideologies are working in the background. For this, critical cultural studies endeavour to decode promotional messages, to analyse branding discourses, and to understand the production of social meaning. Critical constructivists also examine influence and power struggles and look at the formation of interests, identities, norms, and values.[43] Considering branding a highly dynamic phenomenon, some authors stick to practice-, action-, and process-oriented approaches,[44] whereas others take longer historical perspectives.[45] They also situate the branding phenomenon in the political, economic, and cultural contexts of contemporary capitalist development, whilst again others challenge the allegedly given framework for action, ask how this order of the world itself came into being, and reflect on the mutual co-construction of branding and its environment. Moreover, critical research attempts to explain the economic, social, political, and cultural effects of the branding phenomenon. It investigates the commodification of places; links branding practices to identity politics and security policies; and scrutinises the use of branding to exercise and legitimise power. Some scholars examine place branding as a kind of public policy and evaluate it in terms of public interest and welfare criteria. Other authors research socio-spatial connotations and interactions and geopolitical implications. This wide diversity of concepts and methods corresponds to the broad range of disciplines. Thus, contributions to place branding come from several subfields of geography, from tourism and urban studies, in addition to planning and political sciences, including governance, public policy, International Relations (IR) theory,[46] and critical geopolitics, as well as sociology, social anthropology, and history.

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[39] Cf. also Gertner, 2011: 96; Pike, 2011: 5.

[40] Vanolo, 2017: 32.

[41] Eggeling, 2020: 11.

[42] On the mix of motifs, cf. also van Ham, 2001: 3; Govers and Go, 2009: 17.

4 Attempts to Define Branding

There is no single definition of “branding.” Definitions vary considerably according to the authors’ perspectives, approaches, and disciplines, as well as to the object that is to constitute the brand. Hence, the term remains ambiguous and fuzzy; many authors even renounce giving a clear or even any definition. Accordingly, this is not the place to review all or even most existing definitions, but rather to synthesise them to find some common points and understandings.[47]

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[43] On the constructivist research agenda, cf. also van Ham, 2002: 260–262.

[44] Such as Eggeling, 2020.

[45] Cf. especially Ward, 1998a and 1998b.

[46] On the intersection of PR and IR theory, see van Ham, 2002.

Beyond its original meaning of applying a physical mark to a body or artefact, branding is often understood as a practice, a process, or a strategy. Following an influential definition by the American Marketing Association (AMA), branding helps or explicitly serves to identify a particular object and to differentiate it from competitors;[48] this positioning in a competitive field of similar items makes it into a relational concept. Therefore, it deliberately selects attributes[49] that highlight a product's or place's advantages and positive characteristics, which in turn promise a certain economic, but also symbolic, experiential, and emotional value to addressees and attribute particular meaning to the object. In fact, many understand branding as the management, and at its best the control, of an object's reputation and image in the minds of a wider public by designing, planning, and communicating its nature and identity. Processually understood, it stands for building and further developing a brand. Essentially, senders try to influence people's mental images, perceptions, and connections in a favourable way. In this broad conception, branding still assembles all activities to "mark" a product (cf. *Marke* in German and *marque* in French). Hence, branding is a mode of (ideally, reciprocal) communication at the interface between firms (or other brand producers and owners) and stakeholders. However, besides being a strategic communication tool and symbolic construction process, branding is also a legal device related to protected trademarks and designations of origin.

The brand itself "embodies a whole set of physical and sociopsychological attributes and beliefs associated with a product."[50] It can be seen as a unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide specific relevance for its target audiences. Vice versa, a brand reflects the whole set of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and expectations that people attach to an object. Some understand it as part of the attractiveness of an object, especially consisting of its good name, while others insist on the importance of the manifold features that mirror its history, achievements, and aspirations.

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[47] For this synthesis, I consulted the works, most of them related to *place* branding, of Anttiroiko, 2014: 49–64; Vuignier, 2018: 37–61; Anholt, 2011: 289–290; Aronczyk, 2008: 42, and 2013: 29; Dinnie, 2008: 14; Govers, 2011 and 2013: 71; Govers and Go, 2009: 16–17; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 507–508; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 21; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 65–66; Kumar and Kumar Panda, 2019: 257. This review is based less on statements by outstanding practitioners than on reflections from more theorising and critical authors.

[48] For the latest definition, cf. AMA, 2017. Other sources refer to the 1995 definition.

[49] On the selection of attributes, cf. also Jansen, 2008: 122.

[50] Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 508.

Since the 2000s, we can observe a shift in terms from “marketing” to a dominant use of “branding.”[51] Some authors endeavour to distinguish “branding” from “marketing.”[52] Historically, marketing is considered to have preceded the development of branding. Today, it is mostly conceived as a mix of techniques to position a product in the competition, to segment markets, and to target potential clients and consumers in order to satisfy specific, mostly commercial interests.[53] According to the AMA, marketing intends to influence and seduce its specific audience to react positively to the respective object.[54] Such efforts include processes of designing, promoting, selling, and distributing a certain offering.[55] Following this, branding can be regarded as a specific subfield or instrument of the broader marketing mix and as its qualitative extension.[56]

However, branding has been increasingly conceived as a distinct strategy that evolved from marketing and that still partly overlaps with it. Branding can be used to achieve a broader spectrum of economic, political, and other goals, and is much more oriented towards the society at large or an international audience, regardless of the markets to be served.[57] It consists of a wider set of practices and a more identity-based range of activities, and it communicates also less-tangible aspects of the object in question.[58] (Place) branding is also considered to be about larger assets, like overall reputation, trust, reputation, and soft power.

In fact, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between branding and other encompassing strategies for product and place attractiveness;[59] hence, many authors use the terms branding and marketing more or less interchangeably.[60] Accordingly, for places, they resort to a plethora of further terms and concepts to describe and comprehend similar processes, like “place promotion” as another subfield of marketing,[61] or “place selling” as a long-standing historical exercise, which, in turn, goes beyond pure “place advertising.”[62] Anholt refined the nation-branding concept towards a more encompassing “competitive identity” as a blend of brand management, public diplomacy, and economic promotion.[63]

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[51] Cf., especially on places, Vanolo, 2017: 28; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 19; Gertner, 2011: 97–98. In French, there is a general preference for the term “marketing territorial” to designate place branding.

[52] See, for instance, Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 21; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 66; Gertner, 2011: 91; Anholt, 2008a.

[53] Cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 19. Yet, Kavaratzis, 2004: 70 emphasises that marketing serves to achieve several aims, not all of them economic.

[54] Cf. Govers, 2011: 228.

[55] This corresponds to the famous four pillars (4 P’s) of the marketing mix, namely price, product, place, and promotion; cf. AMA, 2022; Anttiroiko, 2014: 49–50.

[56] Compare in this sense, e.g., Anttiroiko, 2014: 49, 64; Vuignier, 2018: 37–38. Cf. also Kavaratzis, 2004: 58.

[57] Cf., e.g., Anholt, 2008a: 1.

[58] Cf. also Vanolo, 2017: 29, 54.

[59] Cf. Vuignier, 2018: 23.

[60] Cf., similarly, Vanolo, 2017: 28, 30; Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 70.

Hence, for our purposes, the essence of branding – irrespective of the specific kind of branded objects – consists in the purposeful construction of a broader, fundamentally positive and attractive image of the object under scrutiny and its strategic communication, for a variety of reasons, to a broad, *in extremis* global, public. It turns objects into distinguishable and attractive “brands” for the addressees and intends to evoke favourable and helpful connotations, associations, and attitudes. In this context, we do not understand “image” in its literal sense as a solely visual representation (picture), but as a mental representation (imagination). Yet, this rough definition of branding still needs gradual modulation, as the following explanations demonstrate. Moreover, given the vagueness of existing definitions, the widespread imprecise use of terminology, and the different approaches in the present book, this introduction and the various authors throughout this edited volume cannot be expected to consistently distinguish between the “branding” and “marketing” of products, persons, and places.

5 Branding Purposes, Actors, and Addressees

Reviewing its history and definitions demonstrates that branding serves a great variety of goals, addresses a broad range of publics, and encompasses many acting persons and institutions. Mainly, it has to do with generating and increasing overall economic and political competitive advantages.[64] In general, both externally and internally, branding is about instilling identification with the branded object and its main internal stakeholders, inducing addressees to engage in some kind of favourable behaviour.[65] In the present condition of widespread social upheaval and increasing distrust in institutions, brands are taken as guarantees of trustworthiness.[66] Brands are expected to guide today’s consumers and citizens who face increasing indigestible complexity and information overload.[67] Manifestly, for goods and services, commercial goals are of the utmost centrality, i. e. the maximisation of sales figures and the optimisation of profits for their producers. Similarly, for nation branding, this includes the promotion of exports, based on a good country-of-origin reputation. Many of its protagonists consider place branding to be an economic endeavour and as decisive for a place's prosperity and competitiveness.[68] In the alleged contemporary "flow economy," a concept made popular by Manuel Castells,[69] places are said to have to compete to capture, partake in, and benefit from a variety of circuits and attract a maximum of material and immaterial resources, particularly on transnational and transregional, if not on global scales. Hence, they try to lure direct investment or other businesses to an economically appealing and supposedly politically safe location; to convince a very demanding clientele of the quality of products; to recruit needed competencies and qualifications; or to attract tourism to pleasing destinations.[70] More and more attention has been given to the consumers' perceptions and their aspiration for conspicuous consumption, distinction, and social status enhancement.[71] Yet, place branding in particular is also undertaken for wider political and strategic motives – e. g. expanding political influence or collecting political goodwill – and is considered an essential element of policy-making.[72]

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[61] Cf., for instance, Anttiroiko, 2014: 63–64. According to the AMA, 2022, promotion is tactical advertising and PR to encourage short-term purchase decisions. Cf. also Kotler, Haider, and Rain, 1993: 99.

