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Moving Milan towards Expo 2015: designing culture into a city brand

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Abstract

Purpose – To create a competitive edge in today's tourism marketplace, cities seek to differentiate themselves and create a positive image. Yet, there is little consensus about city branding processes and few case studies. This paper aims to explore Milan's brand image and personality, focusing on the extent to which its image is dominated by business and fashion or culture and heritage and the implications of this positioning for Milan's re-branding in preparation for Expo 2015.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper combines quantitative and qualitative primary research. It reports the findings of a questionnaire survey, a web survey, desk research and focus group research. It analyses actual and potential tourists' perceptions, Milan's heritage product, current brand personality and the brand fingerprint.

Findings – Business tourism is central to Milan's prosperity; in contrast, its significant cultural attractions remain marginal to its tourism offer. This results in a narrow range of tourist perceptions of the destination and highly seasonal tourist activity.

Research limitations/implications – This paper represents the discovery phase research for a new city brand and further longitudinal and qualitative work is required.

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for the development of a consistent destination branding strategy analyzing the first steps of the definition of the Milan's brand.

Originality/value – The paper makes practical recommendations to tourism and place marketing practitioners for broadening Milan's brand to build on the city's strong architectural and cultural heritage. It also has value for tourism academics since it makes a methodological contribution to the place branding literature through its use of projective techniques.

Keywords Heritage, Culture, Brand image, Tourism, Cities, Italy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In today's highly competitive tourism marketplace, cities have to work hard to differentiate themselves and create a positive image (Morgan *et al.*, 2004; Baker, 2007; Trueman *et al.*, 2008). There is, however, little consensus about the role and nature of city branding and there remains a significant gap in the literature in terms of city branding processes and a lack of case studies (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). This paper seeks to address this lacuna by examining the brand personality of the Italian city of Milan. Anholt's (2006) city index suggests that Milan has a powerful image as a city of fashion, design, shopping and designer lifestyles, clearly outranking Paris on these dimensions. To date, however, Milan's place marketing strategies and activities have ignored its broader cultural heritage and focused on the business market. This has created a seasonal pattern of tourist activity in the city and resulted in a very narrow range of tourist perceptions of the destination.

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As part of the preparations for hosting the 2015 Expo, the Milan Chamber of Commerce, supported by the Municipality of Milan, has commissioned a number of research projects designed to benchmark the city with a range of comparable Italian and international destinations. This paper reports the findings of the discovery phase research for a new branding initiative for Milan based on a face-to-face questionnaire survey ($n = 1285$), a web survey, document analysis, and in-depth qualitative work conducted during December 2007-April 2008. It reports and analyses actual and potential tourists' perceptions of the city, Milan's heritage product, its competitor set, its current brand personality and its brand fingerprint. The paper concludes with a number of recommendations for broadening Milan's brand to build on the city's strong artistic, architectural and cultural heritage.

Literature review

While branding has been applied to consumer products since the late nineteenth century, the idea that destinations should formulate brand strategies only emerged in the 1990s. A strategic approach to destination branding was first introduced at national level with countries such as Australia, Hong Kong and Spain. Then major US cities like Seattle, Las Vegas and Pittsburgh embraced it, responding to a need to compete more effectively, to create a strategic decision-making framework within the destination and to increase destination management organisations' (DMOs) accountability to their stakeholders (Baker, 2007). In a marketplace where a handful of major destinations attract three-quarters of the world's tourists, most countries are in reality niche players and forward-thinking destinations now see branding as a major part of their competitive strategies (Morgan *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, the Destination Marketing Association International, the world's largest official destination marketing organisation, designates the development of a brand strategy as one of the critical items needed for accreditation in its Destination Marketing Association Accreditation Program (Baker, 2007).

There is now an established literature which suggests that destinations wanting to flourish must deliver distinctive, compelling, memorable and rewarding experiences to their target consumers (Dinnie, 2008). This moves them into the territory of brands and destination branding is now considered to be essential for those places with ambitions to remain amongst the leaders in international tourism marketing. Reflecting this increasing uptake amongst DMOs, there is a burgeoning academic literature on the place branding field (Morgan *et al.*, 2004; Anholt, 2005; 2007; Jaffe and Nebensahl, 2006). Although a highly complex task (Fan, 2005; Tasci and Kozak, 2006), as a key essential in destination development and marketing, a brand strategy can work to fuse public and private sector interests, raise the economic value of produce and products, increase pride and confidence in places and change how they are seen internally and externally. Moreover, poor, peripheral and developing countries do not have time to wait for "positive" changes to impact favourably on their brand or reputation. Since negative images are the greatest obstacles to these places' economic development, an aspirational brand strategy can be used to inform residents as well as tourists and the wider international community about the ambitions and appeal of a place (Anholt, 2007). Despite this growing literature on place, especially nation, branding, there is, however, little consensus about the role and nature of city branding and there remains a significant gap in the literature in terms of city branding processes and a lack of case

studies (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006); an issue which this paper seeks to begin to address through its examination of the northern Italian city of Milan.

