Let Them Brand This Town
A Qualitative Study of How Major Cities Manage User-Generated Content in Their Branding Strategies

MASTER PROJECT
THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration
NUMBER OF CREDITS: 15 ECTS
PROGRAMME OF STUDY: International Marketing
AUTHORS: Lucas Carlos Alban, Michael Wieneck
JÖNKÖPING May 2018
Title: Let Them Brand This Town: A Qualitative Study of How Major Cities Manage User-Generated Content in Their Branding Strategies

Authors: Lucas Carlos Alban and Michael Wieneck

Tutor: Sarah Wikner

Date: 2018-05-21

Key terms: User-generated content; City Branding; Place Marketing; Participatory Approach; Content Marketing; Place Branding

---

**Background:** Ongoing urbanization and increased visits to urban areas make cities around the globe compete with each other. As places increasingly aim to attract visitors, residents, businesses or investments, place branding becomes a new discipline within the field of marketing and city branding arises as a means to differentiate a city in the global marketplace. In order to communicate with their potential audience, the digital space allows brands to address potential customers through two-way-communication. In this context, user-generated content (UGC) becomes an interesting alternative to interact with audiences, offering marketing professionals the opportunity to effectively engage stakeholders in the branding process and co-create the city brand.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to gain a broader understanding of how, within the place branding context, major city brands manage UGC in their social media strategies.

**Method:** The study relied on a qualitative methodology and was conducted with an abductive approach. Primary data was gathered through email-based interviews with a sample of eleven representatives from valuable major city brands, as well as with one independent professional in the field of place branding consultancy.

**Conclusion:** In the city branding context, UGC was found to be an effective tool to engage with stakeholders and build a strong brand in order to differentiate it among its competitors. Four categories of potential issues connected to the application of UGC were uncovered: Control, Credibility, Motivation as well as Features of UGC. Finally, a model of UGC facilitating the participatory approach to city branding was proposed by the authors.
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our particular gratitude to all of those that took their time to participate in this research. Our dedication and effort would be meaningless without the involvement of our family members, friends and colleagues, that committed themselves and their valuable time to support us. Our sincere appreciation to our tutor, Sarah Wikner PhD at Jönköping University, for all the guidance and insights over the last months, and also to the other professors that contributed to our academic development. Lastly, we would like to recognize the representatives from the city brands of Boston, Cape Town, Istanbul, Los Angeles, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Singapore, Stockholm, Vienna and Warsaw, as well as Chris Fair, from Resonance, for partaking in the interviews and reserving time for us in their busy schedules to make this study possible.

Jönköping, 21st of May 2018

________________________  __________________________
Lucas Carlos Alban               Michael Wieneck
Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1
   1.1 Background 1
   1.2 Problem Discussion 3
   1.3 Purpose 4
   1.4 Research Questions 5
   1.5 Delimitations 5

2. Literature Review 7
   2.1 Place Branding: An Introduction 7
   2.2 Place Branding: Concepts and Practices 9
   2.3 Marketing Communication and Social Media 11
   2.4 User-Generated Content 12
   2.5 Adverse Features of UGC 13
      2.5.1 Ownership 13
      2.5.2 Control 14
      2.5.3 Credibility 15
      2.5.4 Motivation 15
   2.6 Preliminary Framework: UGC in Place Branding 16

3. Methodology 18
   3.1 Research Process 18
   3.2 Research Philosophy 19
   3.3 Research Approach 20
   3.4 Research Design and Strategy 20
   3.5 Selection of Interviewees 21
   3.6 Contacting City Brands 22
   3.7 Sample 23
   3.8 Data Collection 24
   3.9 Data Analysis 25
   3.10 Limitations on Method 26

4. Empirical Findings 27
   4.1 Place Branding 27
      4.1.1 Aims of Branding a City 29
   4.2 Participation of Stakeholders 30
      4.2.1 Residents 31
      4.2.2 Visitors 32
      4.2.3 Local Business & The Tourism Industry 33
   4.3 Communication Strategy 33
Figures
Figure 1: Place Branding Map 8
Figure 2: Preliminary Framework of Issues Regarding UGC in Place Branding 16
Figure 3: The Research Onion 18
Figure 4: Stakeholder Participation 47
Figure 5: Potential Issues 50
Figure 6: UGC in Place Branding 52

Tables
Table 1: Sample of City Brands 24
1. Introduction

As digitalization is an undeniable major trend, the virtual world increasingly becomes a crucial part of marketing strategies. Cities are progressively incorporating this channel in order to market themselves to the world, but not without facing some challenges in the process. In this section, the background, problem discussion, purpose and research questions, as well as key concepts for this paper will be presented.

1.1 Background

How did you select the destination of your last trip? As places and destinations around the world are looking to attract tourists, residents, businesses or investments, the discipline of place marketing becomes increasingly interesting in both the academic and practical field. Cities, but also regions and entire countries, are presenting what they have to offer to audiences around the world, much like corporations aiming to sell a product do. To reach desired effects (e.g. increase in tourism), marketing techniques are employed, and place brands are being built, giving rise to the discipline of place branding.

A comprehensive literature review by Vuignier (2017), who examined 1172 articles published in the field of place marketing and place branding between 1976 and 2016, gives an insight into the field. His work indicates that the topic of place branding is situated within a multidisciplinary field which goes beyond just traditional marketing since it is also approached by public management and political science. This indication is also supported by Hankinson (2004), who points to tourism marketing but also urban planning as the two main sides with an interest in place branding.

In the perception of several authors within the place branding literature, the aim of place branding is at least two-folded. While on the one hand, it includes the attraction of tourists through branding a destination, on the other hand, it promotes the place’s regional development. It is also highlighted that place branding differs from traditional branding, since the “product” is not as clearly defined and the role of participants in the place brand - residents, citizens or visitors - is much more active in this scenario (Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015; Braun et al. 2013; Zenker et al. 2014; Rehmet and Dinnie 2013, Che-Ha et al. 2015).
As noted by Braun et al. (2013), place brands are not only targeted at outsiders to the place (e.g. visitors) but also at those who are regular inhabitants, be it through permanent or temporary residence (e.g. citizens or students) or other circumstances like employment. Again, residents are considered to play an important role as ambassadors of a place brand (Braun et al., 2013; Zenker et al., 2014).

Vuignier (2017) also points to reoccurring themes within the place marketing and branding research, them being: image, identity, effects, events, stakeholders and the internet and social media. In general, however, it can be perceived that the research into the field of place marketing and place branding is still in its early stages. Currently, there is still a lack of a theoretical framework that advances beyond traditional marketing theory, tailored towards place branding and marketing. Moreover, a common definition of the term place marketing has not been adopted yet, which could be partly due to the multidisciplinary character of the field.

The increasing popularity of branding places has also been expressed by the rise of place branding consultancies (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Simon Anholt can be considered a pioneer in the area of assessing and ranking place brands. The Anholt-GfK Nation Brand Index, as well as the Anholt-GMI City Brand Index, were the first of their kind when published around the year 2005 (Business Wire, 2005). Ever since, places have their brand value and other metrics ranked by consultancy agencies like Resonance Consultancy or Saffron, or market research agencies like GfK. In these rankings, metrics like tourism, culture, governance or economic factors are taken into consideration (Anholt, 2005). Different rankings tend to use somewhat different measures which on the one hand allows an assessment of the place brands and, on the other hand, provides an incentive for additional branding activities to potentially improve one’s standing in the world.

In the intervening time, while place branding is becoming more relevant, the effectiveness of traditional marketing strategies is also being affected. Organizations were once used to operate resources as print media (magazines and newspapers), broadcast or electronic media (radio and television) and out-of-home media (outdoor billboards and large posters) to advertise and communicate themselves. However, internet-based applications (i.e. social media), are changing the way people interact, create content and exchange information. This shift, consequently, also affects the way brands communicate to consumers and influence them (Fill
et al., 2013; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As stated by Spurgeon (2009), we are migrating from previous mass communication to a current mass conversation.

In this new context, consumers gained more power and became able to shape and impact brand images with their opinions as never before. User-generated Content (hereafter: UGC) is a term that conveys content (e.g. a photo published on social media) created by the general public rather than by paid marketing professionals of the brand itself (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). UGC is a tool which has already been proven to be effective and trustworthy in general marketing communication (Burmann, 2010). However, the suitability of UGC as part of the strategy in the particular case of place branding still had not been studied previously.

With the growing interest of stakeholders in this field, marketers are invited to challenge themselves by building place brands and selecting the best strategies for it. Therefore, it appears to be worth exploring how UGC, a contemporary trend in marketing, is enabled in place brands’ strategies.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Nowadays, places and destinations around the world have entered the market of attracting people towards them. The top 100 cities in the world have counted 558 million international arrivals, which accounted for almost half of all 1.2 billion trips that were taken worldwide in 2016 (Euromonitor, 2017). Fueled by the continuous urbanization worldwide, these numbers highlight the increase in competition between world destinations in the present and foreseeable future. Tourism is arguably one of the main reasons for a city or other place brand to market itself. Yet, examples, like Amazon’s search for a city to host its new headquarters in 2017, underline that place branding strategies are also aiming to attract other industries and stakeholders, as cities are major centers of economic activities. Businesses, general investments, residents and events (e.g. sports events or conferences) have been identified as targets of place branding (Vuignier, 2017).

Social media - which include various online channels and networks - represent an important role in brands’ efforts to communicate and attract audience segments (Murdough, 2009). As the world becomes more connected, online presence naturally becomes part of place marketing
strategies. Unlike in traditional marketing, in the era of social media, consumers participate and interact with the brand communication as a whole, instead of only passively receiving information about products (Bruns, 2008; Fill, Hughes, & De Francesco, 2013).

It has already been proven several times in literature - as it is presented further on - that UGC is a very effective tool to engage with the public and break through the clutter. However, few of the existing studies explore the suitability of UGC in place marketing and the possible issues faced by companies when applying it in this field.

Since cities have several stakeholders, like residents, tourism officials and business owners, city brands also acquire meaning and are shaped by their interactions with these groups (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015). As several voices communicate cities’ messages, direct or indirectly, this is different compared to the context of traditional companies branding. Namely, this not only toughens the maintenance of a unified brand image but also generates other different management efforts when executing place marketing strategies. For instance, this partial lack of control over the brand can potentially harm these place brands' perceived credibility.

Hence, a study focused on investigating this theme would not only enrich the existing body of research on the separate fields (place branding; UGC), but also frame them together and fill an existing gap in the literature. The impact of its findings can become not only relevant for the academia itself, but also for place marketing professionals - since this study intends to anticipate and to reveal several uncharted issues that they may find in the practice of their operations.

1.3 Purpose

This thesis addresses an investigation towards the new trends in place marketing, concerning the role of UGC in social media strategies. In the context of a rise in digitalization and a growing importance of city brands, the relationship with visitors, investors and the local communities can take many forms - being some more conservative than others. The interest of this study is to comprehend how managers may dissuade brand guidelines and, moderately, give up control in order to develop the attractiveness of social media content. What is
interesting in this perspective is that both fields of UGC and place marketing have not been genuinely explored yet and that several practical issues may arise.

All in all, the purpose of this research paper is: to gain a broader understanding of how, within place branding, major city brands manage UGC in their social media strategies.

1.4 Research Questions

According to the purpose stated, and the upcoming frame of reference, this research explores the applicability of UGC in the place branding context. In order to fulfill this ambition, two main research questions clarify the inherent intentions of the study:

RQ1: How do major cities manage UGC as a tool for their city branding strategies?

RQ2: What specific issues may arise when applying UGC for place branding on social media?

1.5 Delimitations

As the field of place branding was discovered to include a broad and diverse array of subtopics, some limits to this study shall be clarified. It should be considered that this research was set to take a look exclusively at major, valuable city brands. This is due to the fact that there are various kinds of places that can be branded and a focus on one specific kind was necessary. Cities were then chosen due to the personal interest of the authors and due to the rise of the importance of city branding. Besides, major city brands are also more advanced in their marketing strategies and could potentially bring more valuable insights than cities of any other kind.

Furthermore, the aim of this research is to explore how city brands utilize and manage the tool of UGC. Therefore, this paper only considers how city brands actively make use of content. This is important to say since UGC can also be looked at from a broader perspective, for instance in terms of how content without being presented by official brand channels influences consumers.