[62] Cf. Ward, 1998: 3–4.

[63] Cf. Anholt, 2008a and 2008b: 22. Cf. also Gertner, 2007: 5; Anttiroiko, 2014: 63; Dinnie, 2008: 251.

[64] Cf. van Ham, 2002: 252. Cf. also Kavaratzis, 2004: 70.

[65] Compare van Ham, 2002: 250.

[66] Cf. Hellmann, 2005: 12.

Historically, individualisation, increasing product differentiation, more sophisticated consumer research, and digitalisation have permitted practitioners to address an extended target group as well as a more specific targeting of addressees; new technological devices have made it possible to use e-commerce and social media to place brands. Accordingly, the intended audience of effective branding can be defined as a wide range of different target groups or the wider public, be it local, national, or global. In its predominantly economic understanding, place branding addresses the actors behind the flows that the branders and their clients want to capture: among the different organisations and individuals repeatedly named, we find (potential new) companies and factories, investors, businessmen, industrialists, manufacturers, exporters and importers, corporate headquarters, purchasers, users, conventioneers, tourists and other visitors, residents, foreign students, a skilled workforce, and talented people.[73] For the latter, attracting the highly qualified and innovative, but also demanding and mobile “creative class” and luring it into a “creative city” that offers them a vibrant cultural life and corresponding infrastructural amenities has become a powerful concept, pushed by Richard Florida since the early 2000s, in order to promote urban (or regional or national) development.[74] Even though the relevance of his ideas is highly controversial, this utopian imaginary of the city is also reflected in place branding: the depiction of scenes with people meeting and talking, displaying cosmopolitan diversity and multicultural tolerance; the presentation of a local art scene, nightlife, and landmarks; and reference to educational and consumption opportunities as well as mega-events are considered characteristic.[75] Likewise, those responsible for the further circulation of brand messages (such as journalists, bloggers, followers, marketers, and other media people), but also the regulators, facilitators, and donors (such as state authorities; government officials; local representatives; trade, investment, and tourism agencies; business associations; diplomatic missions; and international organisations) are targets of this kind of communication.[76]

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[67] Cf. van Ham, 2001: 2, and 2002: 252.

[68] Cf., e. g., Gertner, 2007: 5; Anholt, 2008b: 22; Anttiroiko, 2014: 1.

[69] According to Castells, esp. 1996: 376–428, with the constitution of the contemporary "network society" and the global "information economy," the "space of flows" has increasingly replaced the "space of places" as the predominant spatial and social logic.

[70] For example, cf. Dinnie, 2008: 21; Anttiroiko, 2014: 1, 70; Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 249; Kavaratzis, 2004: 59; van Ham, 2001: 2.

[71] Cf. Bastos and Levy, 2012: e. g. 360–362. Thorstein Veblen highlighted conspicuous consumption, which serves to signal social status, particularly in modern societies; see e. g. von Scheve, 2017.

[72] Cf. van Ham, 2001; Anttiroiko, 2014: 70; Anholt, 2008b: 23.

The strong external orientation of branding is complemented by an inward-oriented function: in the case of corporations, it turns to the workers and employees and to other internal stakeholders; for places, it is directed towards citizens, inhabitants, and other societal actors, in order to build and strengthen the sense of a place and feelings of belonging, confidence, and wellbeing, to induce loyalty or stabilise (political) legitimacy, to form and reinforce organisation- or place-related identity and identification, and to activate civic pride, local harmony, social cohesiveness, and responsibility.[77]

For states, nation branding is primarily about broadcasting national interests to an audience at large. However, authors often state that it is not primarily directed towards domestic addressees, as was traditional nationalistic rhetoric, but to an international public, considered to consist mainly of investors.[78] Others underline the importance of a strong internal branding directed at public, private, and civil society actors, who should be activated to "live the brand."[79] Yet, national identity building can be an international marketing asset as well as a domestic propaganda tool.[80] In any case, product as well as place branding have to take into account diverse, often highly contradictory value systems, lifestyles, and preferences, especially since branding has expanded from the national into the global market.[81]

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[73] For such enumerations, cf., e.g., Kotler, Haider, and Rain, 1993: 19, 24; Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 254–258; Gertner, 2007: 4; Govers and Go, 2009: 5; Dinnie, 2011: 4–5; Anttiroiko, 2014: 70; Adam, 2020: 214, 217.

[74] On the concept, cf., e.g., Florida, 2003. On the Saudi city project of NEOM, cf. already Aly, 2019: 99–101; on attracting the creative class by branding, Dinnie, 2011: 4; Andersson, 2014: 151.

[75] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 119–122.

[76] Cf. esp. Pike, 2018: 18.

[77] On nation branding, cf. van Ham, 2002: 252–255; Govers, 2011: 230; Aronczyk, 2013: 64; on city branding, Dinnie, 2011: 5; Kavaratzis, 2004: 70; Anttiroiko, 2014: 70; also Vanolo, 2017: 11.

Traditional application-oriented approaches have often started from the assumption that a uniform, comprehensive communication strategy is needed, with a central direction – be it via a brand manager in a firm or a public authority, a private agency, or a public-private partnership – to develop, manage, and communicate a homogeneous, consistent, and clearly recognisable brand. But, as with addressees, there is in fact a plurality of "makers" involved in branding policies. The coproduction perspective has already developed a more relational approach to the actors' role and influence and perceives place branding as a dynamic process.[82] For place marketing, Kotler enumerates actors from local and regional to national and international spatial and hierarchical scales.[83] This includes brand owners, designers, and manufacturers from the public and the private sector, as well as advertisers, but also many of the regulatory actors already mentioned.[84]

However, producers and addressees of branding are sometimes difficult to distinguish, as the latter can also be active contributors to the branding process. A more participative understanding integrates different perspectives and varying perceptions, attitudes, and interests of the population and of other stakeholders.[85] Branding is implemented not only top-down: consumers also actively participate in producing and conveying brands, especially with the rise of social media; but also authorities endeavour to include citizens in the coproduction of brands.[86] So, at its best, branding is a two-way communication process,[87] and citizens can become, consciously or unconsciously, “brand ambassadors” to the outside world.[88] However, subjectivist approaches have rarely tackled bottom-up appropriation, counter-discourse, conflict, and resistance, e. g. among residents and social agents, related to brands.[89]

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[78] Cf. Aronczyk, 2008: 44. Cf. also Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010: 80, 94.

[79] Cf. Govers, 2011: 230.

[80] Cf. Jansen 2008: 129, on the Estonian case.

[81] Cf. Fırat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995: 44.

[82] Cf. Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 73–76. Cf. also Aronczyk, 2013: 114, on the fragmented nature of branding efforts.

[83] Cf. Kotler, Haider, and Rein, 1993: 34.

[84] Cf. Pike, 2018: 18.

[85] Cf. Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 74–76; Lucarelli and Berg, 2011: 18. On citizens' "right to brand," cf. Vanolo, 2017: 106–108.

[86] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 68, 73–74.

[87] Cf. Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 508.

6 Branding Tools and Strategies

To elaborate the means and strategies for effective and successful branding is a task of application-oriented authors, including branding agencies and consultants. In particular, branding also has to address values and emotions.[90] Practitioners still favour wordmarks, slogans, signs, logos, and other graphic elements as the means to advertise the objects of branding.[91] As a communication tool, these means are regarded as the symbols that constitute the brand. They help to establish a clear and consistent image that allows for a quick recognition and buying decision, especially in commercial branding, and to facilitate the introduction of new products and businesses.

Thus, for instance, for product branding, the slogan “delicious and refreshing,” coined for Coca Cola’s first advertisement campaign in 1886, remained an integral part of the brand for decades; the lettering and bottle shape, which were soon created, too, have become globally familiar characteristics; early on, the producer also used music with popular melodies and lyrics. Simple slogans like the early “Drink Coca-Cola” and the more recent “You can’t beat the feeling” have become classics.[92] For non-profit organisations, the Red Cross and, in Muslim countries, the Red Crescent have become worldwide immediately recognised symbols that stand for its reputation and untouchability. They are based on the inverted national symbol of Switzerland, where the international federation is headquartered, respectively a colour-reversed derivative from the Ottoman imperial and Turkish national emblem, which in itself is a strong and enduring symbol. As already mentioned, in place branding, the “I Love New York” logo and slogan are considered prototypes. Some slogans have rather unintentionally branded countries: thus, “Cool Britannia,” initially coined for ice cream advertising in the mid-1990s, rather than being officially used, soon became very popular in the media, for it gave the country a fresh new look after years of decay and reflected a certain cultural boom, optimism, and pride in the New Labour era.[93] As already mentioned in the previous chapter, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Dubai's Emirates airline logo, based on a wordmark in Arabic and Latin script, has also become a widely known, pervasive sign of a reputed company.

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[88] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 76; Anttiroiko, 2014: 79; Adam, 2020: 219–220; on corporate identity and workers, Aronczyk, 2013: 27.

