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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE BRANDING POTENTIAL OF THE TURKISH CITY “BARTIN”

Aybegüm Güngördü Belbağ

Research Assistant

Production Management and Marketing, Bartın University

Bartın, Turkey

aybegum.gungordu@gmail.com

Abstract

Cities should increase their competitiveness while positioning themselves in the right place of the people’s minds. Competitiveness of cities includes the effort to attract more visitors, financial investments, companies, residents and workers. When the city’s name is mentioned, the first things that come to minds constitute the city’s brand. The purpose of this study is to examine the branding potential of the Turkish city “Bartın (Parthenios in ancient times)”. Data was collected from 18 participants. Dimensions of the city brand hexagon (in particular, presence, potential, people, place, pulse, prerequisites) are used in the study. Using qualitative method, the study found that Amasra, a sub-province of Bartın has got ahead of Bartın. Even though Bartın has many traditional, cultural and historical aspects, consumers are not aware of them due to the lack of sufficient promotion and infrastructure problems. Other sub-provinces such as Çakraz, Kurucaşile, Inkumu along with the center of Bartın has to be renovated for satisfying the needs of consumers. Furthermore, educational and job opportunities should be increased. City is seen attractive due to its nature and the sea. Festivals should be diversified and promoted. Residents of the city are seen unfriendly for younger visitors.

Key words: City Branding, Turkey, Bartın, Qualitative Study, Anholt-Gfk Roper City Brands Index.

Introduction

The history of Bartın lays upon Parthenios in ancient times. The city is a harmony of green and blue with full of timbered houses. Çakraz, Amasra, Inkumu are popular regions of the city. The city hosted a number of civilizations such as Hellens, Romans, Byzantines, Genoeses and Ottomans (Bartın-Amasra Museum, 2018). Its sub-province, Amasra’s fortress has been added to the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list (UNESCO, 2018). However, the number of tourists has remained low, near 250000 in 2010 (Tourism Action Plan of the Bartın City, 2012-2016). Bartın has positioned itself as the city of water referring to the ancient times, but are people really aware of the history behind the current concrete constructions? Paris means romance, Milan means style, New York means energy, Washington means power, Tokyo means innovation, Barcelona means culture and Rio means fun. While being the brands of these cities, these concepts are tied to the cities’ history and fate (Anholt, 2006). City brands can be identified accurately and each one contributes to the consumer’s decision making process. Brand names are intangible and valuable assets. Companies can associate themselves with cities even if they are not related, such as: Chicago Pizza (Parkerson and Saunders, 2005). People can attribute greater characteristics to cities than they already have, as a reason of the cities’ powerful brands (Anholt, 2006).

Cities' effort to be an international brand is mainly based on economic reasons such as the desire to attract fixed capital investments and capital in circulation (transportation, tourism, cultural activities etc.) (Ozdemir & Karaca, 2009). Cities are mostly combined with activities in the consumer mindset –e.g. Rio Carnival, Rio de Janeiro and landmarks –e.g. Eiffel Tower, Paris. When the city's name is mentioned, the first things that come to minds constitute the city's brand. Various indexes have been developed to measure city brands. Among these indexes, Anholt-GfK Roper City Brands Index is the first study to measure city brands. Anholt-GfK Roper City Brands Index presents a city brand hexagon which has dimensions such as presence, potential, people, place, pulse, prerequisites (Anholt, 2006). Only Istanbul take parts in these Index from Turkey and it is examined in central/Eastern Europe.

In the context of the present study, first, city branding studies in the marketing literature and city brand indexes will be reviewed. After that, the city of "Bartın" will be examined based on the data of the qualitative study. Results will be interpreted through the city brand hexagon.

Literature Review

City Branding

Cities should increase their competitiveness while positioning themselves in the right place of the people's minds. Competitiveness of cities includes the effort to attract more visitors, financial investments, companies, residents and workers. Therefore, the image of the city gains importance, nowadays. An image can be defined as a whole which consists of knowledge, ideas and feelings about anything (Uner et al., 2006). A destination image can be formed with knowledge based on the destination, factors related to the perceiver and information collected from independent resources (Uner et al., 2006). The image has a crucial role in city marketing (Kavaratzis, 2004). Along with image, city branding is also an essential step for city marketing and local industrial policies; therefore, cities should be profiled (Anttiroiko, 2014). Since many cities have quiet similar characteristics, a strategy of city branding is to create unique values to distinguish one city from another (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). It can be best understood with its physical aspects, its promotion tools, and people and media's thoughts on that city (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). City branding provides a basic for a sustainable economic policy and it enables residents to identify themselves with their city (Kavaratzis, 2004). During the implementation of city branding, factors such as the majority view on city branding, the inclusion of city branding into political practices, unambiguous political responsibility, stakeholder management, genuine and credible city branding, umbrella city branding versus sub-brands, strategic co-branding with strong brands in the city, the balancing act between distinctiveness and wide support for the brand should be considered (Braun, 2012).

