Place Marketing and the Image of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio

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Master of Arts in Geography

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III ANALYSIS OF THE PLACE IMAGE OF NORTHEAST OHIO</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV PLACE MARKETING IN NORTHEAST OHIO</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V CONCLUSION</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 – Study Area Map</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 – Elements of Place Marketing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 – Actors Involved in Place Marketing</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 – Outsider Perception of Northeast Ohio</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 – Outsider Sources of Perception</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 – Positive Perception Reasoning</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 – Negative Perception Reasoning</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 – Local Perception of Northeast Ohio</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 – Perception of Northeast Ohio Comparison</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 – Positively Cleveland Logo</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 – Positively Cleveland Poster Example</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 – Akron/Summit CVB Logo</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 – Downtown Akron Partnership Logo</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 – Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance Regional Map</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 – Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance Regional Map</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 – Types of Place Marketing Strategies</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 – Place Image Variables</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 – Place Image Results</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 – Place Image Scores</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My passion for Cleveland, Akron, and Northeast Ohio led to the idea of this project. In the spring of 2010, I felt as if there was a missing element of research in geography, one which brings together the ideas of place image and place marketing, with the addition of modern high-tech communication. It did not take long for me to develop a feasible research situation with Northeast Ohio as my study area. As I have told many of my peers, I want to do something with this research, and I personally refuse to give up on this region.

Without the continual enthusiasm from my colleagues, friends, and family, I would not have been able to make it to this point. First, I want to thank Dr. David Kaplan, my adviser. His guidance and persistence allowed for me to complete this project in a timely and efficient manner. Although he has been teaching in Paris during the last semester of my graduate studies, he always stayed in touch and pushed me to defend my thesis as early as possible. It has been an honor to work with him. I also want to thank my committee members Dr. Tom Schmidlin and Dr. Emariana Taylor for their added support and extreme passion for this research topic. Thank you, Dr. Taylor, for joining my committee on rather short notice. My entire committee’s interest and guidance made this process very enjoyable and rewarding.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Background Information

Deindustrialization has left former manufacturing centers of the United States and Europe with the negative perception of being empty, depressed, and financially burdened. Former industrial centers lost their superiority in the national economy when manufacturing was hit severely by the international Kondratieff recession that impacted domestic and foreign markets, starting in the 1960s. The general decline of Fordist manufacturing production, foreign competition, oil price instability, and lack of municipal revenues forced the massive outmigration of manufacturing jobs and residents (Harvey 1989; Johnson 2002; and Wilson and Wouters 2003).

As manufacturing jobs disappeared, residents migrated to more economically viable locations, leading to population losses in many of the major cities in the Rust Belt of North America. One of the most striking examples of population loss is Detroit. The city had a peak of 1,849,568 residents in 1950, and the population has declined drastically to 713,777 in 2010. Similarly, from 1950 to 2010, Cleveland lost 57 percent of its population, Pittsburgh lost 55 percent, and Chicago lost 26 percent. Similar percentages are evident in smaller industrial centers such as Gary, Indiana; Akron, Canton, Toledo and Youngstown, Ohio; and Buffalo, New York (Census 2010). As a
result, regional populations shrank or gained only slightly, and local tax revenues declined, leading to deteriorating inner cities and a negative post-industrial image of these metropolitan areas.

Northeast Ohio, which includes Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown, is prime example of a Rust Belt region with economic troubles and an agenda of reinvention and image reversal. Two decades into Northeast Ohio’s transformations, I attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What are the images that people hold of a region like Northeast Ohio today? (2) How is the metropolitan region promoted internally and externally to tourists, investors, and potential businesses? (3) Are the image deficiencies and positive images addressed in the marketing programs?

An efficient evaluation of a place marketing campaign requires a solid understanding of the place’s current awareness and image, as well as its desired image (Avraham and Ketter 2008). Taking this into consideration, an analysis of resident and outsider images of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio will be required to answer my research questions. From the gathered place images, an examination of the regional marketing strategies will determine whether or not the marketing is properly attempting to create a more positive image. Improving the image of an old industrial region can attract tourists, appeal to inward investment and government officials, and build and maintain confidence among local residents (Bramwell and Rawding 1996; Avraham and Ketter 2008).
**Northeast Ohio Background Information**

The 16-county region of Northeast Ohio is located in the center of the former manufacturing belt of the lower Great Lakes, and contains land that is urban, suburban, and rural. Similar studies could be performed in other regions such as western Pennsylvania and metropolitan Pittsburgh, metropolitan Buffalo, metropolitan Detroit, or northern Indiana and metropolitan Gary, all of which have not yet fully recovered from their decline after deindustrialization. The Northeast Ohio region is unique because it contains many large cities with similar problems, all of which are beginning to realize these similarities and form larger regional collaborations. The population of the 16-county area exceeds four million (Cleveland Plus website). A regional marketing alliance called Cleveland Plus is dedicated specifically to marketing this exact sixteen-county region (Figure 1.1), which is a very important organization studied in this research.

![Study Area Map](Source: Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance)
Taking the entire region into consideration is important, but observing the central city of Cleveland is imperative. The media often considered Cleveland a “comeback city” in the 1990s, but the comeback has stalled. The image portrayed was of a shining example of rebirth in the industrial heartland, but recently, population loss, unemployment in the regional economy, high local tax rates, and political corruption have reversed this. A rising need for social services, deteriorating and failing inner city schools, and the foreclosure crisis have worsened the city’s image in the last few years (Morrison 2009).

Throughout the region, other anchor cities such as Akron, Canton, and Youngstown are dealing with similar issues, which transcends into regional problems. These cities are the center of Ohio’s new post-industrial economy (Smyth 2010). As a result, partnerships in marketing and branding the entire region have developed over the past decade. For example, several Cleveland-area business organizations were consolidated – Cleveland Tomorrow (leading CEOs), the Greater Cleveland Growth Association (chamber of commerce), the Cleveland Roundtable (group focused on diversity issues), and the Council of Smaller Enterprises (small business organization) – into the Greater Cleveland Partnership, which is focused on economic development and conventions. Then, JumpStart (for start-up businesses), BioEnterprise (for life science companies), MAGNET (for manufacturing companies), Team NEO (recruiting organization), Positively Cleveland (CVB), and the Greater Cleveland Partnership recently began to partner to form a regional brand called the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance (Morrison 2009).
This thesis explores the effectiveness of place marketing in the old industrial region of Northeast Ohio by looking at how the strategies outlined in the literature are implemented. In one scenario, the old industrial region will have transformed its image from ‘depressed Rust Belt’ to an attractive place to live, work, and visit. In that scenario, however, the region could become overly attractive. An opposite scenario would be that the region’s image changes little, or becomes more negative.

This paper includes a total of five chapters. Chapter Two follows this introduction section, and contains a review of the literature concerning place image and perception, place marketing in old industrial regions, regional marketing alliances, and success of place marketing. Chapter Three explores the place image of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio through an analysis of computer mediated communication and news media sources, including Web forums, blogs, and a variety of Internet media. The results of this analysis reveal the current media image of the region in detail. Chapter Four contains information about the region’s current place marketing strategies and objectives through a discussion of five interviews with regional place marketers, as well as their marketing materials. Chapters Three and Four both begin with a description of the methods used in each analysis. The final chapter summarizes the findings of Chapters Three and Four, and concludes with a summary and future research implications.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Research in geography and its subfields contains a vast amount of information about the images and impressions of places. Some of the research deals with the psychology behind these images, but in the scope of this project, the focus was on scholarly work in fields of study related to geography. There is also a body of literature that exposes place marketing anywhere from focused tourism marketing or broader strategies with a goal of large scale regional economic development. However, no previous research was uncovered that explores the image of a place followed by an analysis of that place’s marketing efforts. This research takes a unique approach to analyzing place image and place marketing, and brings the two together to study one large formerly industrial region.

Place Image and Perception

A place image is the simplified, generalized, often stereotypical impression that people have of any place or area (Hall 2006). Former industrial cities and city-regions are facing an image crisis. Bad images, characterized by voids in architectural design and
cultural elements, are prominent in cities in old industrial regions in the United States, and Europe, such as Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The perception of these places is a significant issue in attempting to attract business investment, tourism, and resident relocation to these areas (Beinhart 2001). Since deindustrialization, these economically-challenged regions have begun to recognize the need to promote new positive images in the wake of the job and population loss (Hall 2006). The effects of globalization and deindustrialization have been most evident in former industrial cities, which are now attempting to re-image as a response to the negative images associated with their decline (Bramwell and Rawding 1996).

Place image has been a realized concept for centuries. The construction of place images has been considered a modern by-product, but in many ways, city and regional identities have always been an issue, and the differences in resident and outsider perception have been important in the way these places have been promoted. Travel and guidebooks in history portrayed images of places like Jerusalem, Mecca, and Italian cities. The vast majority of these books were created by visitors who attempted to account for what they witnessed in various places. The Italian books of “praise” were authored by local residents who wanted to promote their cities to outsiders and compete with other locations (Beinhart 2001).

The images of cities and city-regions have implications in urban and regional planning, suggesting that policymakers and marketers should pay attention to these views (Wood 1970). Perception and image studies in geography, however, have limitations, as they are concerned with attitudes, opinions, and impressions, all of which are difficult to
quantify. The advancement of geographic perception studies involves the borrowing of ideas from other disciplines, especially psychology and sociology (Wood 1970).

A place can have one or more of six images defined by Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993): positive, weak, negative, mixed, contradictory, or overly attractive. A positive image, although quite subjective and variable, exists when the overall impression shared by most people is ‘positive.’ The place may have flaws and not appeal equally in all aspects. However, the place can be represented positively to all others. It does not require image altering; rather its image can be amplified and delivered to the proper target groups.

A positive place image is sometimes viewed as a high measure of quality of life in a region, which proves to be difficult as there are many ways that quality of life can be measured. Virtually every conceivable quality has been discovered to be important in some study, but it is up to individual communities to determine which factors are most important to determine their quality of life (Herting and Guest 1985). The availability of amenities in a region can be related to quality of life and positive image. Amenities can be a non-exportable good or service that benefits employees, who are either residents or commuters. A higher quality of life, and availability of amenities, tends to offer a better perception of a place (Gottlieb 1994). Local residential satisfaction, along with quality of life, is one of the most powerful variables for explaining life satisfaction (Fried 1984). Community satisfaction is linked to housing, education, healthcare, and leisure services (Sirgy, Gao, and Young 2008).
Places with weak images can have virtually no image held by outsiders, or are generally not well known because of limited marketing, advertising, or small size. The place could have several attractive features, a thriving economy, and happy people, but the outside public’s awareness is limited. The limitation of image promotion can be intentional or unintentional. The intentional ‘hiding’ is often out of resentment and fear of overgrowth and destruction of pristine and valued areas. Several towns in coastal Maine share this ideology (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Negative images can stem from true problems or stereotypes. For example, Detroit is often touted as having one of the highest murder rates and worst economic conditions, leading to a negative image nationally and internationally. Certain aspects of a place may cause a negative image to exist to some people, such as pollution and congestion in the Los Angeles area, or the “cold and barren landscape” of North Dakota. A place with a negative image can attempt to promote a new image, but the positive image cannot be created if it continues to be the place that created the old negative image (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Mixed images are derived from a combination of positive and negative images. A place with a mixed image often disregards the negative in their image promotion, and promotes the positive images that exist. Similar to places with a mix of positive and negative images, some place images are contradictory in that people have opposing impressions about the location (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993). Some people view Pittsburgh as a polluted and dying city because of its former steel and coal industries, whereas others view the city as a clean-air and vibrant city that has re-invented itself
(Lynch 2009). Places with contradictory images can boast the positives so much that people stop holding the opposing and no-longer-accurate image. On the contrary, an overly attractive image can be a burden on a place if it results in too much growth and tourism in a short period of time. Places that are overly attractive can develop and overdevelop too fast, creating problems of pollution, inadequate services, and congestion or other inefficient infrastructure. Cities facing these problems have in some situations publicized negative images to discourage tourists and further resident influx (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Table 2.1 shows the different marketing strategies associated with these image demands. Las Vegas is one example of an “over-full” demand for tourism travel to a place, in which selective de-marketing may take place. The metro area saw rapid population growth and development from the 1990s until the Great Recession, resulting in this overly attractive image. On the contrary, when there is a full demand, the marketing must be maintained. A latent or hidden demand would call for a new marketing strategy to be developed. A place with a negative demand for travel may require a conversion of the marketing to something different. When there is no demand for tourism travel, some sort of stimulational material should be marketed to grasp people’s attention. And a faltering demand for travel may require a re-marketing campaign.
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<tr>
<th>Demand</th>
<th>Marketing Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent</td>
<td>Developmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Conversional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Stimulational</td>
</tr>
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<td>Over-full</td>
<td>Selective de-marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Types of Place Marketing Strategies (Ashworth and Voogd 1988)

*Insider vs. Outsider Images*

Place images and perceptions can vary amongst residents and outsiders, or as worded in some of the literature, ‘locals’ and ‘tourists.’ The outsiders can be people considering relocating, potential businesses, or tourist prospects. Most of the images that outsiders develop are in many ways a result of images created by marketers. In most cases, the views do not vary significantly, but locals and tourists tend to attribute different meanings and significance to each characteristic of a place (Beinhart 2001; Hughes and Allen 2008; Kianicka et al. 2006).