[89] Cf. Lucarelli and Brorström, 2013: 73, 76; similarly, Anttiroiko, 2014: 154–157.

[90] Cf., e. g., Pike, 2009: 624.

[91] Cf. Govers, 2013. Cf. also Vuignier, 2018: 48–49; Pike, 2009: 624; Ward, 1998b: 5–57, 164–170.

[92] Cf. Coca-Cola Deutschland, 2022; Wikipedia, 2022.

In contrast, many authors contest the effectiveness of concentrating exclusively on such catchy textual and graphical elements, or even describe them as useless.[94] They claim that branding is "much more than merely creating a logo and a slogan,"[95] especially for place and nation branding. The focus then is on broader consistent communication strategies that convey clear messages and are based on evident substance. For city branding, material artefacts like signature buildings and landmark architecture as well as special events, especially in the fields of sports and culture, and in general, a rich cultural life, are regarded as further central features that help to spread appealing messages.[96] Scholars also underline that urban branding is not only a discursive practice to establish bright representations; they also point to effective corporate or public policies that produce actual progress and tangible improvement, e. g. in areas such as competitive positioning, social responsibility, and urban regeneration.[97] However, also for places, logos and slogans remain important tools. Since their introduction, coin money, banknotes, and stamps have been widely circulating, mostly state-controlled tools with highly symbolic representations, whose effigies have changed with the passage of time.[98] For conveying key textual and visual elements, especially PR events, factsheets, brochures, videos, and websites have become increasingly prominent devices.[99] Moreover, companies and product families have become influential "umbrella brands" for a range of goods. This is also true in place branding, where national

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[93] See e. g. van Ham, 2001: 4, and 2002: 251–252. Cf. also Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 481; Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010: 82. The slogan was a play on words with the title of the unofficial anthem "Rule, Britannia!"

[94] Cf. Govers, 2013.

[95] Govers and Go, 2009: 13. Similarly, cf. Pike, 2009: 624; Vuignier, 2018: 52, 59; Kumar and Kumar Panda, 2019: 257; Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 7; Anholt, 2008a: 1; van Ham, 2002: 252.

[96] Cf. examples given by Ward, 1998b: 186–208; Kavaratzis, 2004: 70; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 513; Dinnie, 2011: 4. On architecture, cf. also, e. g., Crilley, 1993; Grubbauer, 2011. Klingmann, 2007 relates the use of architecture to personal, residential, urban, and corporate branding.

[97] Cf., e. g., Anholt, 2008a: 2, who says he represents the "action not words" school, and 2011: 289; Gertner 2007: 5; Vanolo, 2017: 10, 54.

[98] Cf. Hymans, 2010; Penrose, 2011; Brunn, 2018.

[99] Cf. Ward, 1998b: e. g. 200–207.

brands can serve as strong umbrellas for regional and urban sub-brands;[100] an overall state or city brand can cover a wide range of segments (tourism, investment, etc.) and speak to various audiences simultaneously.[101] Yet, such subordinated places and products can also be branded independently, but can also either compete with superbrands[102] or be infected adversely by these umbrella brands' bad reputation.

For a comprehensive approach to branding, scholars developed multidimensional models. To refer to but a few of them, Melissa Aronczyk, for instance, summarises four distinct essential steps to prepare a nation brand, namely evaluation (by measuring and ranking); training (with improvement and refinement of tools); identification (of the core idea and message); and implementation and communication (including living the brand).[103] Renaud Vuignier points to four components for a brand as a marketing tool, which relate to construction, exchange, perceptions, and influence.[104] Mihalis Kavaratzis proposes a tiered model of image communication that includes indirect ("primary") communication, e. g. through infrastructure, administration, and services that reflect a place's qualities; intentional ("secondary") communication via marketing practices, like PR, design, advertisement; and tertiary channels that are difficult to control, such as word of mouth and public and social media.[105] Robert Govers and Frank Go developed a place branding model that focuses on closing three major gaps, namely the "strategy gap" between identity and projected image; the "performance gap" contrasting strategic image projection and actual place experience; and the "satisfaction gap" that exists between the visitors' experience of a place and the perceived place image.[106]

The modern concept of branding, irrespective of its historical predecessors, has been increasingly expanded to cover objects other than material, manufactured products.[107] As described above, it started to include services, corporations, organisations, and finally a broad range of places, from cities to regions, countries, and supranational entities. While branding has historically been more about products than companies, corporate brands have by now become equally present and powerful. Their development was strongly based on the evolving concept of “Corporate Identity” (CI). It developed from about the 1970s as a key strategy for enhancing corporate competitiveness and instilling a sense of loyalty, commitment, and pride to the internal audience.[108] A coordinated “identity mix” conveys and shapes the CI through “corporate communications,” “corporate behaviour,” the “corporate design,” and an “organisational philosophy.”

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[100] Cf. Dinnie, 2011: 5, 95, 195; Anttiroiko, 2014: 74–76, 93; similarly, Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 484; Ward, 1998b: 211, on positioning cities and resorts in larger spatial units, from sub- to supranational regions.

[101] Cf. Kavaratzis 2004: 71; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 512.

[102] Cf. van Ham, 2001: 6, referring to spatial and other entities such as the EU, CNN, the Catholic Church, and multinational corporations.

[103] Cf. Aronczyk, 2008: 49–55, and 2013: 68–77.

[104] Cf. Vuignier, 2018: 50.

[105] Cf. Kavaratzis, 2004: 67–69.

[106] Cf. Govers and Go, 2009: 40–42, 245–249.

[107] On this expansion process, cf., e. g., Dinnie, 2008: 22; Kavaratzis, 2004: 60; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 156; Hellmann 2005: 7–9. See also Kumar and Kumar Panda, 2019: 258.

The idea of branding was also extended to social and non-profit purposes, to encompass charitable, cultural, religious, and educational institutions; media houses; sport clubs; and cultural and sports events.[109] Lastly, we should not forget strategic self-branding by individuals, to support the formation of the desired perception by others. Especially in professional life, it is directed at employers, clients, and peers as further categories of addressees.[110] But personality branding is not limited to business, it also extends to political and cultural spheres. More and more people move in largely saturated markets where they feel they have to vigorously profile their brand image in the struggle for attention; this includes artists in the entertainment market and athletes in the sponsorship market.[111] Historically, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) is considered an early personal brand, as the first painter to sign his works and to use his own distinctive logo with his initials as a mark of quality, as well as being an early adopter of letterpress printing to publicise his works, which he was the first to sell in large editions to a wide audience; he is even said to have received an imperial privilege to trademark his products.[112] In the political realm, brands have also been developed by politicians and political parties, to facilitate identification and provide orientation in the opinion market. Occasionally, therefore, parallels are seen between buying decisions and voting decisions.[113]

Many marketing and branding specialists did not see any practical problems in transferring the definitions, methods, and approaches applied to products, and especially to corporations, to the promotion of territories and places.[114] This has increasingly changed, and place branding is mostly regarded as a separate domain with its own techniques. While a few authors absolutely denied the possibility to treat countries like commodities,[115] most point out some fundamental discrepancies between place branding and conventional product marketing and emphasise that this transfer needs careful adaptation.[116] In particular, they underline the much higher degree of complexity and the multifaceted nature of places, which resist simple categorisation. Places reflect long complex histories of internal evolution and external relationships. They show multiple identities and have to deal with and address multiple groups of stakeholders. In economic terms, places are not limited to a particular industry. While marketing and branding products is done by commercial entities and for economic purposes, places are promoted primarily by public bodies and for a wider array of interests and goals.[117] Finally, places already have a name by which they are known, to which people attach meaning, and that is not so easy to change. Hence, the images of places are much harder to control than those of products or companies.[118]

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[108] Cf. Kavaratzis, 2004: 63–64; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 509; Aronczyk, 2013: 83. On the concept, see, e. g., Birkigt and Stadler, 1986; on the analytical application to Egypt’s Islamic economy, Wippel, 1995.

[109] On sports and clubs, cf. Sasserath, 2005; Rein and Shields, 2007.

[110] Cf. Evans, 2017.

[111] Cf. Herbst, 2005, also on the transferability of the concepts from other marketing fields.

[112] Cf. Ebeling, 2013.

[113] Cf. Schneider, 2005.

Brands are also associated with value and valuation.[119] The value of a brand is considered "brand equity." This brand value is generated in relationship with individuals: it is positioned in the consumers' minds and reflected in their brand awareness, quality associations, and subjective judgements, and it evokes psychological and emotional ties with the product, service, or place;[120] a broader perspective encompasses the perceptions of investors, shareholders, and the general public.[121] For products and firms, the brand and its reputation are considered an important asset. Brand equity translates into customers' preferences and loyalty and generates economic benefits.[122] Successful branding promotes symbolic rents by creating reputational monopolies. Especially under conditions of imperfect and asymmetric information, customers will be willing to pay a price premium for highly esteemed and reputed brands. Similarly, in the case of nations, this translates into greater willingness to buy products from a specific country. Hence, brand equity also indicates the actual financial worth of a brand and has started to be quantified in corporate accounting. Accordingly, firms, and by extension places, try to build up, manage, and increase their brand equity.[123] However, especially the intangible elements of a brand are difficult to operationalise to measure its effects.[124]

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[114] In the following, cf. on transfer from product branding, Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008: 152; Anttiroiko, 2014: 61–64; Vanolo, 2017: 28; Freire, 2005: 348; on its vicinity with corporate branding, Anholt, 2008b: 22; Vuignier, 2018: 37–45; on both, van Ham, 2002: 250.