Study methodology

In order to explore Milan's personality and its potential to broaden its cultural "appeal", this study developed three lines of analytical inquiry. First, as a starting point for the definition of city branding, it evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of Milan's current positioning as a destination, with respect to competitor European destinations. Second, the study compared the range of Milan's cultural heritage attractions to those communicated to tourists through promotional material in order to identify the limits of the current offer and to discover potential directions for development of the destination's offer and its brand. Third, the study examined Milan's image and personality as perceived by actual and potential tourists in order to determine critical areas that require intervention and plans of action for redefining the image and brand of the destination.

The analysis of Milan's destination positioning consisted of an examination of benchmarks with competing European destinations. This provides a useful cognitive basis upon which to formulate a strategy of tourist development that links the significant investments planned for Expo 2015 with the re-launching and sustainable growth of the destination in the medium to long-term. In addition, this first analysis forms the basis for the formulation of branding strategies that could increase the national and international attractiveness of Milan by identifying aspects of its offer which could be developed and strengthened, thus leading to resolution of some of the critical problems that are typically associated with this city. Comparison was made with three Italian destinations (Florence, Rome and Venice), which are considered icons of international heritage tourism; and three European destinations (Barcelona, Berlin and Vienna), which have, in recent years, become outstanding examples of successful repositioning and brand construction, largely based on their cultural attractions [1].

The second phase of the study involved an analysis of Milan's leisure and cultural offer which focussed on an assessment of the existing gap between the historical-artistic attractions of the city and what is communicated by agencies (i.e. the city council, the province and the region) in their promotional and informative material distributed free to visitors. Therefore, a apping of the historical-artistic resources of Milan was undertaken using a variety of information sources, both printed and digital. This census of places, structures and buildings was based on the Milan edition of the Touring Club of Italy's "Red Guide" (TCI, 2005) and a list of architectural and environmental assets held by the Province of Milan. In order to capture new developments and architectural attractions, reference was made to Brandolini's (2005) *Milano: Nuova Architettura* and to the data contained in the International Architecture Database (Archinform, 2008). At the same time, a parallel mapping exercise was conducted of the artistic-cultural resources that are promoted by public agencies such as the Lombardy Region, the Province of Milan and the Milan City Council, analysing both paper-based material (promotional literature, informative brochures, maps, etc.) distributed free of charge at tourist offices and main public-sector tourism websites for the city. These mapping exercises were conducted during January-March 2006.

The third phase of the study, to analyse the image and brand personality of Milan, included a face-to-face questionnaire survey ($n = 1285$) of actual visitors and a web survey of potential visitors ($n = 600$) from the city's three main destination markets

Japan, Russia and the UK. This phase of work focussed on Milan's tourism potential by examining the travel motivations, perceptions and future intentions of those who have already visited the city for tourism or business, as well as those of regular travellers who have yet to visit the city. The face-to-face questionnaire survey analysed the tourists' profile, reasons for travel, perceived image of Milan and its personality, knowledge of Milan's attractions, patterns of travel to attractions and levels of satisfaction. This analysis was then compared with the international benchmark cases. The survey took place through the direct administration of a questionnaire, based on a representative sample of tourists who visited Milan between December 2007 and February 2008. The sample was constructed taking into account the motive for the visit – leisure or meetings, incentives, conferences and events (MICE) – see Table I. The latter group was in turn sub-divided into trade-fair and meetings groups and the tourist's nationality (Italian and foreign visitors), in order to obtain a representative sample.

The web-based phase of research consisted of a structured online questionnaire which was administered to representative panels of respondents. Thus, it was possible to identify the level of knowledge of Milan and its tourist "appeal" to people from key tourist generating markets, who have never visited Milan. The sample consisted of 600 people (200 from Russia, 200 from the UK and 200 from Japan) who had travelled abroad in the last 24 months, aged from 18 to 60 years old. The survey was carried out and analysed in May 2008. Finally, this image-based phase of the project also included in-depth qualitative work with 30 Italian and international students (educational tourists) conducted during April 2007. This was intended to establish benchmark information on the current brand personality and brand fingerprint (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000) of Milan. The use of projective research techniques (Westwood, 2007) was a key element of this qualitative phase of work.

The positioning of Milan as a destination

Milan, located in Western Lombardy, is Italy's largest city, with its metropolitan area accounting for a population of 7.4 million. It also occupies a significant position in the country's tourism sector and has several strong points as a destination. Indeed, in Anholt's (2006) City Index, Milan is highly rated as a city of fashion, design, shopping and designer lifestyles, even out-ranking Paris on these dimensions. The city is the second most important Italian destination in terms of overnight stays, with a tourism capacity superior to the "stars" of Italian heritage tourism such as Florence and Venice, even if it cannot operate at the same levels of the competing European cities considered in the analysis (Barcelona, Berlin and Vienna). The average expenditure of foreign tourists is higher than that in other large Italian tourist destinations and they are more

