

# A Comparative Study of Branding Cities through Semiotic Analyses of the Official Websites of Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing

HYEONG-YEON JEON & JI-YEONJUNG

Inha University (South Korea)

## **Abstract**

This study is primarily a series of semiotic analyses of the symbols and visual expressions employed in the contents of the official websites designed to promote three capitol cities of East Asian countries - South Korea, Japan and China. As the investigator assumes that these websites reflect the varying perspectives of the people behind the development and management of these routes of Internet communication, and the semiotic choices made in order to exemplify each city's cultural image. The study aims to analyze the communication strategies of cultural branding in the cases of online contents regarding Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing focusing on the comparative points in these cities' official websites. The investigation includes conducting semiotic content analyses of aforementioned cities' official web pages, as an attempt to find out the branding strategies to achieve differentiation and more favorable perceptions on these three capitol cities. Building upon the finding drawn from this comparative study, the present research proposes to discuss the more effective ways of strategic differentiation of the images associated with these cities from the view of brand communications. This study also deliberates about the viable directions for designing web contents for a capitol city through which cultural messages are delivered in a thoughtful and effective manner.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the branding places is now widespread. The success of campaigns such as Glasgow's «Smiles better» and New York's «I love NY» is well documented (Ward, 1998). In fact, the significant growth in the application of branding to places has been accompanied by a growing critical literature on place branding, focusing on the social and political aspects related to urban planning (Brandely et al., 2002). There has been similar growth in three other domains that examine the subject from a strategy development perspective (Bradley et al., 2002): strategic marketing (Kotler et al., 1999), retail marketing (Warnaby & Davies, 1997; Warnaby et al., 2002), and tourism marketing (Middleton, 1994; Witt & Moutinho, 1995; Seaton & Bennet, 1996). Place branding not only applies to cities, regions, and countries, but also applies lower down the spatial scale (Ashworth & Voogt, 1994) to places such as shopping destinations and leisure parks. It thus covers a wide area of activities and locations and involves a wide range of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. However, it is in the domain of tourism marketing, in particular, that an understanding of city branding is most developed (Wamsley & Young, 1998).

Like product and service brands, city brands as destination brands generate a set of expectations or an image of a place prior to consumption (Metelka, 1981). Some studies' results indicate that visitors' choices of destinations are based on the degree to which they generate favorable images (Gartener, 1989; Woodside & Lyonski, 1989). Destination images are thus the means by which a prospective tourist determines a destination's potential for satisfaction (Pearce, 1982). A destination's brand image is therefore crucial to its marketing success (Leisen, 2001). A key role of marketing in this context is to develop the destination as a positive perceptual entity or brand (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). In an increasingly competitive market, therefore, destination marketers must seek a fuller understanding of the nature of images held by both individuals and organizations in order to build more-favorable brand images, and thereby enhance a destination's attractiveness and economic development.

The concept of the city's image as a destination image has been investigated from a diverse range of perspectives, from the image formation process (Gunn, 1972, Gartener, 1993) to the various external and internal factors that can influence this information-making process (Baloglu & McClery, 1999). Based on the work of Gartner (1993), information sources can be divided into three categories: autonomous, organic, and induced. Sources of autonomous images could, for example, be documentaries, films, and new coverage. Induced images arise from promotional materials, whereas organic images are supposedly from unbiased sources such as friends, relatives, etc. (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Choi et al., 2007). In particular, induced image formation is a function of the marketing, promotion, and advertising efforts of a destination via paid-for broadcast or audio media. Organic images originate from publicity-driven statements, from news reports and newspaper articles, and are regarded as mostly unbiased sources of information (Gartner, 1993).

As a consequence, research on the communication of city brands has predominately been on marketing and advertising strategy. These days, the study of the communication of city images also extends across a wide area of on-line public-relational strategies that have been increasingly and effectively used in tourism. In fact, the Internet serves as a new communication and distribution channel for travelers of travel services and products (Law et al., 2004). The significance of

the Internet in the context of tourist information search and provision has been well recognized in previous studies (Bonn et al., 1999; Marcussen, 1997). Choi et al. (2007) assert that even though destination image has been extensively researched, the Internet as an image-formation agent is still an under-researched area. In this paper, we argue that though the Internet is going to be important for city-image formation, how its content is placed and managed is an important contributor to the growth of branding cities. More and more tourists are utilizing the Internet and on-line resources for their information needs (Gursoy and McCleary, 2004).

Given the current and potential future importance of the Internet as an information source in the city-image branding sector, it appears necessary to analyze the representation of the city government with the information obtained through their web sites. In this research, we explore the official web sites designed to promote three capitol cities of East Asian countries. Actually, Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing are among the most popular destination cities in Asian countries. The governments of the three cities consider their city's brand image important for the development of the city. In particular, Seoul has an ambitious plan to become the «Soul of Asia, a city of design and culture,» reflecting a total change in mindset from that of a dour, industrial-age city. This study aims to analyze the communication strategies of cultural branding in the cases of online content regarding Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing, focusing on the comparative points in these cities' official web sites.

In this study, our interest includes, in particular, the domains of semiotics, which examine the subject from an iconic and linguistic perspective, because there is a lack of research on the symbolic values of the communication strategy that could influence each city's image. Therefore, this investigation includes conducting semiotic content analyses of the aforementioned cities' official web pages, in an attempt to discover the branding strategies used to achieve both differentiation and more favorable perceptions of these three capitol cities. This is because it is true that the Internet is today still a vector of modernity that can easily transmit an image favorable to the city brand. In particular, this study concentrates on the semiotic analyses of the symbols and visual expressions employed in the contents of the official web sites of the cities. The semiotic mapping makes it possible to articulate a grid to find the values and identity of the city brand, and also to find the values and identity of the items constituting each city's image. This research makes one understand that the cultural image of the three cities differs significantly according to the strategy of communication of each one's web site design. This research seeks to identify the key attribute dimensions associated with city brand images and, second, to assess the importance of the original image attributes associated with the history portrayed on the web site. Traditional values such as history have been deeply embedded through visual and linguistic expressions. They are therefore likely to have a significant impact on the perception of the city's identity and image.

The purpose of this study is threefold:

- (1) To investigate previously overlooked architecture and factors of the web site that have the potential of influencing the city's brand image, such as the main menu and main title
- (2) To analyze the signification of historical discourse as representative of each capitol city
- (3) To find the difference among the symbolic values and core concepts among three cities

## 2. BACKGROUND REVIEW

### 2.1. Understanding a City's Brand Image

In a detailed review of destination image research, Etchner & Brent Ritchie (1991) were in broad agreement with other mainstream marketing authors (Kapferer, 1997; de Cheratony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997) in concluding that image attributes can be classified into two subsets: functional/tangible attributes and symbolic/intangible attributes. However, other researchers add additional categories of image attributes. Morgan et al. (2002) include a holistic image attribute in their model to describe attributes that represent the essential nature or essence of the brand, summarizing both its functional and its symbolic image attributes. This image attribute might be said to summarize what some authors refer to as the consumer's overall brand attitude (Keller, 1993).