[115] Cf. Gertner, 2007: 3.

[116] On these differences, cf. esp. Govers and Go, 2009: 13, 68–70; Kavaratzis, 2004: 58, 66. Cf. also Anholt, 2008b: 22; Jansen, 2008: 125; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 510–513; Govers, 2013: 72; Dinnie, 2008: 42, 49, and 2011: 3–4; Kumar and Kumar Panda, 2019: 258.

[117] Cf. also Anholt, 2008a: 1–2; Dinnie, 2008: 19.

[118] Referring to corporations, cf. Govers, 2011: 228.

[119] On brand equity, cf. in the following Anttiroiko, 2014: 52, 56–59; Dinnie, 2008: 61–74; Pike, 2009. Cf. also Govers, 2013: 71; Govers and Go, 2009: 15–17; Vuignier, 2018: 50–52.

[120] Cf. also van Ham, 2001: 250; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 509; Kumar and Kumar Panda, 2019: 257.

[121] Cf. Aronczyk, 2013: 24.

[122] Cf. also Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 250; on economic benefit, AMA, 2017.

This valorisation of a brand is also linked to reflections about the qualification and singularisation of products.[125] With regard to the late modern economy and society, the "singular" and the "unique" have increasingly become the focus of scientific considerations in recent years. The production of quality at various stages of product processing, from cultivation to refinement to sale to the end consumer, is at the core of these reflections. Marketing or branding, which turns a product into a brand, plays a prominent role, especially at the final stage. According to Michel Callon and his colleagues, in an "economy of qualities," economic agents are concerned with the continuous (re-)qualification of the goods and services they design, produce, distribute, and consume and with their positioning in relation to other products in the market.[126] In relation to contemporary society at large, singularities have shaped more and more areas since the 1970s, promoted by individualisation and digitalisation.[127] This not only goes hand in hand with individuals' striving for self-realisation and authenticity, but also extends to things, places, events, and human collectives, each with their own identities. In a post-industrial "economy of singularities,"[128] uniform mass production gives way to events and objects that are characterised, e.g. by narrative, aesthetic, creative, and ethical qualities. Accordingly, the commodity-consumer relationship is less controlled by prices and more by the particular quality attributed to the respective products. Social mechanisms contribute to the formation of individual judgements. Competitive strategies primarily aim at visibility, recognition, attention, and attractiveness. Sociocognitive arrangements (including the display, packaging, and promotion of the goods, the brand, etc.) are also significantly involved in the creation of quality.[129] Places that want to attract buyers, tourists, or investors are characterised by uniqueness, too, just like architecture.

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[123] Cf. also Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 253; Anholt, 2008a: 3; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 509–510. On places and states, cf. Govers and Go, 2009: 12; van Ham, 2002: 253–254; Eggeling, 2020: 8.

[124] Cf. Vuignier, 2018: 74.

[125] Cf. Pike, 2009: 625.

[126] Cf. Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa, 2002.

[127] Cf. Reckwitz, 2017.

[128] Cf. Karpik, 2010.

7 Global Macro Contexts

Globalisation, neoliberalisation, and postmodernisation are counted among the main processes that favour the enormous acceleration and spread of branding activities in recent decades. They shall be succinctly dealt with in this section.

7.1 Globalisation

The contemporary wave of globalisation has been both a strong narrative underlining the need for branding in proscriptive approaches and an ongoing process, in which, according to more descriptive and analytical studies, the surge of branding since the late 1980s is embedded and with which it mutually interacts. The term “globalisation” has often been used as a shorthand for processes in which flows and networks play at least as important a role as national institutions as a framework for social and economic life. The idea that we live in such a space of flows instead of a space of places has become pervasive.[130] In a globalised world in which capital, goods, and people move freely around the globe and can choose to settle in the most attractive places for their businesses and residencies, attractiveness is considered key to economic success.[131]

Opening borders for free trade between national markets on regional and global scales has increased competition between products and companies, which calls for their more proactive positioning. But cities, regions, and states are also considered to have entered considerable immediate interurban, interregional, and international competition for resources and flows of values and hence feel obliged to market themselves to promote their development in a globalised world.[132]

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[129] In branding wine, for instance, the design of bottles and boxes, tastings, and participation in events such as trade fairs, stories about the production process, the region of origin, and the company tradition are part of the further qualification; cf., e.g., Rainer, Kister, and Steiner, 2019.

[130] Cf. again Castell’s 1996 seminal work.

[131] Compare Anttiroiko, 2014: 17, 34–42.

[132] Compare, for instance and on different scales, Anttiroiko, 2014: 1, 61–96; Govers, 2011: 228; van Ham, 2001: 3; Anholt, 2008a: 6; Jansen, 2008: 121.

To be able to stand up to global competition, first, nation branding surged as a means that merges traditional national identity politics and economic country-of-origin marketing; thus, in predominantly economically oriented branding, national identity becomes mobilised as a competitive resource.[133] An important research milestone in this respect was Michael Porter's work, according to which, just like organisations and firms, states strive to achieve competitive advantages over their rivals by playing on the costs and the differentiation among products and supporting productivity and innovation among national corporations.[134] At the same time, globalisation is said to have enormously defied the role of the state, leading to a great loss of state power and control over economic and political affairs.[135] With that, authorities have turned to nation branding as an updated and soft-power version of nation building and nationalism.[136] This was paralleled by claims, made by Edward Luttwak and Pascal Lorot also in the 1990s, of a contemporary shift of interstate conflicts from traditional strategic geopolitics and "hard" (military) power to geoeconomics striving for technological and economic superiority and securing the highest possible welfare and employment for the national population.[137] Accordingly, after the end of the Cold War – at least in the Global North and before Ukraine was attacked in 2022 – markets replaced war, and performance in the marketplace has become more relevant than on the battlefield.[138]

Second, on an urban level, responsible actors also perceive the need to enter unprecedented interurban competition for resources, influence, and recognition. In particular, we can observe the rise and conceptualisation of worldwide dominating and radiating urban places in an emergent hierarchical network of cities.[139] Such "global" or "world cities" are directly connected to the world economy, stand out as basing points for international capital, and house the headquarters of worldwide leading industries, media, and political and cultural institutions.

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[133] Cf. Dinnie, 2008: 21; Aronczyk, 2013: 15. Cf. again Anholt's idea of "competitive identity," e.g. 2008b.

[134] Cf. Porter, 1990. On the impulse for place branding, cf. Ward, 1998b: 4.

[135] Cf. Pike, 2011: 10; Jansen, 2008: 125.

[136] Cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017; Aronczyk, 2013: 16; Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010: 80–83.

[137] Cf. Luttwak, 1990; Lorot, 1999. While the US approach is a more normative, strategic kind, the French approach is primarily analytic. On a branding perspective on this, cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 483. For a critical discussion, cf. below.

[138] Cf. Jansen, 2008: 125.

[139] Cf. Sassen, 2001; Taylor, 2004. Increasingly, the samples under study extended to a larger range of places of global standing, and tiered categorisations of globalness developed. In fact, world cities have also been a historical phenomenon, with many of them placed in the MENA region, Constantinople/Istanbul being the most prominent case, besides Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Tabriz, and others; cf., e.g., Taylor, 2004: 8–10.

They also resort to branding as a means of presence on the world stage, notably in the Western world and East Asia.[140] Hence, starting from this attractive narrative, cities struggle to be recognised as nodes in global networks and for their cosmopolitanism. Yet, metropolises in the Global South have also begun to turn to "worlding" strategies, which include intense branding processes, for a favourable position in the global (attention) economy and recognition as being "world-class."[141] Moreover, branding is not only a device for recognised global cities and major countries, but has also become an important tool against the political, economic, and cultural marginalisation of small states and "secondary cities" in the North and the South, which endeavour to gain visibility as global players in selected fields and central hubs in specific far-reaching networks.[142]

7.2 Neoliberalisation

Globalisation is also understood as closely interrelated with far-reaching neoliberalisation, as the latter's mutual driver, pretext, and consequence.[143] Since the early 1980s, the rise of branding paralleled the fast-growing application and global circulation of neoliberal development policies as well as the rapid spread of an omnipresent economic discourse, both of which privilege market relations.[144] The neoliberal economic logic did not remain confined to the commercial realm, but has meanwhile pervaded almost all spheres of human life.[145] Thus, place branding in particular became oriented primarily towards economic ambitions, so that nations and cities have become increasingly regarded as being (and needing to act) like commercial enterprises. According to Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg, nation branding, for instance, became a form of producing images of the nation quite different from the imagined communities of previous times.[146] As market logic has increasingly underpinned state policies,[147] the nation is nowadays branded less for achieving a favourable political standing and more for its value in the market.

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[140] Cf. Anttiroiko, 2014: 2 et passim; Vanolo, 2017: 132–134.

[141] Cf. Roy and Ong, 2011; on MENA cities, Beier, 2019.

[142] On states, cf. Jansen, 2008: 131; on cities, Anttiroiko, 2014: 71, 164; Alaily-Mattar, Dreher, and Thierstein, 2018; on the MENA region, Wippel 2021: esp. 52, 75–76.