The meanings and characteristics of the image of Budapest were revealed by Puczko et al. (2007). The factors of Budapest’s image vary between the local, national, regional (Central and Eastern Europe), continental (the rest of Europe), and international. Local images are based on primarily attractions, whereas national and regional images are more based on Socialist heritage and cultural activities. Continental images of Budapest are based on heritage as well, but more specifically cultural and historical heritage. International images of Budapest involve attractions, entertainment (drinking,
nightlife, shopping), business venues, and world heritage sites. With the varying attachments to images of Budapest, it is difficult to determine variability in the image between these different geographies.

A case study by Kianicka et al. (2006) concluded that locals’ sense of place in Swiss alpine villages is primarily based on everyday life aspects; occupation, property, and social relationships. For tourists, the sense of place is generally based on the esthetics and characteristics of the place that are experienced through leisure activities. Hughes and Allen (2008) studied images held by visitors and non-visitors in Central and Eastern Europe and did not find significant differences in perception. However, similar to Kianicka et al. (2006), the visitors and non-visitors attach different values to each specific place characteristic.

Beinhart (2001) concluded that an important difference between resident and outsider images is that residents have access to a ‘shared meaning’:

“…It is this understanding that city designers need to tap into crafting city form… City designers may have little to do with the way cities promote themselves. It may not even matter. What is their obligation, however, is to use their skill, together with that of their fellow citizens, to nurture and resolve the many and often conflicted meanings of their own cities so that identity is, most importantly, a locally constructed and understood quality of good city life” (p. 32).

According to Beinhart, developing a shared positive sense of place for local residents is a step to be taken by planners, and external marketing can be left to political and career persuaders.
**Images of Old Industrial Regions**

In the post-Fordist era, emphasis on redevelopment and re-imaging has been noticeable in former manufacturing areas. Since the 1990s, many other old industrial cities of the Midwest and parts of Europe have redeveloped in ways similar to Cleveland, Ohio. The main emphasis of Midwest growth coalitions has been downtown revitalization and gentrification, including the transformation of the central business districts to services, sports stadia construction, the building of entertainment districts, and waterfront developments. The shift to services has been very noticeable in cities like Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Saint Louis, which all saw significant service job growth in the 1980s. White-collar and entrepreneurial markets emerged in older industrial cities, and with these new markets emerged a new need for new or refurbished residential spaced, finer dining, restored historic areas, and a prominent demand for a new urban culture (Wilson and Wouters 2003).

Several growth instruments have been used to finance these huge transformations; these include tax abatements, tax increment financing, historic preservation, public-private partnerships, urban enterprise zones, and high-tech incubator districts. These instruments created better economic climates for investment in the central business districts, but the progress made in redeveloping “Rust Belt” cities is sometimes considered a growth discourse. The growth of the 1980s and 1990s created uneven development, some residential displacement, and the growth of hopelessness and anger in
inner city neighborhoods. The image of many Rust Belt cities and metropolitan areas has improved, but many underlying social problems still exist (Wilson and Routers 2003).

With that said, a temporary image revival in a city like Cleveland does not always lead to a more permanent economic redevelopment success story. According to Burgess, Durack, and Hill (2001), the Rust Belt has been re-imaged in Cleveland through the transformations previously mentioned, but a sustainable transformation is still questionable. Cleveland was nicknamed the “comeback city” in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, and this image has somewhat deteriorated as the aesthetic redevelopments are now over a decade old. However, some are hopeful of a new comeback, as there is over one billion dollars in construction underway in and around Downtown Cleveland as of early 2011, including the Cleveland Medical Mart and Convention Center, Cleveland Horseshoe Casino, Flats East Bank redevelopment, and the new I-90 George Voinovich Bridge (Frolik 2010).

Similar approaches have been used to change the images of old industrial cities in Europe. Downtown areas in many British cities have been transformed into better places to live, work, and be entertained. New Castle’s nightlife marketing presents similar issues to the Midwest growth discourse. Although New Castle’s downtown nightlife has been upgraded, it is doing so at the expense of the city’s poorer residents who are being displaced. Similar to gentrified Midwestern cities in the United States, European cities are attempting to restructure their central business districts from an image standpoint, but there are still similar fundamental social problems in the cities that have not been successfully reversed (Hollands and Chatterton 2002).
**Image Promotion and Place Marketing**

Place images are manipulable, and this practice is common in the private and public realms of urban areas (Beinhart 2001). Ashworth and Voogd (1988) define place marketing as first defining a location or area as a place product, and then promoting it to meet the demands of identified “users” or “customers,” with an end goal of maximizing the social and economic functioning of that place in accordance to those established goals. On one hand, place images can be manipulated by place marketers without truly creating actual changes in that locality, and on the other hand, negative and misleading images may continue despite considerable changes that may have taken place (Hall 2006).

City and regional images are manipulated and promoted in the practice of place marketing, which has become a common attempt to attract residents, business investment, and tourists, as well as to build local moral and confidence. Bramwell (1994) defines place marketing as identifying an area as a place product, then promoting and developing the area to meet the expectations of “users.” The projected place images can be conceived as ideas and impressions of a place that people are able to consider, with an inherent goal of maximizing the social and economic functioning of an area.

In the marketplace of urban geographic regions (Figure 2.1), consumers represent a demand for a place. Target users, characteristics, behaviors, and the needs and wishes of consumers need to be considered. The place itself is a producer in this urban marketplace supply, and that includes the urban function, structure, processes, and policy goals (Ashworth and Voogd 1988).
In geography, research indicates that places can project certain images as a way of expressing the uniqueness of their environment, culture, and economy. Residents of these areas tend to prefer that the projected image promotes a unique identity, which could help people to understand their place and identify with it. The marketing can focus on tourism or destination marketing, business attraction and retention, resident attraction and retention, or general outside investment (Bramwell 1994; Bolton 1992; Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Pratt et al. 2010).

Place marketing has become important in old industrial regions in one sense that organizations realize that tourists’ place images emphasize overall satisfaction with their destination, which influences whether they intend to return and their expectations on future visits (Alegre and Juaneda 2006). Former industrial cities are recognizing that they are not promoting themselves to a single audience, but for a large distinctive market. Various regional authorities have formed campaigns in an attempt to make their regions into products, aiming to attract tourists, skilled professionals, and capital investment.
(Paasi 2002). Along with the diversity in market audience, a far wider range of organizations are now involved with the practice of place marketing. The spending of local development corporations and other image promoting organizations has also increased significantly since the 1980s (Hall 2006).

**Current Place Marketing Fundamentals**

In recent decades, places have changed their view of economic development to a new and broad set of strategies. Ad hoc campaigns of economic development have transformed into very powerful, complex, and broadened strategies of place marketing aimed at developing competitive markets (Naipaul et al. 2009; Bennet 1999; Barth 2001). There has been a rise of “Destination Marketing Organizations,” or DMOs, which aim to create a more positive image of these larger regions (Avraham and Ketter 2008).

After strategies are developed by these broad organizations, the implementation needs a specific target market. Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993) identify and explain four specific target markets for place marketing: visitors, residents and workers, business and industry, and export markets. The visitor market includes business visitors who attend meetings, conventions, and conferences. Visitors can also consist of non-business travelers and tourists. Marketing to residents and workers includes professionals, skilled workers, wealthy individuals, investors, entrepreneurs, and unskilled workers. The business and industry markets are comprised of industry, high-tech and service companies, and entrepreneurs. Export markets include other locations within the domestic market, as well as international markets.
The visitor market consists of tourists and business travelers. Every visitor spends money for lodging, food, and other visitor services, which adds value to the local economy in terms of income and employment, and tax revenues for local governments. The marketing to visitors can be accomplished through convention and visitor bureaus, sometimes referred to as tourism bureaus or visitor bureaus. The agencies responsible for marketing to potential visitors must decide on its target audience, the number of visitors it wants, and work to build the area’s infrastructure to accommodate the visitors they wish to attract (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Marketing to tourists must be careful in attracting specific people. Certain people and businesses may not be desired in a particular goal, thus the marketing should refrain from attempting to draw them. For example, a family-friendly suburban area may not want to attract compulsive gamblers, whereas Las Vegas would assuredly want this specific group to come. The “undesired” visitors are identified as those who might damage the environment, criminals, or those who would take away from or interfere with the indigenous population. Other issues from an over-reliance on tourism include a rise of low-paying service jobs, which are not as economically viable as other forms of business development (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

The next target market, potential residents and workers, is often place-specific. A city-region with an aging population may want to market to young professionals and families. On a smaller scale, a small town with a shortage of educated professionals such as physicians and dentists may market to that audience in hopes of attracting these residents. Incentives should be developed when attracting certain groups of people. For
example, young professionals may place emphasis on entertainment and night life, or families may place emphasis on schools and recreation (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Thirdly, marketing to attract business and industry is important for creating or maintaining an image of being business-friendly and economically strong. Attracting new, modern, and high-tech businesses, in theory, provides employment for citizens and tax revenues for governments. Strengthening a place’s economic base and improving its business climate image can be accomplished by retaining current (desirable) businesses, allowing existing businesses to expand, and providing entrepreneurs and other businesses an environment that is easy for business startup and relocation. Economic development agencies exist as non-profit companies in most states with a goal of attracting outside companies, often with many incentives (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

The final target market is exports. Some places have images associated with their significant export markets, for example: Florida oranges, Wisconsin cheese, Idaho potatoes, Maine lobster, and Tennessee whiskey. After establishing a positive image for a particular brand, a place can transfer the image to other product lines that are related. A key for a positive export market image in large cities and regions is diversification, whereas diversity may not be possible or necessary in small markets with limited resources (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

In these target markets, a number of actors play a role in marketing places. The geographic scale ranges from local to international. In metropolitan regions of the Rust Belt, local, local private sector, and regional actors collaborate amongst one another to market these entire regions. Table 2.2 shows the variety of entities who have an impact
of place marketing. Locally, there are publicly-funded entities at the city and county scale who market their jurisdictions. In addition, a number of local private sector units have a role in the place marketing process. Regional entities include multi-jurisdiction economic development agencies, tourist boards, and county/state governments. In the case of small European countries, national and international organizations, unions, and embassies can also play a role in marketing their respective locations, especially for tourism (Hughes and Allen 2008; Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

In all of the target markets, place marketing promotes positive images. Undesirable and older areas are not normally included as part of the image promotion (Holcomb 2001). In the marketing of old industrial cities, in particular, Ward (1998) adds that most of the attempted image portrayal does not stem from the uniqueness of the place, rather the marketing tends to parallel what competitors are doing. In this sense, the tendencies of image obfuscation can give outsiders a somewhat skewed, but often positive impression of a place.

More recently, the term branding has been applied to the marketing places. Geographic locations can be branded as a product. The product name, or brand name, is fixed by the name of the location, which can be a city, region, or state. The goal of place branding is to create a location that is enticing for temporary visits or permanent moves from people or businesses. The place brand can be marketed through advertisements, including most importantly online ads, and also billboards, posters, and ads in movies, airlines, lounges, and other visible places (Keller 2008).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Local Private Sector</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>International</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>Real Estate Developers</td>
<td>Regional Economic Development Agencies</td>
<td>Political Heads of Government</td>
<td>Embassies and Consulates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Real Estate Agents</td>
<td>Regional Tourist Boards</td>
<td>Various Ministries</td>
<td>International Chambers of Commerce</td>
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<td>Departments</td>
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<td>Business</td>
<td>Financial Institutions</td>
<td>County and State Government</td>
<td>National Unions</td>
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<td>Development</td>
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<td>Departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convention/Visitor Bureaus</td>
<td>Utility Infrastructure</td>
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<td>Public Information Bureaus</td>
<td>Chambers of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure Managers</td>
<td>Hospitality and Retail Industries</td>
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<td>Unions</td>
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<td>Taxi Companies</td>
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<td>Architects</td>
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Table 2.2. Actors Involved in Place Marketing (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993)

**Strategies of Place Marketing**

Contemporary city and regional marketing has developed as a way in which cities attempt to improve their competitive position in the market. In this context, the attractions of the city for investment are promoted to consumers, which in this case are potential investors, in competition with other cities. A city with profit can promote itself to its own residents as much as to outsiders (Ashworth and Voogd 1988).
Individual place marketing practices need to be examined in terms of their strategic marketing objectives, marketing planning processes, and specific marketing techniques (Bramwell and Rawding 1996). It is important to realize that marketing techniques may not in fact be true marketing; often the practices are more sales-oriented. True marketing of a place involves the marketer shaping some idea of what the consumer is perceived to want (Hall 2006). For instance, the Greater Cleveland Partnership devised a “Strategic Plan: 2008-2011”, with specific ‘marketing’ goals of appealing to the needs of potential consumers, i.e. investors, businesses, tourists, and its own residents.

A sales strategy involves persuading consumers to want what the seller is offering (Hall 2006). Place marketing with a sales-oriented approach can have several limitations. A city or regional alliance may attempt to attract residents and businesses because of a certain amenity, but selling amenities that are of little value to their potential consumers can prove to be useless. Baker and Palmer (2006) found that in one American Southwest metropolitan region, recreation was not important to many of its residents. In this case, ‘selling’ the recreation amenities would be a useless attempt to appeal to resident consumers. A good place marketing campaign would be one that is strategic and actually corrects social and economic issues in the region, and then promotes those positive aspects (Avraham and Ketter 2008).

