

Research of Vladivostok's City Image Characteristics in the Context of its Brand Positioning

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Abstract— In the context of market economy, territories are challenged to understand their individual characteristics so as to create competitive strengths as a positive image and powerful brand.

The research touches upon the problem of the image improvement of Vladivostok, the capital of Primorsky Krai, Russia. The study is based on a marketing approach to define the notions "image" and "brand".

The city's image characteristics are identified. The characteristics are the opinions of the following groups of people: city residents, people who know about the city from media sources but have not visited the city before, tourists, holidaymakers, and business people. 4500 people took part in the survey.

The following positive image characteristics of Vladivostok have been determined: geographic location (sea city, unique flora and fauna, mild climate, warm and sunny autumn, opportunity for long, recreational use), areas near the city which are rich in various bio resources such as wild-growing herbs, fish and sea weeds of all sortsetc., the status of outpost in the Far East and proximity to the Asia-Pacific countries, and dynamic development.

The following aspects have negative impact on the image of Vladivostok: environmental problems (air and sea pollution, lack of green space, poor water quality), high prices, poor level of service in hotels and public catering enterprises, uncomfortable urban environment (poor illumination, bad road and staircase conditions, difficulty in finding required places).

The practical relevance of the research is the development of guidelines to improve the city image and identifying the approach to building the city brand.

Keywords— *image and city brand, marketing, territory image characteristics.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern researchers in the field of Economics consider image and brand as important assets of a territory, assuming that their significance tends to increase during the periods of economic crises [1-8]. The urgency of forming a favorable territory image, as well as creating and promoting its brand is

determined by the solution of a number of tasks (attracting investments, establishing partnership relations and increasing the competitiveness of the territory) which would encourage the attention of the target audience - its consumers. The reason for this is the growing importance of information in ensuring the competitive advantages of economic and political actors [9].

Applying the results of a systematic image-making activity to the spheres of economics and marketing, a bright city brand could be created, serving as a competitive advantage which attracts a target audience (consumers of the territory) and the results of such activities could be successfully commercialized.

The relevance of this study is based on the increasing interest in the development of Vladivostok, both from the government of the country and local authorities, as well as from the citizens and representatives of business communities of the Primorsky Territory's capital.

In this regard, the Strategic Development Plan for the city of Vladivostok until 2030 has been developed and approved. However, up to the present time, there are no specialists in the City and Territory Administrations able to deal with the territory image-making issues professionally.

2. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

A. Purpose of the study

To analyze Vladivostok's image characteristics in the context of its brand positioning.

B. Tasks

- To study conceptual-categorical apparatus of the research.
- To conduct an audit of Vladivostok's image characteristics on the basis of axiological approach and sociological research method.
- To determine the main directions of Vladivostok's branding.

3. THEORETICAL PART

The development of researches in the field of territorial image led to the emergence of various interpretations of the concepts of "image" and "brand" in relation to the territory. The works by I.S. Vazhenina, A.A. Graver, D.P. Gavra and Yu.V. Taranova, A.P. Pankrukhin, E.A. Petrova, L.S. Opaleva and others were devoted to the distinction and comparative analysis of these concepts [10-17].

In this study, a marketing approach to defining the concepts of "image" and "brand" is used. In the works devoted to the analysis of the territory image from the standpoint of economics and marketing, territory is presented as a commodity - a brand that should be effectively implemented. Researchers are inclined to identify the notions of image and visual outline, saying that "image" (in English: "image" – visual perception) is the visual outline of an object formed in the mind of people, to which they have an evaluating attitude manifested in the form of opinion. However, it is necessary to clearly distinguish the notions of "image" and "brand", which is substantiated in the works by A.P. Pankrukhin and S.Yu. Ignatyev.

According to A.A. Graver, the marketing approach is more applicable to the studies devoted to the image forming and branding of regions, rather than countries. Common and distinctive features of such notions as image and brand are presented in table 1 [11,13,16].