[143] Following Peck and Tickell, 2002, I mostly prefer the term "neoliberalisation," designating an open, recurrent, multiplex process, to the more static "neoliberalism."

[144] On global circulation, cf. Vanolo, 2017: 68; on market relations, Jansen 2008: 121.

[145] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 28.

[146] Cf. Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010: 79, 94.

[147] Cf. Aronczyk, 2008: 45.

The nation is considered to have become a marketable product, and national identity has been transformed into a market asset.[148]

Neoliberalisation has also reached cities: it effectuated important economic and political changes and deeply affected urban life, even if its implementation differs in detail from one city and one part of the world to the other.[149] Neoliberal understanding of development regards cities as engines of economic growth; at the same time, cities have been more and more made responsible for their own development and their self-promotion. In this context, the rise of the "entrepreneurial city" since the 1970s, which, according to Harvey, surrendered to market rationality and interurban competition, has considerably transformed urban governance.[150] Place marketing and branding are being regarded as one of the most visible and powerful expressions of this entrepreneurialisation of urban policies, when cities have to try to find a position in the market and compete for private investment.[151] Simultaneously, cities, and places in general, are subject to ongoing commodification.[152] They become an experience to be consumed. This goes hand in hand with a growing proliferation of spaces of consumption. Large parts of cities have been turned into arenas for tourism, leisure, cultural events, and spectacles. Under conditions of globalisation and the neoliberal transformation of the urban, namely branding cities together with large urban development schemes, infrastructural megaprojects, and urban renewal and revitalisation have become important tools to draw international attention.

In this context, the role of the state has changed considerably. State agency is largely substituted by the blurring of public and private interests from different spatial scales. Private sector logics and interests have been increasingly integrated in public sector settings; public-private partnerships and outsourcing tasks to private companies have also reached public place and institution branding efforts.[153] According to Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko, "City branding has been associated with proactive operations of the neo-liberal city or entrepreneurial city (…) to promote the interests of the business and especially property owners (…)."[154] There is also a strong presence of international actors (investors, developers, donor organisations, operators, etc.), including the branding business. But against widely held assumptions, state institutions are still strong actors, which massively help enforce neoliberal principles, frequently by means of anti-liberal policies, and have even started to act like private businesses, e. g. by handing over activities to public agencies that can act beyond bureaucratic regulations.[155] In the end, branding has become a part of the production of new urban elites and new positions of power.[156]

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[148] Cf. Jansen, 2008: 121–122, 129.

[149] On the neoliberal city more generally, see e.g. Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez, 2002.

[150] Cf. Harvey, 1989. For reference to urban entrepreneurialism, see, among others, also Vanolo, 2017: 21 et passim; Kavaratzis, 2004: 59; Aronczyk, 2008: 44; Anttiroiko, 2014: 154 et passim.

[151] Cf. also Ward, 1998a: 47, and 1998b: 5.

[152] See also Medway and Warnaby, 2014, on the commodification of place names.

[153] Cf. Jansen, 2008: 122, 129; Aronczyk, 2013: 163; Harvey, 1989: 7.

[154] Anttiroiko, 2014: 154.

7.3 Postmodernisation

Authors also see marketing and branding as a part and reflex of postmodernisation. Among the characteristics of the postmodern era are fragmented experiences and juxtapositions in style, imagery, and discourse and a high degree of openness to difference, plurality, and diversity.[157] Under increasing individualisation and mobility, people become less attached to (and determined by) social classes, traditional ties, and given places. Not least, postmodernity is associated with the rise of post-industrial societies, including the shift from material production to providing and circulating services, knowledge, and information. Another characteristic of the transition from modernism to postmodernism is the central significance of consumption. With the saturation and sophistication of Western consumer markets[158] and the emergence of new affluent, aesthetically and emotionally sensitive middle classes, consumption has itself turned into a central means of producing identity, meaning, and substance in life. Products are less often "finished," but evolve in a process into which consumers can immerse und provide inputs. For the postmodern consumer, experience has replaced material benefit. Tourism in particular is considered a postmodern phenomenon. Politically, the citizen has been increasingly substituted by the consumer.

In particular, postmodern theory concedes a greater role to symbolic than to material conditions. Several authors working on branding point to the importance of symbols, icons, and simulacra.[159] Postmodern branding and marketing can be notably related to conceptual ideas of hyperrealities. In Umberto Eco's understanding, hyperreality means that something "more real" than its archetype is being constructed, though it still refers to some social "reality."[160] In contrast, Jean Baudrillard noted that advancing orders in the system of signs increasingly lack reference to any independent spatial, historical, or social reality – from simple, equivalent imitations of "reality" and serial (re)productions to simulation, characterised by the autonomisation of signs.[161] This last, self-reproducing and self-referential system creates hyperrealities that can still have real consequences (cf. below). In such a simulational world, it is through media rather than social interaction that symbols are communicated. Mass media and information technologies generate their own new realities – and events have to adapt to the mediated reality.

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[155] Cf. also Amarouche and Bogaert, 2019 on the "agencification" of urban policies in Morocco.

[156] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 68.

[157] On the postmodern era, including the role of consumption, cf. in this paragraph, Fırat and Dholakia, 2006: 129–130; Fırat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995; Featherstone, 2007. Cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 5; Freire, 2005: 351–355. While, depending on disciplines, postmodernism emerged as an intellectual field in the 1970s and 1980s, concrete manifestations already came up earlier, for example in the arts and urbanism, mainly in the 1960s. Similar to globalisation and neoliberalisation, "postmodernisation" emphasises the processual character of the phenomenon.

[158] Cf. Pike, 2009: 624.

In line with this, Fuat Fırat and his colleagues stated that "the postmodern age is essentially a marketing age."[162] In the postmodern global branding revolution, the brand itself became the focus of promotional efforts.[163] The main importance of an object is its associated sign, which gives meaning to consumption in contemporary society and adds value to it.[164] People consume less the physical products than the meaning incorporated in a brand, which helps them to define their self-images and to become identified and placed in society.[165] On the individual level, in a "society of singularities,"[166] the need to promote oneself by performing, competing, and self-optimising is as much part of the neoliberal as of the postmodern age.

Marketing and branding are also considered central to the establishment and propagation of hyperrealities.[167] Branding demonstrates that the image takes precedence over the original.[168] The predominance of aural, visual, and figural sensations over written and discursive forms[169] parallels the focus on logos, images, and advertising spots in practical branding. But it also has to adapt to inconsistent consumer behaviour and the diverse, sometimes incompatible lifestyles of the multitude of publics.[170] In postmodern marketing, images precede the final products and products strive to fulfil the provided image. Thus, the product is increasingly becoming a process that interplays with its merchandising. A brand can even develop its own life independent from the product to which it was initially attached.[171] The political process, too, has progressively become a marketing process. Suitability for media and promotional fitness have become essential for political personalities.

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[159] See, among others, Vanolo, 2017: 145–176; Fırat and Dholakia, 2006: 129; Freire, 2005.

[160] Cf. Eco, 1995: 3–58.

[161] Cf. Baudrillard, 1988: esp. 119–148, 166–184; for an interpretation of Baudrillard's work, Blask, 2005. See also Featherstone, 2007: 3, 66–68, 97; Schmid, 2006: 347; on the application of Baudrillard's thoughts to Middle East urbanism and branding, e.g. Steiner, 2010 and 2014; Wippel, 2016.

[162] Fırat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995: 48. According to Freire, 2005: 354, Baudrillard already acknowledged the importance of branding.

[163] Cf. Jansen, 2008: 125.

[164] Cf. Freire, 2005; similarly, Vuignier, 2018: 41–42.

[165] Cf. Fırat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995: 42; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 510.

[166] Cf. again Reckwitz, 2017.

[167] On this, cf. especially Fırat, Dholakia, and Venkatesh, 1995.

[168] Cf. Freire, 2005: 355. Harvey, 1989: 14 also conceded a triumph of image over substance.

[169] Cf. Featherstone, 2007: 68, 96–97.

Place marketing in particular is seen as exemplary of postmodernity.[172] This links to reflections on the form and structure of contemporary cities. Edward Soja presented six intertwined interpretations of their "restructurings" and resulting "new geographies" generated by political and economic crises since the late 1960s.[173] This starts with the transformation of their economic base, towards a post-Fordist production mode that embraces finance, real estate, and entertainment industries.[174] In parallel, these "postmetropolises" have experienced processes of globalisation and integrated worldwide urban networks, too. Their highly diverse and segregated population does not allow for a clearly defined collective identity anymore. Other authors include the eclectic architecture and greater aestheticisation of the urban fabric in the appearances of postmodern cities: building on more playful and experiential designs, they are characterised by stylistic collages, citations of historical references, and the use of decorative, ornamental forms.[175]

Finally, Soja underlines the growing power of simulations in shaping postmodern cities. More and more, entire settlements, shopping malls, festival marketplaces, resort hotels, leisure parks, and other fantasy-made hyperreal spaces are conceived in accordance with mottos and themes.[176] Postmodern cities have become centres of consumption, amusement, and entertainment, soaked with images and signs, in which everything can be staged and made an object of interest, particularly for the “tourist gaze.”[177] Numerous tourism complexes assemble various architectural styles to attract visitors with an “authentic” impression of “traditional” architecture. As simulacra, they are exact and spectacular copies of an original that never existed. Alberto Vanolo also points to the role of architectural replicas, as well as to that of skyscrapers, as distinctive landmarks, designed by globally reputed starchitects, in contemporary urbanism.[178] They have become highly visible, easily readable, and powerful symbols of urban success and attractiveness; the verticality of skyscrapers, in particular, serves as visual proof of having entered the upper ranks of global cities. Cultural icons, like brand-new museum buildings, likewise, carry positive images. Already Baudrillard assumed that, in the age of hyperrealities, the territory no longer precedes the map that tries to reproduce and represent it; rather, maps and simulations like 3D models and virtual animations, which gained a central role in planning and staging the urban, now precede, generate, and sometimes even replace material development on the ground.[179] Fierce communication strategies have sometimes become more important than the erection of real buildings and infrastructure. Social media, movies, music, and other cultural channels give “reality-like” insights into place experience and identity.[180]

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[170] Cf., similarly, Govers and Go, 2009: 6–7.

