

# Emirate of Abu Dhabi Brand Marketing Strategy – Travelers Welcome

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Received: June 11, 2019

Accepted: July 15, 2019

Online Published: July 26, 2019

doi:10.5539/mas.v13n8p57

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/mas.v13n8p57>

## Abstract

Throughout the past century, the United Arab Emirates' leadership realized the significant importance of initiating novel and innovative strategies to market themselves and contribute in their successful position among the global network, thus their obligation was to employ both short and long term strategies that help in the process of successful promotion, insertion and enhanced situation in the foreign market. Highlighting Abu Dhabi as the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and distinguishing it from the rest of the country, Dubai in particular, was the crucial vision of Al Sheikh Zayed Al Nahayan. Where the collaborative emirate's leadership had the potential to mark Abu Dhabi as "the global capital city" (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, 2007).

This research discusses place-branding and marketing of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, where the emirate's brand marketing strategies relies on the desert, sea, heritage and the city as key elements towards placing the capital of the United Arab Emirates on the global map, in addition to improving the reputation of the middle east in general and Abu Dhabi in specific, through presenting two study cases: Masder City and Saadiyat Island, which are viewed as vivid examples of the emirate of Abu Dhabi brand marketing strategies implementation focus.

**Keywords:** place-branding, place-marketing, Abu Dhabi, Masder City, Saadiyat Island, strategies

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the eighties of the past century branding management concept took a new track, where the value of the organization's assist taken from its brand value. Branding as a mere principle is wider than a certain name, logo and slogan, it much more about the long term integrated efforts, skills, vision and competences (Kapferer, 2008).

Many goals could be behind adopting a place brand marketing strategies. However, the competitiveness is the key objective all the time, whether it is related to economic, tourism, or investments. (van Gelder, 2008) in his research about how to utilize the place branding strategies efficiently, he categorized the reasons to spend millions of dollars of the gross domestic income GDI of the countries, cities, and regions around the globe to brand themselves: Places are in front to on hard competition with the surrounding other places for instance the biggest European cities which compete each other to be the first choice to the tourists, investors, exhibitors and innovators. Places are about going into new stages of urbanizing and economic development such as Toronto. Places with back warded economic, business and international institutions, and in order to redress the situation and avoid a close crisis like the state of Ohio in the United States. (Ward, 1998) had discussed the cases of the old cities and towns which utilize the place bran strategies in redress themselves against the reduced industries, tourism and commercial, Atlanta relay on its brand marketing as the key element of its development. Places that already underwent an economic, cultural, or social crisis and it is late to redress the situation but to surpass the ramifications, nevertheless, the most appropriate solution is to intensively innovate a new identity and to address a new brand of the future image of the place like Detroit city at the state of the Michigan in the United States of America. To sum up branding a place could be defined as a fare future endeavor and it is a collaborative of persistent and creative procedures to shape the brand f a certain place (van Gelder, 2008).

Abu Dhabi is the federal capital city of the United Arab Emirates, owned 90% of the UAE's petroleum derivatives and natural gas reservoirs, and it is ranked in the sixth place of the oil exporter around the globe (Hazime, 2011), according to the United Nation World Urbanization prospects the population of the emirate of Abu Dhabi by the 2019 will be around 1420000 ([worldpopulationreview.com](http://worldpopulationreview.com)), and with 67430 km<sup>2</sup> the emirate forming 87% of the total geographic area of the United Arab Emirates.

Due to the studies that had been done in the 1990, after 30 years of consuming the raw petroleum the United Arab Emirates reservoirs will be drought (Zeineddine, 2017), in the case of the Emiratis countries the Gross Domestic Income was relying totally on exporting the oil products that time, hence there was a crucial need to innovate new strategies to redress the situation and because of the huge competition of the international country branding endeavors, the emirate of Abu Dhabi decided to follow the steps of the Emirate of Dubai through the Abu Dhabi's government vision 2030 "National Vision for thorough transformation, focusing on a society that rises up to the 21st challenges and implies economic diversification" the leaders of the emirate aimed to international visibility, thus the government started to plan for the emirate branding strategies through generating the Office of the Brand of Abu Dhabi OBAD (Hashim, 2012).