The authors of the work agree with the brand definitions suggested by of I.S. Vazhenina and Yu.V. Shapkina. According to Vazhenina, the brand of a territory is a set of unique qualities and lasting universal values reflecting the uniqueness, unique original consumer characteristics of the given territory and community, widely known, have public recognition and a stable demand of consumers of the given territory [10]. Yu.V. Shapkina believes that the city brand is a shared, desirable and exclusive concept of the territory's competitive advantage, embodied in certain innovations - goods, services, technologies and/or experience, which are successfully commercialized [18].

The brand is being created on the basis of a vibrant positive territory image. The notion of "image" of territories imply the introduction of the term "territorial individuality" into scientific discourse, which demonstrates the differences of one territory from another and is the basis for its image formation. The territorial individuality is a general set of characteristics that distinguish one territory from another. On one hand, these are official, "identifying" characteristics of the territory - a certain place on the map, belonging to a certain country, its name - a kind of a "passport" of the territory, as well as its coat of arms, flag, anthem, etc. On the other hand, the structure of territorial individuality also includes characteristics of the set of features and resources of the territory.

TABLE I. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS

Criterion / indicator	Concept	
	Image	Brand
Formation	is constructed	is constructed
Emotional evaluation	can be negative	is always positive
Economic evaluation	goes beyond the trade	a brand implies price
Structure	image is always one, although it can be multi-faceted.	an object can have several brands.
Dependence on the object's quality.	does not have a direct dependence	Depends
The presence of a visual expression	it is not necessary	the presence of a logo and other visual elements is required
Contextual characteristics	it is used in all contexts	it is more often used in a practical context.
The sphere of application	in various fields, spheres of activity	it is associated with the sphere of economics, tourism and applied marketing.

Since the territory is a special commodity, according to the marketing approach, the image of the territory can be considered as a set of qualitative characteristics of the territory, attractive for different target groups. It should be noted that image characteristics can be formed based on different approaches. Since the image of any object is made up of a certain combination of ideas that are inherent or implicit in public opinion, in our research, when choosing image characteristics, we relied on an axiological approach, focusing on social, functional and emotional values [19-21].

Functional values include the city's competitive advantages in terms of meeting the needs of the target audience. It includes quality and accessibility of urban services (such as infrastructure, social goods, goods and services produced by urban enterprises and organizations, including local government bodies). The factor of uniqueness of goods, services, and impressions has great functional value.

By social values we mean personal advantages, acquisitions, and benefits that a city can provide to its "consumers". For residents of the city, social values can be, for example, a sense of comfort and coziness, stability and security, an atmosphere of civil and creative freedom.

Emotional values are feelings, emotions and impressions that a city "produces" to its consumers.

Thus, in order to generate initial information for the brand development and improvement, it is necessary to conduct the image audit of the city. Its goal is to assess a perception of the city among its potential consumers both inside the territory and outside of it.

4. PRACTICAL PART

The practical relevance of the study is to identify the "cloud" of associations and opinions about the city among the representatives of target audiences, assess the existing image of Vladivostok taking into account the subsequent positioning of its brand.

The field research of the image characteristics of Vladivostok (using a sociological method of questioning) was conducted from 2014 to 2017. The study involved 4500 participants, where 2400 people (53%) were residents of the city of Vladivostok, 1632 (37%) were city visitors such as tourists, holidaymakers or businessmen, and 468 people (10%) – those participants who have not previously been to the city, but have got an idea of it from mass media.

In order to ensure the covering of representatives from different target audiences, the questionnaire was created in an electronic format on Google-disk using the "Forms" service and was placed in the public domain. The link to the questionnaire was published in major social networks. Besides, analysis of city guests' statements made in the mass media, at press conferences, on blogs and social networks was carried out during the research.

During the conduction of the image audit, special attention was given to emotional values since they constitute the basis of the image that arises in mind, and a sensory perception of an individual. Thus, 82% of respondents who were residents and visitors of the city, noted that they like the city, and only 18% gave a negative answer.

28% of all respondents answered that Vladivostok is associated with a "city by the sea", 20% said that it is a "port city", 18% noted that it is a "city of Japanese cars", 12% of respondents consider Vladivostok a "city of bridges", 8% "think it is a "youth city". However, 7% of participants consider Vladivostok to be a "city of narrow roads", 5% - "a poorly tended city", 2% - "a city without waste treatment facilities".