		Leisure travellers	Business travellers	
			Business	MICE
Interviews sample	Total	(30 per cent of Total)	(42 per cent of total)	(28 per cent of total)
National travellers (44 per cent of total)	560	156	22	182
International travellers (56 per cent of total)	725	232	318	175
Total target	1285	388	540	357

Table I. Composition of face-to-face interview sample

likely to stay in higher quality accommodation (54 per cent of overnight stays are in four or five star hotels). At the same time, Milan's current positioning also reveals some crucial weakness. Milan's tourist industry remains stubbornly seasonal, with steep drops in occupancy levels in the months of April, August and December, and at weekends. This "rhythm" is dictated above all by the trade fair activity; in this way Milan differs sharply from other tourist destinations whose seasonality has been successfully modified through appeals targeted to specific clientele segments. The average stay in Milan is shorter than that in Italian heritage destinations and in European benchmark destinations. Furthermore, there has recently been a significant decrease in some segments of the foreign clientele who are important to the city (Japanese, British and German) in terms of volume and capacity of expenditure, whilst the annual rates of occupancy of Milan's hotels are inferior to those of the other cities in the sample.

The weaknesses of Milan's current positioning can be attributed to its model of tourist development, which is based on strategies of single operators intent on exploiting business opportunities linked to the Milan Trade Fair, and to its lack of a unified destination strategy. In fact, the Milan trade fair, the second largest in Europe in terms of space, represents the principal attraction of the city; in stark contrast, the numerous cultural attractions of the destination remain marginal to its tourism offer. Unfortunately, however, the trade fair-centred positioning of the city reflects negatively on the clientele mix. It emerged from analysis of a semi-structured questionnaire of 120 city hotels (chosen for their level of quality, size and location in Milan), that the business market constitutes the primary target for Milan, representing 45 per cent of room occupancy. The trade fair alone accounts for 27 per cent, whilst the leisure segment accounts for only 20 per cent and the congress segment amounts to 4 per cent, with a further 4 per cent coming from other segments. The business segment is less "manageable" from the standpoint of the destination since the evolution of this clientele is closely linked to the vitality of the diverse economic sectors of the city and less able to be managed or directed with tourism policies.

Analysis of the cultural offer

Analysis of Milan's historical and artistic heritage was accomplished according to two criteria: chronologically (classifying cultural assets by historical period) and by category of attraction. The composition of cultural resources divided by historical period demonstrates, on the one hand, the wealth of Milan's heritage that is still visible and, on the other hand, the relevance of its "modern" heritage which represents 37 per cent of the total cultural resources in the city (Figure 1).

When the list of Milan's existing historical-artistic resources is compared to what is communicated to tourists, it emerges that less than a quarter (24 per cent) appears in the free material distributed to visitors. Moreover, over half of the city's cultural assets from the 19th century are not mentioned; and over 80 per cent of the historical-artistic assets of the 20th and 21st centuries are not communicated to visitors by those who are engaged in welcoming tourists and providing them with information. This comparison clearly demonstrates that none of the city's historical periods are very well represented, but the largest gap is to be found in relation to the post-19th century heritage (Figure 2).

To further explore how Milan's stock of cultural heritage is represented in its tourism offer, it was also classified according to the type of attraction

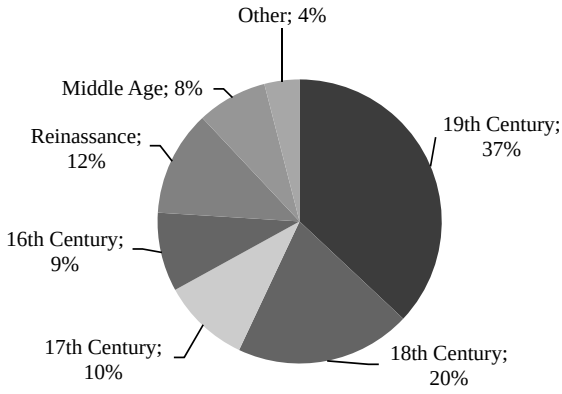

Figure 1.
Distribution of Milan's historical-artistic heritage by historical period

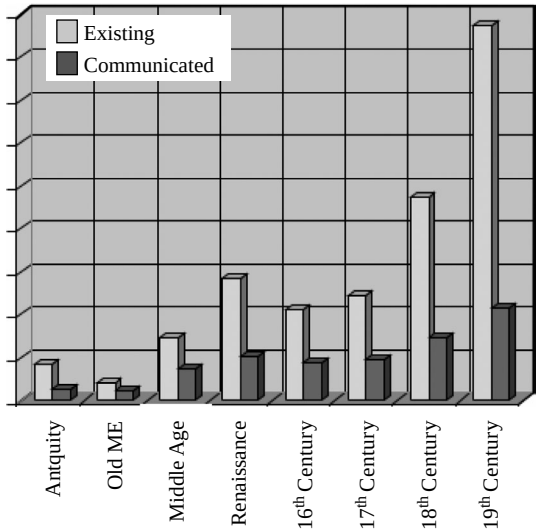

Figure 2.
Comparison between the "census" of Milan's heritage and heritage appearing in tourist promotional material, by historical period

(churches, palaces, public squares, archaeological sites, Roman and medieval city walls, statues, production centres, sports centres, public parks and gardens, canals, etc.) This analysis (Figure 3) demonstrates that certain types of city buildings (houses, palaces, residences), both public and private, are not fully represented in the promotional literature, providing further evidence that Milan's cultural offer falls short of the city's potential offer.