Place marketing is practiced in terms of four broad strategies: image marketing, attraction marketing, infrastructure marketing, and people marketing. Image marketing involves the hiring of agencies or public relation firms to promote a positive image for the place. In a successful campaign, all four strategies can create a more positive image,
but the image strategy focuses strictly on that without marketing specific aspects of the place. One specific aspect, attractions, are promoted as special features, such as natural attractions, historical sites, or entertainment options like fine dining, nightlife, sports venues, and fine arts. Infrastructure marketing adds to the previous two by showing that a place ‘works’ because it has adequate transportation, efficient and affordable energy, good education, access to safe water, availability of recreation, and sufficient lodging and other services. The last strategy, people marketing, can take several forms. This strategy involves the promotion of a place’s character in terms of its residents, i.e. South Carolina’s ‘friendly folks’ (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

Regional Marketing

The practices of place marketing are not limited to individual cities, but the ideas can be applied at many spatial scales. Therefore, city marketing can be incorporated in broader geographical marketing areas at the regional or national levels (Ashworth and Voogd 1988; Lee and Guest 1983). At a smaller scale, city marketing alliances exist, such as individual convention and visitor bureaus or downtown marketing coalitions, but there are an increasing number of smaller organizations merging or working together to form larger alliances. At the national level, Hughes and Allen (2008) study the image marketing of a single entity of nations in Central and Eastern Europe, which is a bloc of fifteen countries with similar economic development goals.

At the regional level, Naipaul, Wang, and Okumus (2009) explore how small proximal destinations with limited tourism products and resources collaborate to market
their destinations, with a focus on three convention and visitor bureaus in northern Ohio, including those in Medina, Lorain, and Wayne Counties. The three organizations collaborated to form the “Tri-County Cornucopia Farm and Gardens.” Regional collaborations like this are also found in areas with more tourism products, such as metropolitan regional alliances in Northeast Ohio’s Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance, the Kansas City area’s KC One Campaign, Pittsburgh’s Visit Pittsburgh and its Countryside organization, and the Nashville Music City campaign.

Regional marketing alliances and collaboration are important because places need cooperation, and cross marketing can be used to create win-win situations. A single city can be marketed as part of a larger city-region in order to appeal to investors, businesses, and tourists since people are mobile across artificial geographic boundaries. A recognizable central city makes marketing the whole region more practical, i.e. the Cleveland Plus region in Ohio. Tourism attraction agencies responsible for destination marketing and regional investment agencies can work together and complement each other’s efforts through their own specific marketing approaches. (Youcheng 2008; Rainisto 2003).

Public and private sector alliances are attractive in destination marketing because of the attraction of investment and tourism can benefit both the financial objectives of private businesses, as well as the social objectives of the public sector. With regional collaborations, there are also ad hoc regional alliances. No specific approach to create marketing alliances can be beneficial in all business environments, so practices can vary
across cities and regions (Palmer and Bejou 1995; Barth 2001; Dwyer 2003; Wang 2007; and Naipaul et al. 2009).

**Evaluating Place Marketing**

Place marketing varies across the board, but the literature suggests a few considerations that can lead to a more successful campaign. A regional approach to the marketing efforts can yield better results than focusing on a single city. A major city that is part of a larger city-region or large metropolitan area should be marketed as a part of that connected region in order to gain critical mass to appeal to outside investors and businesses. Marketing a place becomes even more feasible when there are one or more central cities within the region, i.e. marketing Northeast Ohio, including Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown (Rainisto 2003; Cleveland Plus website).

Another important aspect is the creation of public-private partnerships, which are very useful in regional marketing and economic development (Youcheng 2008). They show evidence of working relationships between the local community and its businesses companies, and also foster better organization for large-scale development projects. With that said, places need cooperation, and “cross marketing” should be used to create positive results in the entire region (Rainisto 2003).

In addition, cooperation amongst different sectors of marketing should exist, i.e. tourism bureaus and business attraction organizations. Horizontal cooperation of this sort leads to the complimenting of each other’s work. So when these agencies market the region, they must be careful to be consistent in their brand promises. In the end, these
promises in marketing package must be kept, controlled, and managed by a planning
group (Rainisto 2003).

To evaluate place marketing efforts, all of the points mentioned in this literature review can be considered. There is some research on this subject, and one of the most recent includes a study by Pratt et al. (2010), which attempted to identify success factors of tourism marketing in the United Kingdom. Many, including this study, use conversion studies and attempt to justify the return on investment for marketing expenditures. Ultimately, a successful destination marketing campaign maximizes expenditures from tourists, and with that said, many marketing organizations and governmental entities commonly attempt to quantify these. In addition, more generic tourism marketing campaigns tend to be more successful in this sense as compared to niche campaigns (Pratt et al. 2010).

Much literature exists on the concept of place selling, advertising, marketing, and branding. Research has also been done on the images and perceptions that people have of cities, regions, and other geographic places. My thesis attempts to bring these ideas together and observe the marketing efforts of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, taking into consideration the region’s current place image.
CHAPTER III

Analysis of the Place Image of Northeast Ohio

Cities and regions have different associated images, which can be positive, negative, mixed, and/or contradictory images (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993). Image perception has important implications in place marketing because images are engineered in some way, and the central task of place marketers is to manipulate these images (Holcomb 2001). Images that people develop of a city or region can often be associated with the “re-engineering” of images due in part to place marketing. Through this chapter, I analyze the different images that residents and outsiders hold of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio as a precursor to analyzing the region’s place marketing. I gathered the images through an analysis of computer mediated communication and media articles. Following the development of place image scores and detailed place image information in this chapter, I explore the way these images are addressed in the region’s marketing in Chapter Four through a combination of interviewing marketers and observing marketing materials.
Methods of Assessing the Place Image of Northeast Ohio

To assess the image and perception of the region of Northeast Ohio, I employed a general inductive approach to evaluate computer mediated communication (CMC) and national media portrayals (Fu, Abbasi, and Chen 2008). A qualitative understanding of the image of Northeast Ohio is important because how people view the region can have effects on resident satisfaction, business relocation, and tourism attraction. This inductive approach is a convenient and efficient way to analyze qualitative data for the purpose of assessing the image of Northeast Ohio. It is essential in this research to suspend preconceived ideas and to allow observations to guide the research. To mitigate potential bias, I analyzed a mix of both positive and negative opinions. I placed emphasis on the content of the remarks and aspects of the region’s image that were positive or negative, and less emphasis on the quantity of positive or negative comments. From this approach, I was able to identify themes in the text data that are related to my evaluation objectives shown in Table 3.1. From the identified themes, I developed a framework for the place image of Northeast Ohio (Thomas 2006; Bernard and Ryan 2010).

To assess CMC, I examined Web forums and blogs. The popularity of CMC continues to grow, offering a convenient and broad range of communication media for analysis. Although this mechanism can have shortcomings such as fragmentation, grammatical issues, and some degree of incoherence, the information is unfiltered and valuable to this research (Fu, Abbasi, and Chen 2008). Many media outlets have articles online that are followed with forum comments, which proved to contain very valuable information. The study was limited to a few dozen sources found through searches of
Lexis Nexis, Google, and actual media Website outlets, which can be found in the references. To reduce bias and expand the research to people outside of Northeast Ohio, I examined a combination of local and national sources, and one international source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Objective</th>
<th>Description/Examples</th>
<th>Positive Image</th>
<th>Negative Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>Cost of living and housing</td>
<td>Cheap</td>
<td>High taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Museums, cultural institutions, arts</td>
<td>University Circle</td>
<td>Nothing to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Unemployment, job outlook, regional economy</td>
<td>Business friendly, new jobs</td>
<td>No jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Access to and quality of grade school and higher education</td>
<td>Many colleges</td>
<td>Poor inner city schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Dining scene, night life, sports venues, music and theatrical venues</td>
<td>Downtown Cleveland</td>
<td>Nothing to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental quality</td>
<td>Pollution, environmental awareness</td>
<td>Improvements made</td>
<td>Industrial pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Air, road, water, rail, public transportation, utilities</td>
<td>Little congestion</td>
<td>Not enough public transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Quality of neighborhoods in the region’s cities</td>
<td>Welcoming and safe</td>
<td>Dangerous, “ghettos”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Traits of residents, friendliness, diversity, appeal to age groups</td>
<td>Midwest hospitality</td>
<td>Young people leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Effectiveness of local and regional government</td>
<td>Happy with politicians</td>
<td>Political corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Parks, cold and warm season sport activities</td>
<td>Great park system</td>
<td>Nothing to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Healthcare, safety, government</td>
<td>Great hospitals</td>
<td>Police layoffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Quality and quantity of sports teams</td>
<td>Plenty of sporting opportunities</td>
<td>Poor sports teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather/climate</td>
<td>Temperature, precipitation, cloudiness</td>
<td>Four seasons</td>
<td>Cold snowy winter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. Place Image Variables (from Kneesel, Baloglu, and Millar 2009; Gottlieb 1994; Jacob and Willits 1994)
I used reports and articles from news media sources on the Web to review media portrayals, and observed images from local sources in Northeast Ohio, national sources, and competing regional sources in places like Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania. The amount of accessible online newspaper and magazine articles is very large, so I used only materials published in 2009 or 2010 to reduce the data and keep the research reasonably sized. The 2009 and 2010 data provided an up-to-date sample for detailed qualitative analysis.

To determine the image of Northeast Ohio, my analysis focused on the evaluation objectives listed in Table 3.1, which includes variables that were specifically searched for within the acquired media information. For example, if an article was published rating Cleveland as one of America’s ‘best’ or ‘worst’ cities for summer fun, I could extract information on the image of the region’s recreation. If a Web forum dealing with nightlife in the Akron/Canton area was found, I could extract information on the image of entertainment. A general forum or article about a number of regional issues could reveal opinions on a combination of two or more of these variables.

I read sources thoroughly, and highlighted key points that related to images of parts of or the entire region of Northeast Ohio. I ignored offensive and derogatory comments, but those comments that seemed “ranting” were often valuable, therefore I considered these in the analysis. From the data, I took a count of noteworthy mentions of different aspects of the region’s image, which is summed up at the end of this chapter in Table 3.2. From the tallies, I developed a place image score for each evaluation objective, with “1” being very negative and “5” being very positive. For example,
education had a similar amount of negative and positive mentions; therefore I assigned a mixed image score of “3.” In contrast, the affordability objective received all positive mentions and no negative mentions, so it received a very positive image score of “5.”

Additionally, I considered the issue of scale in the place image assessment. In its several cities, towns, and rural areas, Northeast Ohio contains a socioeconomically diverse population. Residents of different places within Northeast Ohio could potentially have varying images of different parts of the region. For example, wealthier suburban residents in Gates Mills may view Northeast Ohio as a great place to live and raise a family, whereas poorer and more distressed residents of Cleveland’s inner city may view Northeast Ohio as a dreadful place with few opportunities. The location of users on Web forums and blogs was sometimes given, so at times I was able to examine the place image related to specific geographies.

_Northeast Ohio’s Rankings by Forbes_

Forbes disseminates several annual lists that rank cities, states, and regions in terms of a variety of topics. In 2009 and 2010, Forbes ranked Cleveland in the top ten most miserable cities category. In the 2009 ratings, Cleveland was ranked number four most miserable city. Chicago was most miserable in 2009, and Cleveland was number one in 2010. One of the ranking articles quotes “lousy weather, long commutes, rising unemployment, and high sales tax. Welcome home.” Cleveland secured the number one spot because of its relatively high unemployment, high taxes, weather, corruption by public officials, and poor sports teams. The 2010 ranking mentions the Cuyahoga River
fire that occurred forty years ago, and claims Cleveland’s nickname of the “Mistake by the Lake.” Akron, Canton, and Youngstown also ranked poorly on the Forbes lists (Badenhausen 2009; Badenhausen 2010).

Respondents made comments with regard to Cleveland’s ranking, questioning the importance of some of the variables that Forbes used. There were several hundred comments, and many were in extreme agreement or extreme disagreement with the rankings. The first set comes from a local media source that published the rankings, and its resultant Web forum of comments. Two local residents consider Cleveland “an armpit of a city” and a “septic tank of a city… filthy, dirty, and disgusting. The weather stinks and the sports teams smell just like the city and the county.” A California resident commented, “From my trips to Cleveland it is filled with miserable, uncurious people who cannot drive a car to save their (lives)… The area for about 150 miles out is a suck zone.”

Some focus their negativity on sports teams, especially in comparison to Pittsburgh. Others have a positive view and hope for the city and region. A local suburban resident implies that “it is not all doom and gloom” and believes when the economy improves, people will feel better about Cleveland and the region. This comment also mentions that “unfortunately, the weather is still going to suck forever in Cleveland.” In response to criticisms of the weather, a local resident mentions that the weather is not what makes people miserable, but blames negatives such as high crime, poor schools, the economy, and corrupt politicians.
An Illinois resident who worked in airline industry and travels comments that other cities are much “worse” than Cleveland, commenting that the people of the region are down to Earth, friendly, and family-focused. A local resident emphasizes that the warmer-weather seasons are a good time to be in the region, and also mentions that the worst city ranked should be Pittsburgh or Youngstown. A Missouri resident sympathizes with the city being referred to as the “Mistake by the Lake”, and considers it slanderous and dehumanizing to the people of the Northeast Ohio region.