## 2. Literature Review

The global phenomenon of place branding and place marketing

The concept of branding places has been evolved many years ago, when the nations attained political independence, religious liberty and provided numerous investment and economic chances in order to attract inhabitants and investors to their places (Dinnie, 2015). When the world started got the trend of places branding, tourism was a vital cause to this phenomenon.

The beginning of the 1990s witnessed an expansion in the principles of nation branding, researchers and scholars took on the place-branding and place-marketing terms in their studies (Kotler & Gertner, 2002), those two principles are highly correlated, where the success of a place-brand is a result of the place-marketing strategies for sure. In the book by (ward, 1998) that is titled: "The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities", the author defined place-marketing as "a broad entrepreneurial ethos or ideology which, at specific times, has permeated the common affairs of particular places". in his book, (ward, 1998) has broadly talked about the cities, towns that had thrived through their social, cultural, geographic and infrastructural resources aiming at achieving the goal of their place-brand and marketing, which is the economic development. Towns and cities that were mentioned to distinguish their brand-marketing strategies of development are categorized in the book as: industrial and postindustrial cities, sanatorium cities and the outskirts.

Many factors influence the effectivity of brand-marketing strategies in any place around the world (Gelder, 2008); first of all, and the most difficult to achieve, is the coherence among the stakeholders, where bringing them to the discussion table to set a concrete point of view of the place brand is rare and hard to be accomplished. Secondly the competences of those stakeholders in innovating marketing strategies, the more experienced stakeholders the more likely to be branding successful. Thirdly the experimentation attitude of the stakeholders, where accepting the idea of failing and to be persistent and try again is a key factor of reaching the desired outcomes. Finally; places with more structural assortment such as culture and businesses are naturally more likely to have successful brand-marketing strategies.

## 3. Abu Dhabi "Travelers Welcome"

The 1950s posed a crucial transforming point of time in the Abu Dhabi whereabouts; before that time, the emirate was a city of around 4000 citizens who used to live a very simple lifestyle, with tents for homes or balm-leaves ceiling houses, these citizens' main nutrition source depended on domestic daily fishing, and the city's economy was limited to domestic farming in inner oases. Nevertheless, and after signing contracts with the international oil excavation companies, the situation had totally changed; and by the of the 1960s, major development changes in the city were accompanied with the Gulf Cooperation council (GCC) creation, where the emirate of Abu Dhabi became at the top of the oil producing cities around the world. the development approaches that the leadership of the emirate had adopted throughout the next five years (after 1966) were massive and extensive regarding the aspects of the country's infrastructure; like the healthcare sector, education, sewage system and the road network and highways.

After the death of Al-Sheikh Zayed in 2004, massive changes to the city's regulations were made for the favor of refreshing the economy and attracting more and more skilled workers and foreign investments. The real-estate sector was most affected at that time where law of ownership changed in order to bring more assists to the market of the emirate (Hashim, 2012).

The tactics of marketing Abu Dhabi's brand included promoting the place via massive advertising campaigns and marketing channels like international magazines, billboards, promotion videos, and websites. Images of the city were printed on clothes and mugs and other souvenirs (see an example in figure 1) featuring different monuments of the city (Hashim, 2012).



Figure 1. Fridge Magnet Featuring Abu-Dhabi (Adapted from Worldwide Souvenirs website: <https://www.world-wide-gifts.com> )

#### 4. Abu Dhabi Brand-Marketing Strategies

When it comes to the international trend towards urban branding; Abu Dhabi set its brand-marketing strategies aiming at achieving a considerable value among other countries around the world, depicting the core ambitious of the emirate's leadership (Hazime, 2011). According to the Abu Dhabi's 2030 plan; the pillars of the city's brand-marketing are: empowering women, establishing sustainable domestic resources, activating the growth of the surrounding countries' economics (Zeineddine, 2017), magnetize foreign investments, adopt diversification principle through broadening the economic activities and markets, increase the country's productivity, developing the human resources through establishing better education and training institutions, and extending strategic economic domains: Energy, petrochemicals, metals, aviation, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, tourism, healthcare, transportation, logistics, high education, media, financial services, and telecommunication (Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030, [dpeportal.aedeconomy.ae](http://dpeportal.aedeconomy.ae)).