Tourist perceptions of Milan's image and personality

In the next phase of the study, a face-to-face questionnaire was designed to elicit tourists' perceptions of Milan's image and personality in order to investigate potential solutions for tourism development and the repositioning of the city. Several interesting points arose from the socio-demographic profile of the tourists and the characteristics of their travel to Milan. In the first place, it appears that Milan is a "young" destination, visited mainly by tourists aged between 18-34 years old (49 per cent), followed by the

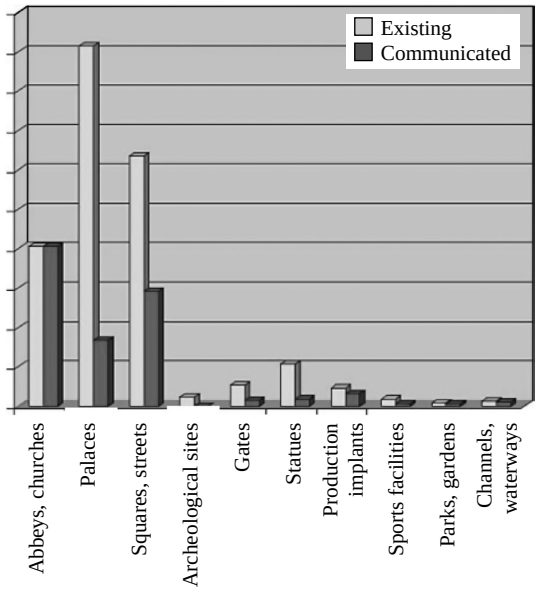

Figure 3.
Comparison between the "census" of Milan's heritage and heritage appearing in tourist promotional material, by type of attraction/resource

age group between 35-49 years old (38 per cent). Secondly, Milan is a destination preferred by educated tourists with almost half of all visitors educated to bachelors' level (49 per cent) and over a fifth possessing masters' degrees (21 per cent). Thirdly, the data suggests that Milan is a popular repeat destination, with half of all those tourists completing the questionnaire making three or more visits to the city, something which might be the result of Milan's business and trade fair market. Milan also appears to be popular with single travellers as over a third of visitors travel to Milan in the company of co-workers (36 per cent) or alone (30 per cent); only about a fifth (21 per cent) travel with friends and only 14 per cent travel with their family. Again, the high proportion of visitors travelling with co-workers or alone is linked to Milan's strong business- and trade fair-oriented positioning. Interestingly, if the data is analysed by segment, the percentage of leisure visitors who travel with friends rises to 55 per cent, whereas the family segment is a very low percentage. Milan emerges from the survey as a "do-it-yourself" destination, where tourists largely organise their own trip (46 per cent). In contrast, for 35 per cent of clients, the trip to Milan is organised by their employer (in particular for the meeting and business segments).

In terms of perceptions, the city is perceived as a "dynamic" destination and Milan's personality is linked to an active lifestyle in which "doing" and "discovering" are valued. This dynamic quality was indicated by the majority of respondents (80 per cent) and is linked to several areas of Milan's economic activity, not only to tourism. In contrast to its competing destinations, tourists tend to have clear images of Milan and to visit the city rather than its greater metropolitan area; in fact, 70 per cent of tourists visit the city of Milan without going to other places in the Milanese Province. In perceptual terms, there are also other weak points which the city is trying to confront through initiatives which encompass policy areas such as transportation and the environment, as well as tourism. For instance, Milan is seen as an "expensive"

destination by most of the interviewees (80 per cent) – particularly in terms of taxis and accommodation – although on the plus side, this was matched by high levels of satisfaction with levels of service. The city is also viewed as a "grey" destination (70 per cent of interviewees), an aspect of the city's personality which is in apparent contrast to other aspects previously listed (e.g. cultured and dynamic), and is linked to the city's air pollution and general lack of green spaces.

A further negative perception of Milan is that it is seen as not being a "very communicative" destination; in other words, while interviewees expressed positive judgements of people's courtesy, they perceived tourist information and street signs as poor and ineffective. In addition, they pointed out a low level of English language knowledge on the part of those who live in Milan or work there in tourism and related services. Therefore, tourists to Milan perceive a strong offer of activities, events and attractions, but find it difficult to obtain clear detailed information when organizing, and later during, their visit. The survey also revealed that Milan's pre-eminent emblem was the cathedral or *Duomo* (75 per cent of interviewees) and, rather surprisingly, only a tenth of tourists suggested that its main association was fashion (10 per cent). Generally speaking, the opinion of tourists about their experience in Milan was positive, with 66 per cent stating that they intend to return to Milan for leisure, while 64 per cent said that they would advise a friend to visit the city. However, the city did not exceed their expectations, as 66 per cent of the interviewees confirmed that their experience as a visitor to Milan was exactly what they thought it would be.

