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## What's in a name? Place branding and toponymic commodification

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**Abstract.** If places are increasingly regarded as brands in both the practice of place marketing and its associated theory, then the study of place names (toponymy) arguably overlaps with theories and concepts involving brand naming within the marketing literature. This paper synthesises the diverse literature streams surrounding critical toponymy and brand naming through an exploration of place branding activities. The paper develops the concept of place name commodification, beyond the limited attention it has received within existing critical toponymy research, before examining the issues of endogenous and exogenous contestation that surround it. The paper concludes by discussing how the commodifying effects of places as brand names, with their associated brand values and imagery, can potentially suppress the alternative place perceptions of users, and in doing so stifle the natural potential for cocreation of the place 'product' and its related value.

**Keywords:** toponymy, place branding, commodification, contestation

### Introduction

In recent years places have become regarded as 'brands', which can be marketed to a greater or lesser degree (Balakrishnan, 2009; Dinnie, 2008; Hankinson, 2004; Iverson and Hem, 2008; Kavaratzis, 2004; 2005; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Morgan et al, 2004; Trueman et al, 2004). Branding effort is often undertaken to improve a place's image in the eyes of external stakeholders (tourists, inward investors), and boost its economic vitality and viability. An important aspect of any branding process is the brand *name* (Durgee and Stuart, 1987; Kholi and LaBahn, 1995; Ries and Trout, 1981; Robertson, 1989; Salciuviene et al, 2010), and there are many locations where those responsible for marketing activities have taken the name of the place (or toponym) and attempted to commodify it—and the place itself—typically through incorporation into a slogan or logo. Whilst place brands per se are far more than their logos and slogans, it is these that represent the most visible aspect of place marketing effort. A toponym can therefore deliver a degree of brand resonance in which the place name itself becomes the core of brand identity activities: examples include 'beBerlin' (Colomb and Kalandides, 2010), '100% Pure New Zealand' (Lewis, 2011), 'Aalborg—Seize the World' (Therkelsen et al, 2010), and 'I-Amsterdam' (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2007).

This notion of place names as potential brand names brings together two distinct literature streams relating to toponymy and branding, which have previously remained unsynthesised. Branding and associated names/identities are a means by which a product can be understood and evaluated (Baines et al, 2011; Kotler and Keller, 2009). Similarly, in a place context Rose-Redwood et al argue that:

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“The discursive act of assigning a name to a given location does more than merely denote an already-existing ‘place’. Rather, as scholars from various fields have suggested, the act of naming is itself a performative practice that calls forth the ‘place’ to which it refers by attempting to stabilise the unwieldy contradictions of socio-spatial processes into the seemingly more ‘manageable’ order of textual inscription” (2010, page 454).

Thus, it would seem that there are strong parallels to be drawn between the process of place naming and branding, at least in terms of its final effect, even if the purpose or processes involved may be different.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationships between place branding activities and toponymy, acknowledging what Rose-Redwood et al (2010, page 456) refer to as the “critical turn in contemporary place-name studies”. The paper moves beyond a core theme in the critical toponymy literature—namely, the *politics* of place naming (which often acts as a focus of contestation)—to develop the concept of place name commodification and the notion of places as ‘artefacts’ or things that can be sold, marketed, and branded. Rose-Redwood et al (2010, page 466) suggest that such toponymic commodification has received “surprisingly little attention among critical geographers and place-name scholars”. Following a short introduction to toponymy, the paper explores the interplay between toponyms and brand names, before going on to discuss the nature of place name commodification in relation to place branding activities and the aspects of endogenous and exogenous contestation that surround this.

### Toponymy

A toponym is a place name, and toponymy refers to “the systematic study of the origin and history of toponyms” (Monmonier, 2006, page 9). Kadmon (2000) argues that the name given to a place can be very revealing about its physical geography, culture, history, and population. In this sense, the name may constitute an important signal of a place’s distinctive identity, the shaping and communication of which is a fundamental aim of place branding activity (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2008).

According to Vuolteenaho and Berg (2009, page 2), toponymic studies “have been scattered across a spectrum of disciplines”, although not a central aspect of any of them (Zelinsky, 1997). There are, however, clear themes and approaches to synthesis that are manifest. With regard to spatial scale, for example, toponyms have been examined in relation to streets (Alderman, 2002; 2006; Azaryahu, 2009; Yeoh, 2009), countries, districts, regions (Herman, 2009; Kadmon, 2000; Monmonier, 2006; Myers, 2009); and even for virtual places (Alderman, 2009). Moreover, toponymic studies may be considered in terms of a pre- and post-‘critical turn’, mirroring developments in other areas of human geography.

