



**CONNECT  
UNIVERSUM  
2018**

**МАТЕРИАЛЫ**  
IV Международной трансдисциплинарной  
научно–практической WEB–конференции  
«CONNECT–UNIVERSUM–2018»

**ЦИФРОВОЙ  
БРЕНД-МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ  
ТЕРРИТОРИЙ: ГЛОБАЛЬНЫЙ  
И ЛОКАЛЬНЫЙ АСПЕКТЫ**

29–30 ноября 2018 года



**Национальный исследовательский  
Томский государственный университет  
Кафедра социальных коммуникаций**

## **A VOYAGE INTO UNCHARTED WATERS: SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS OF TODAY’S GLOBAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

**Dean Kruckeberg**, PhD, APR, Fellow PRSA, Professor, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
(Charlotte, NC, USA). E-mail: dkruckeb@uncc.edu

**Katerina Tsetsura**, Ph.D. Gaylord Family Professor, University of Oklahoma.  
E-Mail: tsetsura@ou.edu

**Abstract.** This presentation examines Russian tourism opportunities in today’s digital and social media environment, in which tribalism exists among a global population that is young, uneducated and with few prospects for personal sustainability. However, this demographics’ proficiency in readily available communication technology is leading to fundamental societal changes that are uncharted waters offering little forgiveness for navigational error. Of particular significance is the flattening, and oftentimes juxtaposition, of power in which highly volatile virtual publics can emerge unpredictably, immediately and with inordinate influence. Media transparency is essential in a global environment in which changes in media usage and news consumption increase opportunities for alternative channels that exacerbate distrust of media and perceptions of truth. Addressing these problems is essential as nation-states engage in both domestic and foreign policy.

**Keywords:** global media environment; tourism; global branding; consumer products; digital brand management; place branding; place brand.

### **Introduction**

Americans seeking to buy consumer products “Made in Russia” have great difficulty. Even if these Americans know that such Russian consumer goods exist, many U.S. consumers might look upon these products with suspicion, questioning their comparative quality, value, and warranties and perhaps questioning the dealer networks and customer service that support these products. Komonov (2017, December 6) observes:

Exports from Russia consist mostly of natural resources – oil, gas, wood, gems, uranium. Russian consumer goods such as apparel, jewelry, and electronics do not have strong positions on the international market. But things are changing slowly. Supported by the government and private investors, Russian manufacturers are seeking foreign customers (2017, December 6).

Komonov (2017, December 6) identifies several Russian consumer brands popular in that country that might appeal to cross-border online buyers. These include children’s shoes; sportswear; accessories made of precious metals, natural materials, and gems; beauty brands; organic foods; and even Kalashnikov-branded apparel. Although consumer goods may account for a significant share of Russia’s non-resource-based exports, *Made in Russia* (n. d.) observes that importers prefer glassware, porcelain and ceramics, jewelry, musical instruments, children’s goods, and fashion accessories (<https://www.madeinrussia.com/en/catalog/consumer-goods>).

Successful global branding of consumer products benefits their manufacturers, distributors, and retailers, as well as the national branding and economies of their countries of origin. Examples include German, Swedish, Japanese, and Korean cars; Italian fashions; and several countries’ electronic goods. Consumer products “Made in Russia” are by-and-large non-existent in the United States, let alone conferring prestige as high-quality goods. In the foreseeable future, Russian cars, commercial trucks, and farm and industrial equipment will likely remain unknown, let alone available, to American consumers. However, despite existing political and economic barriers, opportuni-

ties will undoubtedly increase for “Made in Russia” products in today’s digital global economy and can enhance Russia’s worldwide reputation for the quality and prestige of its consumer products.

However, among the greatest global demand for Russian consumer products may not be what they can physically export to other countries; rather, cultural experiences can be exported virtually that can entice tourists to experience Russia firsthand. Social, political, economic, and cultural benefits can result from hosting tourists who want to see artifacts and performances of Russian intellectual and artistic heritages, who wish to experience that country’s cuisine, sports, and other unique attractions, and who desire and have the financial means to explore the physical beauty of Russia, itself. Of course, promotion of tourism is hardly new in Russia. Rzhnevsky (2018, January 13) disputes the popular assumption that Stalin’s Soviet Union had been closed to foreigners; rather, he notes that advertising had been created by Intourist in the 1930s, which beckoned wealthy foreign tourists to this “earthly paradise” to enjoy the Soviet Union’s theater festivals, river cruises, hunting, and other attractions.

Certainly today, the Russian Federation actively promotes tourism, as evidenced by the plethora of websites and YouTube videos encouraging tourism in Russia. Through today’s digital and internet technologies, further opportunities exist to encourage promote tourism for the benefit of the Russian tourism industry, with the added benefit of bolstering that country’s public diplomacy and national economy during a time that Schwab (2016) calls the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Schwab (2016) argues that this revolution is changing the ways in which we live, work, and relate to one another. He warns that this revolution is evolving exponentially; is leading to paradigm shifts in the economy, business, society, and among individuals; and it will transform entire systems across (and within) countries, companies, industries, and in society-at-large.