The tiger is an animal that is associated with Vladivostok in the opinion of the majority of respondents (77% of city residents, 65% of Primorsky Territory guests, 58% of people who have not visited the city).

Speaking about the unique sights of the city, the majority of respondents (residents and guests of the city) highlighted the following: new bridges - the Golden bridge, the Russian bridge and the De Friz-Sedanka bridge - (38%), old city blocks (20%), railway station building (14%), funicular (10%), airport (6%), Nikolay Triumphal Arch (7%), major department store building (3%), the monument to the Fighters for Soviet Power (2%).

Among the most significant cultural objects, the respondents noted the following: the Primorsky Stage of Mariinsky Theater of Opera and Ballet - (35%), Primorsky State Picture Gallery (25%), Oceanarium - 15%, Arsenyev Museum (10%), Submarine C-56 - (7%), circus - (3%).

The majority of the city's guests (54%) noted the uniqueness of architecture, combining Asian traditions in decorating buildings and European "modern" style.

It has been stated, that Vladivostok's positive image characteristics include: geographical location (city by the sea, uniqueness of nature, mild climate, warm, sunny autumn, opportunities for continued recreational activities), the richness of bio resources in the adjacent territories (forest wild herbs, a variety of fish species, algae, etc.), the status of Russia's outpost in the Far East and the "gateway" to the Asian-Pacific Rim countries, dynamic development.

A key element in forming the image of the region is various events, both specially organized (to attract the target audience) and the extraordinary ones (which become front-page news while covering the region in federal mass media and Internet portals).

The majority of interviewees noted that the city of Vladivostok satisfy their cultural needs, a big number of different events are regularly held in the city. The most significant events for the city's image are ranged as follows: Pacific Meridian film festival (56%), the City's Day (46%), the Navy Day (31%), "Pacific Style Week" (25%), Rock Festival (14%).

Considering that 25% of the respondents out of 4,500 defined the International Fashion Week "Pacific Style Week" as a significant event for the city, the authors proposed the third trend of Vladivostok's brand making as "Fashion City".

The absolute majority of the respondents believe that the APEC summit of 2012 (68%) and the creation of the Far Eastern Federal University (32%) positively affected the image of the city.

It has been stated that 51% of the respondents find the mass media influence on the city's image positive, and 22% - negative, while 27% found it difficult to answer.

When analyzing the development of the city's infrastructure, the opinions of the respondents were divided. Thus, the majority of the interviewed participants (35%) believe that the infrastructure of Vladivostok is developed but requires some improvements, 22% say that there are enough infrastructural facilities in the city, but the third of the respondents (30%), believe that this component is not fully developed and 13% of the interviewees think that the infrastructure of the city requires serious improvements.

Questioning of citizens and guests of the city showed that 49% consider the urban environment to be comfortable for living, 24% answered that the urban environment is not comfortable, and 27% found it difficult to answer. Defining the social values which provide comfortable living conditions in the city, it was highlighted that according to the residents, medicine, security, and comfort could not be ranged more than 3 points on a five-point scale. At the same time, the level of educational opportunities is estimated to be above average.

Analyzing the assessment of the city hotel services, it can be noted that 55% of the city guests find the location of the

hotels comfortable, 25% rate this parameter as satisfactory, 20% are not satisfied with the location of the hotels. At the same time, 34% of guests believe that the choice of hotels in the city is sufficient, 55% rate the choice as average, while 11% are not satisfied with the choice of hotels.

The analysis of prices for hotel services proved that 52% of visitors considered the prices to be high and 48% found the prices comprehensible. 43% of the respondents rated the quality of hotel services as average, 32% found it good, and 21% rated the quality of hotel services as excellent. Meanwhile, 4% of guests are not satisfied with the quality of hotel services.

40 % of the guests rated the availability of food courts as "excellent" on a five-point scale, 39% found it "good", 16% believe the food courts are not quite available, and only 5% noted that food facilities in the city are not available.