The pre-turn toponymic literature has been usefully summarised by Vuolteenaho and Berg (2009, pages 2–7) as falling into three “conventional (but still influential) research orientations”: (i) *philosophical*, characterised by an abstract interest in naming in general; (ii) *technical–authoritative*, involving the development of understanding around the standardisation and systemisation of toponyms to achieve geopolitical organisation and rationalised spatial nomenclatures; and (iii) *historical–culturalist*, where the focus lies on the etymology of place names and how this accords with a broader sociohistorical context. It has been argued that this literature did not fully address the political dimensions behind place naming practices, and in particular how toponymy sits at the “intersection of naming, place making and power” (page 7).

This lacuna has been addressed (at least partially) in toponymy research post the critical turn, which Rose-Redwood et al identify as emerging in the mid-1990s when the study of place names moved away “from its traditional focus on etymological and taxonomic concerns and toward a critical interrogation of the politics of place naming” (2010, page 455). They classify

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three distinct (but arguably overlapping) theoretical frameworks that have been employed to critically analyse toponymic practices, namely: *political semiotics*, *governmentality studies*, and *normative theories of social justice and symbolic resistance*. Political semiotics focuses on the use of toponyms for commemorative purposes and the meaning ascribed to place names by individuals. Governmentality studies concerns the way toponyms are used to classify, manage, and control space. Social justice and symbolic resistance focuses on the power relations of toponymic practice, and how some social groups have the authority to name, whilst others, who do not, may as a consequence resist hegemonic naming practices. Rose-Redwood et al also acknowledge the importance of *commodification* in the understanding of toponymic practice, but identify this more as an area for future research. Moreover, their understanding of commodification seems to be narrowly defined to sports stadia, parks, schools, etc. The place branding perspective, as adopted in this paper, allows for an exploration of this toponymic commodification concept more broadly.

### **Toponym as brand name?**

The concept of place branding is well established as a place marketing practice, and has been the focus of a growing body of research. As noted above, a critical element of any branding exercise is the brand name itself, and this is a topic which has received little discussion in relation to place brands. This perhaps arises from a commonsense view that the place brand name and toponym are usually synonymous and, because toponyms can emerge organically through colloquial naming conventions through history, then unlike conventional brand names they cannot be managed, or indeed changed. Yet toponyms also emerge through conquest, colonisation and decolonisation processes, commemorative attribution, urban relocation, and in some cases international negotiation. In all such instances, where toponyms arise via conscious political decision-making processes, there are arguably significant parallels with the kinds of decisions made by brand managers/marketing teams regarding the brand names of conventional products.

Moreover, many places are branded and use the toponym as the place brand name. This typically involves its incorporation into a slogan or strapline. For example, the ‘100% pure New Zealand’ slogan was developed by M&C Saatchi as part of a place branding campaign for that country (Lewis, 2011), and the ‘Leeds, Live it, Love it’ strapline was created by a branding and communications group on behalf of Marketing Leeds (Julier, 2011). In both cases the toponym is undoubtedly serving the role of brand name. Moreover, these slogans are used in an associative sense to try and convey some of the inherent qualities of the place product. For example, in relation to New Zealand, Lewis (2011, page 274) notes that “it built on the double meaning of ‘pure’ behind the arresting, language neutral claim of ‘100%’ to capture earlier ‘green’ message lines and extend them into the realms of excitement and the dramatic.”

Another approach by which places are branded, and use the toponym as brand name, involves depicting the toponym in a figurative setting so that visually it reveals something of the qualities of the place product. This shifts the toponym into the realms of semiotic encoding. Examples of this would include the logo of the South Tyrol region in Austria, which sets the toponym ‘Südtirol’ against a simplified panorama of the Dolomite Mountains, the multicoloured palette of which supposedly captures the nuances of light and colour in the region. Similarly, the logo of the Pisa tourist board in Italy incorporates the essential toponym and place brand name Pisa, but reflects the place’s best known tourist attraction, the leaning tower, through the simple use of a coloured and italicised letter ‘I’, as in ‘P/ISA’ (Warnaby and Medway, 2010).

Another way of examining the notion of toponyms as place brand names is to take a more conventional branding perspective. In the mainstream marketing literature, for example,

there appears to be consensus (see for example, Armstrong et al, 2009; Baines et al, 2011; Brassington and Pettitt, 2003; Jobber, 2010; Kotler and Keller, 2009; Robertson, 1989; Solomon et al, 2009) as to what a ‘good’ brand name should be, namely: (i) *simple*: that is, easily recalled, spelled, spoken; (ii) *distinctive*; (iii) *memorable*; (iv) *meaningful*: that is, reflective of a given product’s benefits; (v) *evocative*, via the creation of appropriate associations in the consumer’s mind, which may in turn link to relationships between product and consumer in relation to identity formation, nostalgia, and experience; (vi) *protectable*, typically via trademarking or other methods of legal protection; and (vii) *transferable* in terms of the ability to be applied to other products within existing or new product categories.