The office of the brand-marketing in Abu Dhabi (OBAD) concentrates on differentiating the emirate of Abu Dhabi from the emirate of Dubai, where the identity of Abu Dhabi was known in the past for being the conservative neighbor of Dubai, whereas for the identity of Dubai is the city of superlatives (Beauregard, 2003). The ambition was to address the new identity of the country as "the country's livable, cultural and sustainable capital". Thus, the main duties of the OBAD were helping both the private and the governmental sectors to realize the core value and the vision statement of the emirate's brand, and clarifying their role by collaborating to support the branding strategies.



Figure 2. Abu Dhabi "Travellers welcome" initiative's logo (Adapter from Abu Dhabi's Tourism Authority's website: <https://web.tifs.com.au> )

The logo shown in figure 2 depicts the "traveler's welcome" initiative. The OBAD chose the desert, sea, heritage and the city to be the key elements of the emirate's identity shaping, from the proposed logo it is obvious that the traditional fingerprint formed the front face of the logo yet the English for the foreigner audience, Reem Al Shammery the general manager of the office of the brand of Abu Dhabi OBAD, says.

#### 5. Innovation Strategies

Building of a successful brand is indeed need for further more than mere branding campaigns, the effective communication with the local and international communities is essential, such as innovations and humanitarian aids. Where the value of the innovations is taken from brands, where audience usually interact with a certain innovation in a collusive way with its brand (Kapferer, 2008).

In his book, (Dinnie, 2015) discussed the reasons behind adopting the nation's brand-marketing strategies in the United Arab Emirates and in the emirate of Abu Dhabi in specific, where creating the country's glory would help enhance the reputation of the region as it is suffering from conflicts, civil wars, political disturbance and natural

hazardous. The UAE's leadership realized that relying on the cultural trigger and heritage for the country branding would be more efficient in addition to other branding strategies, and its success will be guaranteed. Taking a close look to the humanitarian aids that the United Arab Emirates afford and the various innovations that the government of the emirate of Abu Dhabi as the federal capital of the UAE launches, the vision statement of those innovations always includes "to improve the country's reputation around the world".

## 6. Global Visibility

Through the global visibility strategies that the United Arab Emirates and the emirate of Abu Dhabi specifically had executed, the country's position around the world has been shaped and settled down, through participation in international and local memberships and participations, like the commercial councils and organizations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League and Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), and also the United Arab Emirates represented, through Abu Dhabi, the federal capital city that was considered among the most generous countries in the world in 2014 and 2015, where it is a member in the united nation.

Abu Dhabi represents the most comprehensive sovereign wealth funds with assets reaching up to 627 billion dollars (Dinnie, 2015), which makes the UAE the second privileged sovereign wealth funds across the world.

### 6.1 Architecture Branding Strategies

The urban planning initiative that is launched by the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Executive Council, as an immediate executing of the initiative's outlines the urban planning council that was created in 2007, and comes as an extension to the vision of 2030, where Abu Dhabi city's urban planning framework was generated.

Starchitects from all over the world collaborated to plan and implement the emirate's brand marketing strategies, and each of them have the goal of sculpturing their work in history and to attain esteemed portfolio. Although each of the starchitects have a unique signature in their work, building of the projects was designed according to the local heritage, with regard to the brand vision of Abu Dhabi to be the perfect destination to cultural seekers.

### 6.2 Tourism Branding Strategies

In order to follow the pervious European countries tourism strategies, the emirate of Abu Dhabi's leadership commanded to generate the Abu-Dhabi Tourism Authority (ADTA), where the main vision statements of ADTA are; bringing different brands to the city, and commanding the international starchitects with the unique and creative ideas and create innovative and skilled teams. The goal of the ADTA was to reach three million travelers by the year 2015, and they achieved it. And the significant focus of its plans and strategies are on the elites of the country visitors and tourists, where the leisure places and destinations in the emirate of Abu Dhabi registered about 20% of the total emirates' tourists, the mission was to increase the percentage to 40% (Hashim, 2012), by focusing on the aviation sector, real estate, cultural heritage destinations, and execute promoting campaigns, thus increase the hotels capacities and the infrastructure facilities in the emirates

## 7. The Study Cases

The emirate of Abu Dhabi's branding strategies evolved around many aspects of urban branding; such as sustainability performance, innovations, tourism and the cultural perspective. However, the folds of the most two significant project among the numerous place-brand marketing strategies' initiatives carry many of the sub strategies of the emirate's branding and marketing as the promising future to the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) and the middle east region would have an esteemed place among the global map in the future.