"Naïve" perceptions of Milan's image and personality

From the analysis of the data collected from the web survey, it was possible to study potential tourists' "naïve" perceptions of Milan. Milan enjoys a position of considerable celebrity and is one of the most well-known Italian cities in the key tourism generating markets. However, there is a significant gap between knowledge of the city ("I've heard others speak about Milan") and actual intention to visit the city ("Milan is an interesting place to visit on a trip to Italy") (Figure 4).

Although the city is seen as beautiful, dynamic and a "capital of business", it is not seen as safe and, above all, it is considered very expensive. The image of Milan is not yet strong enough to represent Italy in the world as, despite its recognition as a city of high fashion, European football and shopping (Figure 5), it is not seen as an Italian symbol in terms of "historical attraction" and "food". Yet, given the city's strong

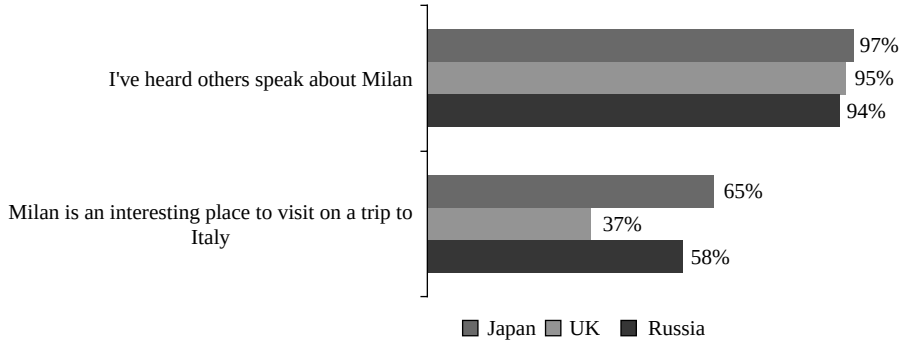

Figure 4.
Knowledge of Milan vis-à-vis interest in Milan as a destination

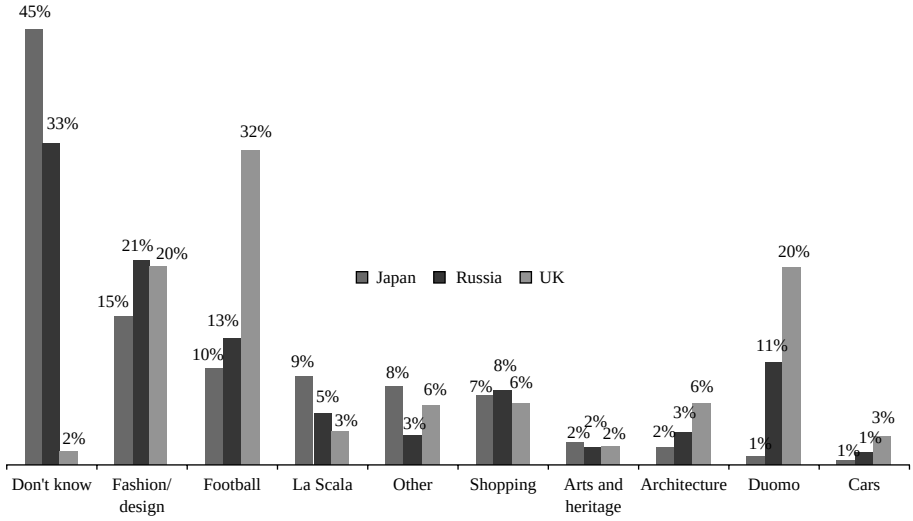

Figure 5.
Recognition of Milan's "symbols" in three key markets

cultural heritage (seen in our census), Milan has the capacity to position itself much more effectively using these very themes, which are of evident interest to tourists.

In order to further explore the "naïve" perceptions of Milan as a tourist destination, the interviewees in the web survey were asked their opinions about a series of statements about the type of destination that Milan represents. Calculating the average of the responses by country, it appears that Russians appear to have the best opinion of the city (average 2.30) followed by Japanese (2.13). The average calculated for the UK market is the lowest (2.11). Overall, the three markets agree that "Milan is an excellent tourist destination" and "suitable for young people" (Figure 6). The potential for leisure tourism is confirmed by the respondents' expressions of their intentions to visit Milan in the next three years (Figure 7), especially for vacations (Figure 8).

