A Study on Strategic City Brand Policy: Based on the comparative analysis of city brand slogans in Seoul and overseas case studies

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전략적 도시 브랜드 정책 연구: 서울시와 해외 도시 브랜드 슬로건의 비교 분석을 바탕으로

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Abstract   All cities have constructed city branding strategically to intensify their competitiveness in global arena. Seoul Metropolitan has launched city brand in policy-level since 2003 and they have struggled to utilize city branding until now. This study explores the changes in Seoul's city brand in order to suggest a future direction for such efforts. The research is grounded in various domestic and foreign theories and case studies are considered from previous studies related to the place marketing, city marketing, and city branding. Relevant data were collected and analyzed, indicating that an unsure city brand requires strategic governance among stakeholders and civic consensus.

Key Words : City branding, City marketing, Place marketing, City brand, City image

요 약   모든 도시들은 글로벌 무대에서 경쟁력을 강화하기 위해서 도시 브랜딩을 전략적으로 구축해왔다. 서울시는 2003년부터 정책 차원에서 도시 브랜드를 출범시켜서 현재까지 도시 브랜딩을 활용하기 위해 노력하고 있다. 이 연구는 그러한 노력에 대한 미래 방향을 제시하기 위해서 서울의 도시 브랜드의 변화를 탐구한다. 이 연구는 도시 마케팅 도시 브랜딩 그리고 도시 브랜드 슬로건과 관련된 이전의 연구에서 고려된 다양한 이론과 국내외 사례 연구에 기초한다. 관련 데이터를 수집하고 분석한 결과, 불확실한 도시 브랜드는 이해 관계자 간의 전략적인 거버넌스와 시민적 합의가 필요하다는 것을 알 수 있다.

주제어 : 도시 브랜딩, 도시 마케팅, 장소 마케팅, 도시 브랜드, 도시 이미지

1. Introduction

As evidenced by the economic development history, evolution from an agricultural to an industrial and finally service industry society has been a natural and inevitable process for the whole world. Rapid changes in the global society have led all cities to intensify the competition for investment, tourism revenue, and residents at varied dimensional scales [1]. In the 1980s, many cities started 'selling the cities' globally. The phrase 'selling the cities' has included physical approaches such as estate development or land reclamation in the past. However, the phrase has

come to be more utilized as the representation of marketing, promoting, and branding the city in modern times. In this sense, many cities have developed plans and policy to support, advertise, and sell themselves within the global market. City branding is the process of designing and communicating the name and identity to establish the reputation [2]. The principal motive behind this approach is to establish the identity of the city and competitiveness.

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, became famous for its rapid economic growth and urban development in the past. More recently, Seoul has been quickly expanding its cultural industry and becoming attractive as a tourism destination in East Asia. Europe and America have had a long history of city contexts from development to marketing, and South Korea has quite often tried to be the benchmark for cases from developed countries in various ways. Seoul introduced the city brand 'Hi Seoul' in 2002, and after several changes, it has since been promoting the city based on the brand 'I. SEOUL. U'. In order to find out and discuss the background of this change, research is required to present the direction of city branding in the future, discussing Seoul's current city brand based on successful precedents. Thus, this paper discusses the current city brand in Seoul based on successful precedents such as New York, Amsterdam and Berlin to make suggestions for future directions.

2. Literature review

2.1 City brand and image

Generally speaking, brand identity is created by symbolic, experiential, social, and emotional values [3]. Brand image includes perceptions of quality and values. brand image is discussed as people's perception of the brand, meaning it is what people believe about the brand [4]. The city brand identity, which is associated with the city's

activity, represents the symbolic, experimental, social and emotional values created by the city, and contributes to the city brand [5]. It is the property of the symbolic, experiential, social, and emotional values the city has created. Meanwhile, the city brand image is also a perception of quality and value by subjects who have recognized the city as a brand. Nonetheless, city-like places are too complex to be treated like products. Places are not just products, governments are not producers, and users are not consumers [6]. Previous researchers have emphasized the value of establishing a positive brand for a nation [7-9]. This idea can be applied for cities and it is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Building a positive brand for city [10]

1. Attraction of inbound investment
2. Attraction of inbound tourism
3. Credibility and confidence by investors
4. Increase of political influence internally (national) and externally (multi-national)
5. Better and more productive global partnerships with other cities, public or private research and university institutions, and private sector organizations
6. 'City of origin' effect on products or services
7. Civic pride: ability to focus local harmony, confidence, and resolve

2.2 City branding strategy

A city branding strategy requires a clear vision for the future of the place and a coherent strategy in order to develop the city brand [10]. It is not always a logo and slogan that develops into a brand but an invisible value and philosophy [11]. The logo and slogan are important tools in branding, yet they are not sufficient for satisfying successful brands. Previous literature has indicated that the value and philosophy of a brand cannot be easily imitated [11]. If the branding only concentrates on the visible, it will fail. Customer decisions are made on the basis of values and philosophy that govern the products and services. Similarly, the city's value and philosophy is also expressed in

the city branding. Loyalty and attention to a slogan would not exist without philosophy [11].