From the local media, responses emphasize Cleveland’s sports, the winter weather, corruption in government, and a “ghetto” inner city. Positives include the remainder of the year’s weather, lack of traffic, access to water, entertainment and culture, and the people. Some doubt the credibility of the rankings from Forbes. Ratings such as these can be misleading and pointless, as one local resident mentions that the region and its people need to ignore the negative commentary and go about making decent lives. A lifelong resident agrees, saying that “This town has its up and downs like all cities. I have lived here all my life, tolerated the jokes and bad press about this town but in the long run, wouldn’t live anywhere else… even in the winter” (Fox8.com 2010).

The Forbes 2009 and 2010 rankings stirred huge forum interest on its Web site. A number of the commentators were identified and determined to be ‘locals’ or ‘outsiders’ to the Cleveland and Northeast Ohio region. A repeating theme from the comments was that outsiders tended to be surprised by the rankings, and locals tended to have mixed reactions. One outsider mentioned that he lived in many countries and has visited Cleveland on occasion, considering the city beautiful, fun, and full of friendly people. He
believes that the city gets a bad reputation from national media and the rest of the country contains many miserable people in miserable cities. This forum challenged the validity of the rankings more than the local forum at times, questioning the usage of weather and sports as determining factors for misery, one saying “Is snow really important?” A resident of Cleveland mentions the city’s high quality of life, culture, arts, lakefront, park system, dining, shopping, and neighborhoods. This person considers rankings like this to be pure ignorance and misinformation. Another lifelong Clevelander mentions parks, walkability of the region’s cities, short commutes, arts, culture, nightlife, and affordability as counterarguments to the miserable ranking.

In sum, this forum showed negative images of Cleveland in terms of its foreclosure rates, industrial collapse, public corruption, and weather to some extent. Positive images stem from the quality of life, affordability, and people. A local implied that it can be fun to live in Cleveland if you have a decent job. Others believe that outsiders would be “pleasantly surprised” and the region has a lot to offer.

In 2010, the number one most miserable city ranking spurred a similar mix of comments. In this ranking, four of the top twenty cities were in Ohio, which surprised a New Jersey resident who is planning to move to the area. The outsider was satisfied with vacations to the region and looks forward to moving to Ohio, stating that “Ohio sure beats Little Rock.” A Cleveland-area resident explained that not everyone wants to move to Sun Belt locations that are prone to mishaps like wildfires, floods, droughts, mudslides, earthquakes, and hurricanes. In spite of a recent large snowstorm throughout the Midwest and the East, this person mentions that Cleveland went about business as
usual, while other places were crippled. The comments turned in favor of the region, boasting many of its amenities and implying that people are generally happy in the region. The content of these ratings systems were also questioned: “Older industrial cities in the north all face similar problems. Instead of publishing adolescent lists bashing cities, visit them and point out what makes them each unique in their contributions to this country.”

The 2010 ratings contained another mix of positive and negative comments associated with the image of Cleveland. Some view the city and region as dying and truly a definition of Rust Belt with rampant corruption, segregation, and having nothing to offer. Others disagree and consider the city unique, attractive, and virtually unknown to outsiders. On the contrary, Cleveland did not even rank in the list of most stressful cities put out by Forbes in 2010 (Levy 2010).

Forbes, however, rated Cleveland positively in a recent ranking of America’s 50 cities for working mothers. Women’s earnings, unemployment rates, crime levels, school systems, health care, and cost of living were all considered. Cleveland was ranked number 18 out of 50, which is fairly positive ranking compared to other recent Forbes lists. Cleveland’s low cost of living, low violent crimes rate, and low unemployment rate contributed to the city’s position on the list (Casserly 2010).

Cleveland and Akron Win the Bid for the 2014 Gay Games

Several major U.S. cities bid to host the 2014 Gay Games, a large Olympic-style competition open to participants from several countries. The Cleveland/Akron bid
surprised the media, because the region is suffering from a foreclosure crisis, massive population loss, and industrial decline, and other cities competing are traditionally seen as more gay-friendly. Boston, Washington D.C., and the Cleveland/Akron area was chosen to host the games. This decision spurred mixed reactions across media outlets and Web forums in which people presented their opinions on the region’s image. “Cleveland – yes Cleveland! – just won the Gay Games” was a quote mentioned by Time Magazine. The city’s world-class athletic facilities, hotels, and public transportation were cited as reasons by the Gay Games Federation. The Federation estimates that the games will attract between 50,000 and 70,000 people to events in both Cleveland and Akron. The event will feature 30 sports over eight days. (Maag 2009; Associated Press in Boston Herald 2009).

Local, national, and international reactions were widespread on the Internet, some considered the choice of Cleveland to be a tremendous accomplishment, and far less had a negative reaction. I drew several images of the Cleveland and Akron region from an analysis of these forums and blogs. A Boston Herald reader commented that the choice is great news for Cleveland and everyone involved in the games. One said, “New England has been recognized as leading the way on equality, and this choosing shows that other parts of America are also progressing socially” (Associated Press in Boston Herald 2009).

A blogger with an interest in the games posted the news soon after Cleveland was selected to host the games in 2014, and several readers commented following the blog. One Cleveland resident referred to the city as dynamic, diverse, and manageable,
highlighting positives such as the dedication of a new gay and lesbian community center being dedicated, lack of traffic congestion, walkable neighborhoods, dining opportunities, public libraries, open and affirming churches, and accessible and efficient public transportation. This commentator considers the city racially and culturally diverse, with strong neighborhoods and a future-oriented commitment to sustainability and the environment.

A New York City athlete considers Cleveland a great town and looks forward to participating in the games in Northeast Ohio. A Washington D.C. resident and Cleveland native promoted positive images by stating, “This will be excellent for the city, which tends to surprise visitors. . . . The downtown could use some life, but is nowhere near as dead as say Atlanta or D.C.’s old downtown.” This commentator mentions the city’s art museum, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, park system, nice suburbs, and for the gay community, a “gay ghetto” that contains a beach, the world’s largest bathhouse, and one of the oldest leather bars in the country. However, this athlete is skeptical, stating that the success of the Gay Games will depend on how the event is promoted, and whether local residents are capable of doing that.

A Boston-area resident was skeptical as well, and does not see thousands and thousands of people wanting to participate and register for the games, asking who would want to spend “precious vacation time in Akron.” This commentator considers Cleveland the sympathetic favorite, “everyone loves an underdog”, and fears that Cleveland will not be able to pull off a successful event. He also believes that “world cities” such as New York, San Francisco, Sydney, and Chicago are more desirable locations than Cleveland
and Akron. Another Boston resident does not consider Ohio a very gay-friendly state. A respondent from Ohio refers to Bostonians’ negative attitude toward Midwest, stating that as a result of Cleveland hosting in 2014, the world will get to see much more of America than the coasts. Another Boston resident who formerly lived in Cleveland displayed positive views of Cleveland, but considers cities like Boston and Washington D.C. to be better candidates for an event of this magnitude. Emphasis was again placed on the questionable ability for the stakeholders to plan a truly successful event.

The contradictory images that people hold of the Northeast Ohio region continued to be posted on the blog. A Cleveland-area resident criticizes Pittsburgh and other cities, boasting that Cleveland’s central city is not “deserted after 5.” On the contrary, an outsider considers Cleveland a “boring town” after dark. Another outsider says, “I can’t imagine what would entice me to visit Cleveland.” A California resident was apprehensive about Cleveland because of negative rumors, but says, “To my amazement, Cleveland is one of the most impressive cities.” A local resident says, “Those who badmouth this place the most have never even set foot here. Cleveland is one of the nation’s best kept secrets…” Another local resident emphasizes that in Cleveland, it is more possible to “go make your own fun.” One outsider went to Cleveland with low expectations and “was shocked at how great the place is.”

Many locals highlighted Cleveland’s attractions and amenities, almost working to promote the cities personally. A local resident seemingly self-promoted the region and mentioned the following:

“Cleveland has a lot going for it… Our theater district (Playhouse Square) is the second in the nation in size only to New York. University Circle,
Cleveland’s cultural center, has more cultural institutions in one square mile than anywhere else in America… Our symphony enjoys its season here at Severance Hall, but spends its summers based out of Vienna, Austria, and is grouped with Boston, New York, and Philly as one of the ‘Big 4’… Our transportation system was named North America’s best in 2007. Our train covers the entire city and connects to the airport, and we recently built an electric vehicle line that connects the center of our downtown with University Circle.”

The resident emphasized more attractions such as Cedar Point, halls of fame, the Lake Erie Islands, and dining/entertainment venues.

An outsider mentioned that Cleveland only has the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and “the Cleveland tourism bureau has its job cut out for them!” He reasonably argued that the city needs to promote more than that, and the notion of having world-class museums and restaurants is something that any city’s tourism bureau can attest. There seems to be heavy emphasis on culture, diversity, and the people. The attractions, cultural institutions, transportation, central location, and LGBT community all have positive images held by both residents and outsiders. Negative images came from outsiders who reaffirmed the Midwest and Cleveland’s historically bad image, and there was an emphasis of negative images promoted by residents of the Boston area, which lost the bid for the 2014 Gay Games (Joe. My. God blog).

*Other Media Rankings of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio*

Several media outlets released other city rankings in 2009 and 2010 in which Cleveland appeared. Most of the ratings revealed a negative media image of the city and region, although some were positive, and some were contradictory. Cleveland ranked in
the top ten worst cities for the newly graduated by one source, citing population loss, high unemployment, and a comparatively low immigrant population as reasons college graduates would stay away.

Another source revealed that Cleveland was the fifth best city for young college graduates. The positive ranking stemmed from high concentration of young adults, inventory of jobs requiring less than one year experience, and the average cost of rent for a one-bedroom apartment. Cleveland ranked above New York, Phoenix, Denver, Chicago, and San Antonio. Other older cities of the Northeast and Midwest rounded out the top four: Cincinnati, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis. A third source produced a similar ranking in which Cleveland ranked number 17 best city for new college graduates. The article emphasized a “go south” attitude as many of the cities on the list are in the Sun Belt, but four of the cities were actually in Ohio. The high Cleveland ranking cited the availability of science and engineering careers and the city emerging as a research base for biotechnology. The article also mentioned the city’s cleaned up environment, relatively low cost of living, and attractions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. (Huffington 2010; Realtor Magazine 2009; DiMeglio 2010).

The 2009 U.S. census estimates revealed that Cleveland was losing the most residents in the country in terms of numerical decline. Other large population losers included Pittsburgh, Cape Coral, and St. Petersburg (Yen 2010). A local media outlet reproduced these findings on their Website, and several readers commented. A Strongsville resident said that there are better opportunities elsewhere, and the only people staying in Cleveland are “thugs, druggies, and breeders.” A Cleveland resident
implied that people are “stuck (in Cleveland) because of family obligations” and would rather live elsewhere. A Mentor resident posted that there are more jobs and less corruption elsewhere. “This town is a sewer and it is getting worse each year,” was quoted from a different Strongsville resident.

Other commentators were surprised by the negativity associated with Cleveland. A Cleveland resident mentioned, “There are so many positive things about Cleveland, but for some reason, all we hear are the negatives.” A former Northeast Ohioan, who lives in Virginia, believes there are many positive things about Cleveland, but there are a lack of well-paying jobs and the schools are poor. A common consensus in agreement with the population loss was the lack of jobs, government corruption, high taxes, poor schools, as well as crime and the presence of thugs in the city’s neighborhoods. Many of the negative comments, however, were somewhat incoherent, ranting, and derogatory.

In contrast to the common negative perception of Cleveland’s inner city neighborhoods, Cleveland’s Rocky River Drive and Edgecliff Avenue neighborhood was ranked in the top safest neighborhoods of America’s 50 largest cities. The rating emphasized the idea that cities can have high crime, but generalizations cannot be made because they are often neighborhood-specific, and many neighborhoods are quite safe (NeighborhoodScout.com 2010).

A different media outlet, WalletPop.com, used unemployment rate, health data, foreclosures, crime data, and climate to determine the ten worst cities to live. El Centro, California ranked number one worst place to live, and Cleveland ranked number two. The rating of Cleveland pointed out the number of people leaving the city, high taxes,
political corruption, bad weather, and bad sports teams. The article cited high unemployment, but mentioned that Cleveland’s unemployment rate was lower than the national average, and it even cited another rating from Forbes as part of its reasoning for positioning Cleveland so poorly. Interestingly, other cities on the list of worst places to live include popular Sun Belt cities such as Las Vegas, Oklahoma City, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Miami (Crowe 2010).

Climate was observed to be a common factor in Cleveland’s negative image, and the city did not fare well on actual weather and climate rankings. One list of worst winter weather cities placed Cleveland at number four, based on yearly snowfall, temperature, and number of overcast days (PRLEAP.com 2010). Forbes rated Cleveland as the number one worst weather city, citing similar variables (Kiladze 2010). Several local residents commented on the findings. One Cleveland-area resident said that he “(chooses) Cleveland because of the weather.” He has lived in California and Hawaii and prefers living in Cleveland. Another commentator stated that the weather is only bad if you allow it to bother you, and another said, “As bad as winter is, we normally have very nice summers” (Macek 2010).