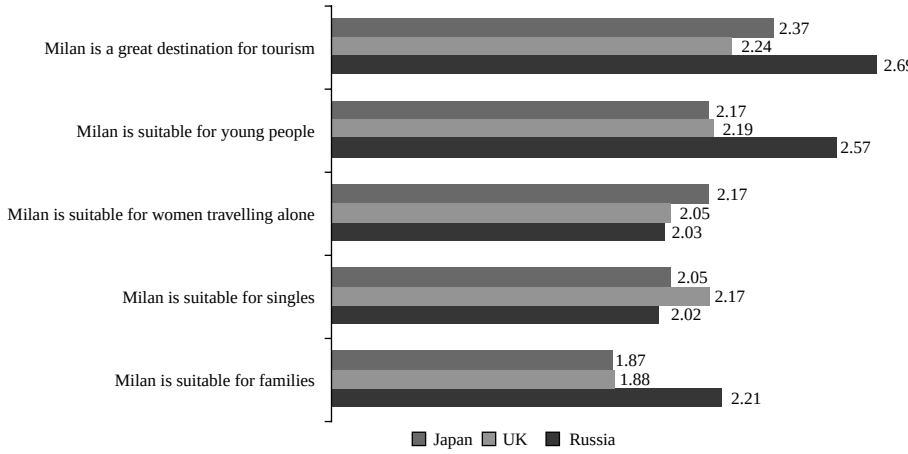

Figure 6.
Perceptions of Milan as a tourist destination

Milan's brand personality and fingerprint

In the final phase of the study, projective techniques were used in six focus groups to elicit rich, in-depth feelings about Milan from individuals ($n = 30$) with experience of the destination. Various research techniques have been developed in order to establish the deep-seated images, attitudes and perceptions which people hold of particular brands or products (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000). However, given their very nature, the measurement of such factors is frequently problematic since images, attitudes and perceptions are subjective and in many cases even subconscious. As a result, since the 1950s consumer researchers and more recently marketers have applied a range of projective techniques and visual and auditory stimuli (originally developed for use in psychoanalytical diagnosis) in focus group settings to construct powerful pictures of respondents' impressions of brands (Westwood, 2007). These techniques involve stimuli which participants are encouraged to respond to and include sentence completion and personification. In this study, in response to the sentence "When I think of Milan I think of . . . " participants frequently alluded to Milan's fashionable, stylish, energetic and cosmopolitan nature. It was felt to be the most European of Italy's cities, offering something for everyone, particularly in terms of shopping and food and was felt to represent the apogee of Italian food, fashion and culture. On a more negative note, Milan was perceived to be an unsafe city, plagued by poor weather, pollution, and poor transport and communication networks. The city's people were felt to be stressed, somewhat rude and unfriendly; rather cold and unresponsive to others.

To explore this top-of-the-mind association further, work was then undertaken to establish a brand fingerprint of Milan. Brand fingerprinting examines participants' thoughts and feelings about destinations through their senses (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000). Here, participants were asked to describe in detail their sensory imprint of Milan (sights, sounds, touch, taste and smell). As we can see (Figure 9), Milan posses a rich