Similarly, city brand should include contents that tell people what a city is or how people can experience the city directly, but a purely promotional slogan can not magically establish the image and reputation of the city [12]. A common misconception in city branding that is made during advertising a city brand is the sole use of a slogan [13].

Table 2. The ingredients for great city branding [13]

1. Embody a clear, distinctive, ambitious yet realistic brand position and persona
2. Base the brand positioning on the population's values, attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics
3. Reflect a clear city strategy and its points of emphasis regarding skills, resources, and capabilities
4. Adapt effectively to deliver benefits to target groups
5. Communicate successfully to internal key influences
6. Integrate efficiently across various marketing communications media
7. Be consistent over time

City branding requires strategic factors and Table 2 represents factors of great city branding strategies. Among the factors, the most important for city branding strategy is consistency; one city, one brand [13].

2.3 Stakeholders of city branding

Branding involves building a relationship with customers, whereas city branding seems to be associated with residents' participation. The establishment of networks among stakeholders has long been discussed as key for an effective city branding strategy. City branding must include all stakeholders of the city because they can contribute considerably to shaping the city through policies, investments, actions, behaviors, and communications [10]. Nonetheless, the political or financial influences that dominate city branding is ineffective. For example, electoral cycles have a heavy influence on the city branding process [10]. Even though

governments, considering itself the owner, usually change everything and causes the fragility of the city brand. However, the government can not develop and implement a city branding strategy by itself. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a city branding strategy in terms of governance. Effective city branding requires an understanding of the role of participating entities and the governance aspect of local government support. The relationship between city marketing and city governance is defined as the city marketing enabling a strategic approach to public planning in collaboration with the private sector [14]. Moreover, previous literature asserted that city marketing philosophy and methodology were able to be adapted and utilized in the practice of city governance [15-17]. In city branding literature, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in urban development and management [18]. Like this, city governance requires strategic alliances with a number of actors at various levels of governance [19]. Likewise, in this study comparative analysis of Seoul and other cities was conducted based on governance factors and methods necessary for the success of city brand.

3. Research methods

The purpose of this study is to compare and analyze the Seoul City Brand and suggest better directions for the future. The background of the case study selection for comparative analysis includes cities with a longer history than Seoul in city branding but also those which have maintained consistency for a long time. Among many prior studies, three representative cities were selected as successful cases [13,20-22] Thus, the selected cities are New York, Amsterdam and Berlin, with the following urban brand slogans respectively : 'I Love New York', 'Iamstadam' and 'Be Berlin'.

This study adopts a qualitative research method and comparative analysis is carried out utilizing secondary data collections and case studies. Comparisons are an essential part of the development of inductive generalizations and are central to the procedures in grounded theory [23]. Empirical generalizations and theoretical inferences can be made by means of design the research comparatively. Moreover, in order to understand better about local specificity or generality, comparative analysis is appropriate, because it can be achieved by studying the same process in different fields or different processes in the same field [23]. Secondary data collections can play various roles in a research project, from being the whole basis of the research to playing a vital or incidental point of comparison [24]. Unobtrusive, high quality data that can be reviewed by others can be found in already collected secondary data [25]. It also has the strength of triangulation, making research findings from primary more credible [26-28]. Furthermore, not only can secondary data be based on larger samples than that of primary data collection, it also offers comparative and contextual data for the researcher to compare with primary data. Re-analyzation of secondary data makes the discovery of new and unexpected conclusions more likely. It has the characteristics of being permanent and available in a form that can be checked easily by others [29,30]. The review of previous literature will assist with demonstrating a much more rigorous understanding of the selected case studies as additional examples. Thus, data corresponding to the research objective were collected comprehensively from recent news articles and academic journals.

Furthermore, the current research is grounded in various case studies from previous literature related to place marketing, city marketing. and city branding [6,10,11]. Selected successful city branding case studies are also based on previous literature [6, 13,20,21,22,31,32].

