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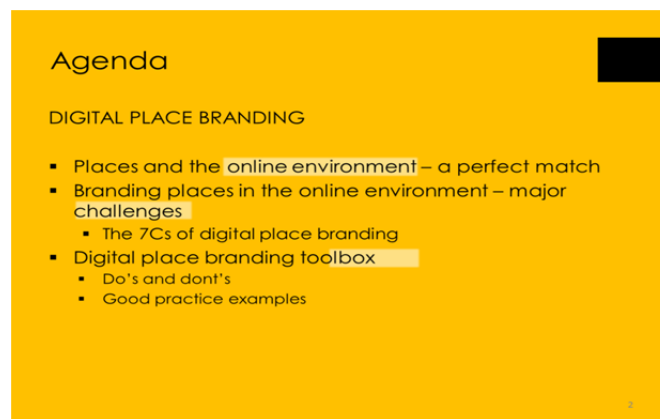
**Национальный исследовательский
Томский государственный университет
Кафедра социальных коммуникаций**

CREATING PLACE BRAND EXPERIENCE IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: CHALLENGES, METHODS, BEST PRACTICE

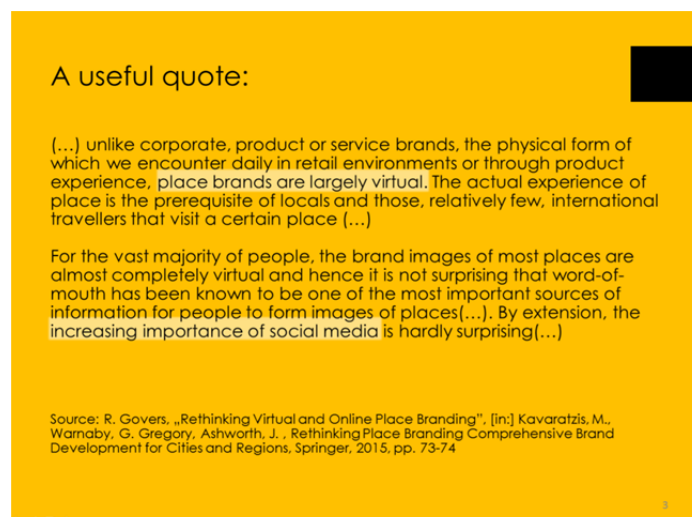
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Hello! I am very grateful for being invited to this wonderful event. I hope that today I can share with you some of the insights about how modern technologies can be used for more effective place branding.



The agenda for today looks as follows. First of all, I am going to talk about places in the online environment and why they happen to be perfectly suited for the usage of the many modern technologies that we have at hand. Then we are going to look into some major challenges. I am going to back up my presentation with certain schemes or ideas from place branding literature. We are going to look into the digital place branding toolbox, and what to do and what to avoid; and also, just like my title suggests, some good practice examples.



I would like to begin with a quote, which, I think, is especially useful for this presentation. Robert Govers, one of the key thinkers and writers in place branding, said something like this:

“... unlike corporate product or service brands, the physical form of which we encounter daily in retail environments or through product experience, place brands are largely virtual. The actual experience of place is the prerequisite of locals and those, relatively few, international travelers that visit a certain place [...].
For the vast majority of people, the brand images of most places are almost completely virtual and hence it is not surprising that the word-of-mouth has been known to be one of the most important sources of information for people to form images of places [...]. By extension, the increasing importance of social media is hardly surprising [...].”

What Govers is trying to tell us is that a large part of place branding activity takes place in the virtual environment. That is why, just next to the things that we are doing in the physical environment, digital environment should be of big concern to place branders, practitioners and to representatives of nations alike.

Places & online environment – a perfect match

PLACES	DIGITAL MEDIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Complex▪ Experiential▪ Participatory▪ Multiple stakeholders▪ Community - based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Democratic▪ Inclusive/ accessible▪ Interactive/ engaging▪ Ability to individualize▪ Community -based

Moving forward with that type of thinking, let's focus on how places in the online environment are suited for each other. If we look at different characteristics of places, what I labeled here as digital media, we can see some analogies, which are very important. For example, places, which we you have heard about probably many times throughout this webinar, are complex entities; they are multi-dimensional; they have many layers, many aspects. They are experiential by nature. In order to be in a place, to get to know it, you need to experience it. They are participatory, which means that they require community participation in order to thrive and to develop. Places are also about multiple stakeholders. So we know that to make the place develop we need to have input from various stakeholders like local companies, local media, or culture people, or academia, and all sorts of other stakeholders. They are reliant mostly upon the community, which means they are community-based.

