

MANCHESTER

Place Branding Case Study



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Introduction:

This assessment will discuss the branding and promotional challenges of Manchester's city brand. Using the ICON model (Figure 1) this case study will examine how Manchester has overcome challenges and will discuss the social, economic, and geopolitical outcomes of this successful city brand.

The ICON Model:

The ICON model (Figure 1) proposes an approach to city branding that is Integrated, Contextualised, Organic, and New. It is a 'framework for the development and implementation of a place brand strategy.' (Dinney, Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice, 2016) And although designed for nation branding can be applied to places at 'municipal, regional and national levels.' The model has allowed cities to move away from 'two-dimensional destination tourism models' and instead to 'city branding – a strategy of identifying valuable assets that a city has to offer, developing these assets and delivering their value to attract investors, visitors and new residents.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017) This case study will critically examine Manchester's success using this model and an interview with Communications Manager, Ryan Johns, from Marketing Manchester – a key stakeholder company within the city.

An Introduction to Manchester – The World's First Re-Industrialised City

Manchester, situated within Greater Manchester and bordered by the Cheshire Planes, the Pennines and Salford is a city with a population of 552,000. (ManchesterCityCouncil, Census and population, 2021) Described as a 'city of extremes' with a 'gritty vibrancy even on its (many) rainy days' (Peck & Ward, 2002), it forms a large part of the UK's 'most populous conurbation' forming a population of 2.87 million. (Statistics, 2022)

Notable for its 'architecture, culture, musical exports, media links, scientific and engineering output, social impact, sports clubs, and transport connections' (Wikipedia, Manchester, 2022), Manchester is home to two Premier League Football Clubs, (Manchester United, Manchester City) and two major Universities (University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan). Since the 1990s the city has 'excelled in pop culture' (Haslam, 2002), including facilities like the AO Arena, The Lowry Palace and Opera house and multiple museums and art galleries. With the third busiest airport in the UK (Airport, 2023) and the introduction of the Metrolink in the 90s (VolkerRail) Manchester has the foundations to attract people from not only all over the UK but globally and its story has been 'replicated elsewhere in the Northwest – notably by Liverpool.' (Haslam, 2002).

Established in AD79 near the rivers of Medlock and Irwell, the city went on to grow through unplanned urbanisation due to the Industrial Revolution (Aspin, 1981). It gained official city status in 1853 and was titled the "World's First Reindustrialised City". (Frangopulo, 1977) It was one of the 'centres of textile manufacturing' and became known as 'the world's largest marketplace for cotton goods' (Kidd, 2006), and was 'without challenge the first and greatest industrial city in the world'. (Hall, 1998) With this brought an influx of population, and therefore the first railway station opened in August 1849. (NetworkRail, 2022)

Despite its success in its early years, Manchester began to suffer from the divide between the North and South. After both world wars the need for manufacturing decreased and redevelopment and regeneration began in the late 60s. (RWinvest, 2022) During this time more than 150,000 jobs in manufacturing were lost (Kidd, 2006) which only furthered the 'post-industrial decline in the North' where the 'divide between the North and the South became the most noticeable.' (RWinvest, 2022)

Manchester – The People

Manchester holds a reputation for a community of 'Mancunians' who are prideful, 'passionate', and known for "never mincing their words" (ILoveMCR, 2014). They will always tell you that it 'happened in Manchester first' and have a 'spirit of dogged independence' sometimes expressed in the 'form of arrogant exuberance' and sometimes described as 'indifference to what the rest of the world thinks.' (Peck & Ward, 2002) Mancunians are a beacon of togetherness, and after the terrorist attacks of 96 and 2017 they only showed how 'local communities' that attempt to 'respond to an urban crisis are critical to successful city branding'. (Williams, Batho, & Russell, 2000) From the 2017 terrorist attack came the 'brand adoption of one of Manchester's oldest civic symbols – the worker bee'. The spread of the bee after the bombing 'contributed to a politics of post-terror togetherness' (Merrill & Lindgren, 2021) and showed people all over the world the spirit of Mancunian people and the strength in community across Manchester. The bee has since gone on to become a firm symbol of Manchester's identity, often features in logos and branding across the city and shared globally.