There have been many studies that have sought to identify the key attributes that are embodied in a destination's image, particularly those associated with individual countries. For example, Embacher & Buttle (1989) identified the attributes associated with Austria. The analysis yielded 11 clusters of attributes: physical environmental/economic development, weather/climate, people, culture, food, suitability for children, tourist facilities and infrastructure, suitability for different types of vacation, and overall appeal. However, a country's image can in general be defined as «the total all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about a particular country» (Martin & Eroglu, 1993, p. 193). Generally, the country of origin is considered an extrinsic product cue (Blilkey & Nes, 1982; Cordelle, 1992; Hans & Terpstra, 1988). Consumers are known to develop stereotypical beliefs about products from particular countries, and about the attributes of those products. Therefore, the country-of-origin image has the power to arouse importers' and consumers' beliefs about products and brands (Blilkey & Nes, 1982; Han & Terpstra, 1988; Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 2002; Tse & Gorn, 1993; Srikanyoo & Gnoth, 2002). The country of origin denotes the home country of a company, or the country that consumers infer from the brand name to be the home country (Han & Terpstra, 1988). One of first conceptualizations of the country-of-origin phenomenon was that of Nagashima (1970). He defined the image that consumers associate with a given country of origin: the picture, the reputation, or the stereotype their businessmen and consumers attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by variables such as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions (Nagashima, 1970).

Just like the company's image, a country's image evokes certain values, qualifications, and emotional triggers in consumers' minds about the likely value of any product that comes from that country. In addition, just like the commercial brand image, a country's image also includes longestablished identities and functions as indicators of product quality (Anholt, 2000; Baughn & Yaprak, 1993; Papadopoulos, 2000). However, a country's image can be conceptualized as «the general belief about a particular country.»

However, a city's image is different from a country's image. Cities aren't usually famous for producing particular products or services; the tourism emphasis is often as much on conventions as on leisure visitors, the apparatus of government is usually more technocratic than political, and the city's culture isn't always easy to distinguish from the culture of the country as a whole. It is always hard to generalize about a whole country, since there can be wide dis-

crepancies in climate, culture, people and infrastructure from one region to another, but cities are simpler, smaller and easier to think of a single entity. An when people consider cities, they often think in quiet practical terms, concentrating on issues such as climate, pollution, transport and traffic, the cost of living, leisure and sport facilities, law and order, and the cultural life of the city. Cities don't usually have a strong political aspect to their image, even when they are known to be the seat of national government; there is something of a «firewall» in people's mind between the actions of a national government and the individual cities in a country, and indeed some cities have more powerful brands than the countries in which they are situated, such as Paris and France, Amsterdam and Netherlands, and several others (Anholt, 2007, p. 59).

## **2.2. Understanding the Official Web Sites of City Governments**

Since the middle of 1990s, the Internet has been playing, for everyone, a fundamental role in the access, dissemination, and communication of information and knowledge. In the city-marketing sector, the most important evolution of our time has been that gaining publicity via the Internet, because this new kind of support makes it possible for the famous city brands to widen to a worldwide scale. A web site today constitutes a «new» communication space in all the senses of the term. With this increased accessibility of the city brand, it has greater proximity to the consumer as a place to visit and a place with a positive image. In addition, the audiences are interested more and more in the famous city brands, and wish to have the more accurate information, for both professionals and tourists, that today's web sites can offer them.

In the field of public administration, the web site has provided new methods to facilitate greater access to government services, make the information more publicity available, and achieve greater accountability by the government to the public. In this sense, there exist in the literature a large number of studies that have analyzed the use of the new technologies in the public sector field, especially in relation to e-government initiatives (Torres et al., 2005) and the use of the Internet as a means to diffuse information (Caba Perez et al., 2005).

The Internet puts at the disposal of the public sector, as well as the local administration, a powerful channel of communication that contributes to the establishment of a dialogue between the administration and the public. Nevertheless, and in spite of the clear advantages offered, the actual use that an administration makes of its web site is conditioned by the will of the politicians and by the strategies of communication and information management introduced (Gandia & Archidona, 2007). However, for this study, we can say that the local entity, in preparing its web site, is used to pursuing the following strategy.

The strategy is that of the ornamental web presence. In this strategy, the city council prepares its web site with a final purpose which is eminently promotional and uses it to disseminate information of a general nature (political parties, composition of the bodies of government, local news, and calendars of events relevant for the public, socio-cultural offerings, local festivals, tourist information, etc.). In this case the web site of the city does not follow any defined objectives but simply reflects a desire to be present on the internet owing to, among other factors: an imitative or mimicking effect (municipalities with similar characteristics having already prepared their web sites); transmitting to the public an image of modernity and innovation; or, providing local politicians with a channel of communication to improve and control their image (Chadwick & May, 2003).

Therefore, it is the local authorities that decide voluntarily if they want to have a web site, what content will be accessible to the visitors, and how it will be related to the city government. To analyze the incentives and the consequences that are derived from the voluntary decision to disseminate information in a web site, we have prepared this study, contributing semiotic evidence with respect to the use that city authorities make of their web sites both to disseminate the city's image and information, and to facilitate communication with the global audience. Throughout this article, we want to understand which factors impact the content of a city's official web site, with the aim of providing some routes that might drive the improvement of relations between the city and its public.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

City branding is an extremely complex phenomenon whose articulation of values is of hardly recognized. While being conscious of the strategic role of the city brand, we are satisfied in the majority with the cases with a kind of navigation by sight, of a mixture of know-how, intuition, and chance. To define city-image branding will thus lead us to outline the bases of a semiotic theory concerning its nature, its operation, and its values.

According to Semprini (1992), the brand, through images, tells a history. The identity of a brand is «the resultant of this complex play of interaction and transformation.» It is true that the brand and its identity consist of a multitude of discourses. It is thus clear that the determination of the identity of a brand is through the workings of the multiple discourses. This is why we will stick primarily to arguing and describing the discursive and semiotic nature of city-image branding in particular — its capacity to allot significance and to build worlds.