Lastly, this research primarily focuses on UGC and its use in the online sphere. While one might intuitively connect UGC to content that is presented online, for example on social media,
UGC can also be used in offline communication channels. This particular option was however neglected by this study, to focus more specifically on what is perceived as the main use of UGC, online communication.
2. Literature Review

The following literature review presents theory from precedent studies related to the research questions of this study. The chapter is divided into six sub-chapters: Place Branding: An Introduction; Place Branding: Concepts and Practices; Marketing Communication and Social Media; User-Generated Content, and Adverse Features of UGC. This chapter ends with a Preliminary framework of Issues Regarding UGC in place branding, which was further used as the basis of this research.

2.1 Place Branding: An Introduction

A place, according to Gieryn (2000), includes three features that are vital for recognizing it as such, them being: (1) a Geographic Location, (2) Material Form and (3) Investment with Meaning and Value. From this arises that many things can be places, from wide landscapes to specific spots within an urban area. As complex as cities can be in terms of physical or social aspects, to define what is a city, resorting to the dictionary appears to be an adequate choice: “an inhabited place of greater size, population, or importance than a town or village” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). In the context of the definition of place, a city can be considered one - since it has a specific geographic location, clearly has a material form and also obtains an investment with meaning and value, due to its numerous inhabitants. This also suggests that cities are complex constructs made up from an interplay between its physical traits and people that inject value and meaning, a relationship that can be assumed to be unique for each city, considering that no two city populations are the same.

Branding as a concept for defining a corporation’s identity emerged in the 1970s (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). It is a marketing tool that has been employed by organizations for several decades, to build an image and differentiate themselves or their products from competition (Rooney, 1995). The purpose of branding and its best practices are thoroughly discussed in business and marketing literature. Diverse definitions and interpretations of branding exist, one of the most used of them being that “organizations develop brands as a way to attract and keep customers by promoting value, image, prestige, or lifestyle” (Rooney, 1995, p. 48).

The aims of branding, as well as its terminology, have, however, extended also to people, cities, nations or other non-products (Vuignier, 2017; Hankinson, 2004; Demirbag Kaplan et al., 2010). Place branding specifically can be applied to any place or destination. Demirbag Kaplan
et al. (2010) define place branding as the application of specific marketing tools and strategies to differentiate a city, place or nation from competition. Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013) argue for an identity-based approach to constructing a place brand and conclude that “place branding is best understood as dialogue, debate, and contestation” between stakeholders from which identity emerges (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013, p.82). This perspective seems most valuable for this study, considering the complexity and number of participants in places like cities, which are the focus of this research.

According to Vuignier (2017), the terms place branding and place marketing are being used interchangeably in the field’s literature. The Place Brand Observer (n.d.), however, points out specific differences. While place branding is more about place making - the development, management, policy and innovation of a place - as well as revolving around the what and who creates a place, the term place marketing refers to how a place brand is communicated and satisfying a target market’s needs. Even though they are not entirely synonymous, for the purpose of this thesis and because the literature does not offer a consensus on definitions, the terms were also used interchangeably in this paper, while aiming to acknowledge the differentiation mentioned above when possible.

Place branding has the purpose of attracting tourism, residents, investments or events (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007). However, as the literature suggests, places are different from conventional products. This is highlighted by Hankinson (2004), who suggests that a trait specific to places is that they can be sold to different groups of people for different purposes. One can, for example, think about most major cities being simultaneously marketed as tourism destinations as well as places for business activities but also, of course, places of residence for people in different stages of their life-cycle.

As pointed out in the Background chapter of this work, place branding is a multidisciplinary field approached from the angle of traditional marketing, public management, urban planning, political science and others (Vuignier, 2017). It is a topic of particular interest to tourism marketing and urban planning (Hankinson, 2004), with importance to urban development, and is influenced mainly by corporate marketing theory (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007).

Some authors like Hankinson (2004), Hanna and Rowley (2011) or Zenker (2014) have taken upon themselves the task of coming up with models specific and relevant to place branding.
However, as characterized by Vuignier (2017, p. 450), the field of place branding is still emerging and “lacks generally accepted definitions, agreed-upon classifications and a general research plan”, which is attributed partly to the multidisciplinary set-up of the field.

### 2.2 Place Branding: Concepts and Practices

From the classic marketing perspective, most articles focus on brand image followed by private management issues, although several other themes have also already been addressed. Figure 1 captures and depicts the diversity that Vuignier (2017) describes in his review of the current place marketing literature.

Figure 1: Place Branding Map

![Place Branding Map](Source: Adapted from Vuignier (2017))

As it can be seen in Figure 1, there is a wide array of different topics discussed within the field of place marketing which underlines the necessity for more interdisciplinary coherence. These
topics are characterized by definitions ranging from narrow to broad and relate to different levels of tangibility from the operational (concrete) to the strategic (abstract) level.

Furthermore, due to place branding being a rather new discipline that builds on traditional, product-based marketing, concepts and terminology, both areas overlap to some extent. For example, Demirbag Kaplan et al. (2010) or Glinska and Kilon (2014) discuss place brand personality – the complex of characteristics that distinguish a place brand – and works out characteristics specific to place brands. For Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), brand identity is a factor that highlights the importance of stakeholders. Swanson (2015) investigates the concept of brand love as originally introduced by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) in connection to place brands; authors like Andéhn et al. (2014), Bose, Roy and Tiwari (2016), Jacobsen (2009, 2012) or Florek and Kavaratzis (2014) deal with the effects of place branding by concerning themselves with place brand equity from various perspectives.

While it can be observed in the literature that traditional marketing concepts are used for the branding of places and destinations (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007). A need for adapting marketing theory and concepts specifically for place branding has been pointed out in the literature by several authors (Vuignier, 2017). Among the reasons for that, marketing and branding cities are considered to be a rather difficult task, which is due to the high “product” complexity. Contrary to a manufactured product, places like cities are not always directly controllable which makes it difficult to create a clear “product” offering. It is also pointed out that the consumers’ interaction with the place leads to unique experience, over which place marketers have little control (Hankinson, 2004).

In accordance with this view, authors have been investigating the participatory role of residents and other stakeholders, like visitors, in the place brand. Braun, Kavaratzis and Zenker (2013) propose that residents, especially in cities, play an integral role in shaping the brand, representing the brand and exerting political power which can influence the brand or the environment in which it exists. Hankinson (2004) also indicates that residents or employees in a city are part of the brand and that there should be a fit between visitors and the population.

In the age of the internet and social media, the idea that place brands are influenced by dynamic relations between stakeholders gets a new and important meaning. Andéhn et al. (2014) conclude that social media offers new ways for people to interact with and shape a place brand.
Zhou and Wang (2014) affirm that social media is a viable tool for place marketers to facilitate participation and interaction between the brand and users which can yield beneficial outcomes such as increased brand equity. The use of social media and especially UGC, however, means that managers of place brands lose some control (Andéhn et al., 2014), an issue that will be dealt with further in the part of this literature review about UGC specifically.

2.3 Marketing Communication and Social Media

Marketing communication, as explained by Keller (2008), can be viewed as the brand’s voice. It is known that the selected manner we use to communicate with consumers dictates whether we form consumer relationships or not (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014; Platon, 2015). In order to fully reach and interact with the target audience in the best possible way, marketers need to constantly search for the right strategy to find their potential consumers and plan on how to approach them through it (Bernoff & Li, 2008). Designing a successful marketing communication strategy has never been a simple task, but it has become even more complex due to the digitalization phenomenon (Belch & Belch, 2004). To fully understand how this topic has become so important in Business Administration, a brief review of the history of marketing communication is necessary (Weinacht, 2015).

About 20 years ago, marketing professionals would create and distribute their advertisements and customers consume them (Berthon, Pitt & Campbell, 2008). Integrated marketing communication is the concept that refers to this attempt of coordinating, unifying and controlling a brand message (Boone & Kurtz, 2007; Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2010). With the revolution caused by internet-based applications (i.e. social media) in the way people interact, create content and exchange information, the effectiveness of this traditional marketing approach has been affected. Customers gained a voice and are now able to broadcast their opinions (Fill et al., 2013; Jucaitytė & Maščinskienė, 2004; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

As explained by Berthon, Pitt and Campbell (2008, p. 8), "the traditional distinctions between producer and consumer and between mass communication and individual communication are dissolving, and with these, traditional models of media management". However, while many companies would consider it a threat, others have started to realize that the internet could be used as a primary component of their communication strategy (Christodoulides, 2009). Content marketing is a term that conveys the publication and distribution of interesting business-related
material in order to retain, educate and attract customers (Brennan & Croft, 2012; Mcpheat, 2011). Instead of pushing of products and services through advertisements, business started to evidentiate to consumers what their company may offer through other formats (e.g. free eBooks, rich blog and social media posts, entertaining videos), aiming to establish a stronger relationship (Pulizzi, 2014; Gupta, 2015). Businesses that produce content are able to use the internet and its platforms as advantages, adding social media as a tool for communication (Brennan & Croft, 2012).

According to Castronovo and Huang (2012), social media has proven its role as a cost-effective and efficient at engaging channel if implemented in the right way. However, most of the organizations are still adapting to this entry process (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). Social media has been defined many times in the literature. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009, p. 358), this term encompasses many items: “online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company sponsored discussion boards, chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer email, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites”. For Larson and Watson (2011, p.3), it can be explained as “the set of connectivity-enabled applications that facilitate interaction and co-creation, exchange and publication of information among firms and their networked communities of customers”. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define it, in short, as the bundle of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of UGC.

2.4 User-Generated Content

As previously explained, the connections between companies and their audience faced a shift from a one-way communication (indirect approach) to a two-way communication (direct approach), incorporating a dialogue-based communication with customers (Crosby & Stephens, 1987; Fill et al., 2013). Through this second strategy, companies have gained an uninterrupted space to engage with consumers, strengthen customer relationships and reinforce the brand value and unique selling propositions through a direct conversation (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Platon, 2015; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Social media, in many ways, made the whole idea of brand audience to be rethought (Macomber, 2015). These platforms enable the creation of more content and encourage a
participatory culture, where users can expose share opinions and ideas with chosen others (Jenings, 2006; Kotler et al., 2010). Accordingly, since many of this internet-based messages relate to companies, products and services, consumers become able to influence the behavior of one another: including aspects as brand awareness, brand image, opinions and purchase intentions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Jucaitytė & Maščinskienė, 2004).

UGC is one of the new tendencies in marketing communication (Dennhardt, Kohler & Fiiller, 2011). While the academic literature on UGC is in its initial phase, companies already encourage this strategy on their social media channels (Arnhold, 2010; Burmann, 2010; Stöckl et al, 2008). Constantinides and Fountain (2008) explain that consumers rely more on each other than on simple advertisements. Consequently, user-created content and user-generated media – which includes reviews, comments, and blog posts – happen to become increasingly used as an attempt to build credibility for a brand (Dennhardt et al., 2011). According to Arnhold (2010), there is a certain agreement that UGC will remain conquering space in the marketing practice. However, authors argue that further studies yet ought to better explore the knowledge around the tool (Arnhold, 2010; Burmann, 2010; Dehnardt, Kohler & Fiiller, 2011).

2.5 Adverse Features of UGC

Even though UGC is generally pictured as an ascendant cost-effective tool, its recency in marketing strategies has naturally generated discussions and doubts towards its consistency (Hagedorn, 2013). While on the one hand only the practice will be capable to uncover UGC's real value, on the other hand, several authors and even companies already attempt to enumerate and deal with some possible adverse features of the tool.

2.5.1 Ownership

The Walt Disney Company (2018, n.p.), among its several pages of terms and conditions, states: "We do not claim ownership to your User-Generated Content; however, you grant us a non-exclusive, sub licensable, irrevocable, and royalty-free worldwide license under all copyrights". While the leading entertainment company attempts to protect itself and its contributing users, nevertheless, most businesses still operate without defined terms regarding the ownership of UGC. The creativity regarding content production comes mostly from outside
of the companies and, as pounded by Lessig (2004), industries are eager to explore and benefit from it.

The issue of ownership, as said by Silbey (2007), starts with the existing copyright legislation - since it is based on an idealized concept of determined author-creator. Taking the new conditions of creation, production and consumption of content, the concept of a defined author seems to be progressively vanishing and becoming more abstract. As Sarikakis and Rodriguez-Amat (2014) explain, technology has been altering the traditional forms of authorship. Within the findings of their studies, the researchers argue that, with the cooperation between firms and users in UGC, it is hard to define who is, in fact, developing the content and, therefore, who owns it (Sarikakis, Krug & Rodriguez-Amat, 2017; Sarikakis & Rodriguez-Amat, 2014).