Manchester – The Regenerated City

Manchester city centre has 'undergone extensive regeneration' throughout the 2000s (Hartwell, Hyde, & Pevsner, 2004), with 'the team working to promote Manchester as a place to live, work and visit.' The council 'seek to grow Manchester's business base', 'support improved infrastructure, residential development, leisure and cultural amenities' in order to 'encourage growth and build on success.' (ManchesterCityCouncil, Regeneration, n.d.)

Major examples of successful regeneration include Printworks – 'the number one spot in the heart of Manchester' (Printworks, 2022), The Corn Exchange – a grade 2 listed building which brands itself as a 'modern leisure venue' (Exchange, 2022) which encompasses everything Manchester wants to stand for – a regenerated mix of history and modernity, showcasing a variety of eateries, shopping, and entertainment areas.

Manchester, also famous for its shopping, hosts the Arndale, the UK's 'biggest inner-city shopping centre' (ManchesterArndale, 2022) and the Trafford Centre. In the late 1990s focus shifted 'towards strong urban regeneration-led focus, with cities pioneering the link between retail and urban regeneration as a central component of a strategy focused on the development and promotion of successful places.' (Lowe, 2005) Manchester, like many others, took this and created whole areas of the city dedicated to entertainment, shopping, and leisure to help drive their city brand, attract locals, tourists, and potential residents.

Manchester's team are working to pursue 'major development projects to regenerate the city centre, attract investment and support business growth.' (ManchesterCityCouncil, Regeneration, n.d.) These projects include creating 'The Factory' – a new creative space for

the city centre. With there being “competition among cities to attract inward investment, multinational corporate presence, tourists and the ‘creative class’” (Florida R. , 2002) Manchester’s plans to invest in a ‘world-class cultural destination and centre for artistic production’ will be very successful in attracting this ‘creative class’. Cities must ‘attract the new ‘creative class’ with hip neighbourhoods, an arts scene and a gay-friendly atmosphere’, where ‘urban fortunes increasingly turn on the capacity to attract, retain and even pamper a mobile and finicky class of ‘creatives’, whose aggregate efforts have become the primary drivers of economic development.’ (Florida R. , 2003) The Factory, among many other hubs like it in surrounding cities, will ‘open up new creative opportunities for local artists and residents from across the city.’ ‘A landmark building like no other, it is designed to host everything from major concerts to intimate performances, immersive theatre, exhibitions and installations.’ The space is expected to attract up to 850,000 visitors per year and will reinforce the city’s status as a ‘centre for culture and creativity’ – adding ‘1,500 full time jobs’ and up to ‘£1.1 billion’ to Manchester’s economy within a decade. (ManchesterCityCouncil, The Factory - a new creative space for the city centre, 2022) This will only add to the growing economy in Manchester, which grew over 2.3% above the national average between 2002-2012.

Another initiative keeping Manchester attractive across the globe is its inclusion of Green Belt, a policy to ‘contain urban growth to reduce urban sprawl in order to protect the identity of outlying communities and to preserve countryside’. In doing this Manchester keeps the interests of its residents locally in mind, ensuring they don’t lose their homes to urban sprawl. Part of this green strategy also includes a sustainable transport strategy for 2040 where there will be ‘90% of morning peak transport to be made on foot, bike, or public transport. This will create cleaner air, lower emissions, less congestion and better, more affordable, and accessible public transport’. (Council, City Centre Transport Strategy for 2040, 2023)

The attraction to the city only seems to be growing, with Ancoats an area voted most recently ‘one of the world’s coolest neighbourhoods’ (Callow, 2022). To ensure the interest continues to grow both nationally and globally the government proposed the High Speed 2 (HS2) a ‘new high speed north-south railway’ which ‘aims to improve connectivity and journey times, creating jobs and supporting the economy’. (Council, High Speed Two (HS2), 2023) Due to open by 2033 the railway will allow the divide between the North and South to begin to close. With more people working from home, it would allow people to travel to and from London and Manchester much faster at less cost.