Therefore, our objective will be finally to open this universe and to try to say what a city-image branding is, thanks to the web sites — to find a theory of city branding and a methodology for the definition and the structuring of its values. For our study, the analysis of the communication of city branding concerns all the forms of discourse related to the images and discourse of the web site. Thus, our analysis will attempt to define the values of the city brand, by using the concepts provided by semiotics (especially the square of the axiology of consumption).

Before entering upon our study, it is necessary to discuss briefly the semiotic concepts involved. The first is on the iconic signs; the second is on the changing of the semantic system. Because of the obvious complementarities that exist between the iconic signs and the linguistic signs, we attempt to use two types of semiotic methodologies, in order to grasp the core concept of the city-image PR strategies of Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing that are presented by their web sites.

#### 3.1. The Concept of an Isotope

With its origin in semantics and semiotics, the concept of an isotope is the redundancy of elements in a text allowing an understanding. According to Greimas (1970), «By isotope, we understand a redundant whole of semantic categories which makes possible the uniform reading of the account, such that it results from the partial readings of the statements and the

resolution of their ambiguities which is guided by the research of the single reading.». Rastier (1972) distinguishes among classmatic (*classématique*) isotopes, semiological isotopes, and what is possibly articulated between them by metaphorical isotopes. In other words, the reader naturally locates, while reading, isotopes that enable him to regard a text as a coherent whole, or at least as a succession of sentences which are not followed by chance.

For our research, it is not strange to especially point out the concept «isotope» while sticking particularly to «semantic isotope.» We can use this concept in order to contribute to the definition of the «coherence» of the discourse (texts and images) of the web site of each of the three cities.

For better understanding this word, we cite initially a definition of Foch's, which is as follows: «An isotope (une isotopie) is a recurrence of one or more semantic units which ensure the homogeneity of a discourse. It is, in a way, the common denominator which progressively takes hold in the unfolding of a text or a picture) and finally ensures the coherence of its contents. If one looks at it from the point of view of reception, via the reader or the viewer, it is the homogeneous level of perception and interpretation which results from partial readings of statements and the resolution of their ambiguity. An isotope is the semiotic event associated with the syntagmatic dimension of discourse; with the combination of units, their co-presence as well as their directional sequence. One of the objectives of describing a text or a picture is the recognition of such isotopes. It is a matter of unveiling the networks of relationships which underpin the contents of the discourse under investigation. This is achieved by starting from contextual values adopted by various elements of the text or a picture.» (Floch, 1990, p.15)

In this research, the isotope plays an important role in regrouping sentences, or words and images, for the analysis of the web site. We will therefore utilize this concept for distinguishing groups of related sentences and images, or of making broader regroupings, to understand the text and the images of each web site in the progression of its set of themes and in the coherence of its evolution.

### **3.2. Semiotic Mapping of Consumption Values**

We will have as a central concern the presentation of a sophisticated tool for analysis, starting with Floch's square of the axiology of the consumption (1990). This instrument, consisting of the semiotics of the values of consumption, seems particularly useful to us for the analysis of the positioning of city branding, because in fact its precise values define a brand's major value.

Then, we propose to examine it using the new grid transformed by Semprini (1992), which consists of various dimensions of positioning (utopian, practical, critical, and ludic), as well as the various quadrants of the mapping (the North-West, the North-East, South-East and South-West). Floch tried to analyze advertising's contribution to the Citroen image by means of the semiotic square. He recognized the semiotic square with four major types of valorization, which can be identified and defined: practical valorization, utopian valorization, ludic valorization, and critical valorization. In his study, we can see how the semiotic square for the four types of valorization (developed earlier to account for the discourse used in automotive advertising) formalizes and demonstrates this effect of linearity and simplicity (Floch, 1990, p. 117).

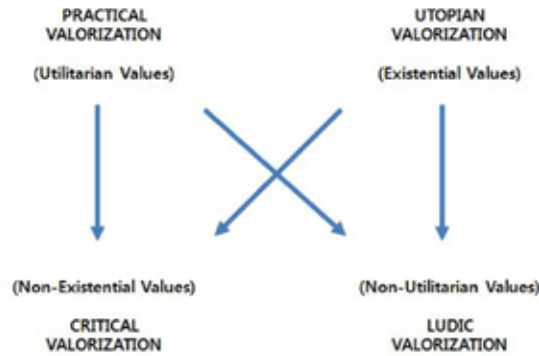


TABLE 1: FOUR TYPES OF VALORIZATION SEMIOTIC

The concepts used (practical, utopian, critical, and ludic) have a general range because they are founded on a very general category of semiotics, *sémio-narrative*, which opposes the basic values to the practical values. This opposition was already defined by Greimas in 1966 or by Baudrillard in 1968. Baudrillard (1968) raised the question of knowing «how the objects are lived, with which need other than functional they answer, which mental structures tangle up with the functional structures and contradict there, on which system cultural — or transcultural, is founded their lived everyday life.»

Floch (1990) still develops the practical values as utilitarian values and the basic values as utopian values. He adds the ludic values and the critical values through the extension of the semantic field of the principal opposition. It is true that this operation of the semiotic square will make it possible to improve the semantic extent of a concept while adapting it to the exploration of the universe of the brand. Therefore, we would rather wish taking part in the construction of a semiotic mapping that was formatted in the work of Semprini (1992). Now is the moment to approach more specifically the discourse of city branding and to show how the semiotic system and the four quadrants can help with the analysis of the discourses with a certain number of keywords.

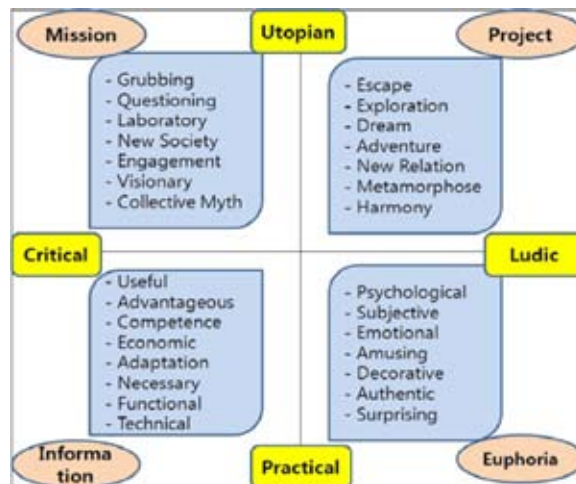


TABLE 2: KEYWORDS OF THE QUADRANTS



Semprini's (1992) grid named the semiotic mapping of the values of consumption to the resemblance of the semiotic square of Floch (1990). The opposite structure of mapping the basic values vs. the practical values is also in the middle of the semio-narrative theory worked out by Greimas (1966). Indeed, this mapping articulates many values of consumption, and not attitudes or behaviors. Even if an integrated theory of consumption is far from being attained, this tool can define the values as the basic orientations in a given city's branding. The semiotic mapping articulates the logics of valorization, which require redefining and specifying during the analysis of the brand. Thus, the same remark can be withdrawn for the four logics of valorization retained for the city brands. By all means, this mapping will make it possible to analyze, with relevance to current marketing situations such as the web site (which has developed within our own times), with the positioning of the image branding for the three capitol cities.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

In fact, our interest will be in knowing up to what point does the universe of city-image branding strategy agree with that of the Internet sites. In this section, this study will proceed by considering the the period extending from July 1st to July 31 2009 for the analysis of the official web sites of Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing, as advertising media of the city government, in order to understand the culture of the three cities. The web site can really convey any illustrative or documentary values. Each web site has been chosen as a result of search queries for «Seoul,» «Tokyo,» and Beijing» entered into the Google and Yahoo search engines. These web sites are among the most highly ranked for their content-search results, and are the most popular Internet engines.

- Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government at <http://english.seoul.go.kr>
- Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Government at <http://www.metro.tokyo.jp>
- Beijing: Beijing Official of Web site International at <http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn>

In fact, we can see that these three web sites have multi-language versions prepared. They do not offer only their own language version, but they are also always accompanied by another language version. We can immediately understand that Asian languages are the natural principals in offering these multiple-language versions. Seoul has six language versions. Tokyo has four, and Beijing has just English and Chinese versions. This study will be thus limited to the English version common to all three, because we do not have the capability of understanding all the languages.

- Seoul: Korean, Japanese, Chinese, English, French, Spanish.
- Tokyo: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, English
- Beijing: Chinese, English

The best approach of a web site is to regard it as an informative, cognitive, or promotional means of communication, because all these are qualities of its contents. How do three cities present the main contents of their images in the form of complex compositions in their web

sites? Each city image must be conceived specifically around the potentialities of web sites. The each web site proposes a different communication strategy in its own way. By comparing the main content elements of the three web sites, we will capture the image strategies that increasing our interest in their web sites possible.

It is now important to examine the contents of the home page, considering the differences among each city's image. The home pages of their web sites are normally composed of almost identical components: images such as plastic colors and iconic photos, texts such as site maps of the home page, texts titles, discourse, etc. The web sites should thus reveal their differences within these same structures.

#### 4.1. Signification of Background Colors

We are interested primarily in know-how as regards to plastic elements. For our study, it is our interest to precisely grasp the signification of the visual contents. The city brands are founded on the use of photos concerning the city, a number of different pages, pages of different quality, etc. Moreover, the information presented is not all of the same value. Some are characterized by content, whereas others are used to manage that content and its organization (menus bars, bonds, icons, banners, etc.) For this study, the home page of the web site becomes a «window» which delimits the field of our vision.

In spite of the common points, we can see a fundamental difference in each web site. The web site is made up of signs. It is about the differences in visual imagery. The plastic and iconic originality make it possible to measure the characteristics of the home page of each city. For example, we can find the visual signification through the differences in background colors and the main menu, the visual contents' location and size, the logotype, the visual representation of the name, the slogan of the city, etc.

First of all, it is necessary to examine the colors of the home pages, which give us the first impression of the city. We can say that the home page of Seoul can be characterized as



TABLE 3: HOME PAGES OF THREE CAPITOLS (SEOUL, TOKYO, & BEIJING)

«Korean beauty,» because of the Korean paper color and the design in the background, which recalls the Korean traditional window shape. This color is perhaps inspired by the image of the typical traditional Korean house, because this plastic style has been used in Korea for a long time. In this context, we can find the value of /Korean aesthetic/ as a plastic signification of the background.

On the other hand, the home page of Tokyo gives us a just-fresh impression, because the blue color of the background convenes with the blue sea of Tokyo, and also the Japanese environment surrounded by the ocean is an island country. It can be defined as the concept of «Japanese and Tokyo’s nature.» In other words, the color of this web page relates to the signification of the /factual/ value for Tokyo.

Lastly, the home page of Beijing can be characterized by the «Chinese symbol,» because the red color recalls the Chinese national flag and China. The color red is already strongly connoted China as the spirit of the public. We can say that this plastic sign, through the symbolic red color, connotes the /subjective/ value concerning Beijing.

CITY	SEOUL	TOKYO	BEIJING
CORE VALUE	AESTHETIC	FACTUAL	SUBJECTIVE

However, it is difficult to say that the plastic symbolism of each city represents the originality of each city, because it is rather more suitable to each country’s representation than to the cities’.

#### 4.2. Signification of the Iconicity of the Photos

Certain visual elements are difficult to disregard: the dimension of the significations of the main photos in the home page. The plastic and iconic impression of identity among the three cities is also supported by a difference relating to the dimensions of the main photos. The visual elements relate to the difference of signification of the message. It is about the variation concerning the culture of each city.

Firstly, on Seoul’s home page, we can remark the location and size of the moving photos of the city. It is thus not difficult to conclude that Seoul counts visual images an important element in demonstrating its attraction. The pictures are large and located at the center of the background, and can entirely fill up one web page, and four photos displayed automatically in succession. However, Seoul’s photos do not have a practical function; rather, they have an esthetic function, compared to Tokyo’s and Beijing’s photos, because we cannot transfer to any web page through these images.



TABLE 4: IMAGES ON THE HOME PAGE OF SEOUL

Actually, these four images are made up of three types of photos: two photographs of Seoul — in particular, the landscape of the Han River by day and night, one photo of the roof of a traditional Korean house, and one photo of children who wear traditional Korean costumes and play a traditional Korean drum. In fact, these three types of photo can be characterized by three of Seoul's values. In other words, we can say that the photos of the Han River represent the nature of Seoul, the photo of the roof represents the heritage of Seoul, and the photo of the children represents the culture of Seoul. The first two photos are composed of several signs to connote contemporary Seoul. Initially, the Han River is the principal symbol of Seoul, and the many cars driving on the bridge and the many buildings present the modernity of Seoul. The two latter photos are about the work to obtain the legitimacy of South Korea and also to show the splendor and variety of Korean culture. In addition, we could easily say that these photos images belong more particularly to the value of /variety/ of Seoul's culture, because the photos of the Han River and the photos of the traditional roof and performance are multi-colored.