If toponyms undertake the role of brand names for places it is helpful to briefly examine how well they accord to these characteristics. This lays the foundations for developing a more critical perspective on the relationship between place branding activities and toponymy.

### **Simplicity**

Toponyms, like brand names, can be simple, but can also be complicated and composed of several words/syllables. Nevertheless, the desire for simplicity remains. In the same way as consumers may shorten complex brand names (Robertson, 1989), then place users can do the same, either through shortened versions (eg, Rio de Janeiro to Rio), or through acronyms (eg, The United States of America to USA) or semi-acronyms (eg, TriBeCa for the district of Manhattan demarcated as the Triangle Below Canal Street).

### **Distinctive and memorable**

Distinctiveness and memorability have natural fit—because of the emphasis on brand name memorability in marketing (often linked to simplicity), much thought goes into the choice of corporate brand names as well as associated graphic design/phonetic symbolism (Van den Bergh et al, 1987). This is in an attempt to appeal to consumers’ semantic memory, defined as “context-independent general knowledge of the world” (Ratnayake et al, 2010, page 1297).

Place names do not necessarily follow such conventions, as they often emerge organically. A toponym may therefore arise from some geographical/topographical feature (although this is not to deny symbolic associations). For example, the name Manchester in the UK is thought to originate from the Roman latinisation of an original Celtic name *mamm* (possibly meaning ‘breast-like hill’—a clear symbolic association), plus the Old English *ceaster*, meaning ‘town’ (Mills, 2003, page 316). Many place names have a similar etymological form, which arguably relates more to the autobiographical memory of place users over time, rather than the semantic memory associated with many corporate brand names, in that they are built out of meanings people attribute to place and remember about it. As Ratnayake et al explain:

“brand-related semantic memories essentially deal with cognitive brand knowledge, brand-related autobiographical memories store personal, affective brand interactions that are related to self-construal” (2010, page 1296).

The change of name of the Russian city Tsaritsyn to Stalingrad, and later to Volgograd, during the 20th century, is an etymological document of how place names can stimulate and reinforce autobiographical memory. The organic emergence of the name Tsaritsyn, first recorded in the 16th century, may be linked to the Turkic words *sary-sin* or ‘yellow island’, a topographic feature on the Volga River. In this sense the name emerged largely as utilitarian denotation of orientation, but took on commemorative nature when it was officially renamed Stalingrad in 1925. In 1961 the name was purposively changed to Volgograd as part of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation programme (Furlong, 2002)—a switch back to a more denotative mode. This remains a contested issue given the resonance of the name ‘Stalingrad’ in relation to World War II. Indeed, there have subsequently been proposals to revert to the Stalingrad toponym because of its historical associations (Furlong, 2002). In short, all

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of the names mean something, but Stalingrad is probably most fixed in the autobiographical memory of the Russian people, due to it being the location of possibly the most famous Russian military victory of the 20th century—although this is tempered by the negative associations many have with the name Stalin. Thus, the autobiographical memory of individuals/societies is strongly connected with toponyms, reflecting the fact that they emerge over time, and are, as such, a societal—albeit often contested—construct. The above examples also demonstrate that toponyms are not fixed and immutable.

The transposition of place name from a thinking and conscious use (in terms of understood links to autobiographical memory), to an unthinking use, where the name becomes just a name, and no longer conveys memories to the user, arguably emerges through collective and cumulative repetition over time. For example, the contemporary use of the term Shepherd's Bush for a district of London is unlikely to raise thoughts of a rural gathering place for shepherds, which is one suggestion as to its derivation (Bailey and Hurst, 2006). To most it is simply a name referring to a particular locale, or to nonresidents perhaps just the name of a stop on the Central tube line, or the home of the BBC Television Centre. In the context of commemorative toponyms, Rose-Redwood et al (2010) identify such processes as geographic denotation superseding the historical referent.

### **Meaningful**

As applied to brand names, the term 'meaningful' is reflective of a given product's benefits (Armstrong et al, 2009; Baines et al, 2011; Brassington and Pettitt, 2003; Robertson, 1989), and/or indicative of how the product works (Armstrong et al, 2009), and/or the type of person who might use the product (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Toponyms do not appear to regularly conform to such guidelines, but this may be because their original meaning has been forgotten, and such names are regarded as simply signifying a particular place. However, many place names (eg, Cambridge, Plymouth) have basic meaning woven into their etymology (ie, bridge over the river Cam, at the mouth of the river Plym), which indicates some feature (topographic or functional) that has meaning for the place user, and is often linked to autobiographical memory. With some place names the meaning, in terms of what the place 'does' (or the function it performs) for the place user is more obvious, such as Surfers Paradise in Australia and Land's End in Cornwall.