So without a vibrant and active community, places cannot develop in the way they would like to. If we look at those characteristics of places, we can also see that digital media allow these characteristics to thrive, and reinforce them additionally. Digital media are very democratic by definition; they are inclusive and accessible; they are interactive and engaging. But they also have the

ability to individualize, which is one of the things that people want to do these days, they want to feel part of the whole, but they also want to be able to express their individuality. Most of all, they are community-based. Without a strong community, also in the digital environment, companies, places and other entities cannot thrive.

Places in online environment
– major challenges

7Cs of digital place branding

- Channels
- Clutter
- Community
- Chatter
- Communication
- Co-creation
- Collaboration

Source: S.Hanna, J. Rowley, „Rethinking Strategic Place Branding in the Digital Age”, [in:] Kavaratzis, M., Wamaby, G. Gregory, J. Ashworth, „Rethinking Place Branding Comprehensive Brand Development for Cities and Regions”, Springer, pp. 85-100.

So having those two in mind, let's focus on what are the challenges that are opposed to the places in the online environment. Here I will be backing myself up with the work by two of my colleagues, Sonya Hanna and Jennifer Rowley, who have come up with this very smart way of presenting the major challenges for digital place branding, as we should call it. They encapsulated it in the formula of the seven Cs, which signified the following elements: channels, clutter, community, chatter, communication, co-creation and collaboration. What do they mean? First of all, there is the *channel* challenge. We live in the era of diverse fragmented communication channels. Places in the online environment need to adopt the multi-channel strategy, but they also need to adopt the strategy that facilitates switching between channels so that the story that we want to tell, or the experience that we want to convey becomes more coherent.

The second issue is *clutter*. As I said before, places are multi-dimensional. They have many layers, and, consequently, they have many sub-brands, to represent them. Within any place, there are incorporate brands, there are brands of tourism attractions, there are brands of sports teams, and other things. So the question is: How do we find a way to produce a unified message across all these sub-brands that are represented by the place? This is the second challenge.

The third challenge is the challenge of the *community*. So basically, how do we give any chance to the community? Do we provide it within any digital space (to be able to talk, to be able to exchange their experiences and their opinions on the place, about the place)? Do we provide them with such a sphere in the digital world?

The fourth challenge is the *chatter* challenge. Chatter means that places, just like human beings, should be engaged in meaningful conversations with different stakeholders and different community members that have something to say and something to contribute to the idea of the place, whether it is with the place's identity or certain problems that the place is facing. The challenge here is: Do we have the means, and do we have the people to engage in such conversations digitally?

The next thing is *communication*. Here I am referring more to the marketing communication. Of course, marketing communication in the case of place branding is like the tip of the iceberg. Place branding cannot rely on marketing communications only, but without a coherent marketing communication, a place brand will not have the chance to be moved forward and to become recog-

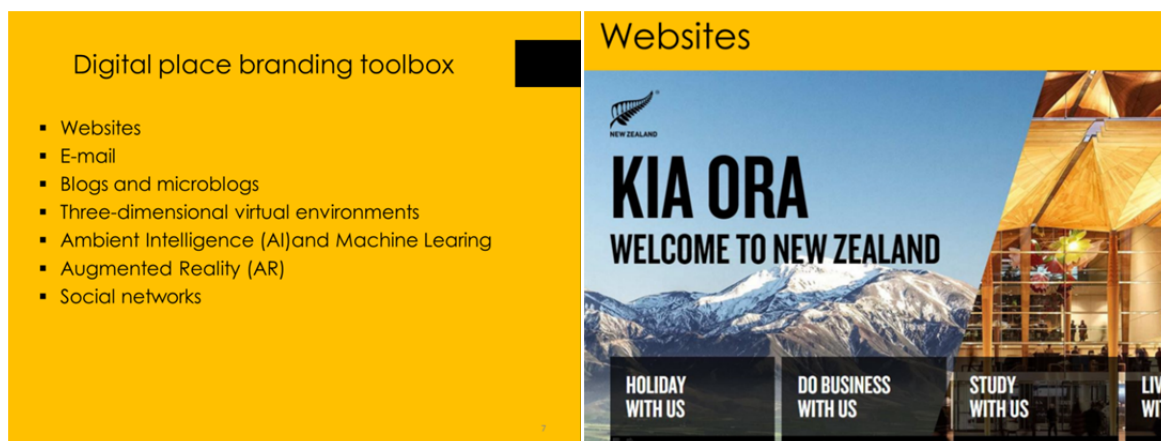
nizable in the minds of target audiences. This is necessary. Do we have a marketing communication strategy across different digital channels?