### 7.1 Masdar City

In 2008, Abu Dhabi's Government launched Masdar City initiative as "the first city ever with zero co2-zero waste" (Hannallah, & Faragallah, 2009). Masdar City aims to be the most sustainable city in the world by balancing the social, environmental and economic components, also working on every component to minimize the Carbone Dioxide emissions.

Masdar City located in Masdar district, 30 km away from Abu Dhabi's down town, the political and resource capital of The UAE. This Eco-city was planned on a 7 km<sup>2</sup> area, and it has the potential to host up to 40000 residents and 50000 business commuters by 2025. All the aspects of the city were designed perfectly, the technological channels, experimental institutions, sustainable material that the city buildings are made of, the building designs were inspired from the heritage of the United Arab Emirates country, laboratories were built to create breaking edge green technologies, and with the existence of more than 350 business companies; the city is considered as the educational, innovational, commercial, and cultural eco-city that indeed contribute to the emirate of Abu Dhabi's globalization (Kolotouchkina & Seisdodos, 2018).

### 7.2 Saadiyat Island (Abu Dhabi's Cultural District)

Under the vision of Al Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and according to the office of the brand-marketing of Abu Dhabi (OBAD) duties, the Saadiyat Island was launched with the cooperation with the local construction sector, where Tourism Development Investment Company (TDIC) is the real estate developer of the project. The Saadiyat Island was meant to be the first cultural and tourism destination in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, with its strategic location and infrastructure; the project is expected to achieve the ultimate potential outcomes of the branding strategies on the emirate's level, the island will contain four significant museums; Zayed National museum, Louver Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and Maritime Museum. In addition to the museums there will be schools, art center, a Biennale Park with 19 pavilions and the Saadiyat Marina.

The project's due time will be in 2020, with 19km long beach (Hazime, 2011) and sustainable infrastructure, will for sure represent an essential mixture of the emirate branding vision; having 8000 residential villas and around 38000 flats (Hazime, 2011), in addition to cultural tourism, commercial and leisure facilities. According to the "Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, 2007; The Saadiyat Island represents "environmentally sensitive tourist destination, and an international cultural destination".

The project's core vision comes according to the core vision of the emirate "travelers welcome"; where the office of the brand of Abu Dhabi officially announced that the targeted audience of the Saadiyat Island cultural project are those travelers who have the passion to live other cultures full experiences, wherever the destination and whatever the expenses are, they are as the OBAD called them "The Cultural Seekers" (OBAD website). The map depicted in figure 3 shows the location of Masdar city and Saadiyat Island in the Emirate of Abu-Dhabi.



Figure 3. Map of Abu-Dhabi showing the location of Saadiyat Island (number 7 on the map) and Masdar city (number 10 on the map) (adapted from the OdyFolio Tourism website: <https://www.odyfolioemirates.com/>)

### 8. Conclusion

Cities, towns, countries and regions that strive to acquire competitiveness across the whole world, are accommodating to all possible globalization circumstances. Many globalization obstacles related to financial overflows, external investments, and creative innovations shape main pillars for innovative strategies that must be effectively adopted by leading countries to encourage and support sustainable economic growth and position themselves successfully in this massive global competition. Abu Dhabi, the capital city, encountered different challenges regarding planning its brand-marketing strategies and implementing those plans.

The major concern of Abu Dhabi emirate's leadership is to distinguish themselves from their neighbor: Dubai; thus focusing on the sustainability development was the core of the emirate's branding vision, they chose to be known internationally as the sustainable, cultural, and traditional city instead of being the other image of the unsuitable, superlatives and hippie city as Dubai emirate's branding strategies. However, the lack of the natural terrain and the poor human resources were among the significant challenges that the leadership of the Abu Dhabi Emirate faces.

Focusing on the sustainability performance, cultural heritage, innovations, green technologies invention and attracting skilled workers and unique competences to be among the essentials of the emirate's brand-marketing strategies was a key element to reaching the potentiated globalization level and to occupy the international esteemed place among other international cities and countries.

Two proposed vital cases of Abu Dhabi's brand vision were Masdar City: "the zero-carbon zero-waste city" which represents the educational, cultural, commercial and residential aspects of the emirate's brand, and the Saadiyat Island which will be the first destination to the cultural tourism aspects of the branding vision.

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