Secondly, in the case of Tokyo, the composition of images is different. Compared to the home pages of Seoul and Beijing, there is no large-size photo images in it. They are replaced by small panoramic images in the corner of the right-hand side of the home page. If we click on this panoramic photo, we arrive at the web site location that has Tokyo's PR video named «Enjoy Beautiful Tokyo in Images.» In other words, Tokyo exclusively concentrates its attention on the intrinsic and realistic linguistic information rather than on visual information. Tokyo organizes its own home page by the valorization of the «articles index,» which is basic and necessarily relates to useful information concerning Tokyo. In spite of that, in this analysis, we preferred to look further into the question of the choice of the photos of panoramic images.



TABLE 5: IMAGES ON THE HOME PAGE OF TOKYO

Actually, the 9 panoramic photos move in turn. The first 3 photos can be characterized as landscapes of Tokyo. Two photos present the blue sea surrounding Tokyo. Three photos are concerned with monumental heritage. There is one photo of a person playing the Kendo. The three heritage photos represent the modern and developed Tokyo. As in the case of Seoul, the photos of a blue sea represent the nature of Tokyo, the photos of traditional monuments represent the heritage of Tokyo, and the photo of a person represents the culture of Tokyo. In spite of all this, it seems to us that Tokyo underlines the value of /modernity/ of this city through the photos characterized by the scene of modern Tokyo, compared with the other cities.

Lastly, for Beijing, it is obvious that the moving images appear at the center of the page on the left-hand side, thus corresponding to the 6 topics of the city: «Beijing in the Eyes of Foreigners,» «Summer Resorts,» «Shichahai (Destination for Generations of Travelers),» «Summer Arrives in Beijing,» «Beijing Statistics» and «Adventure in Chinese Cuisine.» Clicking on these each images make it possible to transfer directly to each topic at the web site. Beijing's web site wants to be coherent, with all its information practical and enjoyable.

Clicking these images makes it possible to pass directly to each topic at the web site. We can thus say that these images play the role of advertising banner.



TABLE 6: IMAGES ON THE HOME PAGE OF BEIJING

Actually, there are three illustrations and three photos accompanied by titles. The first illustration represents the famous heritage monument, Tiananmen Gate. The second and the fourth images are photos concerning summer recreation information. The third image seems to be the introduction to a district in Beijing, Shichahai. The fifth image presents statistical information about actual Beijing. The last photo represents Chinese cuisine. This iconic originality can be important in determining the direction of the value of Beijing towards /enjoyable/ and /sensual/. In other words, these images directly show its strategy to concentrate on the various amusements in Beijing, which lead to pleasant relations with and being close friends with the visitors. We can thus understand that Beijing particularly underlines its /enjoyable/ value rather than its serious value, which could recall the socialism of the country, in contrast with the other cities. Therefore, we can summarize the core values of each city as follows:

CITY	SEOUL	TOKYO	BEIJING
CORE VALUE	VARIETY	MODERNITY	ENJOYABILITY

### 4.3. Signification of Main Titles of the Home Page

How do the cities build the architecture of their web sites? The web site is just like architecture; the page layout is a construction and a creation. This analysis will be centered more particularly on the composition of the web sites. Which imagistic strategy on the web sites exists? In fact, the web site's mission answers to the strategy of waiting on the customers, and of offering collaborative futures to all those who do not know the city. From the first general observation, we try to establish typologies of the web sites of the three cities, which rest on several cross-criteria, as follows:

- (1) Information about the city itself
- (2) Information about the city's tourism for the visitors
- (3) Information about the economy for businessmen
- (4) Information about the practical services for the city residents

Actually, it seems that the web site of a city devotes many more pages to practical information like tourism, the economy, and services, rather than to its identity and story.

For example, Seoul’s web site is articulated around four headings: «Get to Know Us,» «Come & Visit,» «Do Business,» and «Live in Seoul.» The main contents of the Seoul web site rest on completely identical characteristics, according to our typologies. Let us check it through the structure of the main menu of Seoul’s web site.

TABLE 7: MAIN MENUS OF SEOUL’S WEB SITE



Seoul’s web site is composed of the 4 principal menus. It is necessary here to have a space to demonstrate the city’s identity. Therefore, we can consider the menu Get to Know Us to be the space essential to expressing its symbolic image, because the other menus are addressed to practical information, in particular for travel, business, and living there. In addition, among the 5 small menus under the main menu of «Get to Know Us, the menu About Seoul, particularly, makes it possible to show Seoul’s story.

Secondly, the Tokyo web site is composed of 6 principal menus, that is, «Governor,» «Topics,» «Profile,» «Office,» «Residents,» and «Links.» It seems that Tokyo is focused on the presentation of governmental policy and the latest news, excepting the main menu of Profile that has an overview of Tokyo itself. Under this main menu, Tokyo tries to include its identity and its story.

TABLE 8: MAIN MENUS OF TOKYO’S WEB SITE



Lastly, if we examine the structure of the web site of Beijing, we can see that there are 10 principal menus: «Beijing Info,» «Government,» «Travel,» «Culture,» «Visa,» «Study,» «Business,» «Photo Gallery,» «Sister Cities,» and «Beijing Volunteers.» In the same way as Seoul and Tokyo, Beijing devotes many pages to offering practical information and governmental policy. In this case, the main menu, Beijing Info, is appreciated and sought for its symbolism, its adequacy in presenting the identity or the story for which it was conceived.

TABLE 9: MAIN MENU OF BEIJING'S WEB SITE



In fact, Barthes (1966) distinguished in the language of advertising three types of signs: the linguistic sign, the iconic sign, and the plastic sign. The titles, which were chosen as the space to identify each city, give to us very different impressions, because the preferences for specific words in titles help us understand the philosophy and the identity of each city. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2006), «About Seoul» of Seoul, the word «About» means «concerning or relating to someone or something; on the subject of them or it.» For Tokyo, «Profile» means «a side view of something, especially of a face or head.» And for Beijing, «Info (Information)» means «knowledge gained or given; facts; news.»

In other words, it seems that Seoul has the desire to show the public everything relating to its /diverse/ values, in many ways. Tokyo does not have the intention of demonstrating all its values, but its /summary/ value is more efficient. We can say that Beijing expects to show news of its activities to reveal its value of /popularity/ to the public, in the context of the discourse. Therefore, we can summarize the core values of each city as follows. (It is also interesting to verify this strategy in the discourse concerning the history of each city.)

CITY	SEOUL	TOKYO	BEIJING
CORE VALUE	DIVERSITY	SUMMARY	POPULARITY

#### 4.4. Signification of Discourse about History

Actually, it is difficult to communicate a brand without running out of time. The city brand does not escape this rule, because it takes time to become a famous city. In its web site, each city plays with the concepts of temporal values. Concerning temporality, each presents its particular history. According to Semprini (1992), the brand tells a history, and it becomes a vector of direction. Each city's values are a capital, accumulated patiently over time. Each city proposes a historical topic menu: «History» under the main menu of «About Seoul,» «History of Tokyo» under the main menu of «Profile,» and «Beijing History» under the main menu «Beijing Info.» The purpose of this discourse type consists in sharing its values and its identity. Therefore, it is difficult for a city to find the right balance between historicity and modernity.

