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## **Communication of brand personality by CEE cities – international study of municipal activities in social media**

### ABSTRACT

#### **Background of considerations**

Social communication today is moving to the virtual world. Also public organizations, wanting to effectively influence their recipients and thus realize the goals set before them, take actions to use the communication tools available in the network (Mergel 2012, Bryer & Zavattaro 2016). Social media as channels for building relationships with residents, citizens, territorial users, and public service recipients are at the same time platforms for creating brands of public organizations or territories (Mergel 2017).

Analysis of social media content allows to identify the style of communication of the city and its reception by Internet users. It may be of particular interest to link this style with the specificity of the country, including the advancement of governance processes that are a consequence of the public administration model (Osborne 2010) and the level of social trust that is the result of political and historical conditions.

The communication style is the basic component of the brand's personality concept (Keller 2008). It is defined as personal human characteristics attributed to the brand in order to facilitate communication of physical elements and attributes of the brand in relation to the consumer (Plummer 1985).

**The aim of the study** is to diagnose the city brand's personality dimensions/treats and to identify their diversity in selected CEE countries (with different models of public administration).

The research problem is described by the following research questions:

- What dimensions of the city's brand personality are used in communicating cities through social media ?
- Are the brand personality traits identified so far sufficient to categorize the city's brand personality communicated through social media?
- Which of the characteristics of the studied cities in both countries correlates with their brands' personalities?

## **Reasons for taking up the topic**

The brand's personality concept in recent years has been very popular in the field of marketing research. It is a response to the increase in consumer decision-making process of non-functional properties of the brand in the face of unification of the functional properties of different brands within a given product category (Gorbaniuk 2011). The subject of the brand's personality is related to the concept of brand identity and image. Some authors conceptualize the concepts of identity and brand image as multidimensional constructs in which the personality of the brand is an important component (Keller, 2008). Plummer (1985) defines the brand personality as a human personal characteristics attributed to the brand in order to facilitate communication of the physical elements and attributes of the brand in relation to the consumer. The same author emphasizes that the brand personality should be considered from two perspectives: the first - how the brand presents itself in the environment (brand identity, that is the sender's side), and the second - what is the current social perception (the brand image – recipient's side). The article will refer to the sender's side activities.

Due to the growing popularity of the territorial brand concept in the last two decades (both among academics and practitioners), some authors have already attempted to adapt the brand's personality concept also in the context of branding territories (Hosany et al., 2006), cities (Hosany et al., 2006, , Kaplan et al. 2010; Merriles, Miller & Herington, 2009; Hee-Jung & Yong-Gu, 2011; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Ahmad, Abdullah, Tamam & Bolong, 2013), regions (Murphy, Moscardo & Benkendorff, 2007) or countries (Opoku, 2009).

Social media are channels of communication that the city administration can use to achieve its goals. The authors assume that the style of urban communication is a derivative of the model of public administration adopted in a given country. One can assume as Osborn (2010) that in individual countries we are dealing with the dominance of one of three models of administration: Public Administration, New Public Management, New Public Governance. Each of them has a specific impact on the public organization's communication style with the environment and may have a potential impact on the city's brand.

## **Justification for the purposefulness of research in the context of current literature**

The most popular concept of measuring the personality of the brand is the Aaker model (1999), which created a research tool, the so-called the brand personality measurement scale (The Brand Personality Scale). She identified 42 personality determinations, grouped into five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and roughness.

Despite the criticism, the Aaker's model (1997) is still widely used in scientific research. It was also used in relation to the tourist destinations, assuming that the personality of the destination constitutes the construct, understood as "a set of personal characteristics associated with the tourist destination" (Hosany et al., 2006). Research conducted by Hosany et al. (2006) identified three dimensions of brand personality of a location: excitement, sincerity and "festiveness". Other research on the personality of tourist destinations have shown that these dimensions may vary depending on the country or tourist sites concerned. For example, research carried out by Usakli and Baloglu (2010) in relation to Las Vegas identified five dimensions of brand personality, such as: animation, sophistication, sincerity, competence and modernity. Kaplan et al. (2010) for the aim of their study defined city brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with the city brand". Their research identifies six brand personality dimensions for places: excitement, malignancy, peacefulness, competence, conservatism and ruggedness.

The proposed research approach is a certain novelty in research on the brand personality of the city, as earlier studies were carried out to identify the manner of perception of the dimensions of brand personality from the perspective of the recipient.

## **The method**

This study analyzes personality brand communication, which is conducted using official Facebook profiles run by local administration units in cities, being capitals of the regions in 2 selected European countries with different levels of public administration development – Poland and Ukraine. The choice of the countries results from the need to select countries representing parts of Eastern and Central Europe, where changes in public administration on the one hand and the use of social media on the other are at different levels. It was assumed that the country representing Central Europe would be Poland, and Eastern Europe - Ukraine. It can be assumed that in Polish local administration the NPM approach is introduced with the elements of Public Governance model. It is the result of the long-term support for reforms in the area of public administration from the European Social Fund. In contrast, Ukraine, despite previous attempts to implement adequate reforms, has failed to radically change the status quo. Thus, it remains a country with a traditional administrative system (both at state and local level) based on the hierarchy, political system, and low level of trust.

In each of the above countries, a sample of 16-18 cities has been drawn using the purposeful selection method. The authors decided to select regional capitals in both countries which use facebook for communication with their users. The subject of the analysis are the official profiles of these cities on facebook. The research method is the qualitative study based on the researcher's assessment of facebook posts. The 800 posts from Polish cities and 900 posts from Ukrainian cities were evaluated. They have been published at the same period of time starting from November 15<sup>th</sup> 2018. The full content analysis (text, film, photos) of the facebook posts was done by the inter-coder reliability approach. The two coders were the native speakers cooperating with each other on the day to day basis (discussion on interpretation of the posts messages). The choice of the method results from the fact that content analysis is especially useful method in advertising (Kassarjian, 1977, Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).

The results show the breakdown of the key personality dimensions (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, Ruggedness) for the Polish and for Ukrainian cities. The new traits have been identified which are typical for Ukraine which roots at their specific country culture, which is also the culture of its public administration.

In addition, in the next stage in connection with the search for answers to further research questions, the authors use correspondence analysis (CA) - descriptive, exploratory technique, which allow to define the nature and structure of the relationship between qualitative variables, measured in nominal scales (Stanisz, 2007). The use of statistics and charts specific for that method allow authors to show the relationships between the analyzed categories of variables. As a result so-called correspondence maps are plotted.