Consequently, it is argued that content on the internet and, hence, UGC are still uncharted territories for ownership boundaries. As places are considered to be built through a large number of stakeholders' interactions, it may be hard to credit the final outcome of this cooperation in social media channels, making this aspect of UGC to be likely problematic.

2.5.2 Control

Traditional marketing is founded on the idea of message control and brand guidelines towards a predominantly unified message (Boone & Kurtz, 2007; Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2010). Enabling user-generated content, instead, is about partially giving up control and opening the marketing processes to the contribution of other participants (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). As Arnhold (2010, p. 32) defends, brands may benefit from user-generated messages, even when they are not fully in line with corporate brand communication guidelines: "UGC is understood as a user's personal interpretation of brand meaning which is visualized in a certain way".

On the other hand, in the words of Hagedorn (2013, p. 3), "users can create and distribute virtually anything on the internet". As negatives or controversial messages created by users may have a large impact on the brand, UGC may be perceived as risky and dangerous from the points of view of control (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). This aspect has two sides since the brand can possibly benefit from a larger reach within users' networks in the case of positive reviews. However, as there is an inherent risk that undoubtedly comes in when brands partly give up
control, this issue may make organizations remain hesitant about embracing UGC and its uncontrollable nature.

2.5.3 Credibility

Credibility may be defined as the "(...) collection of attributes of messages that make the message content or their senders valued relative to the information imparted" (Rouner, 2008, p. 1040). Christodoulides (2009) explains that consumers construct their own perceived credibility towards companies and brands, depending on the consistency of the image a brand advertises. To Perloff (2014), expertise, knowledge and ability associated with the communicator are main factors for source credibility in the twenty-first century.

Partially opposing to that, other studies defend that reviews of friends and acquaintances who used a product are more trustworthy than the information provided by companies or unknown experts (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Daugherty, Eastin & Bright (2008) point that the practical influence of source credibility on interpersonal relationships has been studied since the 1940s and there have been several opinions on the topic, due to the complexity of its discussion. Therefore, while a plurality of existing studies presents users as a trustworthy source of content, some companies may still be apprehensive about allowing their participation through UGC.

2.5.4 Motivation

UGC is different from sponsored content, it involves unpaid consumers creating content (Crowston & Fagnot, 2018). As money is not the motivator, several studies have been trying to investigate what are the drivers of this spontaneous content creation and how to expand them. Bern and Von Niman (2014) explain that the usage of company-related hashtags when UGC is posted on Instagram are generally motivated by identity formation, personal gain, desire for belonging, categorization, clarification or entertainment. In a more recent study, Vong and Stax (2017) find three large groups of motivators: social, personal and brand. The first, referring to the desire of interacting and contributing with the brand; the second, more hedonic, refers more to self-entertainment when doing it; lastly, the third, approaches intentions as brand recognition and affiliation.

Accordingly, if companies are willing to motivate UGC creation, the authors defend that they should encourage the usage of hashtags and tagging through social media to communicate with
consumers - and drive them to communicate back (Bern & Fagnot; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Vong & Stax, 2017). Brands can initially struggle in the process of engaging their online audience and may have to put some effort into finding the right way to do it (Crowston & Fagnot, 2018). Reasonably, this same issue can also take place in their marketing process of city brands, deserving some further investigation.

2.6 Preliminary Framework: UGC in Place Branding

Thus far, the chief findings of previous studies were elaborated on and this section aims to synthesize and clarify the key points that were taken into account for this study. Based on the literature review, essential areas of interest have been identified and selected to build up a preliminary framework. Therefore, three different fields were combined as the basis of this research: place branding, marketing communication and UGC. This preliminary framework is meant to aid in the empirical part of this study and data collection, in order to find issues regarding UGC in the place branding context.

Figure 2: Preliminary Framework of Issues Regarding UGC in Place Branding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Branding Literature</th>
<th>Adverse Features in UGC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Stakeholders</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ownership</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory Approach</strong></td>
<td>Lessig, 2004; Silbey, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sankakis &amp; Rodriguez-Amat, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andéhn et al, 2014;</td>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braun, Kavaratzis &amp; Zenker, 2013</td>
<td>Christodoulides, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haukisson, 2004;</td>
<td>Li &amp; Bernoff, 2011; Perloff, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavaratzis &amp; Kalandides, 2015</td>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arnold, 2010; Bronner &amp; De Hoog, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hagedorn, 2013; Hanna et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Communication Literature</td>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Social Media</strong></td>
<td>Crowston &amp; Fagnot, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two-Way Communication</strong></td>
<td>Bera &amp; Von Niman, 2014; Vong &amp; Stax, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosby &amp; Stephens, 1987;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fill et al., 2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed by the Authors
Firstly, from place branding literature, the participation of stakeholders in the brand has been identified for the analysis of the empirical data due to two main reasons. First, a participatory approach to place branding has been highlighted by several authors as a vital part specific to the branding of places, since places differ from conventional product offerings. Second, the participation of stakeholders in the place brand is in line with the main focus of this study, UGC, which is a tool that facilitates participation.

Secondly, from the marketing communication theory, the importance of social media as a two-way path is highlighted. Thirdly, as for the already enumerated adverse features in UGC, all were included in the preliminary framework (ownership, control, credibility and motivation), since they all relate to the purpose of this research and were considered to deserve further investigation. Figure 2 illustrates the foundation of the research in a brief preliminary framework.
3. Methodology

In order to fulfill the purpose, the methodology must be selected with relevance and conducted accordingly. This section explains the method of this research, the gathering and analysis of data, as well as illustrates the reasons behind its sample selection.

3.1 Research Process

The research process for this paper was developed based on Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). The aim of this section is to explain how the study was created and conducted with effective methods - justifying it by an adequate research philosophy. Overall, this creates more coherence of the study and offers a methodical and ethical guideline for the researchers. In the following part, all the decisions that had to be made in setting up the research process will be discussed in more detail.

Figure 3: The Research Onion

Source: Adapted from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012
Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) illustrate the research process by means of the research onion, which is also discussed and explained by Sahay (2016). It is a visualization of, and a valuable tool in setting up the research process step by step. According to the research onion (see Figure 3), one starts at the outer layer of research philosophy before deciding on a research approach. Next, the research strategy - the method of data collection one uses - needs to be decided on, which can include a mono-method, mixed method or multi-method approach. Accordingly, researchers should also decide on the time horizon of the study, in this case, however, it was pre-determined and not up for the researchers to decide on. Ultimately, at the core of the research onion, are the data collection and analysis. Figure 3 illustrates the research onion and introduces, in bold, the choices made for this study by the authors - which will be explained later.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This research is approached with the philosophy of *interpretivism*. The underlying argument of this approach is that one cannot understand social conditions without subjective interpretation (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010). Interpretivist research philosophy focuses on understanding phenomena and finding out specific underlying factors (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2009). This is exactly in line with the purpose of this research which is to gain a broader understanding of a specific phenomenon, namely UGC in the context of place branding.

Furthermore, interpretivism aims to yield information on what some people think and do, gain insights on the problems they are confronted with and how they deal with these encountered issues (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2009). This definition overlaps with the ultimate goal of investigating the experiences of city marketers related to UGC, as well as the issues they might encounter with this tool in the city branding context. The research methods connected to interpretivism are usually qualitative, as the philosophy relies on the interaction between the researcher and the subject, most often in the form of interviews (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2009). In accordance with this philosophical approach, the appropriate methods were chosen and designed for the purpose of this research. They are discussed in the following part.
3.3 Research Approach

After the literature review, it could be concluded that there are not many established theories regarding these topics and that a deductive approach would not be feasible. An inductive approach could have been applied, however, the authors decided on another suitable alternative: the abductive approach.

The abductive approach, in essence, is moving between induction and deduction (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In the case of this study, previous researchers have already identified certain areas of interest that could potentially be used as an initial framework for data collection and analysis. Nonetheless, as there still lacks a testable model in the field, the data results of this research would help to complete this framework to generate a model. As pointed by Awuzie and McDermott (2017, p. 357), the abductive approach allows “the researcher’s engagement in a back and forth movement between theory and data in a bid to develop new or modify existing theory”. This motion and flexibility, in the perspective of the authors, were important to guarantee the exploration of the field and the fulfilment of the research questions.

This approach was, consequently, deemed the most suitable for the selected purpose of this research. Hence, previous authors’ input to the fields of place branding and UGC were taken as a basis to develop a framework. Further on, this primary framework was examined and, lastly, enhanced by the insights of this research, promoting a revised model of issues regarding UGC in the place branding context.

3.4 Research Design and Strategy

Founded on the exploratory nature as well as on the interpretivist philosophy of this study, a qualitative data gathering method was chosen. Grounded theory, which aims to derive patterns from data (May, 2011) was a suitable strategy for this research. Even though grounded theory is commonly associated with an inductive approach (May, 2011), it was deemed to aid in this research process with its abductive approach, as abduction also includes inductive elements. In other words, secondary and primary data were used to arrive at an enhanced framework, creating a new model - extracted from data patterns. Among the qualitative research tools associated with grounded theory are interviews (May, 2011). Interviews offer the ability of addressing many issues in a very objective way (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Given that the aim is to explore how UGC is applied in the city branding context, representatives of
city brands who possibly deal with this tool, were seen as an apparent source of data. Interviews, therefore, were chosen for the primary data collection.

Technology became an ally due to the temporal limitations and geographical dispersion of the intended sample. Initially, the aim was to conduct semi-structured interviews by phone or Skype. However, as potential respondents argued that their time was particularly restricted and that email responses were the most viable option, the data collection method had to be adjusted to these conditions.

Ultimately, a decision was made in favor of conducting email interviews. While email-based interviews constrain the depth of data and limit the researchers’ flexibility (Meho, 2006), in this case they guaranteed the participation of the city brand representatives and allowed the obtainment of a meaningful sample number. Also, some potential issues of email interviews with the recruitment of interviewees (Meho, 2006) did not come into effect since it was the preferred method of the potential participants. Thus, email interviews were the core of data collection method in this study to investigate the phenomenon at hand.

### 3.5 Selection of Interviewees

In order to map city brands for the sample of interview partners, two main city brand rankings featuring the most valuable brands were examined. The City Brand Index (CBI), invented by Simon Anholt, was the first ranking. Since 2006, it is biannually conducted and consists of six factors of evaluation: presence, place, potential, pulse, people and prerequisites (Anholt, 2006). The CBI is considered to be a pioneer report of city brands and it ranks the world's top 50 city brands (GfK, 2017). Secondly, an additional recently-released research was used to enhance the reasoning: Resonance 2017 World’s Best City Brands Report, by Canada-based Resonance Consultancy, who specializes in reporting on travel and tourism. In its turn, this report includes 100 cities based on criteria of Place, Product, Programming, People, Prosperity and Promotion (Resonance, 2017). For the selection of city brands to target with interview requests, the top 50 cities of the Resonance ranking were also considered. Both rankings are broadly accepted among both place marketers and the international media, being the GfK still the most reputable in the field (GfK, 2017; Resonance, 2017).
The selection of city brands was therefore based on these two rankings. While both city brand rankings are not identical in order, 33 out of 50 cities from the GfK list are also ranked in the Resonance top 50 list. Thus, 67 valuable city brands were selected to be targeted for interviews. The combination of both rankings was made in order to increase the number of potential respondents, as well as to bring more diversity in terms of ranking, region and city size while aiming to represent the most valuable brands worldwide, according to the two reports. It is important to note that cities were not chosen depending on their current usage of UGC because this research did not want to exclude the perspective of brands who do not use it. The rationale behind this is that brands who do not use UGC in their strategy would still have valuable insights to offer on why they opt out of using this tool.

3.6 Contacting City Brands

After deciding on the potential respondents to the interviews, initial contact with the city brands was established. This was crucial as the communication with the cities would ultimately yield the sample of interviewees. An issue arose in terms of finding the suitable contact person or entity to forward the interview request to. For many cities, it was not obvious whether a specific department or (private) agency was responsible for their branding activities. Furthermore, it was not always apparent whether a city utilizes a centralized approach to its marketing activities, hence it was unclear whether there was mainly one or various departments involved with the branding of a city.