Media Attention to Recent Changes and Growth in Northeast Ohio’s Major Cities

As a region, Northeast Ohio has a generally mixed and sometimes contradictory image because of its population loss, failing inner cities, political corruption, and climate. However, the region’s business community has a very positive image promoted by local and national media. A business-oriented Website promoted Cleveland’s venture-capital-
driven economic plan from its biomedical industry. Growth in the biomedical industry now outpaces the nation’s rate at 7.4 percent annual growth, with approximately 20,000 related jobs. A team of hospitals and universities in the Cleveland-Akron region launched BioEnterprise, a unique business accelerator that aids health-care startup companies. Through BioEnterprise, “forced collaborations” are being implemented (McGirt 2010).

More specifically, the region’s former major steel manufacturing center, Youngstown, has often been referred to as a suffering Rust Belt community by the media. Some articles highlighted that there are no hotels and no commercial airports in Youngstown, a city of 82,000. They mentioned the city’s desolate neighborhoods, 40% vacancy rate in some, and empty lots. “Youngstown is depressed, failed postindustrial America in distilled form” (Donahue 2010).

Recently, however, a national media article noted positives in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, “…something that hasn’t been seen here in decades: jobs and growth.” The article mentioned that INC and Entrepreneur Magazine have listed Youngstown as one of the top places to do business. Special attention was given to the Youngstown Business Incubator, which helps startup companies, particularly in software (Ravve 2010). The founder of the Youngstown Business Incubator argues that Youngstown is “perfectly suited to become a Mecca for producers of business-to-business software” (Donahue 1010). The Youngstown Business Incubator and similarly, the Akron Global Business Accelerator have helped to create jobs in industrial ghost towns of Northeast Ohio (Hatch 2010).
Ravve (2010) mentioned that Downtown Youngstown is somewhat active again, which is proof of some success. She complained about having trouble finding a parking spot, and a businessman responded by saying “That’s a good sign! In the past, nobody came down here, so parking was too easy.” The local Congressman Tim Ryan was quoted in the article as saying that people will look back and say there was a “miracle in the Mahoning Valley.”

Articles generated comments, which promoted mixed images of the city as well. One commentator mentioned that the success of Youngstown’s changing economy may be a bright spot in Ohio, but not in the country. A local paralleled Youngstown to Akron’s attempts to promote small business. An outsider posted that Youngstown is “DEAD” and is only for “losers who can’t make it anywhere else. . . . Do yourself a favor and move away.” Several people mentioned that Youngstown has Mill Creek Park, the second largest metropolitan park in the country after Central Park. One posted that Youngstown is a great place to raise a family and there is a lot to do if you look carefully. One local came to the city twelve years ago and “loves it.” Many who remain or even live elsewhere promoted a positive image of the region and implied that they are confident in the region’s economic future because of the city’s new approach and new way of thinking (Ravve 2010; Donahue 2010; Hatch 2010).

Youngstown has also been positively nicknamed ‘the dreamer’ by a national entrepreneurial media outlet. Their article specified ten startup-friendly cities where there is a do-it-yourself business ethic and a general entrepreneurial spirit. Each city had a nickname, and Youngstown was listed as the dreamer. Others include Madison, ‘the
diversifier’; Atlanta, ‘the grower’; and San Diego, ‘the proactivist.’ Youngstown’s position on this list of economically strong major cities can be attributed to the Youngstown Business incubator. The article mentioned the city as being a Rust Belt burnout, but with a new approach, there is hope for small software businesses (Daley 2009).

Youngstown’s recent success in transforming its economy and image has given rise to the idea of the Rust Belt as a new Silicon Valley based on a recent NPR airing:

“In the Rust Belt city of Youngstown, Ohio, a high-tech incubator is producing successful software companies. Nearly 300 people are working for a cluster of companies that have huddled together to create cutting-edge products. Even in this extremely depressed area, in the midst of a deep recession, entrepreneurship is flourishing and creating jobs.”

One successful company, Turning Technologies, was mentioned as being ranked one of the fastest growing software companies in the country. Comments included support from locals, but disappointment in state and local politicians who have, to them, done little for the Youngstown area (Bobkoff 2009).

In continuance with the positive images of Northeast Ohio’s business climate, Site Selection Magazine ranked the top metropolitan areas for business site selection in 2008. In the top ten metropolitan areas with a population over one million, Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor ranked number nine. In the top ten metropolitan areas with a population of between 200,000 and one million, Akron ranked number two, and Youngstown-Warren-Boardman ranked number seven. In both divisions together, seven of the metropolitan areas ranked in the top ten were in Ohio, evidence of Ohio’s success in attracting
businesses after it has received several Governor’s Cup Awards in the last few years (Starner 2009).

Along with new technologies and an emerging new economy, positive attention has been brought to Northeast Ohio’s emphasis on sustainability and green development. A blog from Forbes mentioned that current projects in Northeast Ohio are leading the way in green technology, including efficient car manufacturing, Lake Erie wind turbines, fuel cell development, and other small projects that foster alternative energy. Forbes has shed negative light on Cleveland and the region in many posts, but some readers were surprised to see a positive mentioning of new happenings in the region (Lavin 2010).

Cleveland has recently begun a Green City on a Blue Lake Initiative, along with a Sustainable Cleveland 2019 goal (SC2019). The city has been viewed by inside and outside media as attempting to become one of the nation’s greenest cities despite the city’s poor environmental history. A FocusOrganic.com (2009) post pointed out that Cleveland is more of a vacation destination than most people would realize, with its green city on the blue lake. The writer quoted, “Apparently we were wrong! From the lake and boating to water parks and lodges, and even the ‘Best Amusement Park in the World,’ Cedar Point… Cleveland looks like it might actually be a really fun place to visit.”

Comments from this post included one person who never had an impression of Cleveland being a green city, but had heard about the river catching fire in the past. As a result, this person wants to visit the area. Another commentator never desired to visit
Cleveland, but is rethinking that and said, “I’m glad the people of Cleveland are changing their image” (FocusOrganic.com 2009).

**Positive Experiences Promoted by the Media**

While some media attention focuses on negative images on Northeast Ohio, there is an abundance of positive media attention on the region. A New York Times article promoted “36 hours in Cleveland” and referred to the city as a place where “you gotta be tough.” The primary focus was what can be done on a weekend 36-hour trip to the city. The article highlighted people who have not abandoned the city. It also mentioned that local entrepreneurs and bohemian dreamers are opening funky boutiques, art galleries, and fine restaurants, which is “injecting fresh life into previously rusted-out spaces.” The ten activities promoted in the article were primarily cultural and entertainment attractions:

1. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
2. Tremont neighborhood – variety of activities
3. Restaurants by Michael Symon
4. Cocktails in Tremont
5. West Side Market
6. Small art galleries
7. L’Albatros restaurant along Lake Erie
8. Beachland Ballroom shows
9. Tommy’s restaurant in Coventry Village, Cleveland Heights
10. University Circle – variety of activities
   (Sokol 2009)

Additionally, in response to recent negative images of Cleveland in the media, a Texas resident posted a blog disagreeing. This person took a trip over a summer to see a
Cleveland Indians versus Texas Rangers baseball game at Progressive Field, and claimed to love the city and its amenities, specifying encounters with friendly and helpful people. The blogger also mentioned that he felt safer walking through Downtown Cleveland than Downtown Dallas. The Texas resident disagrees with Forbes’ ratings systems, stating that all metro areas face the same issues. A commentator to the blog left Cleveland for a beach town, and moved back, claiming that the “grass is not always greener” elsewhere. She valued the metro area’s park system, diversity of communities, four seasons, and unique advantages (Cleveland.com blog 2010).

Cleveland’s culinary scene has also received much positive media attention, internally and externally. The nearby Pittsburgh newspaper credited Cleveland’s culinary scene with an extensive article. An extensive article mentioned:

“Cleveland still seems to suffer from a collective inferiority complex,” (and that this modesty may be why Cleveland’s restaurant scene is still underrated nationally and regionally.) “Cleveland has become a culinary powerhouse and a fantastic destination for culinary tourism.” It gives special claim to Michael Symon’s restaurants and the West Side Market, and the overall affordability of the entire region. “The Cleveland culinary landscape is remarkable for its diversity, but one common theme seems to be a commitment to keep prices low” (Millman 2010).

The media has, in addition, shown many positive images of suburbs of Cleveland and Akron as well. Lakewood was ranked as one of the coolest suburbs in the nation by Travel and Leisure.

“Set along the cliffs of Lake Erie, this inner-ring suburb of Cleveland has been on the radar of the young and urbane for some time. It has a well-established nightlife and gastronomic scene along Detroit Avenue, as well as a sizable gay and lesbian community” (Derouchie 2010).
Internationally, positive images were promoted by a reporter from the United Kingdom who took a trip to Northeast Ohio, and was convinced he “found the REAL America.” The article showcased his trip and emphasized that there is much more to Cleveland than the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The weather was actually considered to be a positive from the point-of-view of the writer. Several attractions were mentioned: Great Lakes Science Center, Blossom Music Center, Cedar Point, Kalahari Resort, the Lake Erie Islands, unique dining and microbreweries, local music venues, museums, sports teams, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the local metro parks, and Playhouse Square. The article mentioned, “There’s plenty to smile about in Cleveland. . . . If you ever took that great American adventure where you were stuck for ideas or found everything to be the same after a few days, then take a trip to Northeast Ohio. You will be far from disappointed” (Scarroll 2009).

Several Northeast Ohio residents commented on the international article. A former Cleveland resident moved to North Carolina for work, but wants to return some day. He commented that Cleveland is everything the article mentions, and the “negative-bent American media” is the source of many of its bad images. A former Chicago, now Cleveland resident, stated that Cleveland is a “mini Chicago… Here we have everything every other big city has, but it’s easier to navigate.” Another commentator left Chicago for Cleveland, complementing its affordability, and calling the city a “gem waiting to be discovered by the world” (Scarroll 2009).
**Evaluation of the Media Image of Northeast Ohio**

Through the qualitative analysis of media and computer mediated communication, the images of different aspects of Northeast Ohio were widely variable, as shown in Table 3.2. A more detailed explanation for each theme follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Positive/Negative Mentions</th>
<th>Image (Outside)</th>
<th>Image (Inside)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>Cost of living and housing</td>
<td>Positive: 6 Negative: 0</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Museums, cultural institutions, arts</td>
<td>Positive: 8 Negative: 1</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Unemployment, job outlook, regional economy</td>
<td>Positive: 8 Negative: 9</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Access to and quality of grade school and higher education</td>
<td>Positive: 1 Negative: 2</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Dining scene, nightlife, sports, music, and theatrical venues</td>
<td>Positive: 10 Negative: 1</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental quality</td>
<td>Pollution, environmental awareness</td>
<td>Positive: 5 Negative: 1</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Air, road, water, rail, public transportation, utilities</td>
<td>Positive: 8 Negative: 1</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Quality of neighborhoods in the region’s cities</td>
<td>Positive: 4 Negative: 4</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Traits of residents, friendliness, diversity, appeal to age groups</td>
<td>Positive: 9 Negative: 2</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Effectiveness of local and regional government</td>
<td>Positive: 0 Negative: 7</td>
<td>Very negative</td>
<td>Very negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>Parks, cold and warm season sport activities</td>
<td>Positive: 3 Negative: 0</td>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Healthcare, safety, government</td>
<td>Positive: 4 Negative: 2</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Quality and quantity of sports teams</td>
<td>Positive: 1 Negative: 3</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Very negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather/climate</td>
<td>Temperature, precipitation, cloudiness</td>
<td>Positive: 8 Negative: 8</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2. Place Image Results
In terms of education, Cleveland and Northeast Ohio displayed a mixed image, some positive and some negative. Generally, the image of higher education in the region was positive, and the quality of public education was negative due to a negative perception of the inner city schools of Cleveland and Akron, in particular. Within the theme of education, I did not have a significant amount of data to work with, so further conclusions cannot be made.

Observations revealed a very positive image of the affordability of the region. Many people commented that they relocated to Cleveland from other larger cities, such as Chicago, to find that home prices and the general cost of living were much lower in the region. National media especially viewed the region’s affordability as a reason that recent college graduates might move to the area.

The weather and climate themes surprisingly produced mixed image. The national media showed a very negative image of the region because of its relatively cooler climate with enhanced winter snowfall and cloudy days. Several forums contained comments that also displayed the region as a dreary place because of weather in the winter season. However, many comments also contained positive attitudes towards the weather. There was an emphasis on the ability to enjoy four seasons, and several people mentioned that the summers are not as unbearable as Sun Belt cities in the South and West.

In terms of the region’s physical environment, a positive image was promoted by the media and computer mediated communication. Despite Northeast Ohio’s industrial past and Rust Belt appearance, several positive comments were made with regard to
environmental cleanup, sustainability, and an emerging green technology economy. The Cuyahoga River fires of the middle twentieth century were often mentioned, but in a positive light showing environmental progress in the region.

Recreation, culture, entertainment, and sports can be looked at simultaneously. The three former variables revealed very positive images, while the latter showed very negative images. Much positive attention was drawn to the region’s extensive park system, cultural opportunities, and entertainment options. However, the lack of championship sports teams appeared often in many commentaries and was associated with Cleveland as being a “losing city.” This was especially evident in 2010 after the departure of Cleveland’s former superstar basketball player, LeBron James, who was viewed as “abandoning Cleveland like so many others.”