The last but one is *co-creation*. Co-creation is a challenge that says: We acknowledge that our place is diverse, that people have different takes and different perspectives to look into the place's identity, and into the experience that the place offers. We also acknowledge that these stakeholders have a number of valuable and important contributions to the co-creation of the place's identity and, therefore, the place's brand. The question for the digital world is: do we enable them to do so? Do we allow them to do it? Do we source from their ideas and from notions?

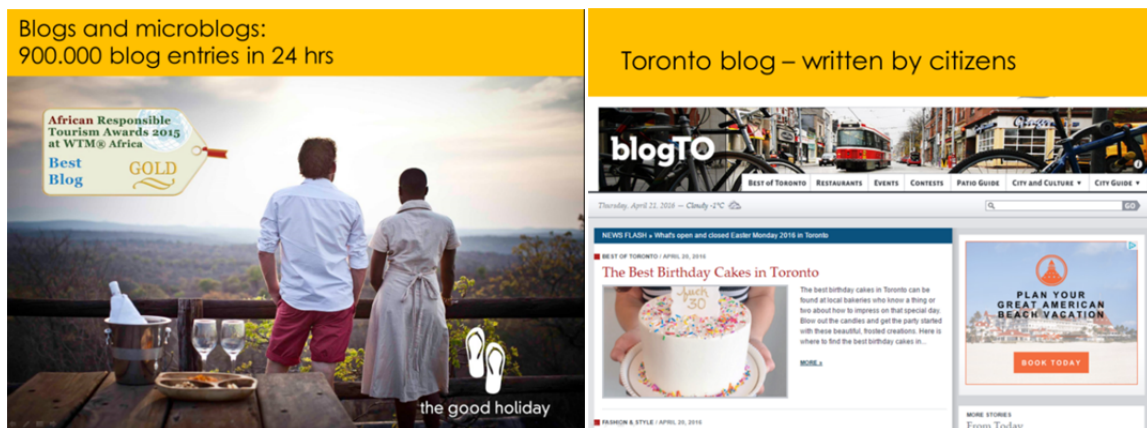
The last one is called *collaboration*. In this sense we mean: Do we provide any platforms for stakeholders to collaborate? Do we give them any space, any tools so that they can connect, so they can become interconnected when it comes to contributing to the place's identity? For instance, do local companies have the chance to collaborate with local universities? Do they have the chance to collaborate with arts, with media that are represented locally? Do these brands, these sub-brands of a place speak in a unified voice? Do they have the chance to use the synergy of them? This would be it when it, comes to the major challenges.



Let's move forward, and let's see about the trends that are happening in the online environment for places. The trends can be summarized as human-oriented technology, which means that in place branding technologies have the sole purpose to ensure a more smooth and seamless experience of a place. We have a trend of co-creation, which I have just addressed in the previous slide. We have the trends of experiences, which have to be immersive, and modern technologies allow us to do that to a greater extent. We have this trend of co-living in the moment, in which we want to share everything instantly the moment we see it. We have the trend called transmedia, which means we have to find ourselves in different media channels across different environments. I am going to talk about it in a minute.



So we have those trends, and we have a certain toolbox: certain things, certain instruments that allow us to ensure more coherent place brand experience. Let's wipe through them. We have of course a website, and I have put here a New Zealand website as one of the model websites for place brands. And I strongly encourage you to visit it. It is a very coherent and dynamic website.