[171] Cf. Klingmann, 2007: 58–61, e.g. on the Absolut and Nike trademarks.

[172] Cf. Ward, 1998b: 5; similarly, Harvey, 1989.

[173] Cf. Soja, 2000. See also Dear and Flusty, 1998; Schmid, 2006.

[174] On the turn to cultural and creative, technology-based "smart" cities, cf. also Vanolo, 2017: 115–122, 126–128.

[175] Cf. also Featherstone, 2007: 96–103.

[176] In the following, cf. especially on the MENA region, Steiner and Wippel, 2019: 10–12; Steiner, 2010 and 2014.

Not surprisingly, the postmodernisation of cities has drastic consequences for city branding. According to Stephen Ward, linked with the structural decline of the modern industrial city in the late 20th century, selling the reinvented post-industrial city started to boom.[181] The use of iconic architecture and postmodern aesthetics has certainly become one of the most successful means to make places attractive to investors, tourists, and visitors. Such architectural dreamscapes can be easily converted into marketable commodities, to satisfy the fantasies of their clienteles. The fact that simulations can attribute to places any meaning whatsoever allows developers to intentionally invent new place identities, in places where identity is inherently absent. Symbolism helps to create comparative advantages, to shape consumers’ needs, and to generate fascination, as demonstrated by Heiko Schmid for Las Vegas and Dubai.[182] For Vanolo, any physical urban element can be mobilised, via its iconicity, impressiveness, and size, to enable any place to foster its recognisability, provoke positive associations, and trigger curiosity.[183] In this regard, Christian Steiner already affirmed that the hyperreal character of many (especially tourist) places nowadays ideally fits postmodern marketing requirements and consumer demands before displaying functionality. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu, he also points to the symbolic capital and political value of hyperrealities.[184] The establishment of hyperreal iconic spaces can be understood as a way to accumulate materialised symbolic capital in a global competition for distinction and recognition; in turn, it can be transformed into economic and political surpluses for its holders, namely the ruling elite who created and owns them, and can enhance their political legitimacy. For them, visions of urban and national economic and societal futures are another important place branding tool.[185] Not least, "cool" nation brands are associated with certain lifestyles and images.[186] In particular, nation brands pass for a postmodern variety of identity formation.[187]

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[177] Cf. Featherstone, 2007: 99; similarly, Govers and Go, 2009: 135–150.

[178] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 145–165. On the role of postmodern architecture, cf. also Crilley, 1993.

[179] Cf. Baudrillard, 1988: 166–167.

[180] Cf. Govers and Go, 2009: 142.

[181] Cf. Ward, 1998a: 46–48, and 1998b: 186–194.

[182] Cf., for example, Schmid, 2006, on a shift from the “economy of attention” to the “economy of fascination.”

[183] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 164.

8 Some Critical Considerations of Branding

Critical reflections question many of the assumptions of conventional branding approaches and point to the downsides of pervasive branding efforts. In the following, I point out only some of the observations that seem to be the most relevant for the present publication.

8.1 The Social Construction of Brands

More functional, application-oriented approaches often claim that branding aims to capture a brand's essence and make its "real" identity visible.[188] Nation branding, for instance, is said to represent and communicate given characteristics of a country. Yet, from a more constructivist position, critical approaches point out that branding first makes the brand. It comes into being through socially meaningful interpretations. Following Vanolo, brands are nothing pre-specified, but social constructions emerging from a multitude of active contributions, subjective voices, and individual life experiences.[189] Besides being an economically motivated instrument, place branding and especially nation branding in fact constitute a truly political practice, contributing to the fabrication and spread of political meaning. This parallels, e. g., the conception of the "nation," which is nothing primordial or naturally given, either, but a continuously reproduced historical construction and social artefact. Benedict Anderson, who conceived nations as "imagined communities," and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, who underlined the role of "invented traditions," contributed enormously to this understanding.[190] Hence, brands are complex, relational, and path-dependent, but they also cannot be freely "invented," as suggested in some early manuals, if they are entirely incongruent with prevailing popular perceptions.[191] Scholars like Kristin Anabel Eggeling therefore plead for a non-essentialist, processual understanding and an approach oriented towards material and discursive practices to investigate, why, how, and by whom the brand and the story behind it are being produced and how branding becomes (politically) productive.[192]

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[184] Cf. Steiner, 2014. Cf. also Adam, 2020: esp. 214; on objectivated "cultural capital," Vanolo, 2017: 148.

[185] On the MENA region, cf. Bromber et al., 2014: 7–8; Steiner and Wippel, 2019: 8–9. For more, cf. the next chapter.

[186] Cf. van Ham, 2001: 3–4. For an example, compare above the slogan "Cool Britannia."

[187] Cf. van Ham, 2002: 265.

[188] Cf., e. g., Govers, 2011: 227, 230; Anttiroiko, 2014, 62; Dinnie, 2008: 14–15; Eggeling, 2020: 9–10. On this identity-basis, cf. also Govers and Go, 2009: 16.

Evidently, urban and other marketing campaigns are always idealised and sanitised representations.[193] In striving to sell a product or place and to present it in the best possible light, branding is very selective and highlights the positive and most appealing elements, meanings, and myths that enhance the marketability of the branded object. In contrast to these messages that seek hypervisibility, other, less positive aspects are deliberately ignored, elided, or eliminated.[194] Representational strategies try to combat and reshape adverse perceptions, such as a negative country-of-origin bias or remnant images of a problematic past in nation branding.[195] Further objects of such a conscious "politics of forgetting"[196] are disturbing homeless people, poor urban neighbourhoods, slums, abandoned and deindustrialised landscapes, and political activism. Other aspects oscillate between the visible and the invisible, depending on social, cultural, and political contexts, such as the presence of mosques, mostly ignored in Western cities, but a key element of branding in Muslim societies, and the presence of gay/LGBTQ people, which only in recent years and mostly only in the Western world have become unique selling points. More generally, advertisements for project sites and cities often feature either stereotyped "typical" locals, or very few or no "real" people at all, in the smoothened and stylish aesthetic and utopian renderings of places.[197]

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[189] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 108.

[190] Cf., e. g., Eggeling, 2020: 4–5, 43–44; Jansen, 2008: 124; van Ham, 2002: 259; Aronczyk, 2013: 83–84; Dinnie, 2008: 116–188; with references to Anderson, 1983 and Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983.

[191] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 54.

[192] Cf. Eggeling, 2020: esp. 10–16, 36–59. For a primordially discourse analysis approach, cf. Mattissek, 2010.

[193] In the following, cf. especially Vanolo, 2017: passim; Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 7–8. In his book, Vanolo illustrates selective and partial visibility versus invisibility with the metaphor of the spectre and the ghost. Here, cf. also Ward, 1998b: 54; Jansen, 2008: 122; Eggeling, 2020: 7, including on endeavours to rewrite and brighten national history in nation branding; Aronczyk, 2013: 34, specifically for Spain.

[194] Cf., e. g., Aronczyk, 2013: 31, 138; similarly, Andersson, 2014: 151; Jansen, 2008: 134, on hypervisibility.

[195] Cf. Dinnie, 2011: 4, and 2008: 96; Gertner, 2007: 4. Cf. also van Ham, 2002: 254; Aronczyk, 2013: 138, e. g. in the case of Chile.

[196] Vanolo, 2017: 104.

However, a brand is not only the result of an intentional, strategically planned process under the full control of those who formally conceive it; it also emerges in many unintended and contradictory ways. Beyond what is officially shown, certain things made invisible can still (re-)enter subjective and personal imaginaries and be difficult to make disappear. Imbalanced exaggerations and exclusions in branding can also be counterproductive, when counter-discourses arise, triggered by certain events, like coups and terror attacks, the destruction of cultural heritage, or media images that foreground decadence, misery, poor labour conditions, or bad treatment of migrants or minorities.[198]

8.2 Race for Ranks and Imitation Effects

Measuring and evaluating also plays an increasing role in branding endeavours.[199] As an evaluation tool, for example, Anholt developed the City Brand Index, which is among the most popular rankings; various other international indices and listings received growing attention. Such benchmarking and ranking, e. g. on economic performance, world-citiness, liveability, creativity, and sustainability, disclose strategic information about cities and nations. Today, this is supplemented by user-generated classifications on social media. Widely published top rankings not only help to improve the international image of places, but also build representations that are catchy and easily communicable – either as a sales argument in advertisements or as an impulse for responsible actors to strengthen branding efforts. However, they also contribute to the excessive use of superlatives ("best," "leading," "world-class") and instigate a not always productive race to the top for better positioning in the competition among places.