The region’s economy was one of the most talked about themes. This aspect of the region’s image was mixed but quite polarizing. As a region with several cities viewed as part of the Rust Belt, many considered the region to be dead, dying, and void of economic opportunities. The region’s high unemployment rate was mentioned often, but others countered the argument stating the unemployment rate of Cleveland and the rest of Northeast Ohio is close to the national average. Completely opposing images were also promoted with regard to the region’s economy. Many articles highlighted the growth of newer industries and opportunities in high-tech manufacturing, green technology, biotechnology, and healthcare.

The political aspect of Northeast Ohio showed a very negative image. Corruption in Cuyahoga County and the apparent ineptness of many of the region’s politicians
spurred many negative comments in this regard. Several national media articles put
attention on the region’s political corruption, and many commentators cited the
corruption as a negative influence on the region’s economy and image.

In terms of general services, a mixed image was portrayed. Positive images were
associated with healthcare and community services, while negative images were placed
on government and safety services. The region’s world-class healthcare facilities were
mentioned positively. Safety services were viewed as corrupt and ineffective, and many
mentioned that they believe the cities in the region are not safe.

Infrastructure in Northeast Ohio had a very positive image. Several people
commented on the accessibility of the region a well-developed highway system, an
international airport and Midwest hub, and the availability of public transportation.
Cleveland was emphasized as being pedestrian and bike-friendly. The region has two
airports, Cleveland Hopkins International and Akron-Canton (soon International), and
that was viewed as a positive for the area’s large population.

The final set of themes, neighborhoods and people, were imaged as mixed and
positive, respectively. Several Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, and suburban
neighborhoods were viewed positively, but others viewed inner city neighborhoods in all
of the major cities to be a problem. Deteriorating and vacant buildings, the presence of
“thugs,” and safety were concerns expressed by some. The people that comprise the
neighborhoods of Northeast Ohio’s cities and suburbs were viewed positively for their
friendliness and family-oriented attitudes.
Table 3.3. Place Image Scores

Taking all of the sources into consideration, the place image of Northeast Ohio is mixed overall. I assigned a score to each evaluation objective, as shown in Table 3.3. A score of “1” represents a very negative image, “3” represents mixed or neutral, and “5” represents a very positive. A simple average of the scores reveals a mean of 3.6 for outsiders, and 2.9 for insiders. This shows that outsiders have a mixed image, with a slight lean towards positive, and insiders are mixed as well, but with more of a lean towards negative.

In addition to this study, an extensive outside survey performed in 2006 provided support for some of the evidence found. Figure 3.1 shows that nationally, most people have a neutral image of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, while roughly one-fifth have a positive image, and far less have a negative image. These results show that the general
image of the region is mixed or neutral. Figure 3.2 reiterates the fact that actual experiences and the media have a significant influence on outsider’s perceptions of places. The survey showed that most people had a neutral image especially associated with the economy and quality of life of the region. Most associated Cleveland and Northeast Ohio’s economy with manufacturing. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 provide the survey-takers’ explanations of their perceptions. The percentages reveal the top responses from survey-takers. In addition, many simply have no impression of the region.

Figure 3.1. Outsider Perception of Northeast Ohio (Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance telephone survey)
Figure 3.2. Outsider Sources of Perception (Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance telephone survey)

- Experience: 32%
- Media: 26%
- Friends/family: 21%
- No impression: 16%
- Other/don't know: 5%

Figure 3.3. Positive Perception Reasoning (Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance telephone survey)

- Heard positive things about region: 64%
- Like the place or had positive experience: 14%
- Cited family/friends in region: 12%
- Remaining reasons combined: 20%
Residents of Northeast Ohio portrayed a majority positive image of the region in the local survey performed the same year, as shown in Figure 3.5. A large amount also had a neutral image, whereas a very small amount had a negative image. Figure 3.6 shows a comparison between resident and outsider perceptions of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. The results concluded a similar percentage of negative images, while outsiders typically had more neutral or mixed images, and residents had more positive images. The Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance survey also revealed that residents tended to associate the region’s economy with manufacturing, but the insiders do associate the economy with healthcare much more than outsiders do. From worst to best, the survey found that residents considered Northeast Ohio a “good” place to live, somewhere short of the “best” place to live.
Figure 3.5. Local Perception of Northeast Ohio (Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance Internet survey)

Figure 3.6. Perception of Northeast Ohio Comparison Graph (Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance)
Conclusions

A combination of the place image themes reveals a mixed image of Northeast Ohio, and the detailed analysis of text data often shows contradictions amongst various media sources. Certain aspects are viewed very positively, others very negatively, while the majority are mixed or neutral. The variety of images that people have of the region often stems from perceptions garnered from the media, which can vary and create contradictions in the opinions people portrayed. Many of the negative images found in computer mediated communication were ranting, incoherent, and derogatory, all of which are shortcomings of this type of analysis, but the information was valuable and unfiltered.

The negative images often dealt with poor-performing professional sports teams, political corruption, and winter weather. However, a complete reformation of the Cuyahoga County government began in early 2011 addressing corruption, and the media has been more supportive of local governments in Akron and Youngstown. In addition, a high number of people have a positive attitude towards Northeast Ohio’s business climate.

The media images were mostly from well-known media sources, but I considered that bias may have been introduced in some of the articles and forums. And although it is very difficult to assess a perfectly accurate image of an entire region without an extensive survey, the analysis performed in this research reveals an interesting urban image contradiction in a formerly industrial region of America. The urban areas of Northeast Ohio have suffered economically in the last 40 years, and the media has shed a very negative light on the region along with others; e.g. Detroit, Pittsburgh, Saint Louis,
Buffalo, and more. Despite the negativity imposed by the media, some positive media portrayals exist, and to a larger extent, an Internet outcry of locals has shown that people are more content with their home region than expected. The variety and diversity of images of the region has implications with the region’s marketing, which will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

Place Marketing in Northeast Ohio

Cities and regions with both positive and negative images have organizations dedicated to marketing and branding. In place marketing, a positive portrayal is promoted to internal residents, and potential residents, businesses, and tourists. The marketing campaign can be examined in terms of strategic marketing objectives, planning processes, and techniques (Bramwell and Rawding 1996). The acquired place image information from Chapter Three will have implications in assessing the region’s place marketing. This chapter examines specific examples of place marketing in the region of Northeast Ohio, including organizations dedicated to marketing Cleveland, Akron, the entire Northeast Ohio region, and the State of Ohio broadly.

The Practice of Place Marketing

As mentioned in Chapter Two, leaders in cities and city-regions have changed their view of economic development to a new and broad set of strategies in recent decades. Once ad hoc campaigns of economic development are now broadened strategies of place marketing and branding aimed at developing competitive metropolitan areas.
After marketers develop strategies, the implementation needs a specific target market. The four specific target markets for place marketing are: visitors, residents and workers, business and industry, and export markets. The visitor market includes business visitors who attend meetings, conventions, and conferences, and visitors seeking tourism. Marketing to residents and workers consists of professionals, skilled workers, wealthy individuals and investors, entrepreneurs, and unskilled workers. The business and industry markets are comprised of industry, high-tech and service companies, and entrepreneurs. Export markets include other locations within the domestic market, as well as international markets (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993). Potential loci of the cities or regions for investment are promoted to consumers, which in this case are potential investors, in competition with other cities. Furthermore, a profitable place can promote itself to its own residents as much as to outsiders (Ashworth and Voogd 1988).

A recent trend in the marketing of Northeast Ohio includes a more specific branding campaign being implemented by the State of Ohio’s Business Development Coalition. Keller (2008) explains that geographic locations, similar to products and people, can be branded. In Ohio’s place branding, aspects of the state are promoted to create awareness and a positive image of the state’s business climate, with hopes to entice permanent business relocations from elsewhere.

**Methods of Analysis**

I analyzed the place marketing of Northeast Ohio with consideration of the place image themes identified in Chapter Three (Table 3.1). For example, the region may have
an image deficiency in terms of the harsh winter weather, so special attention would be placed on how the region is being marketed as a positive place to live, work, and visit, even in the cold season. Also, the region may have a positive image because of its extensive recreation, and in this case, I would observe some of the methods of promoting the region’s recreational opportunities.

I used naturalistic fieldwork and interviews to analyze the place marketing efforts. Conducting naturalistic fieldwork includes making observations and using secondary data resources such as promotional material and news media. I observed Northeast Ohio marketing materials, including Website ads, magazine ads, and brochures. In addition to the material promotion of the region, I reinforced the marketing assessment by conducting interviews. From these personal conversations, I acquired an understanding of the goals and strategies of place marketing used to promote a positive image of Northeast Ohio. I paid special attention to the emphasis of certain strategies as methods of reversing the negative images, including image marketing specifically, as well how attractions, infrastructure, and people are marketed (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993).

I conducted the interviews using a semi-structured approach, in which the elicitation process was rather casual, and I prepared a basic idea of question topics ahead of time. The casual interviewing process can often produce a large amount of data. I asked the participants a set of similar questions, depending on the context and participant. I covered specific topics in each conversation, but each interviewee was asked different sets of questions. The interviews lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes in length, allowing for informative discussions. The semi-structured approach to asking questions
allowed for more flexibility and more open-ended answers. I conducted four interviews face-to-face, and one interview via phone. In this manner, I was able to clarify questions, the interviews were longer, and the responses were elicited from unanticipated and on-the-spot questions. I informed the interviewees that any information that they disclose could be used in this research, so confidential information was not disclosed (Bernard and Ryan 2010). With that said, some details may have been intentionally left out by the subjects, including the limitation of talking about negative media ratings, avoiding the discussion of relevance of the marketing, and perhaps leaving out the inefficiencies in the marketing campaign’s spending.

The information acquired allowed for conclusions to be developed about the methods and effectiveness of current place marketing in Northeast Ohio. The goal of the interviews was to acquire the following information:

- Marketing area of the organization
- Motives and priorities of their marketing:
  - Methods of addressing deficiencies in the region’s image
  - Methods of promoting the positive images that exist
- Examples of the different marketing strategies:
  - Image marketing
  - Attraction marketing
  - Infrastructure marketing
  - People marketing
- Economic impact to their marketing region
- Future plans and ultimate goals
  (Some concepts adopted from Naipaul, Wang, and Okumus 2009.)
I used a digital voice recorder in three of the five interviews and took extensive notes during all five. The first interview was not recorded and it was not possible to record the phone interview. I attempted to acquire the above information, and to determine if the organizations are addressing the current image deficiencies and promoting the positive images. The interviewees consisted of executives or key players involved in place marketing organizations in Northeast Ohio, including formal regional and city marketing alliances, convention and visitor bureaus, and development organizations. The following list includes the individuals interviewed for the study and their respective organizations, and follows with explanations of why they and their organizations were examined:

- **Tamera Brown**: VP Marketing, Positively Cleveland Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- **James E. Mahon**: Director of Marketing and Communications, Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- **Kimberlee McKee**: President, Downtown Akron Partnership.
- **Richard J. Batyko**: VP Regional Marketing, Greater Cleveland Partnership and Program Manager, Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance.
- **Ed Burghard**: Executive Director, Ohio Business Development Coalition.

The Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance is a newer organization formed as an alliance between the Greater Cleveland Partnership, Team NEO, and Positively Cleveland. The Greater Cleveland Partnership is one of the largest metropolitan chambers of commerce in the United States, Team NEO promotes business investment and economic development in Northeast Ohio, and Positively Cleveland is the name for
the Cleveland Convention and Visitors Bureau. Cleveland Plus’ marketing efforts reach into the sixteen-county study area, which includes the metropolitan areas of Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown. To acquire insight on marketing specifically for the Akron area, I examined the Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau and Downtown Akron Partnership. At a broader scale, the State of Ohio has specific marketing and branding aimed at attracting business investment to the state. This branding and marketing to businesses is done by the Ohio Business Development Coalition.