As a solution, a multi-stage contact approach was developed in order to bring structure to the initial contact and to increase the effectiveness of the interview requests. The chosen channel for the first contact was the official Facebook pages of each selected city brand - social media channels are used by most city brands and are meant to connect the brand to the outside world. This channel offered a convenient way to get into contact with the brand directly via interactive chat rather than just email. In addition, it offered a potential connection link to either the city brand manager or another professional - with knowledge on social media strategy and UGC.

The second stage of contact was then based on information obtained through the Facebook chat. In many cases, specific contact persons or entities were suggested for further communication. In case of non-response through Facebook chat or the case of some city brands that did not have an official Facebook account, the contact information provided on the cities’
websites were used to attain this stage. The third attempt of contact was directed to the city brands who were not responsive until that point. Aiming to raise the number of participants, a broader array of potential contacts for each city brand were then approached and previous contact channels were re-tried. Additional channels that could provide contact information, such as LinkedIn, were also utilized to establish contact with city brands.

This whole multi-stage contact approach took place over a 7-week period and allowed this research to arrive at the ultimate sample for the interviews in a structured manner. The most successful response rate, however, was through the Facebook page of the city brands, in the initial attempt of contact.

3.7 Sample

Out of the initial selection of 67 city brands, representatives of 11 brands (16,4%) agreed to take part in the interviews timely, composing the final sample for this research. As presented in Table 1, city brands from five geographical regions were included, Europe being where most of the cities were located. The brands vary in terms of city brand ranking, ownership (i.e. publicly or privately held) and branding phase. Even though UGC usage was not a screening criterion in the sampling process, all the participating city brands of the research happened to be currently applying UGC to some degree. Extra information about the city brands can be found on Appendix 3.

Moreover, both organizations responsible for ranking city brands, Resonance and GfK, were contacted for a brief email interview about their view on the topic - in other words, how important they perceive UGC in place branding strategies. GfK, unfortunately, claimed that any information would only be provided by means of purchase. On the other hand, Resonance's president, Chris Fair, cordially answered all the questions and provided all supplementary data, adding immensely valuable inputs for this research.
Table 1: Sample of City Brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Region</th>
<th>City Brand</th>
<th>Ranking Position</th>
<th>Ownership/Management</th>
<th>UGC Usage</th>
<th>Branding Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #2 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reconstruction Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe/Asia</td>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #49 Resonance</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #27 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>#6 GfK #20 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reconstruction Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #41 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #17 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Maintenance Reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reconstruction Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Top 50 GfK¹ #43 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>#5 GfK #7 Resonance</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not answered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>#26 GfK</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Building</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed by the Authors; ¹ - GfK did not specified the exact ranking position

3.8 Data Collection

As discussed before, chiefly email interviews were used to gather data. They were designed with the main aim of this research, the research questions and the literature review in mind. The questionnaire was designed with the goal of getting insights into the perspective of place brand marketers regarding their view on and usage of UGC in the cities’ branding strategies.

Questions were divided into three categories to, later on, allow an optimized analysis of the data. Firstly, three questions dealt with general information on the city brand - intending to
categorize and contextualize the participating city brands. The second part of questions dealt with city branding in general: four questions were designed based on the literature review to extract information on how interviewees build their strategies and what factors are perceived as most important. The last part of the interview dealt specifically with UGC. As pointed out before, this third part was the core of the interview and its questions dealt with the usage and perspectives on this tool at the disposal of place brand marketers.

In accordance with the abductive approach of this study, questions regarding city branding and UGC were designed so that the data could be compared against the previously established framework but also potentially add different perspectives not discussed in the literature. To allow comparison, all interviews for the city brands were designed uniformly and contained the same questions in the same order, solely the place brand names were adjusted per interviewee. The full template of the city brand interviews, with all its questions, can be found in Appendix 1.

Regarding the interview with an independent professional, a separate questionnaire was built, with eight new questions as this hearing intended to obtain different insights. The first questions, as presented in Appendix 2, asked about the impact of branding on the ranking positions and both the existing and future trends in place marketing. Whereas the final ones focused more on the importance of social media as a communication channel and the role of UGC.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data from the interviews was analyzed taking the previously presented framework into account. Concepts and themes from the framework were color-coded in the interview transcripts. This allowed to condense the data from all city brands and categorize it. When new themes or concepts, not previously investigated, arose within the data, these were also color marked and noted down. This presented the researchers with a collection of categorized data which was utilized to compare the input by the various city brands and extract meaning and connections from what was discussed in the interviews.
3.10 Limitations on Method

The methods heavily relied on the cooperation of relevant professionals in the field of city branding. Originally, semi-structured phone or Skype interviews were intended to take place, but it became clear that not many cities could accommodate this request. As an alternative to the original intended data collection method, email-based interviews had to be conducted, somewhat limiting the depth of data.

Another limitation was revealed in the process of contacting city brands, which is that it was not a simple task to find the appropriated city brand channel to discuss the topic. As it was mentioned in this study, many of these brands belong to or are managed by public entities. This means that the brands are located within public, governmental structures that often were not easy to untangle. There was rarely a case where a city was clearly represented through just one specific brand or communication outlet. As a result, this study mostly interacts with the tourism side of cities rather than entities or organizations that are representative of, for example, the commerce side of them.
4. Empirical Findings

The eleven interviews with city brands and one with a consultancy professional, combined to the previously presented theoretical framework, are the basis of the findings of this research. Intending to ease the reading, the section is divided in six subchapters: Place Branding, Participation of Stakeholders, Communication Strategy, UGC as a Tool, UGC in Place Branding and, lastly, Updated Model: UGC in Place Branding.

4.1 Place Branding

While the interviews yielded data on various specific concepts connected to UGC, they also provided more general information into the place branding context and were vital to take into consideration for this analysis. These general findings regarding the branding of cities, will be presented in this part.

Firstly, it was found that all brands – except for Istanbul – were owned, managed or funded publicly. This underlines what Vuignier (2017) points out with regard to place branding being a discipline touching upon fields beyond just marketing. As city branding efforts are publicly organized, there appears to be a clear connection to areas like public administration or politics in general. One city, Stockholm, has also explicitly mentioned politics as a factor in the long-term perspective of the place brand. It was affirmed in the course of the interviews that city branding takes place in a complex multidisciplinary environment - a fact previously noted by Vuignier (2017).

Furthermore, the relative novelty of the place branding discipline became apparent. While the destinations might have been known for some time already, most city brands stated that they have implemented targeted efforts only in recent years or are just starting to build a clearly defined brand. Cape Town, for example, started branding efforts in the early 2000s in preparation of the 2010 World Cup that took place South Africa. Currently, a reworked brand identity is being rolled out to market the city as a tourism destination. Another example is Rio de Janeiro, which is already known as a destination through iconic places like the Copacabana, but only now is starting to implement more targeted branding strategies. Other cities have also stated that they have recently been implementing more specific strategies or updated the brand. A reason for that seems to be that the discipline of place branding is still arising, and practices are being refined. In this context, Cape Town stated:
“Extensive research shows that best practice destination marketing organisations speak through a singular tourism-facing brand, where the industry-facing identity aligns to the visitor-facing identity. To be reflective of this approach, Cape Town Tourism went through a rigorous process of brand development with the outcome of a brand both representative of the organisation and the city”

- Cape Town

Adding to that, it could be observed that the brands with the longest history of branding themselves – Vienna and Singapore – were also the brands with the seemingly most specific branding efforts. This could be connected to expertise gained over time and also, potentially, to influencing factors like funding for the city brand, which, for almost all of the interviewed cities, depended on public/political considerations.

Generally, it could also be observed – as stated in the literature review – that the city brands approach branding with an overlap to traditional corporate branding. Differentiation, one of the main goals of branding (Rooney, 1995), was also stated by several cities as a major goal of their branding efforts. Themes like identity or image came up several times in the interviews, which is in line with Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). The authors argue for an identity-based approach to place branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The importance of identity for a city brand was also highlighted in the interview with Resonance Consultancy.

“For most people, ‘branding’ is associated with the creation of logos or taglines which have little to no impact on a city’s image or ranking. We prefer to use the term ‘competitive identity’ which speaks to identifying and developing a positioning strategy based on the authentic differentiating characteristics of a city or destination”

- Resonance

Furthermore, interviewed cities have identified specific and detailed visitor target segments, much like any traditional product-based brand would do, which underlined the fact that city branding is also built on traditional marketing concepts.
4.1.1 Aims of Branding a City

In the literature, generating tourism was found to be one of the major aims of place branding (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2007), and this was also found to be true for the interviewed city brands. All interviewed city brands directly or indirectly pointed at attracting visitors as one of the main goals of the city brand - not surprisingly, as public tourism boards have been the entities most involved in branding the participating cities. The one exception is Boston which, regarding this point, mainly focused on its own citizens yet has also stated that attracting visitors is one of the aims, albeit not the most prioritized. Stockholm underlines that tourism is one of the most important factors, the brand justified to measure its success and build its brand by the help of key performance indicators (KPIs) like “number of international visitors”.

“KPIs so far have been, number of international visitors, number of international investments. These KPIs are under evaluation and part of our development for the brand”

- Stockholm

The city brand’s purpose is then, as mentioned, to differentiate destination from competition. Warsaw, for instance, stated that competition among cities is high and several other interviewees affirmed that creating a brand to differentiate the city and highlight competitive advantages is a key issue in their city branding strategies. Here, again, building the city brands identity appears to be of high importance, since essentially all city brands stated that their branding efforts are connected to identity or image building.

While the interviewees mostly pointed to the attraction of visitors to the city as an aim of branding, some other aims of the brands became apparent. Stockholm affirmed the conclusions of Vuignier (2017) that attracting business and investment is also part of a city brand’s goal. The brand of Stockholm explicitly also represents the Business Region Stockholm, having the KPI measuring performance by considering the “number of international investments”, as it was mentioned above. Singapore highlighted that the brand is addressing business. Their targeting, for instance, involves business professionals and is stated in the following quote.

“‘Passion Made Possible’ is Singapore’s unified tourism and business brand”

- Singapore
On the other hand, an entirely different aim is represented by the City of Boston. The brand is currently being built and the aim is to streamline the city’s communication with the public. For Boston, tourism is just a secondary aim. The primary goal is to facilitate the citizens’ interaction with the city, explicitly when it comes to official matters or communication during emergencies. This finding shows how city branding does not need to have commercial aims but can also be used for practical purposes to increase quality of life in the city. Consequently, this raises the question about the role of different stakeholders in a city brand, since that can be connected to the aims of the brand. The next part will deal with stakeholders, their role, and participation with the brand in more detail.

4.2 Participation of Stakeholders

The participatory role of residents in creating and representing the city brand has been discussed in the literature review (Braun et. al., 2013; Hankinson, 2004; Kavaratzis and Kalandides, 2015, Andéhn et. al., 2014) and was resoundingly represented within the interviews.

Essentially, all cities responded that stakeholders play an important role for their city brand in terms of strategy, communication, identity or image. The interviews corroborated that stakeholders are ambassadors for the city brand, as stated by Braun et. al. (2013) and Zenker et. al. (2014). At numerous occasions during the interviews, the positive effect of and cooperation with various kinds of stakeholders was mentioned. This sentiment was shared by all city brands and it is best summed up by a brief statement from Stockholm, sequentially presented.

“Visitors, residents, businesses and stakeholders are all very important for building the overall 'brand' Stockholm”
- Stockholm

Furthermore, the participation of stakeholders is apparently connected to UGC. This connection is self-evident, since it is likely stakeholders (e.g. residents or visitors) who generate the content that is then featured by city brands. Additional to that relation, some cities have mentioned that they see value in UGC specifically contributed by stakeholders. This will be
dealt with more explicitly at a later point in this chapter. In the following, findings regarding the value and roles of different stakeholders will be presented in more detail.

4.2.1 Residents

Residents appear to be at the center of most city brands’ strategies. For instance, Singapore stated that it derives brand characteristics from the passionate attitude of its citizens, Warsaw said that all residents create the brand and Cape Town pointed out that for the cultural experience that visitors seek, the locals are vital. Boston represents a special case, since the brand of the City of Boston is primarily meant to be for the citizens and plays a functional role as it aims to facilitate an easier interaction between city government and its citizens.

“The main purpose of this branding is to, well, it's mainly to the citizens of Boston, and the people who live around in the area of Boston. It is not really for advertising, it is for outreach, in order to convey information to the public and also to the city side”

- Boston

Interviewees have, furthermore, stated that residents play a role as ambassadors for the city brand, for instance when they travel abroad and meet other people. Warsaw sees residents at the center of their communication strategy and for building the city’s image. Prague brought attention to a specific subset of residents, namely "expats".