This issue becomes complicated where place names have a double meaning in which one meaning is 'rude' or inappropriate in a particular language. An obvious example for English speakers is the village of Fucking in Austria [*ing* being an old German word for 'people' and 'Fuck' coming from 'Focko', the name of an early resident, hence the name meaning 'place of Focko's people' (see Bailey and Hurst, 2006)].

### **Evocative**

There is a strong link between toponymic memorability and evocation, due to the fact that place names can draw heavily on autobiographical memory. Thus, people remember place names because of what those places mean to them and the images they evoke, through real experiences, knowledge of historical events, or media and cinematic portrayal.

Evocativeness in relation to the brand names of conventional products also relates to emotion. Thus, the marketing literature identifies 'good' brand name characteristics as those that have strong or positive connotations and engender good feelings (Jobber, 2010; Solomon et al, 2009). Toponyms, due to their link with autobiographical memory, can also evoke emotions, both positive and negative. Venice, for example, is a place name which evokes images of love and romance which are intimately tied to a history involving famous figures such as Casanova, Baffo, and Venetian Courtesans. By contrast, the name of Wootton Bassett in the UK, former passing point for the repatriation of fallen UK armed services personnel from Afghanistan, evokes combined emotions of grief and pride for many.

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If places are multisold to different types of place users (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), and thus reassembled in place users' minds in different ways, then the emotions an individual toponym evokes can also vary. In terms of evocativeness, this is where the notion of the toponym as place brand name becomes problematic. For the brand names of conventional products, such multiple evocations would be seen as damaging to brand consistency. Organisations thus spend large amounts of time and money standardising product attributes and delivery in order to minimise differences in evocation and subsequent perceptions of the brand. However, for the places named above, emotions of love or grief, which might be the primary evocation for those not living there, may take a secondary position to those of rootedness and dwelling for residents.

Significantly, negative emotions associated with place names do not necessarily present an insurmountable marketing hurdle as might be the case with conventional brand names. Here, names engendering negative emotions are typically dropped, especially after disastrous events in which the brand name is implicated (eg, Townsend Thoresen and Railtrack were brand names that both faltered following accidents involving multiple fatalities). By contrast, dark place marketing (or 'thanatourism') draws its appeal from death and tragedy. In such instances the association of the name with infamous events is a critical aspect of place marketing success.

#### **Protectable**

Conventional brand names are protectable through trademarking. Protecting a toponym is more difficult, not least because several places may have the same name. There are, for example, over thirty Manchesters across the world. Place names can only be protected when used in conjunction with tangible goods; typically food and drink products (eg, Parma ham, Champagne, or Melton Mowbray pork pies). These fall under a broad legal framework of EU name protection laws, such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). These prevent use of a particular place name in association with the product when its point of origin/production is outside a designated geographical area. However, such names are only protectable within the context of an associated product. Thus, the name 'Champagne' is not protected when used, for example, as a special edition name for a model of car (eg, the BMW 530i Sport Champagne Edition). Emphasising the marketing potential of this toponym, the Swiss village of Champagne has traditionally made a still wine labelled as 'champagne'. However, the Swiss government conceded the village would phase out use of the name by 2004 in accordance with EU law, resulting in a 70% decrease in its wine sales (BBC, 2008).

The value-adding properties of a place name are not always protectable. There is nothing protectable about the terms 'Italian-cut', 'British-made', or 'Made in Germany', although they do have to have some basis in fact to avoid transgressing trade descriptions legislation. Of more interest is the effect—positive and negative—place names have when associated with certain categories of good, an issue extensively explored in 'country of origin effect' research (see, for example, Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Johansson, 1989; Piron, 2000).

#### **Transferable**

Unlike conventional brand names, transferability does not seem as much of an issue with toponyms. Yet, it does emerge as an important issue when considering autobiographical memory. For example, place names have in the past been transferable in colonial/historical exploration. More recently, Rose-Redwood et al (2010) have identified how the American military have used existing US toponyms to make the unfamiliar streets, districts, and landmarks of Iraq more manageable. In such instances, these places often bear little if any resemblance to the original locations, although this is not always the case. Thus, Derryfield,

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in New Hampshire USA, was renamed in 1810 as Manchester because of its growing cotton industry.