4. Findings

4.1 Changing city brand from Hi Seoul to I. SEOUL. U

In order to brand and promote a vibrant image of Seoul, on Citizen's Day in October 2002, the government of Seoul announced the 'Hi Seoul' city brand. The city slogan was launched during Mayor Lee Myung Bak's term, and he focused on the urban redevelopment and reconstruction of Seoul. Such efforts aimed to brand Seoul's dynamic image and promote the community spirit of Seoul's residents. 'Hi' is the most common way of saying hello in the world, so it was included to deliver a friendly image of Seoul. At the same time, it is also homophonic with '*high*', reflective of Seoul's ambition and vision to compete with other global cities in the international market [33]. In 2006, the Seoul Development Institute conducted research to improve the city brand slogan [34]. In a survey, 219 foreigners who had lived in Seoul for more than 6 months were asked about the 'Hi Seoul' slogan. Over 50% were aware of the slogan and 43% believed it represented the image of Seoul whilst 19% did not. The findings of this survey suggest that the awareness of the city slogan was rather high among foreigners in Seoul, indicating that the city government made efforts to promote the city brand at the time. However, according to other follow-up research results, it still required a city brand strategy to achieve differentiated positioning. The government should develop strategic plans to promote the city branding with the existing 'Hi Seoul' slogan instead of changing to a new one [34].

However, 13 years after 2003, newly elected Mayor Park Won Soon decided to launch a whole new city brand slogan called 'I. SEOUL. U'. The change led to many controversies among professionals and the public, with the main criticism suggesting that the new mayor's administration was showing off. Changing all the

'Hi Seoul' branding to a new brand cost more than $1 million, and Mayor Park's political opponents argued that this project would be remembered in history as a waste of the city's budget and the taxpayers' money. The argument goes against the principle that a city should have a single city brand in its basic purpose [13]. This finding presents that Seoul city brand has a high degree of political influence, in terms of city governance.

The Seoul Brand Promotion Committee established seven principles for developing a new city brand after the 'Hi Seoul' brand (Table 3). It can be seen that the newly established principles are based on the essential principles that the preceding studies highlight the effectiveness of urban brands [10,13]. Among these seven principles, five principles place great importance on citizens' participation.

Table 3. Seven principles of the Seoul Brand Development [35].

1. The project governance should ensure citizens lead all processes of brand development, selection, and dissemination
2. The entire process of brand development must be communicated in detail via the Seoul brand web-site
3. Various easily implemented plans should be sought to help more residents have an active share in the project
4. The developed brand should be something that individual residents feel proud of and visitors are easily attracted to
5. The brand should be developed as a 'face' of Seoul that is, and continues to be, close to Seoul residents
6. A resident-friendly brand should be developed to ensure that it is widely understood and used
7. The brand should be a global city brand representing Seoul's vivid culture and future values

This indicates the importance of public-private cooperation based on citizens' participation, not on the government level. These are seven principles that the former 'Hi Seoul' city brand did not achieve and can be discussed as an improvement in terms of the purpose and effectiveness of the city brand.

The new city brand was a notable achievement as the opinions of the Mayor of Seoul were excluded from the beginning [35]. They implied if

the project were to be affected by the current mayor's opinion, there would be a risk of the Seoul brand changing with ever new mayor elected. For this reason, the committee focused on a resident-oriented method in an effort to increase civic participation while maintaining political neutrality. In the 5 years since instituting the city brand 'I. SEOUL. U.', sculptures of the slogan have been installed at 29 attractions in Seoul, including Seoul Plaza, Seoul Grand Park, Yeouido, and Ttukseom Han River Park. In a Seoul City Brand survey of residents released by the Seoul Metropolitan Government in 2020, recognition of the city brand has increased year after year, from 63.0% in 2016, to 66.3% in 2017, 84.0% in 2018, 86.6% in 2019, and 88.3% in 2020. Likeability of the city brand also rose, from 52.8% in 2016 to 57.1% in 2017, 70.7% in 2018, 73.3% in 2019, and 75.1% in 2020 (Figure 1).