“Prague residents, especially 'expats', are a vocal group and help create the reputation of Prague as an open and creative city”

- Prague

The input by Resonance offered another perspective important to consider. While residents were found to be invaluable to the city and its brand, the assessment in the following was stated by the consultancy agency.

“Organizations are learning that successful place branding is less about how the local community wants to be perceived and more about identifying and communicating specific competitive advantages and differentiating characteristics that will resonate with the audiences it is seeking to influence and/or attract.”
Sometimes these may be one and the same with the views and aspirations of the local community and, in other cases, they may not”
- Resonance

This view rounds off the findings about the role of visitors. They appear to be vital for city brands in building and communicating the brand identity. Yet, gaps between the locals’ and brand’s aspirations can arise. It follows, as stated by Resonance, that the brand manager’s role then becomes to bridge those gaps through solid strategies that ultimately work towards the benefit of all stakeholders.

All in all, it can be observed that residents are recognized as an important, potentially the most important, stakeholder in a city brand. City brands recurrently shared to rely on their citizens for building and communicating the brand identity.

4.2.2 Visitors

The role of visitors for the city brands was elaborated on by most of the interviewed brands. Several cities mentioned that, besides residents, visitors are a primary source for word of mouth communication. Prague, for example, sees visitors’ word of mouth as the “cornerstone” of their communication strategy – as the city does not promote itself very much, the brand relies on stakeholder communication. The view that visitors are important in communicating the brand in order to generate more visitors came up several times, as it is also articulated by Singapore:

“They are key in driving advocacy for the destination. Nothing is more powerful than word of mouth from families and friends when it comes to a destination decision”
- Singapore

In accordance with the finding that experiences by visitors and the communication thereof play a role for city brands, it was also shared that visitors are vital for their contribution of UGC. It was found that cities value the content produced by visitors, similar to the importance of UGC generated by residents. Most cities were found to actively encourage visitors to share content, as it will be further presented in the section '4.5.4 Motivation'.
Generally, it was found that the main participatory role visitors play for city brands is their communication to other potential visitors. As in traditional marketing, the word of mouth of (tourism) customers – visitors to the city – was identified as vital for the brands. Connected to that is the contribution of content by visitors, offering another dimension of communicating their experiences, which is utilized by cities to build and communicate their brands.

4.2.3 Local Business & The Tourism Industry

Local businesses, as stakeholders in the city brands, were mentioned to a much lesser extent than visitors or residents in the interviews. However, business was included implicitly several times when the importance of all stakeholders was highlighted. Also, while not discussed broadly, the role of business for the city brands was indicated at some points. Rome, for instance, mentioned the presence of communication to visitors of gastronomy and entertainment. From the specific target segments, Singapore shared it becomes clear that to attract visitors, the city brands relies on the existence of industries that cater to these segments (e.g. nightlife or shopping). Rio de Janeiro has explicitly mentioned local businesses as places for communication to tourists and potentially generating re-visits to the city.

Generally, while not largely discussed by the interviewed city brands, it is clear that city tourism relies on supporting industries within the city to cater to visitors’ needs. The role of the tourism industry came up at some points. Cities like Rome or Cape Town, among others, have indicated their cooperation with the tourism industry. From statements in the interviews, it appears that city branding activities are also partly directed at tourism operators.

4.3 Communication Strategy

The findings dealing with communication strategies of city brands are presented here in two segments of results. First, in "communication channels", the findings regarding the selection of channels to deliver the brand message (i.e. traditional marketing channels or digital media channels). Second, in "two-way communication", a brief discussion of how city brands reported the advantages and disadvantages of the dialogue-based communication facilitated by social media.
Communication Channels
As previously explained, marketing communication channels are the means that brands use to deliver their message (Keller, 2008). As it was explained by Bernoff and Li (2008), in traditional marketing, the right selection of communication channels dictates the success or failure of a branding strategy. According to the empirical data, that is not different in the place branding context. Place brands constantly adapt the channel according to the goal they want to achieve, as illustrated by an excerpt from Singapore's answers.

"For the initial year of building up a new brand, our focus is on broad reach channels, both online and offline, to achieve brand awareness. As we move into the next phase (...), we will move into channels that allow us to target interest groups more accurately"

- Singapore

Traditional marketing methods (i.e. leaflets, magazine advertisements and printed media) were somewhat mentioned by cities as part of their chief communication channels. In further detail, Warsaw and Rio de Janeiro featured advertisements in local public transportation, Rome featured partnerships with airline carriers, advertising posters and trade magazines. Boston, with a holistic approach, explained that the whole branding of the city's office material, such as business cards or letterheads, were also considered ways of communicating their brand.

On the other hand, digital media - including both city webpages and social media accounts - was highlighted on all the interviews as one of the main components of their branding communication strategies, as illustrated by one of Rio de Janeiro's quotes:

"We constantly market the city in our digital media (social media and official website) to strengthen Rio's image"

- Rio de Janeiro

Facebook was directly mentioned by six (Cape Town, Istanbul, Rio de Janeiro, Singapore, Stockholm and Warsaw); Instagram, by seven (Cape Town, Istanbul, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Singapore, Stockholm and Vienna); and Twitter, by only Cape Town and Stockholm. Yet, all interviewees, to some extent declared to rely on social networks to market their cities and engage with the public.
Two-Way Communication

Social media enabled a shift towards two-way communication models by companies (Crosby & Stephens, 1987; Fill et al., 2013). As discussed in the literature review, two-way communication also plays a role when it comes to engagement through UGC. While previous studies (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Platon, 2015; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014) discussed how two-way communication aids city brands in reaching broader audiences, a relevant downside was also identified in the interviews' answers.

Cities stated that the interaction between potential customers and brands do not necessarily have to be exclusively positive. In some cases, the two-way communication through social networks may intend to harm a brand's image - therefore, the dialogue-based communication is not deliberately perceived as positive. This issue, in the place branding context, is explored in further detail in section "4.5.1 Control".

However, taking the favoring aspects of two-way communication into consideration, its contribution in facilitating the participation of stakeholders is noticeable. Rome, for instance, acclaimed UGC's function in encouraging the participation of visitors, residents and local business, explaining that the two-way communication process also has a strong beneficial side. This other perspective, also brought up by city brands in the interviews, will be further discussed and detailed in the next chapters.

4.4 UGC as a Tool

UGC has already been considered a big trend in several studies from the general marketing communication literature (Arnhold, 2010; Burmann, 2010; Dennhardt, Kohler & Fiiller, 2011; Stöckl et al, 2008). Remarkably, in this research, the entire sample of city brands applied it as a tool, showing its high presence in the place branding context. Moreover, besides the enthusiasm for the tool from the organizational side, UGC directly affects the estimated city brand value, as it is explained by Resonance. The Canadian consultancy group explained how UGC can affect a city ranking position in the following excerpt:

"When it comes to measuring the promotion or 'buzz' around a city, we're analyzing its rankings in Google Trends and the number of check-ins on Facebook. As a result, our
Some cities emphasized how important UGC became in their marketing communication and content, as the example of Los Angeles and Cape Town, that affirmed that their digital channels consistently leverage UGC to showcase their destinations. Another interesting contribution came from Warsaw, the city brand said that content created by the residents encourages visitors to feel the city like a local would do. This aspect was also supported by Istanbul's contribution that UGC is a way of marketing the destination through a visitor's eyes. Rome defined its usage as a way to promote the brand through experiences.

"We see User-Generated Content as extremely valuable and have integrated it into our social media strategy"
- Cape Town

"The destination is seen with the eyes of the persons that really visit the place"
- Istanbul

"[UGC] (...) enabled tourists to visit Warsaw in an unconventional way and see Warsaw via eyes of its residents"
- Warsaw

"At a strategic level, using UGC means, in perspective, promoting Roma brand through the positive experiences of those who visit it"
- Rome

4.4.1 Application of UGC

As mentioned, all city brands, in this research, incorporate the content generated by visitors and/or residents in their strategies. However, since this application may take different forms, interviewees were asked to report what specific kinds of content were being applied. As a result, images appeared as the most present type of UGC, indicated and used by all the cities.
The noteworthiness of users' contribution with images is exposed by Boston's and Los Angeles' quotes.

"As a tourism board, we cannot be everywhere in Los Angeles at all times of day. We rely on our visitors and locals to share stunning images with us to promote Los Angeles"

- Los Angeles

"We also have a photo folder on Google photos where residents can upload photos that they have taken around the city. We can't run around and take photos all the time"

- Boston

Facebook review posts were cited by Istanbul, Prague, Rome, Singapore and Warsaw. As stated in previous studies, online reviews are strong ways of promoting a brand (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Jucaitytė & Maščinskienė, 2004). In the words of Rome, these positive comments can work as a "great business card for the city". This was also supported by Cape Town, who mentioned the presence of user-generated messages across all their social media channels (Website, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). Istanbul affirmed to perceive these reviews, whether on Facebook or TripAdvisor, are an important level of branding.

Some unconventional sorts of UGC were also reported by some of the city brands. Warsaw highlighted the trend 'live like locals' and explained several creative marketing actions conducted to include content created by locals. For instance, through a platform called 'Open Warsaw', the tourism board invited residents to create their thematic trails - showing their favorite locations across the city. The result, besides an interactive map application, was a series of seven video testimonials - in which the awarded trails were presented by their creators. Warsaw also cited other contests, one of short stories featuring Chopin and other regarding the preparation of a card for the Palace of Culture and Science 60th birthday.

Another example of an original UGC strategy was Boston's call for local artists to interact with their new logo, creating unique versions for each holiday. As explained in the contests' webpage: "with hundreds of holidays, our designers aren’t able to create custom artwork for every single one. That’s where the artists of Boston come in" (The City of Boston, 2017, n.p.). This action selected 25 proposals, each representing a different occasion. Illustrations of this competition, as well as for the other mentioned UGC strategies, can be found on Appendix 5.
Organic Reach
In the context of what was previously discussed, as the example of the participation of stakeholders in the city brand, one crucial benefit of UGC is that it creates engagement. In this research, all city brands have discussed the importance of interacting with people and UGC was found to extend a city brand’s organic reach.

“Collectively, individuals sharing content about Los Angeles reach far more people than we can reach as one entity”
– Los Angeles

As indicated by Los Angeles, all content generated by "users" holds significance for city brands. Therefore, not just the content shared on official brand channels promote the city, but also any UGC increases the brand’s reach. Likewise, Rome and Istanbul supported that the tool helps to generate social media traffic and reach different targets. Taking into consideration that city brands have also stated their reliance on stakeholder participation for word of mouth, UGC apparently can play a key role in creating engagement and increase reach.

4.5 UGC in Place Branding
As stated in the problem discussion part of this research, the recency of UGC as a tool in place branding conceals its potential issues. Through the statements of the city brands and of the place branding specialist, the adverse features previously presented on literature (Ownership, Control, Credibility and Motivation) were reinforced and detailed. Furthermore, new issues were charted: Availability, Quality and Similarity. This section introduces and briefly explains the issues that were mentioned on the interviews. The discussion and managerial implications caused by them is, however, discussed further in the last sections of this paper.

4.5.1 Control
The first adverse aspect of UGC is one of the most known both in the marketing literature and in the place branding context. When companies create content, the process is controllable to a great extent. In the case of UGC, however, companies give up this control and may find issues regarding this partial absence of direct supervision. This issue was reported by most of the city brands and the topic of control is here explained in two fronts: brand image and ownership.
Brand Image

When opening the process of content production for the participation of other stakeholders, not always the brand communication guidelines are followed, putting the brand image command into risk. This uncontrollable nature of UGC had already been presented by several authors (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). In this study, it was again made aware by eight of the participants: Boston, Cape Town, Los Angeles, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, Singapore, Vienna and Warsaw.

As said by Vienna, finding content that fits the visual concepts and textual language from the brand guidelines can be a hard task. The same was supported by Prague, which affirmed that UGC rarely fits their long-term strategy. Boston and Singapore highlighted the potential "viralization" of negative experiences and reviews, saying that the city brand would have little control regarding that proliferation.

"For destination marketers, there is also little control over how your brand story is told via UGC, as opposed to traditional branded content"
- Singapore

Even though it may be hard to control UGC, some cities reported to put effort into reducing its associated risk. Cape Town, Los Angeles and Warsaw, for instance, explained that through strategic partnerships with photographers and influencers they try to partially direct the UGC production and slightly guarantee some guidelines.