We have blogs and microblogs, in which we can ensure that this is a growing sector actually. It is estimated that we have around 900,000 blog entries in 24 hours each day. Actually, the industry also recognizes the importance of these blogs, and this is, for example, a case of Toronto blog, which is written entirely by the citizens, which also serves the purpose of co-creation of the place brand identity.

Three-dimensional virtual environments (2)

Second Life: Dublin

- In 2007 Tourism Ireland launched the first marketing campaign in 2007 in Second Life, including Saint Patrick's Day 2008 in virtual Dublin

We have things that are not very often discussed or talked about. These are three-dimensional virtual environments, like, for example, Second Life, which have been used for some years now by several countries and several cities that actually have their replicas in the Second Life environments and that basically pursue the same agenda like in the real life. For instance, in the case of Dublin: whenever there is a St. Patrick's Day celebration in real life, there is also a Second Life celebration of Saint Patrick's Day. The players, which are an increasingly large amount of people, can also experience this virtually.

Ambient intelligence



Various sensors (GPS, electronic compasses, wireless networks) in the environment can be used for mobile apps and guides that support and personalize tourist experience

- determine the location of tourists
- personalized services on location in real time.
- data-mining of social media generate an overview of a tourist's personal interests, needs, intentions, mood and emotions

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Going forward, we have ambient intelligence, which is one of the things that places are trying out to brand themselves. These are especially useful in the tourism industry, although not only. So through those various sensors, we are able to personalize the experience of a place more and more often like starting with determining the location of tourists, or personalizing services, or even data mining of social media to generate certain overview of tourist's profiles and intentions, and moods, and emotions. This is of course in the birth phase, in the embryonic phase still but more and more cities and countries are resorting to it.

Augmented reality



Here we have also the augmented reality, which is again widely used by different entities, and augmented reality, as we know it, allows us to see more contexts about places, events, and certain objects related to the places' identity. This is also more and more widely used.

Social networks

- Facebook
- Myspace
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- Instagram
- Youtube
- Pinterest
- Persicope
- TripAdvisor
- WAYN.com
- LinkedIn
-



Social media influences around **25% of international travel choices**

52% of Facebook users dream about vacation when on the channel, even when they aren't planning a specific trip

87% of Millennials on Facebook said they use the social media site for travel inspiration, while 20% use Twitter and Pinterest

While on a trip, **60% of travelers**, and **97% of Millennial travelers**, share their travel photos.

Almost 50% of vacationers are more likely to hear about a new travel company or destination on Twitter than anywhere else

Source: Adweek, 2015



If we look at social networks, we very often forget that social networks are often a very diversified phenomenon. When we think of social networks, surely, we think of Facebook, we think of Twitter, of Instagram, but we very often forget that there are many more than that, and each of them requires a different language and different approach, that social media stand behind a lot of influences. They represent a lot of impact when it comes to decisions for people to travel around a place, to experience this place. So they are a separate category to be taken care of. Aside from that we have several social networks that are not maybe that much used like for example WAYN.com. The abbreviation signifies ‘where are you now?’ So this is the platform that connects places that are categorized not by geographical location but by experiences. It categorizes also the travelers who are able to meet like-minded people to share their experiences with them and to start a conversation with them about the place.

Curators of Sweden



THE WORLD'S MOST DEMOCRATIC TWITTER ACCOUNT

CHALLENGE:
To prove Sweden's core values (open, authentic, caring, knowledgeable) and actively position it as a progressive country.

IDEA:
The first country in the world to hand over its official Twitter account to its citizens. Ordinary Swedes are @sweden one week at a time. Based by tweet, the image of Sweden is built: dynamic, innovative and deeply human. No censorship. No limits.

RESULTS:
26,000 followers from 120 countries in six weeks. First interaction: thousands of conversations. Featured in all major media around the globe for an equivalent PR value in excess of \$19,800,000.

CURATORS OF SWEDEN



If we look into the social media issues, we have a certain groundbreaking things like for example the democratization of official social media of countries. Here for example we have got the case study of curators of Sweden, the first democratic twitter account owned by the state. Here I'd like to play a very short film to show you how it works.

[The video is played.]