The Challenges of Regeneration

An issue facing Manchester’s regeneration plans lies with the locals and residents. Being named ‘the 4th most deprived local council in England’ (Government, 2010), locals have been pushed from the city centre into Greater Manchester. Residents living in areas undergoing regeneration feel that their quality of life is affected. From ‘problems associated with relocation, demolition, environmental quality, complexity, funding issues, uncertainty, frustration, fear for the future and consultation fatigue’, the process of regeneration can itself directly result in ‘immediate and potentially lasting negative effects for local communities.’ (Davidson, McGuiness, Greenhalgh, Braidford, & Robinson, 2013) Despite Manchester being known as ‘Europe’s most affordable city’ in 2013 (Moonen & Clark, 2013), regeneration efforts could hike prices for locals. As discussed by the University of Lisboa, ‘providing affordable housing in cities undergoing mass regeneration is a troubled tryst.’ (Branco & Alves, 2015) But cities like Manchester need to be careful not to lose their local

community's respect as 'residents are important for maintaining neighbourhood brand identity' (Zavattaro, 2019) and without them, the fundamentals of a city would collapse.

A major criticism for regeneration in the UK is that 'it's created corporate uniformity in our towns and city centres.' Locals feel that cities all have a similar goal – 'uniformity at the expense of individuality'. (Haslam, 2002) It is discussed how people fear the city is in danger of being 'sold off to the big corporations and property developers', with 'loft apartments selling for close to a million pounds...while less than two miles away there are vacant properties, boarded-up houses, whole streets with a value of next to nothing.' It's presented that 'conflict and gaps in wealth have always been in the city. But the new wave of urban regeneration has exacerbated not solved this problem.' (Haslam, 2002)

Despite Manchester's best efforts, there are basic foundations missing within the city that hamper its success. With crime and drug use rising, and Manchester 'scoring highly in many indicators of social disease: teenage suicide, school exclusions and poverty', it is no wonder that a lot of locals migrate to the south of England hoping for success. Haslam discusses how 'there are plenty of people around who have the impetus, talent and desire' to succeed, but to reach that success 'they have to go to London' where 'the power stays.' Manchester has the beginnings of infrastructure to support already successful people, with modern apartments, shopping centres and lots of leisure facilities, but it struggles to 'harness the talent' of the youth and 'keep it in the north' (Haslam, 2002).

The ICON Model - Integrated

The Integrated dimension of the ICON model reflects 'that place brand endeavours rely on a wide range of stakeholder groups.' An integrated approach to place branding 'involves high levels of inter-agency collaboration' as well as 'collaborative public-private sector programmes.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017) Literature in the field is clear, 'in an environment as diverse and ever changing as a city, no singular agency, organisation, institution or team of professionals can adequately undertake a brand exercise.' (Dinnie, Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice, 2016)

An interview with the Communications Manager of Marketing Manchester, a key stakeholder in the city, who covers consumerism, conferences, investment, study, and migration told how the biggest stakeholders within the city consisted of their company, two football clubs, the shopping centres, local museums and arenas, the airport and the two universities. Of which all are working together to 'promote Manchester as a place to live, work, study and stay.' (Johns, 2023)

'The development of a city brand is a complex undertaking that requires the collaboration and cooperation of a vast range of organisations and individuals, within both the public and private sectors.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017) Marketing Manchester works with the other stakeholders in the city by 'connecting teams in order to tell the same story which will drive people into Manchester and the surrounding areas.' (Johns, 2023) Through collaborative campaigns across the city about events happening across Manchester they use their relationships to drive locals, tourists, students and potential residents in and around the city centre and greater Manchester to ensure all businesses benefit from high footfall. With 'cities offering a natural setting to capitalize on the influence and exposure of these partners' Manchester is doing well to 'initiate city branding activities by bringing them all under the same tent.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017)

The ICON Model - Contextualised

The Contextualised dimension of the ICON model encompasses the importance of 'stakeholder needs and capabilities' along with the 'importance of matching the values of target audiences.' To have a successful city brand, city officials must 'grant a reasonable degree of empowerment' to 'professionals on the ground' like 'marketing, communications and PR staff.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017)

Marketing Manchester act as the 'professionals on the ground' throughout Manchester. Johns explained how 'they work with local councils and governments to decide the narrative of the city'. The councils and governments trust their relationship with the company enough to know that they are presenting not only the wants of tourists but also the needs of residents.