"We regularly chat with photographers on various social media channels and inspire them into taking photos of particular Warsaw themes (...) We talk to bloggers who plan to come to Warsaw or currently in Warsaw and we give them advice on what to see and do"
- Warsaw

Boston pointed out the presence of a press team checking and reviewing any content before they get published in official channels. Moreover, the city brand also expressed the issue of control, affirming: "there have been times when UGC is used against the city and, you know,
that can be problematic”. Rio de Janeiro voiced this same point and added the fact that many critics are not connected to the tourism office.

"As we represent Rio de Janeiro, we also daily receive several critics, even though they are not really connected to our duty - tourism. We try to receive them in the best way and to forward it to those who are really in charge of those issues"

- Rio de Janeiro

Singapore, regarding this aspect, stated that UGC can work both ways, positively and negatively. Similarly, Boston compared the tool to a "double-edged sword", highlighting both its favorable and unfavorable consequences during the interview.

Ownership
As technology has been responsible for changes in the previously existing forms of authorship, ownership of online content is still something polemical and hard to oversee (Sarikakis & Rodriguez-Amat, 2014). As this issue is closely connected to a city brand's ability to control its content sources, it is here presented under the heading "4.5.1 Control".

City brands, appropriately, seem to be aware of this front of the control issue, having four interviewees (Boston, Cape Town, Vienna and Singapore) citing it. Vienna, for example, portrayed copyright management as a big challenge, which was followed by Cape Town's report that the precise credit for the content is often hard to find.

"Credit is always super important. Sometimes it can be difficult to include"

- Cape Town

Later on, when talking about a previously executed contest, the city brand enhanced the issue again, reporting that obtaining the rights to use images was a struggle and legalities took a considerable amount of time. Likewise, Boston expressed the preoccupation towards copyright and ownership regarding UGC. The city strengthened that they would not post anything without previously obtaining proper permission for it.
4.5.2 Credibility

Credibility was also an aspect previously mentioned on the literature reinforced by the interviewees of this study. In the city branding context, however, this issue was brought up in two main approaches. A first one, presented as "audience", concerning how target groups perceive the UGC; and a second one, here called "authenticity", regarding the trustworthiness of the content. Both approaches are explained in the following.

Audience
UGC may be perceived differently according to the target group of a brand's communication strategy. Chris Fair, Resonance's representative, when asked about the weaknesses of UGC, pointed out the dependence on some characteristics of the target - since some age groups may not consider UGC as much as others.

"One criticism of our approach could be that some people don’t consider user-generated ratings and reviews in their analysis of places to live or visit. And that is true for older consumers – but they are also the least likely to relocate to a new or different city.
For younger audiences, such as Millennials, who are the most likely to consider moving to a different city, our research shows that user-generated content is much more important than information in traditional media. So, our approach then is to analyze place from the perspective of the audience most of our clients are seeking to attract"
- Resonance

Correspondingly, Stockholm raised this same issue. The city brand first explained that UGC did not fit all their target groups nor all their channels. Later on, the Swedish capital added the following point:

"[It is a challenge to] identify for what target groups UGC can add value to your brand"
- Stockholm

Authenticity
The reliability of UGC is a problem that divides opinions. On the one hand, some authors (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Li & Bernoff, 2011) defend in their studies that people are
seen as more trustworthy than companies. This point was directly supported by some of the interviewees (Cape Town, Rome, Singapore, Vienna and Warsaw).

"People trust other people more than they necessarily trust marketers, so UGC gives more credibility to what we're saying"

- Cape Town

"UGC is the most authentic form of advocacy in the digital space"

- Singapore

As said by Vienna, UGC is considered to be authentic, which was supported by Singapore's quote. Cape Town also explained that the strength of capturing real moments is directly attached to UGC.

On the other hand, another part of the authors in UGC literature somewhat oppose to that opinion. Authors argue that the perceived credibility of a company or a brand is built more through the consistency of one brand message (Christodoulides, 2009; Perloff, 2014). Even though this side of credibility of UGC was not brought up by many cities as an issue, Rio de Janeiro contributed with an interesting point. The city brand explained that their official pages work as a "seal" on the content and, therefore, the publications become more credited once under their name. Boston raised a different context for credibility: weather emergencies. Though the excerpt below, we can see another relevant aspect of the credibility of a city brand and the importance of its strong image.

"We are actually in the middle of a snow storm right now, but even last week we had a horrible flooding (...) We were able to put into action on our social media 'that one brand' and people responded. It was for the people, how to deal with the flooding and protect their home"

- Boston
4.5.3 Motivation

As UGC differs from sponsored content due to the absence of payment to the content creator, city brands must attempt to motivate content-generation through other means. All city brands, except for Stockholm, reported to encourage the production of UGC. The issue of motivation is here presented under one main area: incentives.

Incentives

Several authors reinforce that the usage of hashtags and tagging in social networks are ways of driving it (Bern & Fagnon; Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Vong & Stax, 2017). This technique, was reported used by eight cities, whose hashtags promoted the brand and, frequently, generated contests - as exemplified by Warsaw's quote.

"We asked our residents for pictures of the city from their perspective to prove that #DiscoverWarsaw is a slogan of unique value to every one of us. We put ten winner’s photos on magnetic postcards, each telling a different story about Warsaw as a modern, open and welcoming metropolis"

- Warsaw

Cape Town exemplified to drive motivation by selecting the best pictures tagged with #lovecapetown and producing a video with them. Vienna detailed picture contests according to the time of the year (e.g. #xmasinviena), awarding the best participants with goodie bags. Competitions on social media in order to obtain UGC were also mentioned by Boston, Istanbul, Prague and Warsaw. The complete list of each city's hashtags is presented on Appendix 4. Boston's example, however, differed from the others since it was not connected to photography, but to art intervention.

Warsaw brought other examples, such as a Valentine's day challenge, in which foreign couples living in the city were invited to share videos. The city, as mentioned in "4.4.1 Application of UGC", was also responsible for several creative actions to raise engagement with both locals and tourists. As argued by Istanbul and Los Angeles, the exposition of their social media channels may justify the excitement of taking part in these actions. Istanbul also said that "people love to feel like protagonists in this digital world". Examples of these city brand marketing actions can be found in Appendix 5.
"We believe visitors/locals are incentivized to share content with us by the exposure they’ll receive from being featured on our channels that collectively reach more than 4 million people globally. We have done campaigns in the past such as asking people to share their #LAstory, which have also been very successful. Although that campaign is no longer running, the hashtag has 500,000 photos"

- Los Angeles

4.5.4 Features

In the interviews, when asked about the challenges and the disadvantages attributed to UGC, the city brands brought up some relevant characteristics of UGC: availability, quality and similarity. It is important to state that this is a whole new group of issues, that yet had not been found on previous studies, and that is now charted by this research and successively presented in further details.

Availability

While on the one hand, UGC is widely available in high quantities and for no cost, the pursuit and selection of it is not perceived as an easy task. This issue, arisen from the interviews, explains that the availability of UGC holds positive and negative aspects. Vienna, for instance, stated this great availability of content as an advantage, but also noted:

"If you were offered UGC that fits your brand perfectly and you can use it it’s perfect. But if you need a specific kind of content and you need to find UGC that perfectly fits that task and also your corporate identity and your brand – that’s the tough part"

- Vienna

As epitomized by Vienna's excerpt, availability has both sides. In the first side, the quantity of available content online was presented as a pro. Istanbul, for instance, defended that one of the biggest benefits of UGC is that "content is easy to obtain". Cape town added to this point saying, defending UGC's accessibility:
"[UGC is] easily accessible, it’s posted online already, [we] just need to find the best out there"
- Cape Town

However, the negative side comes in when filtering and reviewing this immensity of data. To find appropriate content needed for the brand communication can be a time-consuming puzzle, as suggested by Cape Town. Singapore added to this point, explaining that it might be difficult to identify the content if it is not linked to the place - for example through hashtags and geotagging.

Since the quantity of content is considerable, city brands also mentioned the use of software to filter and sort content. Prague, for example, assumed to be currently negotiating with the platforms Crowdriff and Chute to be able to integrate UGC more significantly into their web strategy. Cape Town also reported to use Crowdriff to monitor UGC, to reply to users' posts and to compile albums of pictures. The city also reaffirmed the importance of these tools on a quote presented in the following.

"Luckily both Crowdriff and Chute cater to that need. That said, these tools are quite pricey, and we would need to get quite a lot out of them to make it worth our while"
- Cape Town

In essence, while content is widely available in high quantities, that also means sorting it according to the brand identity or communication becomes a problem. This new issue also highlights the importance of technology to be able to apply UGC in the brand communication efficiently.

**Quality**

While content like pictures or videos can be an authentic way of conveying actual visitors’ experiences to target audiences and to enhance the brand’s communication, it was noted that their quality can be an issue. Cities (Cape Town, Los Angeles, Prague, Rome and Vienna) in the interviews brought up the quality issue, pointing that sometimes content cannot be shared in official channels due to its inappropriate condition. Los Angeles, for instance, noted that the resolution of images is often a problem, especially when UGC is also supposed to be used in
printed materials. Vienna and Singapore also explained this issue, having their perspective presented below.

"Most of the time bloggers get to us drawing attention to their blog post and asking us to share their content. Sometimes we find the blog posts ourselves. For me the quality of the content is key! Also, the picture and the headline need to fit the brand!"

- Vienna

"Photos can often be poor quality. Not all users have great photography skills, so, the photos are sometimes unusable"

- Singapore

As quality is partially related to the previously mentioned issue (i.e. availability), it was considered to be another facet regarding UGC features. Furthermore, it appears that when it comes to the quality of UGC, city brands cannot just rely on content streaming their way. To guarantee a certain level of condition in the content, city brands might also have to actively intervene to receive desired results. Here a fine line between using UGC and self-created content arises, which will be further discussed.

As noted by Cape Town, Los Angeles and Warsaw, social media influencers and photographers play an important role in the creation of the UGC featured on official communication channels of the brand. Influencers could be residents or visitors who, contrary to an average user, possess certain skills in content creation which can raise the quality, as argued by Los Angeles. Boston, in this context, also illustrated the issue by reporting to be training citizens on how to tell a story through video.

“*We work with some photographers/influencers more than others because we appreciate their consistency, aesthetic and interest in collaborating with us***”

- Los Angeles

"In terms of video storytelling, we are working on a larger concept, where we are giving people cameras and calling on them to put their own stories in video"

- Boston
All in all, this new issue found through the interviews, quality of content, will certainly have to be taken into consideration in city brands' strategies to get the most out of UGC as a tool. Questions that arise regarding to what extent cities should guide the creation of content will be further debated in the managerial implication section of this paper.

**Similarity**

The last issue connected to features of UGC that came up in the interviews was the similarity of content. While it was pointed out that there is a lot of content available for city brands, Prague raised that most of it only shows just a handful of different places and attractions. Los Angeles and Rome reinforced this point. The Italian city brand pointed out the branding aim to communicate places and features of the city beyond the most known (cultural) attractions, which is not always easy when relying on UGC.

As also argued by other cities, this may comprehensible but not desirable - since most city destinations are known for punctual highlight attractions frequented by tourists. Especially when city brands want to present unique angles, a mass of similar UGC can limit the potential effectiveness of this tool. Interestingly, a solution to this issue was pointed out by Los Angeles:

> “Highlighting what’s new in the destination and focusing on the diversity of our destination allows other content creators to step in and do the same”
> - Los Angeles

From this, it appears that while city brands can rely on UGC for their branding purposes, there can arise a need for taking control and influencing the direction of content production by users. Los Angeles further stated: “it’s critical that we lead by example”, indicating that some foresight is required. Generally, from these findings, it can be followed that city brand managers need to consider to what extent they can influence the generation of UGC. Consequently, city marketers might have to design a UGC strategy about the aspects they aspire in long-term goals.
5. Analysis of Findings

In line with the abductive approach of this study, the data obtained in the interviews provided a basis for revising the preliminary framework, which was presented in chapter “2.6 Preliminary Framework: UGC in Place Branding”. Accordingly, after the empirical findings, the model was to be upgraded. A detailed explanation of this process - the analysis of the previous framework and the composition of an updated model combining the new findings - is provided hereafter.