CONNECT UNIVERSUM (n. d.) identifies Fourth Industrial Revolution trends as including digitalization and globalization of economies and cultures; expanding the range and the convergence of such as artificial intelligence the “Internet of Things”; and the blurring between real and virtual reality. CONNECT UNIVERSUM (n. d.) notes these technologies increase the mobility of people and capital, with an unprecedented increase in competition. CONNECT UNIVERSUM (n. d.) says these trends are becoming serious challenges for place managers, who must find unique selling propositions to develop infrastructures as points of attraction for the mobility of people and capital. CONNECT UNIVERSUM (n. d.) concludes that the internet is the key channel to position and promote brands in the information and network society, with digital brand management as the main instrument of place brand strategy. The final goal of digital place brand management is to attract investors, tourists, new residents, and skilled migrants.

Certainly, marketers, advertising executives, and public relations practitioners participating in digital brand management of place brands can and will creatively exploit opportunities that will emerge in this Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, despite digital brand management’s apparent potential to promote Russian tourism, traditional pre-existing barriers remain that hamper place brands’ attempts to increase tourism, specifically the need for trust that can only exist through transparency. Indeed, Anholt (2010) disputes the existence of “nation branding,” observing that “brands become powerful when the product behind them earns trust” (p. 5).

Because countries and cities aren’t for sale, the marketing communications campaigns associated with them can only be empty propaganda: instead of saying “please try this product” they are only saying “please change your mind about this country”, and the message misfires (p. 5).

Anholt (2010) distinguishes between place branding and place brand, that is, national images are not created through communications and cannot be altered by communications; rather, “It is one of the positive side-effects of globalization that in our media-literate and constantly communicating international arena, propaganda is not so much evil as impossible” (p. 6). National reputation cannot be constructed, but can only be earned.

Trust must exist for successful place brand management. Tsetsura & Kruckeberg (2017) define trust as the belief in the truth of a communicator’s message. These authors note that people

trust those whom they perceive to be telling the truth, citing Valentini and Kruckeberg (2011), who argue:

... (T)rust can only exist where it is deserved, i.e. such trust cannot be betrayed. A requisite of trust is the reasonable prediction and anticipation of an action by an actor based on that actor's prior behavior and other communication (p. 99).

Tsetsura & Kruckeberg (2017) say the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the new social media – with their conflicting, sometimes incredible and oftentimes suspect information – have redirected consumers' attention from channels of communication to the content providers of these channels. Thus, they conclude, the internet may have done society a great service in creating a healthy skepticism about the truthfulness of media and in reassigning responsibility to the users of these media.

As someone who has developed friendships with a myriad of Russian friends and colleagues throughout the years and as a traveler who has made multiple visits to Russia beginning in 1989 in locales as far-ranging as St. Petersburg and Moscow and Ulan-Ude and Barnaul, I relish trips to Russia. However, an informal focus group of a nonrandom convenience sample of potential tourists to Russia suggest that I likely am an anomaly in America. Three white middle-/upper-middle-class males explained to me why they had not visited Russia. A corporate attorney with a family, a successful financial advisor with a family and a retired federal law enforcement officer, all with the economic means to visit that country, have traveled internationally. The corporate attorney performed work in South America and in the Caribbean; the financial advisor vacationed in Mexico and in the Caribbean; and the retired federal law enforcement officer had vacationed throughout western Europe, the Caribbean and in Central America.

Two said they would like to visit Russia, the attorney to see Saint Petersburg and its churches and the retired law enforcement officer thought he would enjoy Saint Petersburg. However, they hadn't considered a trip to Russia. They viewed such trips as expensive, and the lawyer thought Russia would be boring for children and his children might not like the food. Thus, he did not view Russia as a destination for a family vacation. All were middle-aged and undoubtedly remembered the Cold War, and they certainly were cognizant of contemporary events and tensions between the United States and Russia; however, they did not seem unduly concerned about safety issues, that is, crime, nor did they have any concerns about government surveillance of tourists – perhaps because of their expressed preference for touring Russia in a commercial tour group.

Based on my own experiences, I could have easily corrected and dispelled many of their misconceptions about a trip to Russia. However, a digital place brand manager could have done so far more effectively proactively using digital and internet technologies – but only to the extent that trust is present, which can only exist through transparency.

### *References*

1. Anholt, S. (2010). *Places: Identity, image and reputation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. CONNECT UNIVERSUM (n. d.) Digital place brand management: Global and local aspects. Retrieved from [http://connect-universum.tsu.ru/doc/Infletter2018\\_eng.pdf](http://connect-universum.tsu.ru/doc/Infletter2018_eng.pdf)
3. Komonov, J. (2017, December 6). Made in Russia: 8 brands for cross-border consumers. Practical Ecommerce. Retrieved from <https://www.practicalecommerce.com/made-russia-8-brands-cross-border-consumers>
4. Made in Russia. (n.d.) Consumer goods account for a significant share of Russia's non-resource-based exports. Consumer goods exports raised \$1.4 billion in H1 of 2017 Retrieved from <https://www.madeinrussia.com/en/catalog/consumer-goods>
5. Rzhovsky, S. (2018, January 13). Posters of Stalin's Soviet Union luring foreign tourists. Retrieved from <http://russiatrek.org/blog/art/posters-of-stalins-soviet-union-luring-foreign-tourists>
6. Schwab, K. (2016). *The fourth industrial revolution*. New York, NY: Crown Business.
7. Tsetsura, K., & Kruckeberg, D. (2017). *Transparency, public relations and the mass media: Combating media bribery worldwide*. New York: Taylor and Francis/Routledge (Research in Journalism Series).
8. Valentini, C., & Kruckeberg, D. (2011). Public relations and trust in contemporary global society: A Luhmannian perspective of the role of public relations in enhancing trust among social systems. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 4(1), 89-105.