Where there is real and genuine resemblance between places, names may be unofficially transferred. Numerous 'Little Italy' and 'Chinatown' districts in cities worldwide are testament to their supposed resemblance to these countries, at least in terms of business ownership and population. Here, transferability operates on a colloquial level with unofficial names replicated elsewhere in order to capitalise on perceived positive associations. Similarly, the informal use of the term Silicon Valley for an area of California characterised by high-tech companies has been appropriated as a colloquial toponymic shorthand in other locations with a comparable economic hinterland, both in its original 'valley' form (in China, India, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, Sweden, and Dublin), and through local variants such as Silicon Glen (in Scotland), Silicon Fen (around Cambridge, England), Silicon Oasis (Dubai), Silicon Gulf (The Philippines), and even Silicon Roundabout (London). In this sense the 'Silicon' epithet becomes the ultimate form of commodified toponym.

### **Critical perspectives on toponyms as brand names**

In calls to expand the horizons of critical place name studies Rose-Redwood et al (2010) highlight a need to move beyond rather formulaic debates, in which discussions surrounding power, politics, and resistance routinely come to the surface. They suggest that the commodification of place naming is one underexplored area deserving of greater enquiry. Arguably, any examination of toponyms as brand names inevitably addresses the issue of commodification head on. As illustrated above, place names can act as brand names and are often perceived as such by those responsible for place marketing effort. However, closer inspection suggests that toponyms cannot be treated in entirely the same manner as conventional brand names. This reflects place marketing more broadly, which necessarily adapts mainstream marketing processes for place contexts. This section develops the concept of place name commodification and explores some of the tensions that surround this.

### **Commodification**

Toponyms can be commodified, but that commodification process needs to consider the issue of credibility. Issues of place scale and the nature of the messages associated with the toponym become critical here. The commodification of New York in the slogan 'I love NY' and on the multitude of merchandise bearing the toponym is arguably credible to stakeholders, both internal (eg, residents, local businesses) and external (eg, tourists), simply because of the size and scale of the city as a global destination.

The 'I love MCR' campaign and the commodification of the Manchester toponym on a range of merchandise (<http://www.shop.visitmanchester.com/store/>) may also be credible, at least to internal stakeholders. From an external perspective such attempts to commodify the Manchester name might be met with scepticism. Yet there is perhaps an acceptance of this by the city's marketing authorities. The aping of the 'I love NY' logo using the Manchester toponym, which in the world of conventional marketing activity could be viewed as contravening brand protection principles, acts as an intertextual reference in which Manchester is able to poke fun at itself.

Where toponymic commodification starts to become problematic is where the associated marketing effort and sloganising are at odds with external and/or internal perceptions, and are beyond mere self-referential parody. The slogan 'Doncaster—discover the spirit' represents the town's attempt to project a more positive image (BBC, 2003). But associated message boards and blogs on the topic suggest that this has been met largely with scathing derision by internal and external stakeholders alike (see BBC, 2003; Chavtowns, 2008). On other occasions toponymic sloganising appears the epitome of blandness, such as 'Wolverhampton—making

it happen' or 'Middlesbrough—moving forward'. The above examples could arguably be seen as cases of toponym and associated marketing messages that do not gel; a form of place marketing non sequitur. In conventional marketing terms this would be seen as the brand communications message being at odds with perceived brand values.

Another key issue with the commodified approach to toponyms is the perceived extent to which, like conventional brand names, they can simply be switched or changed to meet place marketing goals, such as improving place image or increasing inward investment and tourism spend. This represents a form of toponymic rebranding. The recent name change of Staines to Staines-on-Thames is a good example of this. Councillors officially voted for the name change on 20 May 2012 as part of the town's "rebranding hopes to attract more businesses and tourists to the area" (Mail Online, 2012). A key motivation stemmed from concerns the town had "a reputational difficulty—nationally and internationally" (Mail Online, 2012), not least through the fact that comedian Sacha Baron Cohen lampooned the town as the birthplace of his fictional rapper character Ali G (BBC, 2010; 2011).

Reflecting one of the key themes in the critical toponymy literature, such rebranding can be contested. Thus, some residents have termed the Staines name change "pretentious". The local football club will not change its name from Staines Town FC, and its secretary is quoted as saying: "Changing the name exposes the town to ridicule, it turns its back on 1,500 years of history and is not necessary" (Alleyne, 2012).

Similar to the above, property developers and estate agents have long been known to apply new toponyms to existing places, largely for the purposes of improving housing prices, property demand, and economic gain. Recent examples include the renaming of a refurbished area of Kings Cross in London as the 'Regent Quarter', for which the website and associated movie represent a good example of place commodification (see <http://www.regentquarter.com>), and the emergent name for the London district of Fitzrovia, north of Soho, as 'Noho'. The Noho renaming has been championed by billionaire property developers Christian and Nicholas Candy (Davis, 2008) and supported by property agents (see <http://www.patmore.co.uk>). The Candy brothers have argued that 'Noho' was not dreamt up on a whim, but came about after "extensive research" and a decision "not to hark back to an historic name for the site since the scheme is an example of contemporary, urban regeneration" (Davis, 2008). Again, however, the renaming has provoked a toponymic dispute. Local councillor Rebecca Hossack has argued that Noho is:

"a meaningless word .... It drives a wedge between the community and the mirage of 'lifestyle'. It's so trendy and so superficial. It implies a transitory lifestyle. But there are people who've been here for generations" (Davis, 2008).