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[197] Cf. also Freire, 2009: 420, on typical locals.

[198] Exaggerations and special forms of deliberate obscuring, such as greenwashing, pinkwashing, and more recently sportswashing, which can also prove counterproductive, are dealt with in the next, empirical chapter of the introductory part of this book.

[199] On the establishment of city rankings, cf. Vanolo, 2017: 177–190; Anttiroiko, 2014: 109–141 et passim; on nations, Aronczyk, 2013: 69–75 et passim; Eggeling, 2020: 6, 38–39; on the objectivating use of statistics, Adam, 2020: 219.

But successful symbolic and iconic elements of branding risk replication and plagiary. The quick imitation, e. g. of product or architectural innovations, leads to the rapid loss of comparative advantages.[200] Not only are commodities increasingly standardised to garner widespread trust and acceptance;[201] urban renewal and transformation programmes that accompany inter-city competition also risk leading to the standardisation and confusability of cityscapes and the loss of place identity.[202] Vanolo therefore warns against mimicking urban policies and architecture with similar types of waterfronts, marinas, skyscrapers, and skylines, as well as against branding material featuring nearly the same visual images, messages, and logos; the repeated use of always the same adjectives – such as "global," "cosmopolitan," "vibrant," "exciting," "creative," "dynamic," "smart," "green," "sustainable," and other buzzwords from the neoliberal catalogue – is notorious.[203] Similarly, nations make repeated references to established global discourses of recognised economic and cultural achievements, efforts, and aspirations.[204] For products and places, aspects like social responsibility, fair trade, and ecological awareness have been growing in importance for the image of a brand and also tend to be widely evoked. Thus, uniform commercial "brandscapes" emerge, when the few same global brands dominate everywhere.[205]

8.3 Fragmentation Effects and Uneven Development

Globalisation and neoliberalisation led to the dominance of economic discourses. In particular, branding strategies show a tendency to erase the visibility of the effects that globalisation, neoliberalisation, and postmodernisation have on cities.[206] Soja describes the postmodern transformations of the metropolitan structure as a process of increasing spatial, economic, and social segregation, fragmentation, and polycentralisation, due to which urban agglomerations have clearly become more amorphous, diverse, and less tangible – a mixture increasingly difficult to be held together.[207] Besides its creative aspects, an extremely heterogeneous and multicultural population also shows destructive dynamics. New patterns of polarisation and uneven development have arisen and create new landscapes of despair, poverty, conflict, and violence, reinforced by urban branding in the interest of the capitalist class.[208] In consequence, there is an obsessive demand for security, leading to a steep rise in spatial surveillance, social control, and fortified areas of exclusion, which in turn are preferentially marketed. Also, spatial planning has become less inclusive and more fragmentary, concentrating on the lucrative and appealing parts of the city devoted to leisure, consumption, and simulation, while it turns to social issues only with the aim of halting the spread of unrest and of pacifying certain neighbourhoods.[209] The physical "cleansing" and "redeveloping" of stigmatised and marginalised places in neoliberal and postmodern urbanism parallels their being ignored in branding.[210] The accessibility of the many hyperreal projects, in particular, is often at least partially restricted by security guards, entrance fees, or exorbitant prices.[211] Negative externalities ascribed to excessive destination branding include excessive tourism, pollution, precarious jobs, and rising prices and rents.[212] Another result of interurban competition is said to be the formation of asymmetrical global hierarchies, in which a few cities and regions assume a pivotal role in the contemporary globalised economy.[213] The omnipresent "space of flows," which all strive their best to integrate into, does not lead to spatial homogeneity: flows bypass organisations and territories considered uninteresting or merely ordinary, thereby leading to uneven geographies, which in turn demand even more activities to attract attention.

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[200] Cf. Harvey, 1989: 12.

[201] Cf. Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 5–6.

[202] Cf. Andersson, 2014: 145, who also mentions the "paradox of similarity." Cf. also Jansen, 208: 131; Adam, 2020: 221.

[203] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 94–95, especially with reference to Asian cities, 117–144.

[204] Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 49–50.

[205] Cf. Pike, 2011: 10; on brandscapes, Klingmann, 2007. For Anttiroiko, 2014: 17, likewise, the race for ranks risks assimilation.

[206] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 134.

In connection with the preceding explanations, various scholars also critically scrutinise branding's focus on the "creative class" as a component of the neoliberal agenda.[214] According to Anttiroiko, the contest for the creative class and the creative city legitimises urban restructuring and the use of starchitecture against emerging social tensions and identity conflicts.[215] Innovation- and talent-oriented branding offers this narrow class of people a better quality of life at the expense of the rest; it risks increasing tensions in job markets and higher prices and rents.[216] Other groups that actually exist are intentionally kept invisible. Also, the assumption has been challenged that these creatives are exceptionally spatially mobile and prefer soft factors like the event quality of a place over hard factors such as job opportunities. Another criticism of the concept has been directed at the missing causal link between attracting the creative class and fostering economic progress.

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[207] Cf. Soja, 2000; Dear and Flusty, 1998. Featherstone, 2007: 107, likewise contrasts the aestheticisation, primarily of Western cities, in recent decades with the persistence of classification, hierarchies, and segregation within urban areas.

[208] On branding effects such as marginalisation, polarisation, and gentrification, cf. also Andersson, 2014: 150.

[209] On the MENA region, cf. Steiner and Wippel, 2019: 9–10; Wippel, 2021: 51.

[210] Compare also Vanolo, 2017: 125.

[211] Cf. also Steiner, 2014: 26; Wippel, 2021: 77–78.

[212] Cf. de Losada, 2019: 1–2.

[213] Cf. Anttiroiko, 2014: 26–33.

[214] Cf. in the following Aly, 2019: esp. 101, with regard to the new Saudi town of NEOM.

8.4 Political and Societal Consequences

From a critical perspective, place branding and especially nation branding also raise issues of democracy, participation, and governance.[217] The shift of decision-making and implementation from (elected) state representatives and public actors to the corporate sphere reflects and further fuels the neoliberal restructuring of the economy and society and entails serious dangers for democratic procedures and civic participation. A major impetus for branding is to control the communicated and perceived image of a nation. But according to Peter van Ham, when protagonists ask for high-level coordination and consistency, as well as for internal cohesion and commitment, this may result in a disciplined society.[218] He warns that strict implementation of established branding methodologies is difficult to realise in democratic countries; in contrast, authoritarian regimes feel free to act as they want. As a depoliticising practice, nation branding is a particularly attractive, persuasive instrument of legitimation for leaders and elites in undemocratic contexts. Therefore, critical research also looks at the ideological work behind branding. It investigates links of branding practices to identity politics and security policies and their use to legitimate political power. Moreover, it analyses the work and influence of private consultancy firms and regards branding as a form of spectacle that reinforces depoliticisation trends.

Decision-making in this process often remains opaque and exclusive, and no input from civil society and citizens is desired or expected. Contemporary branding also favours certain elites' visions and knowledge and, for instance, advances a specific vision of globalisation and presents it as unavoidable and compulsory. At the same time, this changes the context in which national identity is developed. Authorities tend to establish a "monologic, hierarchical, reductive form of communication"[219] that allows for only one particular kind of message and collective representation, ignores pluralities, dissent, and resistance, and eliminates alternative ideas and imaginaries of the state and society. Similarly, cities are conceptualised as single, homogenous collective actors.[220] Their branding is conceived as a predominantly technical issue, leaving little opportunity for local protest, grassroots action, or political struggle. Accordingly, practitioners and researchers increasingly have asked to integrate the broader public's ideas and views in more open, participatory processes, also to ensure that a place's population will consequently "live" the brand.[221] Yet, this obviously clashes with the manifold restrictions in authoritarian (and profoundly neoliberal) regimes, as prevail notably in the MENA region that is the focus of this volume.

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[215] Cf. Anttiroiko, 2014: 142–152.

[216] Cf. De Losada, 2019: 2–3.

[217] In the following, cf., for instance, Jansen, 2008: 121–124, 134–135; Aronczyk, 2008: 43, 45, 55, and 2013: 64–65, 85. Cf. also Andersson, 2014: 145, 150; Eggeling, 2020: 36–40 et passim; Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 487.

[218] Cf. van Ham, 2002: 266–268.

8.5 (Socio-)Spatial and Temporal Entanglements

While place branding very obviously is based on geographical references and reflects asymmetric geographies that cities try to cope with, other forms of branding, too, are intrinsically linked to space and place. Andy Pike, a key author in critical research, points in particular to the deep and still-growing spatial entanglements of brands for commodities and services.[222] First of all, the geographies of brands refer to the entanglement of product brands and place brands. Product brands are closely linked to spatial provenance and connotations that help to affirm their value and meaning; however, these associations may also lower the value of the object if linked to negative images, e. g. of quality. As we have seen above, already very early in world history, branding was used to guarantee geographic origin; later, in the mass industrial age, "Made in" labels emerged in tandem with the consolidating territorial nation state. As a next step, country-of-origin proofs were demanded by rules-of-origin clauses in trade agreements in a both liberalising and regionalising world economy. More recently, local or regional "geographic indications" and "protected designations of origin" have proliferated to warrant a product's source and qualities, related to methods and reputation, and are protected by international conventions or national legislation. Geographic nomenclature can also be part of a brand name and a protected trademark, which serves as primary product identification.[223] Socio-spatially entangled histories, national stereotypes, and other place-related connotations play a considerable role in consumers' valuation of brands. In the case of intertwined "place-product co-branding," certain places are associated with certain products and, vice versa, products with certain symbolic qualities are ascribed to places (like for Detroit and Ford and for chocolate or watches and Switzerland).[224]

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[219] Jansen, 2008: 134.