The temporal dimension is a basic component of all the discourse of a city. It makes it possible for the city to exist, to be developed, and to be useful by positive effect of contamination, its identity, its image, and its services. Each city builds discourse on time and temporality to show its history, and its originality. In certain cases, time is just one of the components of the discursive architecture of a city in building a memory of the city. In other cases, it rests among several meanings of temporality. Each city can return to different values and significances.

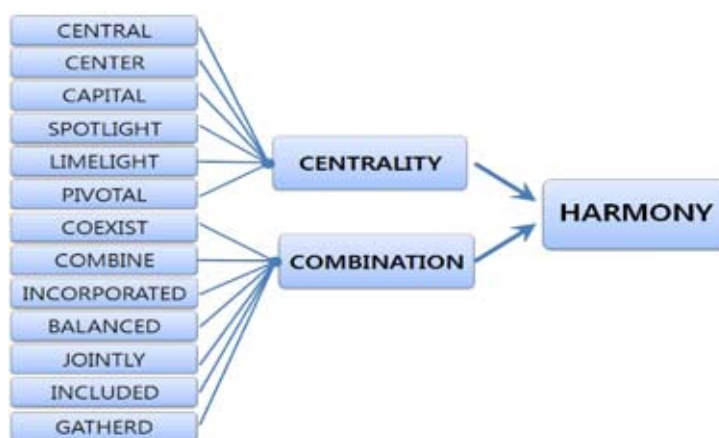
Thus, we try to find a principle of classification of these various significations. The city, as it is known by a nice turn of phrase, «crosses time.» Therefore, in this chapter, we concentrate on the various significations of the discourse about the history, according to each city.

#### 4.4.1. Signification of Seoul

The discourse results from textual and visual elements that are emergent from the culture, the history, or the ideology. In addition to the description of a correspondence between the form of the statement (*énoncé*) and the contents of the message, the linguistic and iconic plans show the identity of the organization of two dimensions of direction: a similar structure underlies the text and the image to form a coherent and efficient message.

This web page is composed of two thematic texts accompanied by 5 photo images. Seoul presents a text under the title «Center of Korean Culture» and a text titled «Seoul, Origin of Modern Civilization.» This discourse symbolizes perfectly the relative time, in the transmission of its long history and culture, from the prehistoric era to the present day. In all the discourse, it is not strange to especially point out the concept «isotope» while sticking particularly to «semantic isotope.» Actually, /centrality/ is a term that typically comprises values of Project according to Semprini (1992). The concept of the /centrality/ of Seoul is expressed by frequently using isotopes such as «central,» «center,» «capital,» «spotlight,» «limelight,» «pivotal,» etc. It is a semantic isotope that the nature that causes the concept of the /centrality/ of Seoul.

TABLE 10: ISOTOPES AND VALUES OF SEOUL



In addition, we can meet the other isotopes in various forms everywhere on its web page. This city wants to show its intention toward the Project concerning the concept of /combination/ by using the isotopes in its text as follows: «coexist,» «combine,» «incorporated,» «balanced,» «various,» «included,» «jointly,» «whole,» «gathered,» etc. On the other side, Seoul shows five photographs of Seoul that tell its history between the ending of the 1800s (Joseon Dynasty Era) and the 2000s (present). In these photo images, we can find the isotope of the value of /combination/, because there is the value of /harmony/ in various and different eras communicated through the colored photos, the faded photo, and the old black-and-white photo.





TABLE 11: PHOTO IMAGES OF SEOUL'S HISTORY

It seems that these images aim at showing the various old or contemporary objects and persons, like old classic cars, the newest sunglasses, persons wearing traditional costumes, persons wearing a «Red Devil» tee shirt, etc. The history has today's multiple and varied tools for showing the various possible versions of the life of the city, Seoul. In this direction, instantaneity and atemporality join in a purely abstract and mental representation of a temporal dimension. These things often provoke the myth and are often defined by their transitory characters. It is about abstract temporality. They are also the discourse concerning the improvement related to its projection towards the future. Wishing to connote the core value of /harmony/, it seems that Seoul has without hesitation chosen its position in the ground of the quadrant of the Project.

#### 4.4.2. Signification of Tokyo

This web page is composed of a text and a photo image. In this discourse, Tokyo's temporality rests upon chronological time, a time dated and segmented according to the external logics of this city. It is about the indicator of work according to important dates and precise moments. The culture of this segment is interested in the control of time fragmentally. It does not follow the subjective or mental order. The discourse and the image are punctuated according to logic of the suitable moment. For example, the chronology of this city is distinguished by nine stages: the Meiji era (1868-1912), the Taisho era (1912-1926), September 1923, the Showa era (1926-1989), the Pacific War in 1941, May 1947, the 1950s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. The discourses are sufficiently short and simple.

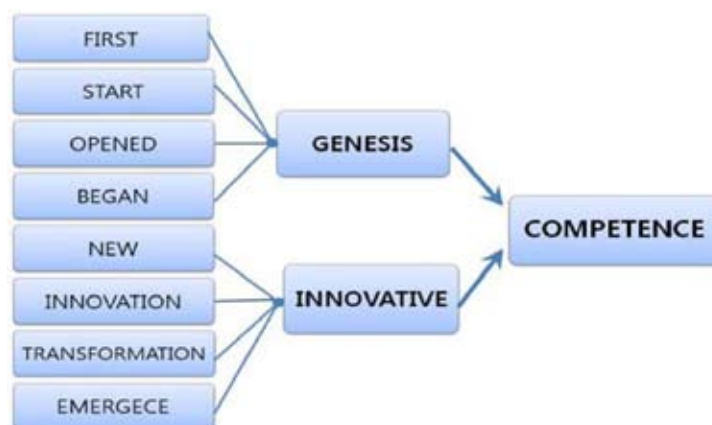


TABLE 12: PHOTO OF TOKYO

The accompanying image is also simple. There is a black-and-white photograph that can be adaptable to the text, for example, a photograph suitable to the modern Tokyo era. In this photo, it is neither dramatization nor hyperbole. The texts and the image are very direct concerning the information indicated. The source of legitimacy of the city rests on the valo-

rization of sobriety and simplicity. Indeed, the culture of this site associates the concept of /competence/ with that of need.