Similarly, one blogger has suggested that Noho is "surely no more than an attempt to create a so called 'cool city-centre niche' born of 'agentese-speak' for prospective buyers" (<http://www.london-taxi-tour.com/fitzrovia/index.htm>).

Clearly, place names are far more difficult to change than brand names because the former toponym often has a strong link to autobiographical memory, reflecting a level of perceived connection by the place consumer. This is only seen in conventional branding with megabrands, typically exhibiting very high levels of brand equity and generating notions of what Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have called 'brand love' among consumers. In this sense, changing the name of a place is tantamount to changing the name of a brand such as Coca-Cola, certainly in terms of the emotions that might arise from this.

Brand love in relation to toponyms is typically reflected through their commodifying and economic potential. Whilst the love of the Stalingrad toponym by some Russians is undoubtedly a reflection of the name's historical kudos and links to Russian autobiographical memory, it is also a reflection of the name's enhanced ability to attract tourists. Indeed, those



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organisations in the business of battlefield tourism offer trips to Stalingrad and not Volgograd (see, for example, <http://www.battlefieldtours.co.uk>).

Perhaps the ultimate form of commodified place name is toponymic prefixes like ‘Silicon’ and ‘Media’, which are applied to areas as an indicator of their business capabilities and connectedness. Typically these epithets are adopted because there is no previous toponym for the area, either because it was open, undeveloped country, or because its spatial boundaries are so indistinct. In this sense, such toponyms represent an attempt to create places from placelessness. Dubai with its ‘Media City’, ‘Internet City’, and ‘Knowledge Village’—high-rise business zones in what was previously desert—represents the epitome of this tendency.

### **Contestation**

Conventional brand names are rarely contested, simply because of their legal protection. When such contestation occurs, usually by an organisation claiming to own all or part of a brand name being used elsewhere, then that dispute, if unresolved, usually ends up in the courts. As demonstrated in the critical toponymy literature, contestation surrounding place names is more complex. At one level, replication of a toponym does not necessarily result in contestation as might be the case for a conventional brand name. Thus, as noted above, there are more than thirty Manchesters in the world. Equally, the multiple usages of ‘Silicon’ as a place name prefix for many regions exhibiting a greater propensity of high-technology industry is not contested. This is perhaps due to the fact that the multitude of Silicon Valleys are nebulous or fuzzy areas with typically transient and/or low residential populations who feel unchallenged by the colloquial recycling of the Silicon term.

#### *Endogenous versus exogenous forces*

However, many toponyms are contested, emanating from forces, both endogenous and exogenous to the place in question. Examples of toponymic contestation arising principally through endogenous forces are usually related to a newly proposed toponym, either via commemorative or political/quasi-political assignation, or through some form of toponymic commodification (as in the Noho and Regent Quarter examples above). Such contestation emerges as a form of toponymic civil war. The small village of Buxworth in Derbyshire is one such example. Originally called Bugsworth, some early-20th century residents of the village began to dislike the name because of its connotations with bugs. A referendum in 1929, championed by the local vicar and schoolteacher, led to the name being changed (*The Christian Science Monitor* 1930). In 1999, following a call by some residents to change the name back to Bugsworth, High Peak Borough Council spent £350 balloting the approximately 600 village residents. The vote to keep the name Buxworth was won by 239 to 139, though ironically most villagers still refer to the place as ‘Buggy’ (Bunyan, 1999).

Inevitably the distinction between endogenous and exogenous toponymic contestation can become blurred. Contestation over the name Londonderry/Derry, for example, has been reported as reflecting ongoing sectarian tensions not only internal to the city, but also across the rest of Northern Ireland (Doherty, 2007; Rose-Redwood et al, 2010). The village of Fucking in Austria, mentioned above, is another example of endogenous and exogenous tensions combining. Notwithstanding attempts by some villagers and businesses to capitalise on the toponym (through the selling of souvenirs such as postcards, and even beer), problems have emerged through the fact that other residents resent the attention that the name brings (Mirror Online, 2012). The culmination of this endogenous tension has been a ballot, resulting in the village choosing to change its name to ‘Fugging’. However, despite the new ‘Fugging’ toponym being accepted by a majority of Fucking residents, exogenous contestation has emerged from an existing village called Fugging some 170 miles away, which ironically was also once called ‘Fucking’ (Meltzer, 2012). Existing Fugging residents do not approve of another place taking their toponym. As Fugging mayor, Andreas Dockner, said:

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“Nobody alive now remembers why it was changed from Fucking to Fugging, but it was and that is now our name. We think one Fugging in Austria is enough” (Mirror Online, 2012).