This is an interesting case. Sweden has been doing it for many years now, but they have decided to close the account, because they are now thinking about a different way of communicating. It is just very recent, I have just found out about it. But they have been doing it for years, and it has been, as you can see, quite successful.



Another idea that is worth looking into is Lisbon's idea. It is called Lisbon's hidden viewpoints. Let me just show you how they have managed co-creation to enhance Lisbon's experience.

[The video is played.]

As you could see, it is pretty much all about co-creation, all about contributing to creating the brand experience.



Because I am running out of time, I am just going to draw your attention to a couple of more cases. This is for example the city of Jun in Spain, which has only 35,000 citizens but it has 400,000 followers because the mayor is basically running the city through Twitter account. I just suggest that you look into this case more closely.

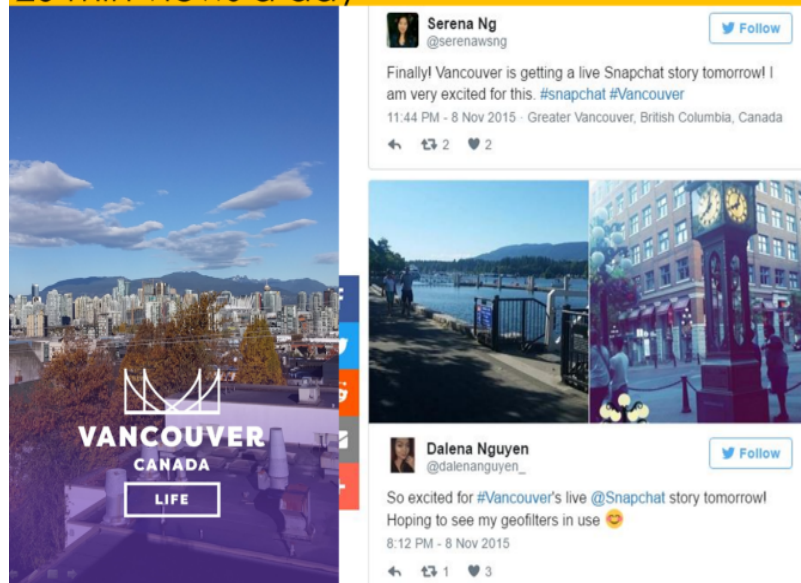
Play Melbourne - Periscope



Again this is the next thing that we can use this is the Periscope and it also invites people share stories to share authentic stories about a place and to encourage citizens to participate. Let's just have a quick look at it.

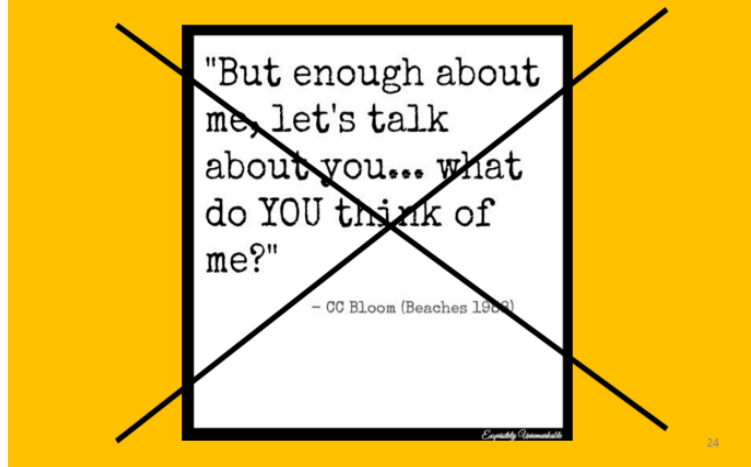
[The video is played.]

Live Stories – Snapchat, since 2014, 20 mln views a day



This is just a sample of things that are happening throughout the world and as you can see this actually the new media give many possibilities to engage in the co-creation of places. Again another one is the Snapchats live stories which have 20 million views a day so it just gives you the idea of what kind of audience we are talking about.

Social media place branding – what to avoid!



I think that many places can build their awareness among the target groups through the online environment, but definitely the strategy in the real world should follow, or it should be parallel developed in order to ensure this online and offline cohesion when it comes to place branding.

Thank you so much for this opportunity!