When Oh Se-hoon was elected mayor in 2021, the Seoul Metropolitan Government founds that opinions were divided among city officials as to whether to keep the city brand or replace it [37]. An official from the Seoul Metropolitan Government stated that 'I. SEOUL. U.' brand had increased likability (compared to antipathy) at the time of the launch in 2015, but now it is seen as a symbol of the former mayor's administration [37].
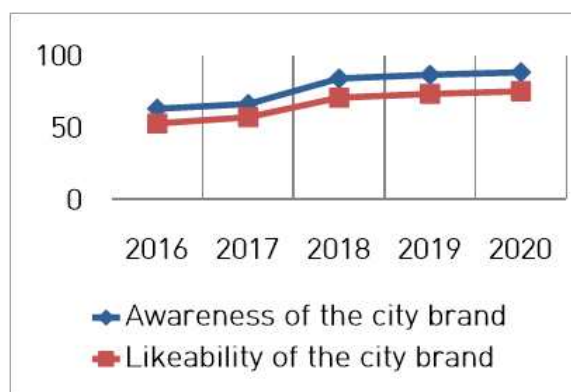

Fig. 1. The Survey of Seoul City Brand [36]

4.2 Successful city brand overseas

In order to conduct comparative analysis, this

study selected successful case studies in city branding from previous researches which is New York, Amsterdam and Berlin [13, 20-22].

The most famous city brand is considered New York's 'I Love NY' (I ♥ NY), which was created to revitalize the city's economy and has grown into an international place brand through a sustainable campaign and steady management since 1975 [38]. The logo was designed by New York Magazine's artistic graphic designer Milton Glaser. New York's decision to promote a private-led branding strategy in order to revive the city instead of a government-led one is considered a good choice [38]. The most significant finding from the case of New York is that a consensus among residents towards the city brand was necessary for a successful city brand [39].

Judging from this, Seoul City Brands, both 'Hi Seoul' and 'I. SEOUL. U' lacked the consensus of citizens from the background of city brand formation [11]. It was argued that political governance affected the formation of the city brand more [37].

Meanwhile, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, The city brand was badly managed due to a lack of consistency, uniformity, and availability before a new city branding campaign was launched in 2004, called 'Iamsterdam' [6]. The 'Iamsterdam' brand took 2 years to launch, and the main coordinator of the whole city brand effort was the newly established Amsterdam Partners.

This organization included seven municipality departments, representatives from several large private companies, organizations concerned with travel and tourism, and representatives from the seven neighbouring municipalities [6]. As such, urban branding partnerships are hybrid-type organizations [10], and effective stakeholder engagement is important in accommodating city branding as an important and respected area in modern urban development [18]. The Amsterdam Partners targeted city branding not only for

residents, tourists, and businesses, but also embraced international visitors, students, workers, and migrants in Amsterdam based on multicultural policy. The 'Iamsterdam' city brand campaign expressed the city's diversity, collectivity and the individuality of its residents [40]. This branding campaign has been targeted to stimulate a sense of collective identity, by promoting pride and solidarity among their citizens [40]. The Amsterdam city brand is able to discuss a 'shared sense of belonging' in city governance that helps people identify with their city, emphasizes cultural differences as a multiculuralist policy to embrace diversity and encourages citizens to recognize and embrace each other's customs [41]. In here, City marketers in Amsterdam believed branding should not include political rhetoric, and if political players were allowed to intervene, the city brand would be left to the whim of short-term evaluations by politicians who did not have a consistent long-term vision in city branding [40]. Therefore, the fundamental idea is to encourage residents to participate in all sorts of activities to build self-esteem as residents of Amsterdam.

The meaningful findings from Amsterdam's city brand indicate that the purposes of city branding and essential precondition for success are to encourage civic pride and make residents believe in the core value of the city. In the case of Seoul, it was reckoned the lack of strategic governance from the city government and private sector based on leadership and partnership in city branding formation [42]. To overcome this, it is discussed that the Seoul metropolitan government should focus on organizing its resources in a region, securing the budget, planning and promoting the program, managing and advertising the city brand, establishing the strategy of place marketing and constructing networks related to the city brand [43].

In 2008, Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit launched a new city brand slogan 'Be Berlin'. It

seems that Berlin politicians has long been looking for a new image and new brand in order to overcome the city's complicated past, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of the city. Berlin had already been involved in various practices of place marketing and branding throughout the 1990s and early 2000s [31]. It was involved with large constructions to change urban identity and the discourse on city identity. They discussed whether the new 'Be Berlin' was an innovative brand for civic participation or some degree of continuity with past practices. This brand campaign was organized in two phases. The first encouraged residents' participation by sharing their stories, such as 'be a storyteller, be an ambassador, be Berlin' [31]. The second phase is more like attracting tourists and investor internationally using conventional marketing methods. As the Berlin case shows, launching a new brand slogan is considered a never-ending attempt to project a new image of the city to residents and tourists.