[220] Cf. Vanolo, 2017: 129, 189; Eggeling, 2020: 7.

[221] Others criticise the transfer of responsibility to "live the brand" to the citizens; cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 487.

[222] In the following section, cf. Pike, 2009 and 2011. Cf. also Anttiroiko, 2014: esp. 26–33; Vanolo, 2017: 36; Andersson, 2014.

We can also find geographic markers in branding that connect with prominent distant places, such as "Paris," "Venice," or "Switzerland" for a city's or region's atmosphere, architecture, or landscape.[225] Places themselves are repeatedly spatially positioned, with spatial metaphors, such as regional or civilisational "bridges," "gateways," "crossroads," "hearts," and "hubs," to represent key strategic locations on the global map.[226] Such efforts are particularly enormous when places from the periphery of international politics, economics, and attention attempt to move into more central positions of perception. Betweenness then becomes a particular geopolitical asset and an opportunity to emphasise cosmopolitan traits of identity. Vice versa, attempts are being made to give negative geopolitical associations a positive twist, such as with the continental marker "Africa."[227]

However, the resonance of brands may be geographically uneven and nuanced, e.g. due to varying cultural responsiveness and sensitivity, nurtured by and further nurturing spatial differences and unequal geographies of power.[228]

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[223] Cf. also Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005: 511, and 2008: 152–153. This is done especially for food (e.g. *Jamón ibérico*, parmesan, champagne, etc.), but also for other products and companies (such as, in an arbitrary list, *Eau de Cologne*, *Deutsche Bank*, American Airlines, Kentucky Fried Chicken, the *Jysk* retail chain, and *Bayerische Motoren Werke*/BMW).

[224] Moreover, cf., similarly, Anttiroiko, 2014: 50.

[225] Cf. Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 8, on Budapest as the "Little Paris of Middle Europe." In the MENA region, Beirut, for example, was the former "Paris of the Middle East" and strove to become "Hongkong on the Mediterranean" in the 1990s; cf. Schmid, 2001.

[226] Cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 496; Adam, 2020: 218; Vanolo, 20017: 11; Eggeling, 2020: 49. Kazakhstan and Turkey are examples of states that want to leave peripheral situations in favour of more central positions.

[227] Cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 497. We can add practices of reference to (re)emerging and (re)invented regional contexts, like the "Indian Ocean," instead of the "Arab world" or the "Middle East;" cf. Wippel, 2013.

[228] Cf. also Andersson, 2014: 150; Vanolo, 2017: 36–37; Govers and Go, 2009: 11; Medway and Warnaby, 2014, on the linguistic, ethnical, and political contestations of place names.

The progressively hybrid, multi-country origin of products in transnational value chains and the existence of truly global brands render associations more complex and multiscalar. With the pluralisation and globalisation of media, brands have been increasingly communicated across territorial borders; e-branding has de-territorialised brands even more. At the same time, market segmentation and differentiation in search of niche markets and premium payments by exploiting economic and social disparities lead to branding practices that vary among places and contribute to the perpetuation of uneven development and socio-spatial inequalities; the same is true, on the production side, for the division of labour across the globe by big brands. Moreover, the geographic positioning of places may also reinforce geopolitical hierarchies, when they are associated with the sphere of a strong country or world region (such as "Europe").[229]

References are not only spatial, but also temporal – to past, present, and future.[230] While branding regularly silences problematic historical aspects, allusions to a distant history can also be made explicit and serve to link the present to the myths of a vital and continuing glorious past, an ancient civilisation, or long-lasting "traditions"[231] and can help to legitimise current economic orientations or retain a political order (particularly important for dynastic lineages of monarchies), but also to distance a new political regime from dark previous ones (such as in the post-Soviet era). Vice versa, besides emphasising current strengths, temporal references can be "revolutionary" and point to change, progress, and visions and promise a bright, prosperous, and peaceful future.[232] At the same time, such future-oriented outlooks can serve to manage and control the future by limiting or even ruling out the possibility of alternative conceptions from the outset.[233]

8.6 Geopolitical Aspects and International Relations

The debate on nation branding partly blends with current conceptual thinking about geopolitics, international relations (IR), and national identity. As we have seen, authors like van Ham think that a fundamental transformation has occurred in recent decades from traditional geopolitics characterised by the logic of hard power relating to territorial claims, border control, and warfare to postmodern soft and competitive expressions of power based on the use of intangible assets of influence, status, and prestige and the formation and spread of images in world politics.[234] In this widely perceived shift, factors like culture, values, moral authority, and legitimate policies and institutions have increasingly been integrated as tools of power; visibility and attractiveness have come in the focus of the contemporary attention economy. In the logic of neoliberal globalisation, national identity becomes central to national competitiveness and serves as a potential resource of added value. While nation-building was traditionally conceived as a concept and practice turned to the domestic context to generate collective identification, strengthened globalisation has extended national identity into the international sphere. Market-oriented nation branding is understood as a device to increase a state's soft power and global recognition of its importance and is interpreted as the updated and more benign, even peace-promoting form of (a commercial) nationalism.[235] This also entails a reconceptualisation of states from ends to means of political action.

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[229] Cf. Browning and de Oliveira, 2017: 496.

[230] Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 6–7, 49–50.

[231] Cf. Ermann and Hermanik, 2018: 8. Cf. again Wippel, 2013, on Oman as an old "trading empire."

[232] On the role of visions in Gulf cities and nations, cf. also Bromber et al., 2014; on the future orientation of branding, Bolin and Ståhlberg, 2010: 94.

[233] Compare also Eggeling, 2020: 30.

Yet, against the postulated shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics, more critical authors see a less categorical contrast and point to the persistence of traditional forms of geopolitics and state power. Accordingly, nation branding remains deeply entangled with rather traditional geopolitical scripts, and emerging geoeconomic forms tend to recast conventional geopolitics in light of market logics, i.e. when boundaries between public and private, state and market, domestic and international become more blurred. States always paid attention to matters of image and identity (and their manipulation) in relations with others, in order to achieve influence. As the state as such is invisible, it has always needed to be personalised, symbolised, and imagined. Vice versa, not all moves in contemporary international policy are only about image-making and subordinated to economic ends. Diplomatic logics (i.e. a secure position in the international system), economic logics (seeking an advanced competitive standing in globalised markets), and cultural logics (seeking the construction of a collective identity) do not necessarily oppose, but can reinforce each other. Nevertheless, the divergence of branding messages to the inside and the outside can still obstruct domestic nation-building, but can also have a disciplining function. Likewise, instead of emphasising peace, conflict resolution, and intercultural understanding, nation branding can be used to globally less inclusive and cosmopolitan ends, representing instead aggressive nationalisms, as demonstrated by cases like North Korea, Russia, and ISIS (the latter voicing a quasi-state claim and exhibiting a branding strategy of its own), or a still strongly discriminating geoeconomic logic.

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[234] In connection with this paragraph, cf. in particular van Ham, 2001 and 2002; for more critical perspectives and in connection with the entire subsection, Eggeling, 2020: esp. 4–9, 38; Browning and de Oliveira, 2017.

[235] Cf. also Jansen, 2008: 133.

Moreover, for Sue Jansen, neoliberal branding is a kind of privatisation of foreign policy.[236] It finally also perpetuates and legitimises the nation state as a frame of identity, allegiance, and belonging in the context of advancing globalisation.[237] In practice, especially in authoritarian contexts, branding increasingly serves less to brand the nation than the state and the ruling regime, e.g. by promoting the image of a benevolent ruler.[238]

9 Outlook

This chapter has shown the deep historical roots of branding and how it has gained considerable momentum in recent decades in interaction with the rapid changes in macroeconomic, social, and political conditions. This went hand in hand with the development of application-oriented publications that designed rather schematic, ready-made toolkits. However, the phenomenon was gradually subjected to explicitly critical and reflexive conceptualisation and assessment. Likewise, the manifold forms of the branding phenomenon, including the object areas to which it has increasingly extended, and the multiple, interdisciplinary sources, questions, and perspectives of the theoretical approaches that have developed in the meantime, have been identified and demonstrated in the preceding sections. An immense number of ensuing publications could have been integrated into the conceptual part of this introduction. However, they have mostly only branched out into more specific aspects and sub-fields of branding theory and concepts, or have merely further elaborated on many of the aspects already dealt with here without adding much of significance to these explanations. In addition to this chapter's overall framing of this edited volume, the authors' individual book contributions repeatedly take up partial aspects of the general ideas on branding addressed in this conceptual introduction. But first, the next chapter turns to the MENA region and provides a literature-based overview of the regional unfolding and varieties of the global branding phenomenon, which have been repeatedly tied back to the various conceptualisations of branding as presented here.

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[236] Cf. Jansen, 2008: 124.

[237] Cf. Aronczyk, 2008: 43, and 2013: 64.

[238] Cf. Eggeling, 2020: 39, 51, on Kazakhstan and Qatar.

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