

What is city image advertising in China: A comprehensive definition and classifications of city image advertising from both the perspectives of scholars and practitioners

Since 1999, the year when the first city image advertisement was broadcasted on China Central Television (CCTV) in Weihai, Shandong province, city image advertising has become one of the most used means employed by the local authorities to cope with the increasing competition among cities inside and outside of China. Despite the extensive use in practices and scholarly discussion on city image advertising in China, a unified and comprehensive definition of the subject is lacking, and two essential research gaps remain. Firstly, existing studies either define city image advertising in China from the perspective of city branding or city marketing by following the definition given in Western countries, but ignore the possibility of defining such subject from advertising. More importantly, as the existing definitions of city image advertising in China are merely based on academic knowledge from the scholarly discussion, the practitioners' ideas are absent.

This paper, firstly, reviews the literature on city image advertising outside and inside of China, and categorises the scholars' definitions of city image advertising into six criteria from the perspective of advertising studies, namely, product category, target audiences, purposes, media outlets, geographical regions and advertisers. Then, the paper moves its focus to the practitioners' perspective. By analysing the interviews conducted with advertisers and directors involved in the production of Guangzhou's city image advertisements, the paper adds the categories of mobilisable resources and room for creativity. As a result, the author argues that the city image advertising in China can be classified into four types, namely: city branding advertising, government image advertising, city image advertising for specific purposes and other city image advertising, with the support of eight criteria from the perspectives of scholars and practitioners.

By presenting a comprehensive definition and classifications of city image advertising in China, this paper contributes to the academic knowledge in two ways. Firstly, it expands the mainstream understanding of city image advertising in city branding and city marketing perspectives to the perspective of advertising. Secondly, by adding the practitioners' perceptions on Chinese city image advertising, the paper bridges the gap between academic knowledge and advertising practices and further contributes to the understanding of the subject.