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Berlin case shows, launching a new brand slogan is considered a never-ending attempt to project a new image of the city to residents and tourists. In the case of Seoul, which has a complicated past like Berlin, it may be said that launching a new city brand is aimed at showing a new image of the city, but the grounds for supporting this should be valid. According to an analysis of Seoul City brand change from 'Hi Seoul' to 'I. SEOUL. U', it is difficult to see that it simply provides a new image for citizens and tourists, because political influence can not be ruled out in the background of the change [34,37,39].

5. Discussion

This paper aims to identify the future direction of the city brand in Seoul by focusing on the change in its city brand. The research results suggest future direction by discussing successful city brand case studies overseas based on previous researches. The results of research analysis are summarized through three key words: consistency, continuity, and civic participation [7-9, 13]. Seoul's city brand slogan has changed several times since first being launched in 2003. According to the analysis of the findings, this is due to the political leverage that exploited the city branding strategy. Previous studies have asserted that a city brand should be consistent over time [6, 12, 13]. A city brand never settles down within a short period of time; it requires a long lead time and patience. After resetting the city brand with 'I. SEOUL. U.' in 2015, opinions about changing the brand slogan have again emerged today as a new mayor has been elected. In the case of Seoul, it seems necessary to reduce political leverage on city branding to achieve consistency in the city brand. This does not suggest excluding the government from the city branding strategy. However, successful city brands have shown the

importance of cooperation between the public and private sectors [6,10,40]. The case of New York provides a good precedent of private-led development participation in creating a brand logo [32]. Based on this fact, many cities in world pursued development of a visual logo and slogan, and Seoul openly benchmarked the case of New York since they developed 'Hi Seoul' city brand. Indeed, the 'I Love NY' logo has played a great role in their city branding strategy to revive the city image, attracting a number of tourists from around the world [38]. However, it is essential to build up an invisible value and philosophy, not only create a stylish logo and symbol [10]. The logo and slogan can mimic one another. However, the value and philosophy of a city can not be easily imitated [11]. The analysis of the Seoul city brand showed that the city had been struggling to determine whether to reset the city brand or not [37]. When Seoul's metropolitan government re-developed the city brand after 'Hi Seoul' they initiated brand logo contests among residents to promote civic participation and, thus, benchmarked successful cases from overseas [20]. However, simply starting a civic contest does not sufficiently promote civic participation. Sincere civic participation in city branding comes from civic attention [13]. According to the previous studies on city brand in overseas, New Yorkers really love their brand, and everybody shared the city's value and achieved civic consensus. Moreover, both the 'Iamsterdam' and 'Be Berlin' city brand seem to indicate residents' identity. However, Seoul, unlike these three cities lacked such factors in the city brand 'Hi Seoul' or 'I. SEOUL. U'. Representing the city identity may assist in enhancing civic pride as residents trust the core value of the city. Branding a city is similar to telling the story of the city [8]. The city brand should tell people what a city is like or what a city can show. However, a simple logo and image can not deliver the whole story. Berlin adopted a brand campaign that encourages residents to share their stories themselves, emphasizing civic participation [31]. In this unique strategy, the city employs residents to deliver the city brand. Thus, a city can establish an image and reputation through its residents.

6. Conclusion

Along with city marketing progress, cities are looking for effective strategies to promote themselves. Branding the city shows that the city has become an attractive place to live, visit, and invest in. Many city authorities create a brand for their urban place based on the interest, needs, and values of the city. Thus, this research addresses the implication for the future direction of city brand policy. Seoul's city brand can be summarized in three words: political leverage, inconsistency. and discontinuity. Cities should avoid such factors to establish a successful city brand. Seoul should revise its city brand policy carefully based on the context of successful city brands from overseas. Officials debated whether to reset the city brand again or not when the new mayor was elected in 2021. If the city had a powerful brand identity or if political leverages had not affected the city brand policy too much, such debates would never have emerged. In short, these restarted concerns represent the current city brand position of Seoul no matter how the city brand has been properly utilized to date. The three successful city brands examined herein provide a good precedent to apply in Seoul. They have in common the importance of civic participation and the division of roles between public and private sectors. A city brand is a complex entity that should embrace all aspects, making city branding a difficult challenge that takes time. Seoul should be patient with its second city brand to settle down properly rather than creating third new brand.

Detailed strategies of civic-related strategic governance should be explored.

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