Scholars used qualitative methods (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011), quantitative methods (Uner et al., 2006; Demirbag Kaplan et al., 2008; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Gómez et al., 2018), case studies (Zhang & Zhao, 2009; Hayden & Sevin, 2012), "Define-Visualize-Measure Model" (Sevin, 2014) to test the perceptions about city brand images. Furthermore, city brand indexes were developed (Anholt, 2006). Scholars who examined Turkish city brands chose cities such as: Istanbul (Uner et al., 2006; Demirbag Kaplan et al., 2008; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011), Adıyaman (Akci & Uluisik, 2016), Ankara (Demirbag Kaplan et al., 2008; Hayden & Sevin, 2012), Bolu (Cop & Akpınar, 2014), Duzce (Cop & Akpınar, 2014), Sakarya (Cop & Akpınar, 2014), Kocaeli (Cop & Akpınar, 2014), Elazığ (Yucel & Ozturk, 2018), Erzurum (Serceoglu et al., 2016), Eskisehir (Ozsoz, 2018), Nigde (Iri et al., 2011), Mugla (Marangoz & Tayçu, 2017), Izmir (Demirbag Kaplan et al., 2008), Usak (Gokerik & Tekin, 2016), etc.

City Brand Indexes

When people think of a city, they consider deeper subjects such as: Pollution, climate, transportation, leisure activities etc. City brands are measured with indexes such as Anholt-GfK Roper City Brand Index and Saffron City Brand Barometer Index. *Anholt-GfK Roper City Brand Index* measures brands of cities with a city brand hexagon. Dimensions of this hexagon are (Anholt, 2006):

- 1) *Presence*: This dimension represents a city's international position and reputation. It involves questions related to the scientific and cultural contribution of the city, city's management style, being familiar with the city, frequency of visits to the city and the city's famous symbols.
- 2) *Place*: Place represents perceptions related to the physical aspects of the city such as: The beautifulness of the city, being satisfied to travel the city and the climate of the city.
- 3) *Potential*: This dimension involves the economic and educational advantages that a city has to offer to visitors, businesses and immigrants. It also represents the easiness to find a job in the city.
- 4) *Pulse*: Pulse indicates the perceived attractiveness of the city.
- 5) *People*: This dimension shows the friendliness of the city's public. It involves the adjustment to the city in the context of language and culture. This dimension also represents the city's safety.
- 6) *Prerequisites*: Prerequisites point the basic characteristics of the city. It is about the perceived thoughts of people regarding the living style in that city and beliefs about the standards of public spaces such as: Schools, hospital, sports centers and transportation.

On the other hand, *Saffron European City Brand Barometer* measures the strength of European cities according to their asset and brands. A city's asset strength shows that the possible degree of powerfulness of a city brand. A city's brand strength represents the powerfulness of a city brand at the moment (Saffron, 2018). Although these models use different methodology, the rankings show the same cities finishing in the top (Papp-Váry, 2011).

Method

Snowball sampling method was used in the current study. Data were collected from August to September in 2018. Totally, 18 people participated in the study. Semi-structured guide is created through Anholt-GfK Roper City Brand Hexagon. Interviews were carried out in cafes. An average interview lasted about 50 minutes. Table 1 represents the characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

No	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Income (Turkish Liras)	Job
1	Woman	27	Married	Bachelor's degree	6000	Housewife
2	Woman	23	Single	Bachelor's degree	500	Student
3	Man	23	Single	Bachelor's degree	1600	Student
4	Woman	23	Single	Bachelor's degree	500	Student
5	Woman	22	Single	Bachelor's degree	500	Student
6	Woman	32	Married	Master's degree	6000	Doctor
7	Woman	32	Married	Bachelor's degree	1000	Housewife
8	Man	26	Single	Bachelor's degree	3000	Public servant
9	Man	24	Single	Bachelor's degree	470	Student
10	Woman	35	Married	Master's degree	6000	Doctor

11	Woman	35	Married	PhD	4000	Academician
12	Man	35	Married	PhD	5000	Academician
13	Woman	32	Married	Master's degree	8000	Doctor
14	Man	32	Married	Master's degree	4000	Academician
15	Woman	31	Married	Master's degree	4500	Public Servant
16	Woman	64	Married	Bachelor's degree	2500	Teacher
17	Man	66	Married	PhD	3900	Academic
18	Man	27	Single	Master's degree	500	Student