5.1 Part 1: Stakeholder Participation

Firstly, the findings indicated that the participatory approach, as outlined in the literature review, appeared to be vital for city brands. The participation of stakeholders was already expected to play a role in this study due to the self-evident connection of stakeholder participation and UGC (i.e. users participating in content creation). However, the interviews revealed that stakeholders are even more in focus for city brands than was expected. Accordingly, the model was adjusted to reflect that the aspects and relations exist within the participatory approach – meaning the involvement of stakeholders - to city branding. Each of these relations will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

The first part of the updated model depicts the process of city branding, specifically as it relates to tool of UGC due to the focus of this study. The components seen in the model were extracted from the literature review as well as from the information obtained through the interviews. The arrangement and illustration of relations between the components were then illustrated based on the authors’ interpretations of the data, as in line with the interpretivist angle of this study. Ultimately, the aim of this model was to depict the phenomenon of UGC in place branding by relating the observations from secondary and primary data.
At the top of the model, *city identity* represents the basis for all city branding activities. By this term, the authors mean the entirety of the city that is being branded. This, on the one hand, includes the people who are involved in shaping the city by living, visiting or doing business there; in other words, the stakeholders. And, on the other hand, the *city identity* is also supposed to include all other aspects of the city - as for instance sights, architecture, events, culture and other traits that influence the makeup of an urban area. Relating it to marketing, *city identity* is meant to reflect the “product” that is being branded. As from the interviews, for instance, there was a case (i.e. Rio de Janeiro) in which elements of the city identity were already broadly
known around the world (e.g. Christ the Redeemer), but it was not related to a direct branding effort - since the city stated to be only in an initial phase of its city brand project. In general, therefore, the identity of a place, or city in this case, essentially arises from the three factors that were underlined in the literature review, as in the definition of place by Gieryn (2000): geographic location, material form and invested values and meaning.

In the model, the city identity is connected to the brand identity. The difference between the two is that the former, as mentioned, is meant to represent the city in its entirety with all the potential traits and perceptions while the brand identity is specifically created by place brand marketers to serve aims like attraction of tourism. Illustrating the difference with the example of one of the participating cities in this study, the city identity would be the South African city Cape Town, while the brand “Love Cape Town” and all meaning attached to it by the marketers would be the brand identity. Based on the findings of this paper, it appears that the aforementioned connection takes place via two routes, titled by the authors as the passive route and the active route.

The passive route, represented in the model by the dotted line, means to express that the city identity – everything that a city has to offer – inevitably influences the brand identity, even when not directly intended to do so. Especially the stakeholders, as became obvious from the interviews, play a vital role in shaping the city’s brand identity. The passive route illustrates that a city will always create a perception of itself, whether marketers actively try to shape the identity or not. This relates back to the definition of places by Gieryn (2000), specifically that places are being invested with meaning and value, for example by the citizens. Furthermore, the passive route affirms the assessment of Hankinson (2004) that cities have a high “product” complexity. Vice versa, it was determined, the brand identity will also have an effect on the city identity. This would be the case whenever parts of the image and identity created by city marketers are adopted and become part of the city. This can potentially take many different shapes and forms, one might think about how city brand logos or other designs can be integrated into the city’s landscape, for example through architecture, art installations or the general presence of these brand designs throughout the city.

More interesting from the marketing point of view and for the purpose of this paper - which is exploring the use of UGC in place branding - is the active route (bold lines). In the context of the participatory approach, the stakeholders, as part of the city identity, are particularly
important and take a direct path to contribute in the branding of cities. They are, as the findings showed, a key part in building the *city branding strategy*, which then is implemented to create the *brand identity*. What is meant by the *active route* was illustrated clearly by Singapore, for instance. The city brand draws on traits of Singapore’s citizens – stakeholders - to create the city’s *brand identity*. Another example would be when parts of the city, such as landmarks or specific attractions, are integrated into brand logo or other city brand communication materials.

In the focus of this study, as well as at the core of the updated model, is *UGC*. The findings showed how content provided by users – city *stakeholders* (e.g. residents or visitors) – is integral and perceived as beneficial by all interviewed city brands, confirming previous findings of Andéhn et al. (2014) or Zhou and Wang (2014). It therefore follows that, in the model, *stakeholders* are connected to *UGC*, since this group provides the content. *UGC* itself is part of the toolbox available to city brand marketers who rely on *dialogue-based communication*, which creates the connection to the *city branding strategy*. Essentially, this expresses the findings that city brand marketers incorporate *UGC* in their *city branding strategy* to ultimately create and communicate the *brand identity*. The light grey line connecting *UGC* to the city *brand identity* aims to reflect the findings that UGC - whether featured on official brand channels or not - always may affect a *brand identity*. The enormous quantity of *UGC*, uncontrollably, has some impact on how the city’s brand is perceived.

In essence, the interviews confirmed the view of Braun et. al., (2013); Hankinson, (2004); Kavaratzis and Kalandides, (2015); and Andéhn et. al., (2014) in the place branding literature that the participatory approach to place branding is viable for city brands, among the interviewees it appeared to be of most importance. This has to do with people being an integral part of what makes a city; the “product” that is to be branded. UGC is then embraced as a way to facilitate essential dialogue-based communication, which is the preferred choice of city brands for building the brand identity, according to the obtained data. This means that UGC becomes a mediating force utilized by place brand marketers to extract the essence of the *city identity* and piece together a coherent city *brand identity* - based on the stakeholders and other intrinsic features of the city. It therefore arises that identity in the city branding context, as discussed by authors like Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), is tightly connected to the tool discussed in this paper, UGC.
5.2 Part 2: Potential Issues

As pointed out before, the recency of UGC as a tool may hide its potential weaknesses and challenges. The preliminary framework, presented in "2.6. Preliminary Framework: UGC in Place Branding", highlighted four potential issues: Ownership, Control, Credibility and Motivation. However, after interviewing the city brands, other relevant aspects of the employment of UGC were encountered. These issues were grouped into four main bands and used to build the second part of the updated model of this research, as explained in the following.

Based on the literature review, control was found to be one of the main issues connected to UGC. Supplemented by the findings from the empirical data, it could now be determined that the issue of control is presented in two facets: ownership and brand image. The former relates to how city brands have to mind copyright and content ownership when utilizing the tool of
UGC. The latter is connected to how content generated by users independently (e.g. reviews or other posts online) can be somewhat uncontainable, and, therefore, represents a potential risk to a coherent brand image, if not observed and monitored. In an effort to address these issues, brands showed strategies such as a direct communication with each user before utilizing any image or review posted by them.

*Credibility* was also identified as a potential issue of UGC. The findings regarding this point draw a picture of controversy whether *credibility* is more of an issue or opportunity in the city branding context. On the one hand, it was found that the *audience* that is being addressed needs to be considered. It was pointed out that UGC is likely to resonate more with younger generations and that not all target audiences consider the input by users to be important in their decision-making process. On the other hand, *authenticity* was found to be one of the biggest strengths of UGC that can be used to the advantage of city brands. To those who are affected by UGC, its originality is what makes it powerful. Regarding whether *authenticity* may be a positive aspect from UGC, it was not uniformly agreed on, making it to become a special issue of *credibility* that deserves attention when designing a communication strategy.

Furthermore, the literature suggested that due to UGC differing from sponsored content, *motivation* should be considered as a potential issue surrounding the tool. Regarding the empirical data underlined *motivation* as part of UGC in the city branding context, cities were found to manage this issue by incentivizing users to relate their posts to the brand through the usage of hashtags and by participating in contests initiated by the brand. Hence, *motivation* was found to be an issue that certainly needs to be taken into account when applying UGC in the city branding context. If citizens, visitors and local business do not constantly engage with the brand, there is no outcome in regard to content for the city brand to utilize.

Additional to the previous issues that were raised in the literature and then enhanced through analysis of empirical data, a sizeable contribution of this study appeared in a new block of potential issues listed under *features*. Three new matters, in some extent, related to intrinsic features of UGC were raised in the empirical part: *availability, quality* and *similarity* of UGC. Firstly, the large amount of content available in various channels online was perceived as a strength - regarding disposability - but also as a weakness when it comes to reviewing and sorting through the content. Secondly, *similarity* arose as an issue when a considerable number of interviewees criticized that, since most users visit the same city attractions and live similar
experiences, most of the available content looks alike. Lastly, the *quality* of content, especially in reference to resolution of images taken by citizens and tourists, was also presented as a potential issue with UGC in place branding. Some cities suggested intervention in content creation to guarantee quality levels and to guide composition which, remarkably, stands in connection to the issue of control and also potentially generates further managerial implications. The practical implications of all the previously mentioned issues shall be addressed in the final chapters of this paper.

### 5.3 Final Model Presentation

Heretofore, both the participatory approach - in which stakeholders interact with the city branding strategy to build a brand identity - and the potential issues that may arise from the application of UGC, were presented. Based on this, a final model is subsequently built. Through an extensive combination of highlights from the literature and valuable insights from the data provided by major city brands, the final model of UGC in place branding is, ultimately, presented in the Figure 6.

Figure 6: UGC in Place Branding

![UGC in Place Branding Diagram](Source: Developed by the Authors)
As it can be seen, the left side of the model presents the previously discussed relations of components within the participatory approach to city branding. On the right side, the issues connected to UGC are pointed out. This shall provide an overview for brand managers how cities with their stakeholders relate to the tool of UGC and the brand identity, as well as what potential issues should be considered when employing UGC in the branding strategy.
6. Conclusion & Discussion

To generate a high quality in-depth analysis of the findings, this research results are here discussed in terms of managerial implication. Furthermore, suggestions for upcoming research and an explanation of this study's restraints are also presented.

6.1 Purpose and Research Questions

This study was guided by the definition that places are characterized by three factors, namely geographic location, material form, and investment with meaning. The branding of places, especially but not exclusively, for tourism purposes is a contemporary trend following in the tradition of conventional corporate product branding. The field of place branding, however, is still emerging, relies on traditional marketing concepts rather than field-specific models and is of multidisciplinary interest. Due to increased urbanization and travel to urban areas worldwide, cities were found to be of special interest in the place branding context. For the branding of cities, the participatory role of stakeholders was identified. Since nowadays participation of stakeholders can be facilitated by two-way-communication online, special interest was placed on UGC as a tool that has recently gained importance in marketing communication.

By means of a qualitative study conducted among some of the most valuable city brands worldwide, this study generated some meaningful insights into the practices and issues faced by city brands when applying UGC as a tool. Additionally, based on an initial framework and the empirical findings, a model has been created to represent the process and application of UGC within city branding. Hereby, the two research questions of the study were answered.

RQ1: How do major cities manage UGC as a tool for their city branding strategies?

All city brands within the sample of this study were found to actively apply UGC as a tool in their social media strategy. It was found that, since cities are dynamic places containing many people and their interactions, UGC fits well into the participatory approach to place branding, which focuses on stakeholders and how they contribute to the place brand identity. This study showed that city brand managers are aware of the importance of visitors, residents and local business and that UGC is an essential tool for involving them in the city branding process.
While with UGC the content creation is taken over by the user, it was found that active intervention from the marketers’ side is required in order to overcome issues with UGC and achieve more effective outcomes in the communication strategy. Active incentivization of content generation, cooperation with content creators, software solutions to efficiently filter content, as well as less structured measures (e.g. directly approaching users to obtain permission to publish their content in official brand channels) were found to be utilized to address these issues and manage UGC.

**RQ2:** What specific issues may arise when applying UGC for place branding on social media?

This study also explored the issues faced by practitioners when implementing UGC in their communication strategies. The extensive analysis of primary and secondary data revealed four main issues connected to UGC: *Control, Credibility, Motivation* as well as *Features* of UGC. These areas cannot uniformly be identified as problematic, as some of these issues have the potential to have both positive and negative implications for brand managers, as for example the *quantity* of UGC available. They rather represent issues that brand managers must pay attention to and manage when applying UGC as a tool.

While ongoing digitalization will increase the importance of online communication and the interaction with user through UGCs, it should be noted that it is still a tool mainly suitable to address technologically apt segments of the population. As a result, certain customer segments will not be effectively reached or engaged through UGC in the city branding context.