*Economic and sociopolitical motivations*

Factors motivating toponymic contestation can be either economic or sociopolitical. In situations where the place name is used as an epotonym (ie, where the place name has become synonymous with goods produced there—eg, Champagne for sparkling wine, or Parma for ham), then name protection is clearly important as it can provide competitive economic advantage relating to the given product. This is especially relevant if the use of a name becomes contested by other places that may have legitimate claim upon it. For example, the Swiss village of Champagne is now challenging the EU regulation that surrounds the use of the term ‘Champagne’ solely for sparkling wine from a specific region of France. The argument is that wine produced in Swiss Champagne should also be allowed to use that name, especially as wine has been produced there from 1657, and the village itself has been named thus since 885 (BBC, 2008).

Such contestation differs from that associated with conventional brand names, where activities such as ‘passing-off’ or ‘copycatting’ (Varley and Rafiq, 2004) are far easier to arbitrate through legal channels. The reasons for this related not only to the commonsense legitimacy of any place being able to use its own name to market products produced there, irrespective of whether another place has attempted to protect that same name for itself, but also to the fact that contestation over place naming can often be pan-national or between economic areas (as in the Champagne case above, which is Swiss versus French and EU versus non-EU), and legal systems tend to be less effective across such jurisdictional boundaries.

Sociopolitical motivations driving toponymic contestation typically emerge with a desire to forge new identities for places such as former colonies and emergent countries, often involving a change of toponym and its subsequent proselytisation. In some instances the toponym promoted by a given place can be externally challenged, resulting in toponymic variation and a focus for contestation and dispute. For example, the favoured country name used by many residents of the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is the Republic of Macedonia, or simply Macedonia, yet these toponyms are contested by Greece and other international bodies who argue that they are a statement of claimed national, regional, and ethnic identity, and as such may be perceived as an act of sociopolitical aggression that challenges the stability of the Balkans. Concerns run so high that in April 2008 the World Council of Hellenes Abroad, a Greek Government quango, placed an advert in *The Times* newspaper contesting the use of the toponym ‘Macedonia’. The argument is put thus:

“The term ‘Macedonia’ is not exclusively related to a specific state. Rather, it has always been used to delineate a wider geographical area, approximately 51% of which is part of Greece .... The choice of one state to monopolize the name ‘Macedonia’—the largest part of which lies outside its borders—neither reflects geographical and political reality .... Furthermore, it is associated with the argument for the unification of ‘Greater Macedonia’—a policy conceived by Stalin and Tito and pursued by the leadership of FYROM to the present day. The name is therefore linked with an ongoing policy that foresees territorial claims to a part of Greek territory, that has had a Greek identity for more than three millennia” (*The Times* 2008).

The dispute remains unresolved, and the compromise position from the UN that the country be referred to by the provisional term ‘former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia’ is considered unacceptable on all sides, with those within the country itself objecting to the Yugoslavian connection as much as Greeks dispute any use of the term ‘Macedonia’. For this reason FYROM remains officially, in UN terms, a *reference*, and not a *name* (Wood, 1997). Attempts to propose new names for the country from one side (eg, New Macedonia

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and Upper Macedonia from FYROM's government versus Vardar Republic and Republic of Skopje from the Greeks) have been dismissed by the other (Kentrotis, 1994; Turnock, 2003).

Sociopolitical motivations clearly lie behind the above toponymic dispute, and similarly driven instances of place name contestation lie in the use of the terms Burma instead of Myanmar by Western countries, or the Arabian Gulf instead of the Persian Gulf, the latter name being contested by some Arab countries because of its Iranian connotations. This official use of one toponym over a contested alternative by given states and nations can represent a form of toponymic cleansing (Azaryahu and Golan, 2001).

A key theme of contestation in place naming is that, when toponyms are purposively changed either for sociopolitical reasons or in a drive towards economic gain and commodification, there is usually some level of resistance. Even well-meaning attempts to improve the lot of society through toponymic redrafting can result in contestation and opposition. The renaming of places in centres of Black American population in the US to reflect Black history and iconic figures (Alderman, 2002; 2006) might be viewed as a force for good. But there is also a danger here that naming for the purposes of minority communities might be seen as a form of toponymic tokenism by those within such communities and engender further alienation from those outwith, or a form of toponymic ghettoisation (Alderman, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

The transposition of classic marketing theories into a place context may be fraught with difficulty (Ashworth, 1993; Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Corsico, 1993; Kavartzis, 2007; van den Berg and Braun, 1999), and this is equally true with regard to branding and toponyms. The relationship between toponyms and branding is especially important when investigating notions of brand rejection/resistance, which could be seen as a synonym for contestation—a key theme of the critical toponymy literature. The world of mainstream branding, typified by fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and services, is replete with examples of brands under constant scrutiny and attack from stakeholders for the values they stand for and the actions of the companies that own them. McDonald's, BP, and Gap are all examples of brands and organisations that have felt pressure in this way through legal challenges and consumer boycotting and 'buycotting'.