Findings

General brand images of Bartın and Amasra are tested through the first three words that come into the participants' minds when thinking Bartın and Amasra. *Top words for Bartın* are listed such as: Relatives (1 time), peacefulness (3 times), university (3 times), Amasra (14 times), Kampüs Café (University's only café, 2 times), friendship (3 times), Inkumu (1 time), Agdaci village (University's location, 1 time), red street (central street in the city, 1 time), Yalı (one of the regions of the city, 1 time), Blacksea (3 times), Zonguldak (neighbouring city, 1 time), history (1 time), flood (1 time), chocolate baklava (1 time), tel kırma (a traditional handwork, 1 time), sea (1 time), rain (1 time), fish (1 time), job (1 time), blue (2 times), tradition (2 times), nature (4 times), sun (1 time) and uncertainty (1 time).

"Deep blue sea, green woods, virgin soils. Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror had said: "Is this the eye of the World?" when he saw Amasra. Old and new Bartın coexisting with tradition. Traditional simit [a kind of bagel] sellers, bakeries selling soapwort bread, gözleme [a kind of pancake], white baklava, su böreği [a pastry made with water], water buffalo yoghurt, hardworking women, friendly people, fish houses, fisheries, historical timbered houses, main street, Kemer bridge made in 1887, tel kırma, street fountains are important too." [No 16]

Top words for Amasra are listed as follows: Rabbit Island (an island close to Amasra, 1 time), vacation (3 times), tourism (1 time), crowd (1 time), sea (8 times), nature (8 times), air (1 time), fish (7 times), friendship (1 time), salad (3 times), bazaar (2 times), crying tree (a famous tree in Amasra, 1 time), history (2 times), shopping (1 time), Baris Akarsu (singer, 4 times), marina (1 time), Bartın (1 time), Blacksea (1 time), tradition (1 time), day tripper (1 time), beach (2 times), Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror (1 time), castle (1 time) and peacefulness (1 time).

Presence

Reasons for visiting Bartın are listed as follows: Relatives (3 people), education (4 people), traveling (8 people) and job (4 people). *Reasons for visiting Amasra* are listed as follows: traveling (14 people), being with friends (1 person), as a leisure time activity (1 person), sea (1 person) and vacation (1 person).

Famous symbols of Bartın are listed such as: water buffalo yoghurt (2 times), nature (1 time), port (1 time), bakeries (1 time), black cabbage (2 times), çiftetelli (a folk dance, 1 time), Amasra (4 times), Inkumu (1 time), Galla Bazaar (3 times), fish (2 times), tel kırma (2 times), salad (1 time), bridge (1 time), strawberry (1 time), agda (lemon and sugar syrup, 1 time), starflower (1 time), simit (1 time), inland navigation on the river (1 time) and nougat (1 time). 6 participants indicated that they don't know the famous symbols of Bartın.

When participants were asked whether they know about *Bartın's contribution to culture and science*, 8 of them said that they did not know and 2 of them said that the city has no contribution to culture and science. Noted contributions were indicated such as Çeşm-i Cihan (The eye of the World, 1 time), historical Kemer Bridge (1 time), timbered houses (1 time), Prof. Semavi Eyice (2 times), Barış Akarsu (1 time), university (5 times), the history when Romans and Genovese were inhabitants (1 time). One participant commented on this issue:

"The city has a contribution to tourism culture. It is one of the beautiful cities of West Blacksea region. It is a developing city with the contribution of the university. For instance, the university has been the 6th in 92 vehicles with its vehicle that is working with alternative energy." [No 4]

When *festivals and activities held in Bartın* was asked to participants, 8 of them told that they don't have any information on this issue. One of them indicated that there is not any activity in the city, two of them told that the activities were either bad or insufficient. Five of the participants mentioned Strawberry Festivals and 3 of them indicated the Spring Festival held by the university.