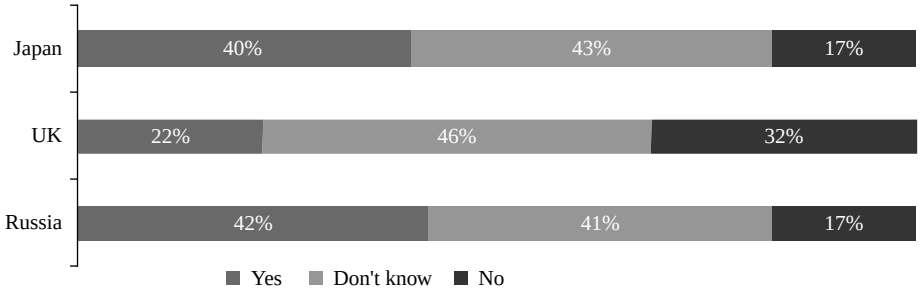

Figure 7.
Intentions to visit Milan in the next three years

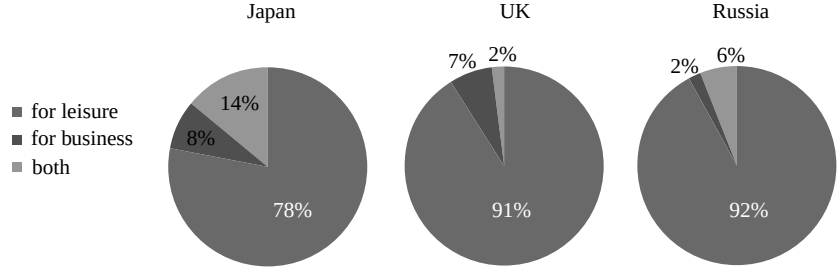

Figure 8.
Motivations for visiting Milan in the next three years

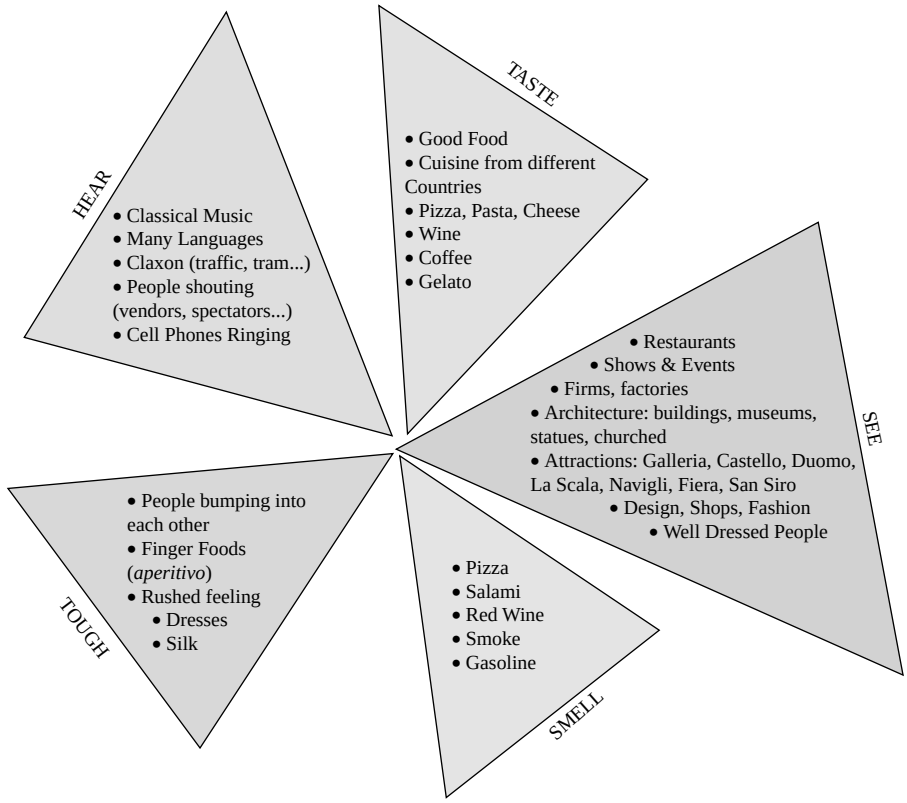

Figure 9.
Sensing Milan

sensory print, reflecting the vibrant characteristics of both the city and the Milanese people. Milan is seen to offer luxury and diversity. It is regarded as a busy, noisy city, with all the problems that are usually experienced in such places (such as pollution); however, is also seen to offer both a gastronomic and fashion smorgasbord and a distinctive architectural setting.

The qualitative research then sought to establish the extent to which the city of Milan is distinctive by using personalisation techniques in focus groups (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000). Often used in marketing and consumer research, personalisation involves ascribing human personality traits to objects and is based on the notion that just like people, products or brands are perceived as having definite personalities (Aaker, 1997). Participants were asked to imagine Milan as a person and to describe them, their gender, behaviour, clothes, characteristics, and lifestyle. Significantly, there was a high degree of consensus over Milan's personality (Extracts 1 and 2):

Extract 1. Personality profile of Milan
Milan is a beautiful and successful 35 years-old business woman who lives with her fluffy poodle in a beautiful flat near Porta Genova. She is sophisticated, self-confident, energetic, friendly, determined, motivated, sincere and spontaneous. She is a volunteer for charity and this demonstrates her altruistic and sensitive aspect. Her daily routine is as follows: she wakes

up early in the morning and she goes jogging along the Naviglio to keep fit; she comes back home, she has s shower and then she puts on her make-up. This businesswoman wears La Perla underwear, a Valentino business suit with Armani belt, Damiani earrings and necklace; she accessorises with her Prada briefcase, Gucci watch, Sergio Rossi shoes and Versace sun glasses. Before going out, she sprays on her D&G perfume and gets into her BMW coupe but, before beginning her intensive day, she stops to have a good coffee. During the day she has a salad lunch in order to maintain her figure and in the evening to amuse herself she goes out for an aperitivo and has fun with her friends. She also likes to attend the different events that are going on in the city or to go to some special clubs. Sometimes she goes to the restaurant with her boss who occasionally invites her to see a performance at the world renowned La scala theatre. At the end of the day our beautiful woman comes back home satisfied, takes off her make-up, undresses and sets her alarm clock. She goes to bed, wrapped in her soft silk sheets.

Extract 2. Personality profile of Millan

Milan is a beautiful and successful 47 year-old businesswoman who works as a financial analyst and part-time consultant to international clients. She is divorced with grown-up children and has a drug addiction. She has a Bachelors at Bocconi, but no masters (she has not reached that status yet). She is a talented and eclectic chef who has limited time for cooking except on special occasions and who enjoys panini, coffee and sushi. She drives a convertible jaguar and dresses appropriately for the occasion: at work she wears a grey and white pin striped skirt suit, with a bold silk camisole, 12 cm stilettos worn which confidence and a Ferrari red handling. Her underwear reveals her true self: sexy but classic and branded. Inside her handbag she carries: a BlackBerry for work; another for her kids; an AMEX Black Unlimited; Dior cigarette case; Chanel no 5; bottled water; 24 h lip gloss; compact; head-ache and sleeping pills (she's addicted); pictures of her kids (old and disintegrating); pepper spray; pen-drive; MAC personal computer; eye glasses (she is short-sighted). For fun she spends Fridays having an aperitivo with friends at wine bars and Sunday at the sports stadium (VIP section) with friends (they may be interested in player). She is going for a facelift and liposuction. She does not go to church since she has a deep scar from her Austrian ex-husband which she keeps well hidden.