These concepts of 'brand' resistance and rejection are rather different when it comes to toponyms. Here, a place's consumers and producers might typically perceive that it is not being well served by its marketing efforts. In other words, it is place stakeholders themselves that perceive the place brand to be under threat through the associations made with it by the marketing and branding practitioners charged with its promotion. In such instances these stakeholders can effectively take on the role of defender of what they perceive to be the brand values of the place and its toponym. Ward (2000a; 2000b), for example, has explored the resistance to the 'Manchester—we're up and going' place marketing campaign, in which local businessmen and entrepreneurs took exception of the use of the toponym within the context of the wider slogan. Essentially, this is a case of protecting the place brand name 'Manchester' against what was perceived to be poor marketing and branding activity that would reflect badly on the place itself.

It is perhaps significant that much of the above discussion of place names as brands reflects an underlying theme of contestation over time, often linked to historical and/or ongoing disputes, which in many cases are rooted in genuine physical conflict between different ethnic groups/nations (see Kadmon, 2000; Monmonier, 2006). In many ways, contemporary contestation over place names could be regarded as a form of semantic (as opposed to physical) conflict—a linguistic reflection of deeper rooted disputes over economic and sociopolitical resources linked to territory. However, in many instances, even contested names continue to exist because of an insufficient impetus for change. The city of Volgograd

is one such example. Not everyone likes the Volgograd toponym, but equally there is not enough strength of feeling for it to be otherwise named. Indeed, Furlong (2002) reports that despite calls to rename Volgograd to Stalingrad by a group of disaffected World War II veterans, such a move would require a “city-wide referendum—and there are signs that many ordinary Volgograd residents, especially the younger generation, are opposed to the idea.”

The notion of the place brand name with associated brand values and imagery begins to commodify the place itself. It helps to turn the place into a place ‘product’, a thing and artefact, by giving it a coherent brand identity. In doing this, there is an inherent process of limiting the possible perceptive versions of a place to consumers—echoing notions of the brand monolith in the FMCG sector. In this respect, place branding campaigns, in an effort to project one universal reality (or hyperreality) of the place product to relevant audiences, often end up suppressing (albeit unintentionally) a place’s eclecticism and natural distinctiveness. In truth, places typically remain much more disordered in the way they serve the needs of their consumers, in essence performing the oft-cited ‘place marketing’ role of being multisold at one and the same time to multiple audiences. Consequently, to standardise a place to create a place product with one brand image and identity, as a form of McDonaldising space, is often doomed to failure. There is typically a counterversion of the dominant place product variant; a subplot to the main text. This is often reflected in variants of the place name or the usage of old place names alongside current versions.

The paradox here is that if disorder represents the natural eclecticism and vitality of places and, thereby, a primary marketable asset, then attempts to undertake such marketing through tools such as branding can potentially undermine this disorder. The ultimate manifestation of this is the plethora of newly named Silicon valleys, glens, fens etc, and Media cities that have emerged around the world. In their move towards some universally marketable and brandable toponymic shorthand for place, these become sterile nonplaces, with most indications of uniqueness or place differentiation managed out. In such instances, any form of disruption to the central place product and brand is kept on the margins hidden from view.

In conclusion, the application of mainstream marketing and branding concepts to place naming needs to have an understanding of an array of discipline areas and perspectives—such as history, geography (both human and physical), linguistics, and politics—and requires a more holistic view of marketing as a network of interactions between stakeholders, rather than (over)relying on more simplistic notions of straightforward exchange dyads (eg, buyer versus seller) in relation to space. This multistakeholder perspective accords with recent calls for a more cocreational view of place marketing in which every individual/agency is at once both producer and consumer of space, simultaneously integrating available resources to achieve this (Warnaby, 2009). Adopting this cocreational marketing perspective, place names are thus invested with multiple levels of meaning, a point long recognised in subject areas such as geography. In management/business disciplines, such as marketing, this indicates that future theoretical developments in relation to place names as brands (eg, in country-of-origin effect research) may need to cast their net wider into other subject areas, and dig deeper within them to truly understand how a place name might resonate with those involved in its cocreation and consumption.

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