Tamera Brown leads Positively Cleveland’s marketing efforts, and her interview laid the foundation for identifying local place marketing efforts in terms of convention and tourism attraction in Cleveland. James Mahon holds the same general position, but for Akron’s Convention and Visitors Bureau, which offered insight on the marketing efforts in Akron and Summit County. Kimberlee McKee gave a unique perspective on small-scale urban place marketing, specifically how the Downtown Akron “Special Improvement District” is marketed to potential residents, businesses, and tourists. Richard Batyko is the head figure for the newly-formed Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance, which is a unique entity that markets the entire Northeast Ohio region. The study area for this research project is defined by the boundaries of “Cleveland Plus” and the Batyko interview was essential to this project. The final interviewee, Ed Burghard, heads the Ohio Business Development Coalition. Burghard is a former executive with the Cincinnati-based Procter & Gamble Company, and his knowledge and expertise of product branding has led him to work in “place branding” the State of Ohio.
In terms of material promotion, I collected marketing and advertisement materials disseminated by these organizations before, during, or after the interviews, and evaluated as physical examples of their efforts. I viewed marketing examples from other local marketing organizations online. I extracted information from these sources, including the marketing strategies used and how the material is promoting a positive place image of the region as it relates to the negative images that currently exist. In my analysis, I analyzed marketing materials from the following organizations: Positively Cleveland, the Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Downtown Akron Partnership, Cleveland Plus, NeoIsGreat.com, the Wayne County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Visit Canton and Stark County, and the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Limitations and Bias Avoidance in the Methodology

I planned to interview at least four out of nine identified interview subjects, and reached a total of five. I failed to reach some of the organizations, but limiting the interviews to five allowed for a more examinable data set, and did not require the use of qualitative analysis software. With five longer interviews, the place marketing techniques and strategies are quite representative to the entire region, especially given that many of the organizations are now cooperating under the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance umbrella. The end conclusion of the research is not to discredit or credit any organization’s marketing efforts, but to determine whether the promotion of Northeast Ohio aligns with the media and Web image of the region.
Current Place Marketing in Northeast Ohio

Northeast Ohio has an extensive network of organizations and collaborations that are dedicated to promoting the region. Each of the four major cities has their own chambers of commerce, and many cities and counties in the region have convention and visitor bureaus dedicated to promoting their jurisdictions to business and leisure travelers. Regional marketing emerged in the mid 2000s as the Greater Cleveland Partnership, Positively Cleveland, and Team NEO formed the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance, which markets the entire Northeast Ohio region to potential tourists in nearby states and business investors in large metropolitan areas (Batyko interview). At a larger scale, the state of Ohio’s Business Development Coalition works with organizations, in this case, within Northeast Ohio, to attract new businesses from outside state boundaries (Burghard interview). In this chapter, I analyze the place marketing starting with Cleveland organizations, followed by Akron, then other smaller organizations, and concluding with a summary of the region’s marketing including information about the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance and the Ohio Business Development Coalition.

Cleveland Marketing

Two primary organizations market the Cleveland and Cuyahoga County area. Team NEO is responsible for promoting to businesses that may potentially relocate to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, and Positively Cleveland works with potential convention organizers and leisure tourists. Positively Cleveland markets the metropolitan area for
conventions and tourism by sending out promotional material, advertisements, and meeting with potential convention planners. Tamera Brown describes the marketing of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio as emphasizing affordability, accessibility, authenticity, an unexpected region that has a “Midwestern hip” component to it.

The convention and visitors bureau works with the idea that outsiders have a generally neutral image of Cleveland. People tend to have low expectations of the region, and after visiting they are impressed. Outsiders see and recognize the low cost of living, accessibility, lack of congestion in terms of traffic, access to water, and entertainment options. Meeting planners who visit also tend to have low expectations, but given a few days, they are often impressed with Cleveland. The interview revealed that current residents tend to be negative and assume “everywhere else must be better,” but most of Positively Cleveland’s marketing is not aimed at reversing negative perceptions internally (Brown interview).

![Positively Cleveland Logo](Source: Positively Cleveland CVB website)

Figure 4.1. Positively Cleveland Logo (Source: Positively Cleveland CVB website)

Positively Cleveland’s marketing is not as emphasized during the winter months, but for the cold-weather season, marketing includes ads with visually pleasing images of winter scenery within the region, and focuses on indoor activities such as the arts, theater, and other cultural venues. Cleveland is marketed year-round as being transformed into a
“hip Midwestern” city, and Downtown and other eclectic neighborhoods are highly emphasized. Photos in promotional material are very useful, and these tend to display a vibrant and hip city. One photo emphasizes a unique community of diverse people in Cleveland by showing two men shaking hands, one wearing a business suit and the other with an arm covered in tattoos (Brown interview).

![Figure 4.2. Positively Cleveland Poster Example (Source: Brown interview)](image)

In terms of specific attractions, infrastructure, and people marketing, the focus is based on the audience. For all visitors, attractions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame are advertised. For conventions and meetings, infrastructure marketing emphasizes the new Cleveland Medical Mart and Convention Center, a downtown-to-airport rapid transit line via the RTA Red Line, the United Airlines hub at Hopkins International Airport, and efficient highways and public transportation. Positively Cleveland promotes the people of Cleveland as warm, welcoming, and diverse, and features local celebrities such as Chef Michael Symon (Brown interview).

A few areas of improvement are admittedly needed in Cleveland, especially the quality of public education in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and corruption in county government, which all have very negative images locally and nationally. However, the Cuyahoga County government has recently been reformed and took its new
form in early 2011 with new executive/council leadership. In addition, unemployment remains an issue and the economy needs to improve, especially given the recent recession. Brown added that Lakefront development should be a priority to solidify Cleveland’s position as well (Brown interview).

The economic impact of Positively Cleveland is significant. For every one dollar spent by the bureau, 105 dollars is added to the Cleveland area economy for convention and tourism. In 2009, tourism added 5.9 billion dollars into the local economy, which includes 61,000 related jobs, and 865 million dollars in taxes collected. Northeast Ohio tourism is responsible for about 36 percent of total tourism in the state, followed by Cincinnati and Southwest Ohio (Brown interview).

**Akron Marketing**

Akron is within close proximity to the Cleveland market, but has its own convention and visitors bureau. Jim Mahon considers Northeast Ohio, and Akron in particular, to be affordable, accessible, and flexible when marketing to potential outside convention and leisure tourists. Again, people tend to have few impressions of the region, but have a positive image after visiting. The first goal for the bureau is to bring meeting planners to Akron. Once in Akron, many people become impressed by changes in the region over the last two decades. One slogan used to market Akron has been “take another look.” The success of Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic’s Biomedical Corridor initiative is another vehicle used to show changes in Akron’s economy in recent years (Mahon interview). The goal for this “innovation district” is to attract and market high-
tech biomedical businesses in a geographic region near downtown and the University of Akron, which will guide the city’s development for decades (Williamson, 2006).

![Akron/Summit CVB Logo](Source: Akron/Summit CVB website)

Figure 4.3. Akron/Summit CVB Logo (Source: Akron/Summit CVB website)

The Akron area is marketed year-round, more specifically for leisure tourists in the summer months and conventions during winter. In fact, a recent marketing slogan was coined, “every season every day.” Akron’s image is marketed similarly to Cleveland’s scheme by using visual aids and photos in brochures and magazines. Site visits for meeting planners are important as well and tend to create a good impression for most visitors. Specific attractions are marketed, especially the Interstate 77 Hall of Fame Corridor, which includes the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, National Inventors Hall of Fame, and Pro Football Hall of Fame, all within a 60-mile stretch between Cleveland, Akron, and Canton. In terms of infrastructure, the Akron area is marketed for its meeting venues, hotels, and accessibility by road and air. Having two airports in the region has proved to be very significant in attracting meetings. The people of the region are marketed as having traditional Midwestern hospitality and exceptional customer service. The Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau attempts to back up these
promotions with actual experiences, which again reinforces the importance of site visits (Mahon interview).

Brochures from the bureau emphasize accessibility and affordability for business and leisure travelers. The region’s two airports are promoted, as well as hotel and meeting space. Specific attractions are marketed, including those in recreation, culture, arts, and entertainment. The most emphasized attractions are the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath, museums, the local music and culinary scene, concert venues, and nightlife. Future plans and goals for the bureau are to continue attracting business meetings and tourists, and to attract as many people as possible to the 2014 Gay Games, which are to be held in both Cleveland and Akron (Mahon interview; Akron/Summit CVB brochures).

At a smaller scale, Akron’s central business district is marketed by the Downtown Akron Partnership, which manages a 42-block area that has been a special improvement district since 2000. Districts like this are common in and around the downtowns of old industrial cities, with a goal of attracting residents, tourists, and small businesses back to the center of the city. A clean, safe, and vibrant neighborhood with a unique sense of place is marketed by the organization. One concept is to create more than a “9 to 5” downtown, one with “24/7 urban living.” The Downtown Akron Partnership works to improve and revitalize the city center specific to new demands and demographic shifts back to urban living, and markets the downtown as unique and “quirky” (McKee interview).
Downtown Akron is marketed as having potential and being unique. The marketing operates with a metaphor that residents and workers tend not to recognize the positive amenities downtown, and tend to have negative images. Outsiders often are very impressed when visiting Akron, especially downtown. A repeated theme continues with the idea that outsiders generally have neutral impressions of Northeast Ohio, which quickly turn positive after a visit.

When asked about the common negative image of winter weather in Northeast Ohio, there are admissions of harsh weather, but mitigations for marketing these perceptions are in place. Downtown Akron’s skywalks are promoted, which connect some buildings preventing the need to walk outside. Winter activities, such as skating, are centered on the area’s Lock 3 recreation area and are heavily promoted to local residents and workers.

Despite negative images of crime and unpleasant conditions, the Downtown Akron Partnership markets a clean, safe, and vibrant image. Ambassadors are present along the district’s streets daily to maintain this image. Attractions are heavily marketed to suburban visitors, downtown residents, and university students, especially the city’s
direct connection to a national park, which refers back to the uniqueness of Akron. In addition, they market the growing university, newer convention center, new art museum, thriving nightlife, the Civic Theater, Lock 3 Park, and new restaurants along Main Street and Maiden Lane. The lack of awareness of many downtown workers has also spawned a promotional “go get out of your office” campaign aimed at getting downtown employees to realize and experience previously unknown urban amenities in the central business district (McKee interview).

Benefits of efficient infrastructure are marketed by the Downtown Akron Partnership as well. They consider Akron the right size and to be a very accessible “big city with a smaller feel.” The Biomedical Corridor is also marketed similar to the Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau. Akron’s people are marketed as being genuine and volunteering, but for downtown, the goal is to market to and attract a more diverse group of residents who want urban living, and the Biomedical Corridor could potentially help with this goal. The ultimate goal of the organization, similar to Cleveland’s efforts, is to continue attracting residents back to the city, which can help to create a 24/7 neighborhood-like downtown that is a significant hub for living in Northeast Ohio (McKee interview).

The Downtown Akron Partnership also produces brochures and small advertisements for university students, young professionals, and downtown visitors. The materials emphasize accessibility, and include a local skywalk and parking map to ease suburbanite’s and outsider’s “fear” of parking. In addition, they provide a “metro living tour” brochure with a year-round exploration guide, map, and other information. The
guide promotes a showcase of metropolitan living experiences with a phrase “work here, play here, live here.” Words describing Akron include basic, metropolitan, eclectic, and restoration. Information is also provided for living opportunities in or around downtown and in newly renovated or gentrified areas. With this, the idea is promoted that this successful urban center has maintained a hometown feeling during its 15-year urban renaissance. “A cure for suburbia” is mentioned, again pointing to a strong promotion for urban living in Northeast Ohio (DAP brochures; McKee interview).

Marketing heavily caters to University of Akron students as an attempt to keep young people in the downtown area for social and recreation activities. Attempts are being made to increase connectivity to the university and downtown with the construction of new bridges, pedestrian-friendly paths, and bike lanes. Student housing is being developed near the central business district as an attempt to increase the young resident base of the central business district. Specific attractions are marketed to college students, especially dining, nightlife, and entertainment options. The Downtown Akron Partnership has developed a “Do Downtown” discount card for students and other visitors, offering discounts at several downtown businesses as an attempt to attract more people to the area and away from popular suburban shopping and entertainment districts. Marketing to local suburban residents is stressed, which could create competition with other cities and suburbs in the region, such as Cleveland and other Northeast Ohio suburbs (DAP brochures).

The main marketing objective of the Downtown Akron Special Improvement District is to maintain and enhance the image, awareness, and usage of downtown as a
vibrant hub of activity where people live, work, dine, shop, and play. Most efforts are given to the image promotion of Akron and its central city, and the rest to specific attractions. Cooperation exists between the city, county, Akron/Summit Convention and Visitors Bureau, Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Akron. Business, parking, and stakeholder support is a key issue in the special improvement district.

The Downtown Akron Partnership developed a forward-looking service plan for the special improvement district through 2014. The three main goals are:

1. Stronger promotion of business, cultural, entertainment, residential, and recreational opportunities in downtown.

2. Larger percentage of Greater Akron community living, working, playing, shopping, and dining in downtown.

3. Increased number of businesses coming to and staying in downtown, as well as supporting a case for increased investment downtown.

In the service plan, safety and comfort are promoted as a way of trying to rid people’s “fears” of larger cities. Brochures promote keeping your car and self safe, and the partnership also has several ambassadors on the streets to assist pedestrians and drivers and to keep the area clean. The cleaning effort includes clean sidewalks, appealing public spaces, as well as educating and helping property owners to maintain and improve their properties. For safety, visible uniformed presence is emphasized, as well as increased safety patrols before and after work hours, safety escorts, and having block watch meetings. For vibrancy, an improved appearance is sought, including streetscape improvements, floral planting, and physical improvements to signage and other infrastructure. The partnership wants to market a welcoming and friendly environment
by actually creating this safer and cleaner urban landscape (DAP Service Plan 2010-2014).

*Marketing at a Broader Geographic Scale*

Most of the large cities and most counties in Northeast Ohio have dedicated organizations responsible for marketing their jurisdictions for tourism and business investment. Recently, the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance formed to promote the entire 16-county region centered around the four major cities of “Cleveland + Akron + Canton + Youngstown.” The organization is a combination of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, Positively Cleveland, and Team NEO, and partnerships with other organizations in the region. It leverages on the region’s strengths and areas of growth in healthcare, biotechnology, high-tech manufacturing, and entrepreneurial activity. Other partners in the region that aid in travel and leisure marketing include the Akron/Summit CVB, Ashtabula County CVB, Canton/Stark County CVB, Central Portage County CVB, Geauga County CVB, Lake County CVB, Lake Erie Shores and Islands, Lorain County CVB, Medina County CVB, Salem Visitors Bureau, Streetsboro VCB, Trumbull County CVB, Wayne County CVB, and the Youngstown/Mahoning CVB. (Batyko interview; Cleveland Plus brochures; Cleveland Plus website).