In all of the personalisations of Milan, "she" is a businesswoman, intimately entwined with fashion, design and culture. Each of the personalities exhibit human characteristics which echo the city's dynamism, busy urban lifestyles, elegance, culture and range of evening entertainment. In Extract 2, the businesswoman's "face-lift" was a reference to Milan's hosting of Expo 2015 and the group also made reference to the city's former association with the Austrian Empire. This qualitative work confirmed that Milan has a rich and distinct personality which could form the basis of the development of a coherent brand strategy for the city. Interestingly, it also confirmed the city's negative associations which emerged in the survey phases of the study, notably pollution, traffic congestion and insecurity (seen in the pepper-spray carried by the woman in Extract 2 and her drug addiction).

Conclusion: designing culture into a city brand

This study which has provided an in-depth analysis of Milan's current competitive positioning has produced a range of results which could inform a repositioning of the city, especially in view of its hosting of Expo 2015. On a practical, "tactical" level, the study has revealed that much more needs to be done to facilitate the tourist experience; thus, whilst tourists are aware of the wide offer of activities, events and attractions in Milan, they encounter difficulty in finding clear and detailed information, both when

they organise their trip and during their stay in the city. At the more significant strategic level, however, the quantitative research phases and the document analysis in particular have demonstrated that there is considerable potential to ascribe greater significance to its cultural heritage in the city's tourism offer. This finding was also endorsed in the qualitative phase where the projective techniques revealed that those with actual experience of the city considered that it formed a key element in the destination's personality. The study has also clearly shown that whilst there are obvious strengths in Milan's existing artistic and cultural heritage which could be exploited, there are also negative elements in its perceived image, notably pollution, insecurity, expense and a lack of green spaces. Thus, any destination development strategy and branding initiative must enhance the positive features and address the negative ones in order to successfully reposition Milan as a leading international tourism destination.

Milan's current tourism industry and its positioning are strongly influenced by the city's business and trade fair activity. This has led to persistent problems of seasonality, a trend that is due to tourism operators who conduct their business in isolation and shun a cooperative strategy for developing new clientele segments and encouraging potential growth in currently unexploited tourism markets. At the same time, we have established that Milan possesses a considerable heritage of unexploited resources that could play a meaningful role in the construction of a successful brand. The development of an appealing brand for new market segments such as *leisure* and *conference*, which would connect them to cultural attractions, could lead to more effective management of the city's seasonality problem, lengthen the average overnight stay and increase occupancy levels, with a favourable impact on the destination's economy. The building of a new brand starting from the cultural resources of the city should take account of the unique features of the current positioning, although many existing elements could play a stronger role in Milan's cultural offer and be linked to the business segment. For example, many "themes" of Milan's internationally renowned trade fairs (e.g. fashion, design and innovation) are easily connected to the city's substantial number of contemporary art and modern architecture attractions. In addition, "designing culture" into the development of a new destination brand which takes advantage of culture as a distinct element may also contribute to reducing the negative effects that Milan's current business-oriented positioning has on its image as it is now seen as a "grey" and "expensive" city.

Such a concerted strategy of increasing awareness of the city's cultural heritage could also reinforce the positive elements of the city's image through a stronger promotion of contemporary art and design to tourists. The fact that Milan attracts a young market with high levels of education, which is therefore more likely to be attracted by a culturally-based offer, together with the fame of some of Milan's cultural "emblems" provide numerous opportunities to build packages, itineraries and events. In addition, the city's brand fingerprint as revealed by the projective research techniques clearly identify that Milan is perceived as having a distinctive architectural, cultural and culinary heritage. To summarise our recommendations, the inclusion of culture at the very core of the Milan city brand is likely to:

- strengthen the positive elements of Milan's image that are already perceived by actual and potential visitors;
- overcome some of the negative aspects of the city's personality that are linked to its current business-oriented positioning; and

- create greater balance in the clientele mix, thus resolving problems of seasonality and creating the foundation for further development of Milan's potential for tourism development.

A city brand for Milan which incorporates design, fashion and architectural and artistic culture in its brand values and personality may enhance the positioning of Milan by raising its international profile, synthesizing its distinctive features and communicating its personality. At the same time, to be successful, the very place branding process requires cooperation among the destination's many stakeholders who actively intervene and participate in the promotion of the brand and the delivery of its experiences. Any place's stories, ambience and "feeling" are inseparable from the place itself so Milan's destination management agencies need to consider how they bring the brand to life when visitors arrive. This adoption phase of the branding process can be very much about change management and it can call for changes in relationships and partnerships in a destination (Baker, 2007). Thus, in addition to leading to an enhanced brand identity and international profile for Milan, the creation, management and promotion of a revitalised brand would aid the concentration of marketing efforts in the city and coordinate the initiatives of single operators around a common idea - the brand and its values.

Note

1. The field research from this first phase has been analysed in depth and summarised in academic papers (De Carlo and Canali, 2006; Canali and d'Angella, 2009; d'Angella and Go, 2009).

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