Finally, this study contributed to the existing literature by examining a contemporary communication tool, UGC, within the context of an emerging field in marketing. The results can ultimately aid scholars and professionals in order to understand UGC and its employment in the place branding context. The updated model, built by the findings of the research, provide an overview of the application of UGC - in order to specify what issues should be addressed in this process. In the following chapter, managerial implications arising from this study will be discussed in further detail.
6.2 Managerial Implications

A city brand is not simply a brand created by marketing professionals, it is an entity build through active and passive actions of stakeholders of a city in a participatory process. That became clear in the course of this research, highlighted by both literature and empirical data. The findings of this paper suggest that stakeholders should be at the center of a city’s branding strategy, as the co-creation of a brand identity was found to be a common approach among some of the world’s most valuable city brands. The active inclusion of stakeholders creates an appealing and coherent brand identity, which reflects and helps to shape the already existing city identity. Connected to this, UGC was found to be a viable tool that can aid city brand managers in extracting the essence of a city by engaging stakeholders and working their contributions into the brand communication. Further suggestions explicitly dealing with the management of UGC are presented hereafter.

With regard to social media communication strategies, the findings support the undeniable importance of digital platforms for the marketing of cities, chiefly Instagram and Facebook. In this context, UGC arises as a smart and cost-effective way of incorporating the participatory approach in the place branding process and strategy through online channels. The tool, overall, is presented as a method to portray the experiences and the perceptions of residents, visitors and even local business regarding the city. As the tool increases the authenticity of the brand communication, it also helps to reach other primary goal of city branding: differentiation. Original city brands are able to break through the clutter of content and to become more attractive to tourists, potential residents and financial investors.

However, the city has to surrender part of command of its brand identity to allow stakeholders to participate in content creation, and this concession forces city brand managers to strike a balance. This research found some cases, for instance, in which city brands built partnerships with photographers and professional writers for UGC generation. While, on the one hand, users provide authenticity for the brand, on the other hand, marketers might prefer to apply some guidance to obtain the final image desired by them. For practitioners, the evident importance of an established branding strategy, with clear small- and long-term goals, is also highlighted by this. In order to maximize the benefits of UGC and to be able to properly take advantage of the tool, brand managers must previously outline the genuine purpose of its application and then decide on how to source it.
To fulfill the designed brand objectives, marketers must make use of incentives to drive UGC. Personalized hashtags and contests are identified as possible ways to motivate users to engage with the brand and to guide UGC to fit the brand strategy. These social media actions can be themed to embrace features of the city (e.g. municipal holidays and festivities, sports events or native celebrities) and help professionals to strengthen ties with the city identity. Furthermore, in these cases of competition, participants are encouraged to present their best, which also addresses issues of quality and similarity. If designed well, these marketing actions not only result in adequate UGC production, but in the growth of the brand's organic reach - since every individual’s reach contributes to it.

From a tourism perspective, it can also be argued that positive word of mouth from visitors holds even more power than the advocacy by residents. Potential tourists seem more likely to identify themselves with helpful reviews and visual storytelling pictures and videos generated by previous visitors, when choosing a destination. That authority may not be found in some residents' UGC, since it has a different approach and expresses a local's point of view. If tourism is a key outcome for the city brand, it is recommended to consider incentives and reminders for visitors to share content on their personal network (e.g. free Wi-Fi activated by social check around tourist attractions).

For major city brands, with the great availability of content, analyzing and filtering all of it may become a determinant issue. Software solutions appeared as an upcoming trend to review and sort content. Besides these functions, those operating systems help brands to guarantee rights of usage through an automated process of requests to share user's content - a preoccupation of city marketers. The suitability of this applications has to be evaluated by each city's context, since they are considered to be generally high-priced. However, they seem to have a great forthcoming value in helping marketers.

Although, managers should not always rely on UGC and social media to market their cities - depending on an analysis of the target audience of the brand for this decision. The issue of credibility of UGC is rather important, especially if the target group of the city brand is more advanced in age. This is important to say since places may count on senior tours and third-age travelers, for instance, as main revenues in the tourism sector. As those audiences may not be as involved in social media, online UGC would not be a reliable primary strategy for city brands.
to approach them successfully. Yet, the pictures taken by previous tourists or their reviews can still be used to build printed materials or in traditional marketing tools (i.e. TV, magazine or newspaper advertisements) if the brand wants to adopt that strategy.

Lastly, the model presented in this study can be considered by brand managers when employing UGC in the city branding context, to obtain an overview of the tool. As this research looked for issues regarding the practical application of UGC by city brands, it naturally generated a collection of relevant managerial implications, which can be more or less relevant according to each city brand's characteristics. The model therefore provides a bigger picture and can aid managers to make strategic decisions for its application within the specific context of their strategies.

Conclusively, this study revealed that city branding professionals have a crucial role in deciphering the existing personality of the city and, then, creating a strategy to build its brand identity through a two-way communication process - in which UGC can be a facilitator. Even though several issues were charted, they do not restrain the tool's application in city branding, but emphasize important aspects to be considered in the process. Considering this, UGC, besides being cost-effective, is a resourceful strategy to engage with stakeholders and build a highly valuable city brand.

### 6.3 Further Implications

Separated from aim and purpose of this study, some implications arose. These are connected to the participation of stakeholders in the city brand and the tool of UGC, which was found to be an adequate facilitator of inclusive strategies.

As social issues connected to tourism arise (e.g. gentrification, housing shortages, etc.), city marketers should be mindful of the effects of disproportionate tourism on the communities within the city they promote. Strategies that involve the stakeholders should also be designed to consider stakeholders’ needs and concerns, bringing benefits not only to the institutional side but to the whole community. This is also connected to UGC, since it was pointed out how content can work against the city brand if there is dissatisfaction. In essence, if stakeholders’ needs are addressed properly, their contributions can be more positively impactful for the city brand.
While most of the empirical findings were connected to outward communication and attraction of visitors or business, the example of Boston has shown that UGC can also be used for a mainly inward communication and branding strategy with the aim of citizen engagement or empowerment. City marketers should also explore whether similar strategies can be applied to generate more or better citizen engagement. This, in return, can potentially improve the city brand for outward purposes (e.g. attraction of tourists or business) due to the importance of stakeholder participation. Therefore, the positive effect of strategies to improve the local community is conceivable and also desirable. In this case, the city and its citizens should not only be seen as the "product", but also as "customers".

6.4 Directions for Further Research

The authors suggest a few points to take into consideration that could guide future research into the matter discussed within this paper.

Firstly, future research should aim to contemplate the complex governmental and city administrative environment wherein city brands are inserted. It could be of interest to take a closer look at a city brand, taking into account all entities that make up the entire, concrete and abstract, identity of a city, something that was far beyond the scope of this research.

Furthermore, the authors suggest that some of the findings regarding UGC in the city branding context seem universally applicable to other places, however future research should investigate how UGC fits into, for example, nation branding. Since the participation of stakeholders was highlighted in this research, it should also be considered that not all places have as many (different) stakeholders as cities do. Different places (e.g. a national park or other tourist destinations) may have different numbers of content contributors available to them, which could potentially have another impact on what was found by this paper. Therefore, future research could focus on different places to create a broader picture of how UGC can be best utilized in other branches of place branding.

Additionally, further academic research could look into how the findings of this paper relate to cities of other sizes, branding phases and status. A comparative study seems interesting to explore this topic further beyond the boundaries of this paper.
Lastly, the suggested model should be expanded through further research into the topic. Especially the relationships that were pointed out in the model (e.g. between city identity and brand image) could be further explored to create a more detailed and accurate image of how the participation of stakeholders, in a city, functions and how it can be optimized. Each of the presented issues connected to UGC also deserve particular further investigations, which would help brand managers to more effectively counter threats and manage UGC in the branding strategy.
References


Florek, M., & Kavaratzis, M. (2014). From brand equity to place brand equity and from there to the place brand. Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 10(2), pp. 103-107.


The Place Brand Observer. (n.d.). Place Brandings vs. Place Marketing - What's the Difference?


Appendices

Appendix 1: Template of Email Interviews - City Brands

Hello, Team Name of the City

Once again, thank you very much for taking your time to contribute to our project that we hope will be of great value for you too.

Increasingly, several places around the world start to work with user-generated content (UGC) - the content produced by visitors and citizens (e.g. pictures, videos, reviews, blog posts) - incorporating it in their place brand strategy. We are very interested in Name of the City’s perspective on UGC in relation to your city branding strategy.

Team Name of the City, we kindly ask you to answer all questions as extensively as possible, a higher level of detail will allow us to draw more meaningful conclusions.

This interview should take maximum 25-35 minutes of your time. There are 12 questions, but if a question is not applicable to you, please indicate it clearly.

1. Please, tell us a little more about the city brand Name of the City:
   a. What is the official brand name for Name of the City?
   b. Is it owned/managed publicly or privately?
   c. When did the city start branding itself?
   d. What is the main aim of branding Name of the City?

2. In your opinion, is Name of the City in a phase of creating, maintaining or restructuring its brand image?

3. What are the target groups of Name of the City's place branding strategy? Please, rank them according to their importance for the brand, feel free to add as many as you need:
   i.
   ii.
   iii.

4. When it comes to managing the city brand of Name of the City, what are the 3 (three) most important aspects for you in the branding strategy? (How you measure these aspects with Key Performance Indicators would be interesting, if possible)

5. How do you see the role of visitors, residents, and other stakeholders like local businesses in Name of the City's place branding?

6. What are the most important channels for Name of the City's place brand strategy?
7. Could you please elaborate on the challenges of building and maintaining your city brand?

8. Do you actively apply content generated by visitors/residents or other stakeholders for the branding of Name of the City? Please, provide examples if possible (i.e. pictures for Social Media, blog posts, etc.)

9. In case you are not currently applying user-generated content in your strategy, could you provide us with some reasons for that?

10. Have you already used extra motivations for visitors/residents to generate content? Please, tell us a little bit more (i.e. creation of hashtags, promotions, social contests, etc.)

11. What strengths and weaknesses do you perceive from UGC in the place branding context?

12. Could you please elaborate on the challenges of applying UGC? Please, be as detailed as possible.

13. Is there some comment or reflection that you would like to add?
Appendix 2: Template of Email Interviews - Independent Professional

Hello, Team *Name of the Company*

Once again, thank you very much for taking your time to contribute to our project that we hope will be of great value for you too.

Increasingly, several places around the world start to work with user-generated content (UGC) - *the content produced by visitors and citizens (e.g. pictures, videos, reviews, blog posts)* - incorporating it in their place brand strategy. We are very interested in *Name of the Company*'s perspective on Place Marketing in general, as well as UGC in relation to city branding strategy specifically.

Team *Name of the Company*, we kindly ask you to answer all questions as extensively as possible, a higher level of detail will allow us to draw more meaningful conclusions.

This interview contains 8 questions and it should take maximum 25-35 minutes of your time.

1. In the vision of *Name of the Company*, to what extent can branding impact a city's image and ranking?

2. Are there specific trends that *Name of the Company* observed in place marketing over the past years?

3. What main trends do *Name of the Company* foresee for place marketing?

4. When it comes to managing the city brand, what do you think that would be the most important aspects in a branding strategy?

5. What strategies do you think were used by the top cities on *Name of the Company*'s report to stand out?

6. Currently, does Social Media have any influence in the *Name of the Company*'s ranking of Place Brand Value?

7. In *Name of the Company*'s perception, how can the content generated by residents and visitors help with Place Marketing?

8. What strengths and weaknesses do you perceive from applying UGC in the place marketing context?
## Appendix 3: Extra Information about the Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Brand</th>
<th>Official City Brand Name</th>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Length of the Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>City of Boston</td>
<td>Phone Interview</td>
<td>00:23:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>Love Cape Town</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>1696 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>Visit Istanbul</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>643 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>City of Los Angeles</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>697 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>Prague: Emotion</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>815 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>1049 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>835 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Singapore: Passion made Possible</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>1391 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>Stockholm – The Capital of Scandinavia</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>686 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>VIENNA</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>1266 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>Warsaw Brand</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>1331 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contact Name</th>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Length of the Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resonance</td>
<td>Chris Fair</td>
<td>Email Interview</td>
<td>911 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 4: City Brands' Hashtags

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Hashtags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>#LoveCapeTown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Istanbul</td>
<td>#IstanbulExperience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>#LAsistory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>Selected according to trending topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>Selected according to trending topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>#VisitSingapore; #PassionMadePossible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>#masinvienna; #summerinvienna; #springinvienna; #fallforvienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>#DiscoverWarsaw</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5: Examples of UGC reported by City Brands

Cape Town - Blog Post

Warsaw - Video
Boston - Art Contest

Happy Easter!

Happy Mothers Day

Happy Saint Patrick's day

from the City of Boston

Rio de Janeiro - Instagram Photography
Los Angeles - Instagram Photography

Vienna - Call for UGC