TABLE 13: ISOTOPES AND VALUES OF TOKYO



In all the discourse on this page, it is not difficult to find that Tokyo connotes the concept of the /genesis/. This concept is expressed by using, very repeatedly, the isotopes «first,» «start,» «opened,» «began,» etc. It seems that this discourse aims at demonstrating the primary value of Tokyo. In addition, this web page makes us find its legitimacy in its innovative capacity, which can justify its historical performances. We can find the other concept, /innovative/, everywhere in the discourse of this web page by means of the isotopes «new,» «innovation,» «transformation,» «emergence,» etc. Wishing to combine the core value of /competence/, Tokyo chooses these terms for its historical discourse. It is the reason for which we position Tokyo in the ground of Semprini's quadrant of Information (1992).

#### 4.4.3. Signification of Beijing

This web page does not comprise an image, but rather a text for the presentation of Beijing's history. Let's see this text without an image under the discourse «Major Cities.» This city's legitimacy is expressed through the appearance of the aesthetic history. The keyword of legitimacy can be defined as the /authenticity/. Beijing finds its temporality in emotional values. It is about the time of the memory, which can be characterized by monumental architecture. In this context, we also find the isotopes of /monumental/ to be different everywhere in its web page. Beijing presents the concept of /monumental/ by using the isotopes in its text as follows: «legacy,» «architectural,» «architecture,» «construction,» «build,» «palace,» «temple,» «garden,» «monument,» etc.

In this web page, the memory is often a means of going through time. The text directly shows Beijing's spirit to be that of authentic relationships and close friendships with the viewers of the web page. In this context, what is important is to focus the viewers' attention on this city by using this discourse. Beijing holds forth an intimate and positive discourse. This kind of discourse makes it possible to visit us. This kind of feeling gives the viewer a pleasant and distracting pause, but also the desire of travel in a universe of characterized heritage.

TABLE 14: ISOTOPES AND VALUES OF BEIJING



In this case, it is shown under the presentation of the concept of /magnitude/. Actually, the /magnitude/ is referred to by frequently using the isotopes «the largest,» «massive,» and «the great,» «expanded,» «widened,» «extended,» «huge,» etc. In addition, what is interesting is its way of telling, because this discourse chooses the superlative form of terms, like «the largest.» It is a question of showing its desire for communicating with the public as a potential visitor. We can thus say that it is important to find the subjective and lived moment, and a time related to feelings. Therefore, we can give a place to Beijing in the quadrant of the Euphoria.

In this context, it is not difficult to summarize the core values that we could find of each city, thanks to the use of Isotopes, as in the following:

CITY	SEOUL	TOKYO	BEIJING
CORE VALUE	HARMONY	COMPETENCE	AUTHENTICITY

## 5. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed at applying intuitions of semiotic nature to the concrete needs and the strategic web sites of cities' brands. The complex city-brand image concerns at the same time all the forms of communication and marketing of the city that take part in the foundation of the design of the web site. In spite of that, this study preferred to look further into the question of the determination of the value of the city brand and its positioning through its web site. We thus investigated three cities in a historical and socio-cultural context, for better accentuating their evolution according to the analysis of the structures of their web site.

We would actually wish that the semiotic methodology were more precisely elaborated, to have further enabled this study. In this study, we tried to adapt semiotic tools for the analysis of three capitols: Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing. We had the intention of showing that there were contributions specific to the total coherence of the discourse of each city through its web site. Each web site proposed a different communication strategy in its own way. Thus, this study

described at length four specific elements on the web sites to analyze the each city's values. We have analyzed four main components: plastic colors, iconic photos, the structure of home pages' texts and titles, and discourse. Therefore, by comparing the main content elements of the three web sites, we have caught the image strategies that make it possible to increase our interest in their web sites. We can summarize the core values of each city as follows:

	SEOUL	TOKYO	BEIJING
COLORS OF BACK PAGE	AESTHETIC	FACTUAL	SUBJECTIVE
ICONICITY OF IMAGES	VARIETY	MODERNITY	ENJOYABLE
TITLES OF STRUCTURE	DIVERSE	SUMMARY	POPULARITY
HISTORICAL DISCOURSE	HARMONY	COMPETENCE	AUTHENTICITY

Firstly, we were able to find the value of /aesthetic/ to be a plastic signification of the background of Seoul, thanks to the traditional Korean house's image; the color of Tokyo's web page related to the signification of the /factual/ value for Tokyo; Beijing's plastic sign, through the symbolic red color, connoted the /subjective/ value concerning it.

Secondly, this study understood that Seoul's photographic images belong to the value of /variety/ of Seoul's culture, because of the multi-colored contents; Tokyo demonstrates its value of /modernity/ through the photos characterizing the modern Tokyo scene; Beijing, particularly, underlines its /enjoyable/ value thanks to the photos concerning the various amusements in Beijing.

Thirdly, this research was able to discover that Seoul has a relation with its /diverse/ values for the public, by its use of the word «about»; Tokyo demonstrated its value of /summary/ by means of the term «profile»; Beijing revealed its value of /popularity/ for the public through the application of the word «info.»

Lastly, this study found out that Seoul tried to show the concepts of /centrality/ and /combination/ in the utilization of the isotopes, wishing to connote the core value of /harmony/. Tokyo's web site associates the core value of /competence/, by connoting the concepts of /genesis/ and /innovative/ through the isotopes. Beijing's legitimacy could be defined as the core value of /authenticity/, by its use of the isotopes for the concepts of /magnitude/ and /monumental/.

It is necessary, finally, to show how the three cities could be positioned in our quadrant mapping, and more precisely in one of the four quadrants that we described. Thus, in this chapter, we proposed how three cities could be positioned in each quadrant, by precisely explaining why the city could be positioned in said quadrant. Therefore, we have positioned Seoul in the ground of the quadrant of the «Project,» Tokyo in the ground of the quadrant of «Information,» and Beijing in the ground of quadrant of «Euphoria,» by using the semiotic mapping of values of Semprini (1992).

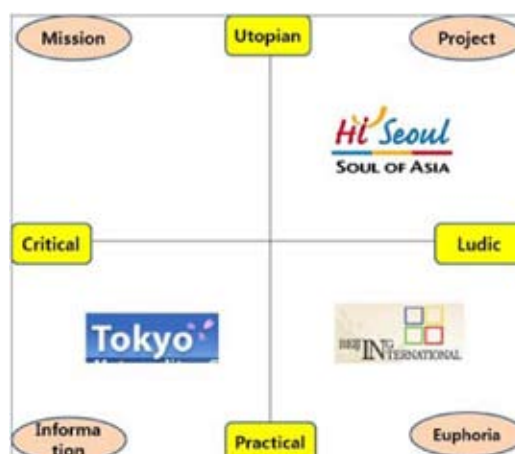


TABLE 15: POSITIONING OF THE THREE CITIES

In this study, we have developed the various cities' brands on the basis of only one type of communication, the web site. However, it is only one possible attempt to see the identity of each city brand. Actually, for a professional analysis, this type of communication is insufficient on the level of informative data. It would still remain to study the identities on the level of reception: each one's credibility compared to the preceding discourse of the city, its legitimacy with the public, its coherence compared to the tendencies and dominant values of our time. In spite of it all, we hope that this semiotic study makes it possible to understand a little more clearly the images and values of the cities, thanks to this analysis their web sites.