73% of the interviewed city residents believe that the main idea of Vladivostok is a transport and logistics hub and a shopping center. 23% of the residents noted that the best image-making idea for the city could be culture and tourism, (4%) noted other.

It is notable that when talking about Vladivostok, the city where the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences is located, most of the respondents do not view Vladivostok as a city with the potential to be a scientific center. Whereas, according to scientists, including the representatives of the World Organization for Environmental Protection, as well as according to the panel discussion at the Eastern Economic Forum, Vladivostok might claim to become a scientific and educational center.

Identifying the components of the city image, it is necessary to cover its negative characteristics, seeing as having awareness about them and working towards their elimination makes it possible to achieve considerable positive results. Thus, the question: "what do guests dislike most of all in the city?", revealed the following answers: dirty streets, ugly houses, recreation places - 3% respectively, 7% note polluted environment, 13% believe that the city has a low level of security, 12% of the respondents do not like household services, 15% dislike hotels, 17% are not satisfied with public transport in the city and 30% - with high prices.

Considering Primorsky capital as a business center, about 85% of the surveyed guests believe that the citizens quickly and qualitatively solve business issues, they are sociable (87%). 34% of the respondents consider the main business trend in the city as increasing tourists' attraction to Vladivostok. Along with this, the cultural cluster is also a prospective direction of the city's development. It is promoted by the opening of the Primorskiy Stage of Mariinskiy Ballet and Opera Theater, a branch of the Russian Ballet Academy named after Vaganova, the "Hermitage-Vladivostok" art center and other important cultural objects, which today have become a "visiting card" of the city.

The Eastern Economic Forum held in 2017 announced the improvement of urban environment as the main development direction of the Far East and, first of all, the city of Vladivostok [22]. At the same time, according to the

environment quality index (which includes the urban area as a whole, housing and adjacent territories, social and recreational sites, green areas and embankments, street infrastructure etc.), Vladivostok takes a rather high position among other cities - 166 points out of 300. For comparison: Tambov, the leader among the major Russian cities, scored 198 points. According to the index criteria, which includes a security level, comfort, environmental friendliness, identity and diversity, modernity of the environment, a satisfactory mark is given to a city if it scores a minimum of 150 points. It is remarkable, that the most successful part of Vladivostok's infrastructure is housing which scored 36 points, which is a high index in overall rating.

Thus, according to the research results, it has been stated that Vladivostok belongs to a small group of Russian cities that have recognizable, stable image characteristics and a vivid individuality. Vladivostok is a dynamic and rapidly growing Russian city in the Asia-Pacific region. A city with a unique location, rich resources which is connected to the world by all means of transport. A city with a special pace of life, peculiar people and favorable climate.

Considering the revealed image characteristics of Vladivostok, it is possible to propose three basic concepts for its brand making:

1. Vladivostok is a resort city, a center of cultural and environmental tourism.
2. Vladivostok is an energetic business and shopping center.
3. Vladivostok is the "fashion" capital of the Far Eastern Federal District.

As for the first two trends, it obviously should be noted, that systematic activity is being held there, while the third direction is relatively new for the city. In the modern world, the fashion industry and fashion commodities often become drivers of the creative economy, and there is a competition among cities for the right to be called fashion capitals. So, in 2016, a strategy of a "fashionable" image and brand making for St. Petersburg was launched, claiming that "St Petersburg is the center of the Russian fashion industry".

Vladivostok has a certain image associated with the fashion industry: Fashion Week and exhibitions are held here, there are successful local design brands, local Universities prepare specialists in the field of fashion design, fashion journalism is developing here. With some effort, the city could form a brand "Vladivostok is the fashion center of the Russian Far East." For example, the Fashion Week "Pacific Style Week" held since 2012, is a large-scale project aimed at bringing high fashion to the Far East. This event attracts many famous personalities to Vladivostok and forms a bright emotional background, making the city recognizable.

Conclusions

Thus, the conducted image audit of Vladivostok revealed the presence of unique image characteristics that allow to form three basic concepts for creating its brand as a resort city - a center of cultural and environmental tourism, an energetic

business and shopping center, and the "fashion" capital of the Far Eastern Federal District.

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