Some examples can be made as follows:

"Actually, I have no idea about the activities held in Bartın. University students should promote the city. In my opinion, it's important for cities. For instance, students who travel to Eskisehir, praise Eskisehir and create a perception about there. There is a lack of creating perception about activities held in Bartın." [No 1]

"Every year, the city hall organizes festivals such as the strawberry festival. Each year, different famous people come to the city and the public enjoy those evenings. Furthermore, the university arranges Spring Festivals. There has to be more famous people in the festivals." [No 2]

"I have been to the theatre. The cultural center is neglected like a coffee house. I wish there were any social activities, it does not matter what it will be." [No 11]

"I'm aware of activities arranged in the city from billboards. I don't think the festivals has a contribution to the public culturally. Scientific and cultural activities filled with knowledge will have a positive impact on the younger generation. I cannot think of any activity that stuck in my mind." [No 12]

The comparison of Eskisehir with Bartın remains important according to the findings of the study. Eskisehir can be a role model for Bartın. Similarly, Bartın is compared with other Turkish cities such as Kastamonu, Eskisehir and Amasya in the Tourism Action Plan of the Bartın City (2012-2016).

Information about *the city's history* was indicated as follows. Six of the participants told that they do not have any information on this issue. Four of them indicated that they have little information. One of them noted that only Çeşm-i Cihan is known. Three of them mentioned Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. Two of them accessed historical information from Bartın and Amasra museums. Three of them stated that Bartın was a province of Zonguldak. Two of them mentioned about the Genoese. One of them said that Bartın is a port city. One of the participants told that:

"The city's old name is Parthenios. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror wanted to conquer the city without fighting and his wish came true. The river has been used as a shipyard." [No 3]

Perceptions about the *management style of Bartın* are as follows:

“Management style of Bartın is not good. Even if it is city or water, there is always water cut in the city. Transportation is hard and expensive in the city. But, I can say that the mayor is student friendly.” [No 3]

“Bartın is managed as if it is a town not a city. Management should feature the timbered houses and natural beauties such as: City’s river, waterfalls. Investments in the city are only made for pulling votes. When there is an example such as Eskisehir, I think the resources in Bartın are wasted for nothing.” [No 12]

“Services of the city hall are satisfying, as a reason of the city has a safe city image. But, the river of Bartın should be reclaimed and repositioned as a touristic asset. There has to be a square in the city.” [No 17]

On the other hand, 5 participants noted that it could be better; 5 of them stated that it is not good; 5 of them said that they do not know and two of them said that is good. Some participant mentioned the city as a village more than a city and a management that does not value the city’s lands.

When it comes to *the beautifulness of the city*, 10 of the participants told that the city is beautiful; 4 of them noted that it has a mediocre beautifulness; one of them said that it has not that good; one of them told that it is a small but pretty city. Most of the participants mentioned the beautifulness is because of Amasra. Some examples can be seen as follows:

“At first every student wants to leave the city immediately but then, you get used to its beauties and stay. Actually, the harmony of sea and green is an advantage. When you compare it to different cities, it is beautiful even if you don’t like it when you are staying in it.” [No 3]

“Even Bartın is a highly rich region in terms of natural beauties, it has been too late to handle these beauties. The river that pass through the city, has been left as a ruin. While most of the European cities promote themselves as brands with the help of their rivers, Bartın refuse this unique resource, strictly. On the other hand, one of the greatest wounds of Turkey which is brutal urbanization is seen widely in the city just like any other city in Turkey.” [No 12]

Place

The climate of the city is mentioned by participants such as being rainy and cool (2 participants), has a wet air (2 participants), similar to Ankara’s climate (1 participant), a typical Blacksea climate (2 participants), hot (2 participants), warm (4 participants), unexpected temperature degrees such as sudden rain or hot (5 participants). Some examples are:

“You can leave with a t-shirt in the morning, and you can freeze or get wet in the evening or it can be otherwise.” [No 3]

“We wear a jacket than the weather becomes sunny. We wear a cardigan, then it purs down.” [No 9]

Being satisfied while traveling to the city is indicated as mediocre (7 participants), bad (4 participants), good (4 participants) and nostalgic (1 participant). People who seem traveling to the city as a bad experience, say that traveling to the provinces such as Amasra and Inkumu are satisfying. Some examples are:

“I like it because of its calmness. It is not complicated; it does not suffocate you. The crowd in Amasra should be decreased. There is not any effort on this issue. It is not cool at all.” [No 1]

"It's a one-time city. Maybe you come twice, but it is meaningless to visit any more, except for the sea." [No 3]

"City center is place that you can travel in half a day. Two days are enough if you go to provinces. Touristic places are limited in the city center. Even if the new museum and parks are valuable for the city, the city will not be able to free itself from being a little city in the Blacksea, unless the secret history brought to light." [No 12]

Potential

Easiness to find a job in the city is perceived as hard by 9 of the participants and easy by 5 of the participants. Three of them indicated that they did not know. Some of the participants noted that they did not see any beggars in the streets; thus, they relate this to the easiness to find a job. One of the participants stated that:

"Job opportunities in the city are limited. Finding a job is hard for the people who live here because there is not a mall, factory or well-functioned industrial zone in the city. Natural beauties are preserved in the city; thus, job opportunities should be aimed at industries such as: Modern agriculture, stock farming, forest products, sea and yacht production. It would be the right decision if he city can be a pilot region for these industries. Furthermore, tourism investments can prevent younger generation to migrate to bigger cities such as Ankara." [No 12]

Educational opportunities are noted as mediocre (5 participants), good (3 participants) and bad (8 participants). 2 of them had no information on this issue. One of the participants said that:

"Educational opportunities are not much good. There is a developing university but it has time to develop more. Other schools are more standard." [No 3]

Pulse

Comments on *the attractiveness of the city* are as follows. Nine participants consider Bartın as an attractive city but mostly, because of Amasra. Five participants see the city as unattractive. While one participant sees the city partially attractive, one participant has no information on this issue. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that the promotion of the city is insufficient. Some examples on this issue are as follows:

"Of course it is attractive. Otherwise, students won't come to Bartın when googling it and seeing Amasra." [No 3]

"Bartın is far away from being attractive because of not enabling social, cultural, educational and health benefits, sufficiently. First, the river of the city has to be reclaimed. The quality of the university has to be improved. The need of lack of infrastructure has to be fulfilled. Thus, the city can turn into a livable city." [No 12]

"The city is attractive because of Amasra." [No 14]

People

Eight participants noted that *the people who live in the city are friendly and warm*. Four participants told that the people are partially warm and friendly. Six of the participants said that the people are not friendly, they see the people in Bartın as money grubbers mostly because of tradespeople. One of the participant indicated that:

“The people in Bartın are not much familiar and warm. They look at students as if they are money similar to every little city.” [No 4]

Fourteen participants reported that they easily *fit in the city’s society*, while one participant did not. On the other hand, 2 participants told they partially fit in. One of the participants told that:

“I partially fit into Bartın but it is not a city that I can maintain my whole life.” [No 12]

For 15 participants, the city is *safe*; while for one participant it is not safe. Some participants mentioned that:

“I feel safe in the city. For me, it is beautiful and comfortable.” [No 3]

“I think Bartın is very safe. Families let their children play in the streets even midnight, and they do not have any trouble. Children leave their toys, bicycles, scooters outside.” [No 12]

Prerequisites

Living in Bartın seems to be fun (1 participant) and beautiful (7 participants). 2 participants reported that the city is good for saving money because there is not much to do in the city. For 2 participants, it is easy to live in the city. For 4 participants, the city is boring. One of the participants mentioned that:

“Bartın is mostly a boring city for those who grew in metropolises. Furthermore, it is livable city for those who do not have any desire in terms of social or cultural activities.” [No 12]

Accommodation opportunities in the city are affordable for 11 participants and expensive for 5 participants. One participant noted that:

“Accommodation opportunities in Bartın are very limited. Primary accommodation is the Öğretmenevi (a guesthouse for high school teachers) and a number of hotels. The number of accommodations is higher in Amasra.” [No 12]

The standards of public spaces were rated as poor quality by 7 participants. For 4 participants, the quality is mediocre and for 4 participants the standards of public spaces have good quality. One participant [No 1] indicated that even though the state hospital is good, transportation is very bad.

Conclusion

City branding is a popular practice adopted by many cities around the world in the context of intensified urban competition (Zhang & Zhao, 2009). Current study employs the dimensions of the city brand hexagon for examining Bartın’s city brand image. While only Istanbul is in the radar of city brand indexes, Bartın case illustrates that the city has valuable resources unless they are not wasted. If Amasra gets into the UNESCO World Heritage list, the tourist population of the city will increase. However, infrastructure problems and especially the reclamation of the river has to be solved immediately. Amasra becomes prominent rather than Bartın itself according to the visitors and residents. Other sub-provinces such as Çakraz, Kurucaşile, Inkumu along with the center of Bartın has to be renovated for satisfying the needs of consumers. Nature and sea are the most important factors for consumers. Therefore, Bartın should focus on its slogan “the city of water” and create a city logo based upon it. Festivals should be diversified and promoted. According to the study, core values and the identity of the city are neglected. Therefore, consumers are not aware of the city’s various aspects. Stakeholders and target audiences such as companies, residents, travelers and the university should be consulted in order to create a long-term city

branding process. One limitation of the study is that the sample mostly consists of consumers under 35 years old. Another limitation is the selection of only Turkish consumers. Future studies can compare the observations of the city with the studies of other competitor cities such as Kastamonu, Amasya and Eskişehir.

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