## REFERENCES

- Anholt, S. (2007): *Competitive Identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions* New York, Palgrave.
- Ashworth, G.J. and Voogt, H. (1994): «Marketing and place promotion,» in Ward, S.V. and Gold, J.R. (Eds). *Place Promotion, the Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, John Wiley, Chichester.
- Baloglu, S. & McCleary, K.W. (1999): «A Model of destination image formation.» *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868-879.
- Baughn, C.C. and Yaprak, A. (1993): «Mapping country-of-origin research: recent developments and emerging avenues,» in Papadopoulos, N. and Heslop, L.A. (Eds), *Product-century Images Impact and Role in International Marketing*. *International Business Press*, New York, NY, 89-116.
- Berli, A. and Martin, J.D. (2004): «Factors influencing destination image.» *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(3), 657-81.
- Bonn, M.A., Furr, H.L. and Susskind, A.M. (1999): «Predicting a behavioural profile for pleasure travellers on the basis of Internet use segmentation.» *Journal of Travel Research*, 37(4), 333-40.
- Bradley, A., Hall, T. and Harrison, M. (2002): «Selling cities: promoting new images for meetings, Tourism,» *Cities*, 19(1), 61-70.

- Caba Pérez, C., López Hernández, A.M. and Rodríguez Bolívar, M. (2005): «Citizens access to online governmental financial information: practices in the European Union countries.» *Government Information Quarterly*, 22(2), 258-76.
- Chadwick, A. and May, C. (2003): «Interaction between states and citizens in the age of the Internet: e-Government in the United States.» *Britain, and the European Union, Governance: an International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 16 (2), 271-300.
- Choi, S., Lehto, X.Y. and Morrison, A.M. (2007): «Destination image representation on the web: content analysis of Macau travel related websites.» *Tourism Management*, 28 (1), 118-29.
- de Chernatony, L. and Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1998): «Defining a brand: beyond the literature with experts interpretations.» *Journal of Marketing Management*, 14(5), 417-44.
- Embacher, J. and Buttle, F. (1989): «A repertory grid analysis of Austria's image as a summer vacation destination.» *Journal of Travel Research*, 27(Winter), 3-7.
- Floch, J.-M.(1990): *Sémiotique, marketing et communication*. Paris. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Gandia, J.L. & Archidona, M.C.(2007): «Determinants of web site information by Spanish city councils.» *Online Information Review*, 32(1), 35-57.
- Gartner, W.C. (1989): «Tourism image: attribute measurement of state tourism products using multidimensional scaling techniques.» *Journal of Travel Research*, 28(2), 15-19.
- (1993): «Image formation process.» *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 2(2), 191- 215.
- Graham Hankinson (2004): «The brand images of tourism destinations: a study of the saliency of organic images.» *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 6-8
- Greimas, A. J. (1970): *Du sens, Essais Sémiotiques*, Paris, Le Seuil.
- (1976): *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*, Paris. Le Seuil.
- Gunn, C.A. (1972): *Vacationscape. Designing Tourist Regions*, Taylor and Francis. *University of Texas, Washington, DC*.
- Gursoy, D. and McCleary, K.W. (2004): «An integrative model of tourist information search behavior.» *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(2), 353-73.
- Han, C. & Terpstra, V. (1988): «Country-of-origin effects for uni-national and bi-national products.» *Journal of International Business Studies*, 19(2), 235-55.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (1997): *Strategic Brand Management*. Kogan Page, London.
- Ke, W. and Wei, D.D. (2006): «Understanding E-government project management: a positivist case study of Singapore.» *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*, 9(2), 45-61.
- Keller, K.L. (1993): «Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity.» *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 1-22.
- Kotler, P. (1980): *Marketing Management : Analysis, Planning and Control*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- Kotler, P., Asplund, C., Rhein, I. and Haider, D. (1993): *Marketing Places*, New York, Free Press.
- Leisen, B. (2001): «Image segmentation: the case of a tourism destination.» *Journal of Services Marketing*, 15(1), 49-66.
- Marcussen, C.H. (1997): «Marketing Europe tourism products via Internet/WWW.» *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 6 (Nos 3/4), 23-4.
- Martin, I. and Eroglu, S. (1993): «Measuring a multi-dimensional construct: country image.» *Journal of Business Research*, 28, 193
- Metelka, C.J. (1981): *The Dictionary of Tourism*. Merton House, Wheaton, IL.

- Middleton, V.T.C. (1994): «Marketing in Travel and Tourism.» *Butterworth-Heinemann*, Avon and New York, NY.
- Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. and Pride, R. (2002): «Destination Branding.» *Butterworth-Heinemann*, Oxford.
- Nagashima, A. (1970): «A Comparison of Japanese and US attitudes towards foreign product.» *Journal of Marketing*, 34, 68-74.
- Papadopoulos, N. (2000): «Countries as brands.» *Ivey Business Journal*, 65, 30-7.
- Paramesaran, R. & Pisharodi, R.M. (2002): «Assimilation effects in country image research.» *International Marketing Review*, 19(3), 259-278.
- Pearce, P.L. (1982): «Perceived changes in holiday destinations.» *Annals of Tourism Research*, 9, 145-64.
- Semprini, A. (1992): *Le marketing de la marque*. Paris. EL.
- Torres, L., Pina, V. and Royo, S. (2005): «E-government and the transformation of public administrations in the EU countries: beyond NPM or just a second wave of reforms? » *Online Information Review*, 29(5), 531-53.
- Tse, D.K. & Gorn, G.J. (1993): «An experiment on the salience of country-of-origin in an era of global brands.» *Journal of International Marketing*, 1(1), 57-76.
- Warnaby, G. and Davies, B.J. (1997): «Commentary: Cities as service factories?» Using the servunctor system for marketing cities as shopping destinations. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 25(6), 204-10.
- Walmsley, D.J. and Young, M. (1998): «Evaluative images and tourism: the use of personal constructs to describe the structure of destination images.» *Journal of Travel Research*, 36 (Winter), 65-9.