These organisations work well together and align their goals to suit the needs of their target audiences through using the power of councils and governments to create things like new airline routes. Johns explained how pre-pandemic these organisations didn't work as well together as 'there was a much larger focus on international markets and tourism, however, since then the focus has rested much more domestically, improving the lives of residents as well as encouraging a city that invites tourism.'

The ICON Model - Organic

The Organic dimension of the ICON model discusses that a 'blend of planned and unplanned activities must take place in a branding endeavour' but ultimately 'policy should be rooted in the place's identity and culture.' It implies that 'policy makers should accept that a place brand evolves not only through deliberate manipulation by established authorities, but also in unexpected and unplanned ways that are beyond the control of official decision makers.' They should 'welcome' this idea rather than resent it as it is subject to a 'plethora of activities and incidents that may be planned or unplanned.' (Warren & Dinnie, 2017)

Cities like Manchester benefit from a lot of unplanned activities that encourage their positive branding. From football match results to street performances the city holds space for communities to come together and create narratives that benefit the branding of the city, including social media tags and trending hashtags bringing Manchester into people's lives all over the world.

However, Manchester has also seen the negatives of this space as proven by the terrorist attacks that plagued the city in 96 and 2017. Terrorist attacks not only 'shock tourists' utility' but have the potential to 'change the image profile of the destinations' with possible 'strongly negative impacts on image and attractiveness.' (Arana & Leon, 2008)

From this it is important for cities to have reputation and policies that are established in the face of adversity. For Manchester, after the attacks in 2017, they used the opportunities created by locals to create a brand identity through the community of the worker bee. After the attacks in Manchester and the Pandemic, Johns described how 'it is important for the city to encourage different relationships that would support them in times of adversity and encourage the city brand to continue climbing in its positive brand stance.' He recommended that the city would begin to build a relationship again with New York through a cities-to-

cities partnership as they did pre-pandemic, whilst also using communities created locally to support initiatives and create incentivised support.

The ICON Model - New

The New dimension of the ICON model ‘emphasises that cities must not lose sight of the need for innovative products, services and experiences.’ These innovative practices ‘offer the potential for creating intangible new place-related narratives’ and can also take form in newly built environments. (Warren & Dinnie, 2017)

Johns explained how the Manchester brand is only just beginning. From recovering after terrorism and the Pandemic, the city has only just begun to create space for innovation. “Building after the pandemic meant a lot more focus on the domestic UK and Ireland market, however now the long-term markets are beginning to return we are seeing space for new, future markets in the USA and India which will be huge drivers of tourism to Manchester. We expect that soon we will also partner with Japan with direct flight routes’, allowing space for a more culturally diverse tourism market opens a more culturally diverse population.

Manchester is also working to round off all the previous work between stakeholders, Johns mentioned the ABID – accommodation business improvement district where hotels will offer people ‘to stay for £1 per night per room’, in turn ‘filling hotels and allowing a fund of money to go into a pot to be put towards new events that will continue to drive interest from around the globe, fill hotels and create profit for businesses around the city, encouraging investment in business and communities.’

The ICON Model - Conclusion

The ICON model allows cities to ‘leverage urban planning, economic development, resident engagement strategies, stakeholder management and long-term strategic vision’ alongside ‘promotional campaigns’ that ‘position a city in the minds of residents, visitors, and potential investors’ both at home and abroad. (Warren & Dinnie, 2017) Manchester is the example of a successful city brand that leverages these connections to create communities that re-invest into where they live and that convert visitors into returning or moving to the city. However, the city and its stakeholders need to be mindful of what residents want to see from the city in future. They risk pushing locals out of the city through mass regeneration in local areas and from this could lose the spark and community created from ‘Mancunians’ which have created so much history that has shaped Manchester’s reputation. More grass-root incentives like improving schools and community safety projects could help those in local areas know they are not forgotten.

Appendix:

Figure 1 – The ICON Model

Source: (Dinney, Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice, 2016)



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