Regional cooperation is emphasized because physically and psychologically, most people live beyond their artificial geographic boundaries. When businesses make investment decisions, they consider an entire region because employees come from a large geographic area around a major city. Regional collaboration creates a stronger
marketing program when entities work together rather than against one another. There is increasing competition for businesses, residents, and tourists with other cities, regions, and even countries and international regions such as the European Union, and Cleveland Plus founders believe that inter-regional partnerships can help make the region competitive (Cleveland Plus website).

![Cleveland Plus Regional Map](Source: Cleveland Plus website)

The “Cleveland Plus region” is marketed as a region of over four million people and 6,000 square miles. The name itself is marketed as having two aspects: geography and attitude. The organization considers Northeast Ohio to be a powerful and dynamic region with more to offer than many people would think. Northeast Ohio is promoted to have “thriving cities and communities full of vitality, must-see destinations, world-class attractions and exciting business opportunities.” The Cleveland Plus website mentions:

Cleveland Plus has deep roots and an authentic character. It’s exciting and forward-thinking, but also familiar and comfortable. There is an abundance of offerings in the arts and culture, business and manufacturing, professional and recreational sports, health care, education, technology and the outdoors. Above all, Cleveland Plus is the people. Confident. Proud. Diverse. And exceptionally welcoming. Everyone is a plus in Cleveland Plus (Cleveland Plus website).
Their primary goal is to attract businesses in major industries from outside of Northeast Ohio through the efforts of partnering Team NEO. The business marketing is taking place nationwide and internationally, through collaborations with the approximately 200 best site selectors. Furthermore, there is some tourism marketing through the partner Positively Cleveland, which takes place in closer proximity to Northeast Ohio, including within Ohio and extending to surrounding states, metropolitan centers, and the Northeast Megalopolis. About ten percent of the marketing is internal and aimed at community influencers, who in theory can help spread positive news about the region to others within the region. The idea is that the spread of positive news and information about the region can have a trickling effect of instilling pride and unity in the region (Batyko interview; Cleveland Plus brochures).

Cities in the Midwest in general tend to have a more negative self-impression than destination cities like New York City, Boston, and San Francisco. Also, negative media rankings of Northeast Ohio are an issue in terms of economics, political corruption, and weather, but these rankings are generally ignored by marketers. Residents within the region who have a negative image tend to be more vocal and express those opinions more, and the national media rankings are not necessarily factual. Cleveland Plus continues to have a goal of promoting a positive image regardless of the negativity, and confirms that much of the bad press is not accurate with their insider and outsider perception surveys. On the other hand, positive media portrayals do exist and are
increasing in number, but tend to be overshadowed by the negative attention (Batyko interview; Cleveland Plus brochures).

Cleveland Plus markets with the idea that Northeast Ohio has a transforming economy, with innovation and the ability to build from that innovation. Unemployment is near or below average compared with much of the country, and parts of the region are adapting to a new economy and receiving positive national and international attention. For example, Youngstown is being hailed for “intelligent shrinking,” and newer high-tech jobs are being created. The entire Cleveland to Pittsburgh corridor could potentially become a biotechnology corridor, and that can be and is being marketed. Youngstown is very important in that it lies in the center of this emerging corridor (Batyko interview).

Cleveland Plus does market specific attractions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and entertainment districts, but the marketing caters more to potential businesses, with not as much weight placed on tourism. However, their partner, Positively Cleveland, focuses part of its marketing on tourism, which proved to be successful when Cleveland/Akron recently won the bid for the 2014 Gay Games. Team NEO’s marketing leverages tourist attractions and events in its efforts to attract business investment. Infrastructure marketing becomes important for this business marketing approach, in which Northeast Ohio’s accessibility and transportation system are emphasized. This includes the region’s highway system, airports, and access to rail and water. The region is marketed as boasting honest, welcoming, and trustworthy people with urban hip added to Midwestern values (Batyko interview; Cleveland Plus brochures).
The Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance has been quite successful in its goals since its inception. Between 2007 and 2009, Cleveland Plus attracted 29 companies to the region and created 3,100 jobs. The annual payroll added to the region as a result between 2007 and 2009 was $95 million. The organization has gained positive attention from national media. Their national media relations efforts increased positive national coverage by 37 percent, and more than 75 stories have been placed influencing positive references about the Northeast Ohio region (Cleveland Plus brochures).

The alliance identifies competitor regions, such as Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Kansas City metropolitan area, and the Nashville region. Visit Pittsburgh and its Countryside” promotes the Southwest Pennsylvania region to potential tourists and meeting planners (VisitPittsburgh.com). The “KC One” campaign promotes metropolitan Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas as a vibrant metropolitan region of 18 counties and 2.2 million people. KC One’s regional marketing is oriented towards economic development and business attraction (ThinkKC.com). “Visit Nashville, Music City” markets the Nashville metropolitan area for tourism and conventions, similar to Visit Pittsburgh and its Countryside and Positively Cleveland (VisitMusicCity.com). The marketing strategies of all four regions, including those found in Northeast Ohio, focus on each region’s economic and cultural strengths, specific attractions, infrastructure, and other amenities and aspects of quality of life. All four campaigns operate at broader regional scales and are not specifically limited to the core city. However, the Cleveland Plus initiative has more of an encompassing collaboration
of different sectors of the region, including convention and tourism attraction, economic development goals, business attraction, and even some internal marketing.

In some ways, however, Pittsburgh can be considered a collaborative partner. Cleveland and Pittsburgh metropolitan fringes and exurbs are blending, and the combined region is aiming to become the Silicon Valley of biotechnology. Cleveland is closing the gap on competitive regions in terms of economics, and has a much larger population base of over four million people. Future marketing by Cleveland Plus aims to continue attracting innovative industries and grow the Northeast Ohio economy, which can be aided by attracting more immigrants and talented creative professionals. For this goal, a new international welcome center is being planned for Cleveland (Batyko interview; Cleveland Plus brochures).

In addition to the newer regional marketing alliance, the State of Ohio markets to outsiders for business attraction through the Ohio Business Development Coalition. I interviewed Ed Burghard, the executive director for the organization. The coalition applies corporate branding fundamentals to place branding. This gets to the difference between place image and identity. Image is what a place is and what its perception is. The Ohio Business Development Coalition takes place image and marketing a step further and brands Ohio with an identity, which involves more of what the place strives to be and what it is working to become (Burghard interview).
Ohio’s being branded with the identity of a place to do business, which is not differentiating than its competitor states; rather the product or benefit (Ohio as a place to do business) is delivered differently. They drive the positive assets of the state and attempt to change the negatives in an attempt to take away the competitor’s competitive advantage. Burghard explains three “moments of truth” in the capital investment decision process: (1) Winning the opportunity to compete, (2) Winning the competition, and (3) Winning the repeat investment (Burghard interview).

Most importantly, Ohio’s branding and marketing realizes the difference between collaboration and competitions; for example, between regions. Competition for businesses between regions can exist, so the minimization of duplicate investments is imperative, as is cost-sharing and collaboration. In terms of state marketing, the Ohio Business Development Coalition realizes potential issues with competition for relocating businesses between Columbus and Cleveland, or Akron and Youngstown (Burghard interview).

In the Chapter 3 media analysis, negative references in web forums were made not only to Cleveland and the Northeast Ohio region, but to Ohio in general. The national media and outsiders were not as critical to the state as a whole, but the state still

Figure 4.9. Branding Logo (Source: Ohio Business Development Coalition website)
has some Rust Belt perceptions and attitudes. The Ohio Business Development Coalition has a new brand promise, which describes Ohio as the “State of Perfect Balance.” Emphasis is placed on work/life balance, and they pin Ohio and its regions as a place where employees can achieve professional and personal success. Burghard reveals that although the branding promise is for Ohio, the same general promise holds true in each region of the state, i.e. Northeast Ohio. However, each region is unique and has a certain bundle of assets that are promoted (Burghard interview).

The assets promoted in the brand promise are expected to be relevant, authentic, competitive, concise in articulation, and consistent in delivery. The brand promise needs to be relevant or investors will not even consider the location. For consistency, the “talk and the walk” must be aligned. Place brand management needs to be effective through an understanding of the potential impacts of policy change and infrastructure upgrades on the business climate. Image, attraction, infrastructure, and people marketing are all part of the promise delivery (Burghard interview).

Ohio’s accessibility is heavily marketed due in part to its infrastructure, and all regions of the state are promoted to have unique access to metropolitan, suburban, and rural living. Indiana may have similar campaigns, but in branding Ohio, these promises are delivered differently. In terms of the brand promise delivery, the Ohio Business Development Coalition promotes the state mainly to the primary megalopolises, such as Boston, New York City, and Washington D.C. Ohio’s shorter commutes and lack of big city stresses may be appealing to a company’s employees who are considering a move from Manhattan to Downtown Cleveland (Burghard interview).
Branding Ohio in this way has proven to be successful so far. A semi-quantitative measure that takes into account business site selection in relation to other states showed that Ohio was the winner in all years from 2006 to 2009, allowing the state to win the Governor’s Cup Award. Quantitative research studies in 2006 and 2008 evaluated both CEO and site selector perceptions of Ohio in terms of its business climate. The Ohio brand was eleven percent stronger in 2008 than 2006 for Ohio-based executives. Burghard reveals that this is a strong indication that the coalition’s communication efforts have been relevant, authentic, and competitive. Furthermore, for capital investors who have made investments in the last three years or plan to in the next three years, the Ohio brand was two percent stronger in 2008 than 2006, showing that the private sector branding was working (Burghard interview).

The Ohio Business Development Coalition sees the state and its regions as well-positioned because of its well-balanced economic portfolio. They see the future to be high-tech manufacturing that leverages on the state’s knowledge economy. Presently, the tax structure is very competitive for companies that serve a global marketplace, which can enable future profitable globalization of Ohio businesses. This new manufacturing and balanced economic portfolio would ideally make Ohio one of the best states to do business. Marketing and branding Ohio will be challenged by limited resources and funding, especially during bad economic periods. Yet, place branding is needed the most during a bad economy. If the branding is to be successful, Burghard states that it requires a long-term view and willingness to invest in the future, because a strong place brand will have good payoffs during economic recoveries (Burghard interview).
Implications and Conclusions of Northeast Ohio’s Place Marketing

Northeast Ohio has a number of organizations that promote aspects of the region. Collaborations for this effort are extensive throughout the area, and this is evident from the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance. Other competitor and non-competitor regions have cities with convention and visitor bureaus, and large regional marketing alliances, but the Cleveland Plus idea and campaign is not only geographically collaborative, but is all-encompassing in terms of the variety of organizations under its umbrella. The regional campaign is diversified in that it promotes to potential businesses and investors, convention and meeting planners, potential tourists, and locals residents. The makeup organizations include entities that market specifically to each of those. One of the primary issues in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio’s image over the last few decades has been the economy, and the regional marketing partnerships are made up of agencies that are actually transforming the economy, which have received very positive national and international attention.

It is difficult to state that one specific strategy or method of place marketing and branding in Northeast Ohio is ideal, but it can be asserted that a key aspect is regional cooperation. All organizations involved have their own objectives, but as a whole, the collaborative efforts of the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance have far-reaching goals of creating and promoting a prosperous region over the next several decades. Its makeup organizations are spending the resources to actually create a vibrant metropolitan region, and then marketing it. Uniqueness and accessibility are promoted, and the common theme of the region’s identity is metropolitan living without the glamour and congestion
of destination cities, with a good work/life balance. All four of the identified target markets are used, but the business and industry sector is the most emphasized aspect in the region’s marketing and the state’s branding efforts. The questionable issues raised in Chapter Three, such as weather, political corruption, and crime, are often ignored in the marketing, whereas more controllable objectives are scrutinized, addressed, and then the resulting positive outcomes are marketed. However, I cannot conclude that ignoring such issues is the correct way to go about the place marketing. Regardless of the sometimes ranting in the media and Web sources when it comes to these image deficiencies, they are very prevalent and often overshadow any positive attention that may appear. Perhaps these very vocal negative images should be addressed in a way that has yet to be attempted.
CHAPTER V

Conclusion

In this research, I sought to explore the current place image of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio based on computer mediated communication and other media, and then analyzed the place marketing efforts within the region that aim to create a more positive image. Place image and place marketing were studied together because the primary mission of place marketers is to manipulate these images (Holcomb 2001). The image of places has an effect on business investment, resident relocation, tourist attraction, and local resident satisfaction. Place marketing seeks to create a positive image to these potential “consumers” of the region (Holcomb 2001; Hall 2006; Ashworth and Voogd 1988).

Going into this research, I hypothesized that Cleveland and Northeast Ohio has suffered from a collective image crisis, one which focuses on the Rust Belt identity prominent in the former manufacturing core of North America. Goals of reinvention and image reversal have emerged in Rust Belt regions since the 1990s, and this research has shown that recently, the efforts have begun to steer in the right direction. My analysis of computer mediated communication and media portrayals revealed that the image is in fact, not as negative as presumed, but is actually a polarizing mix of very positive to very
negative perceptions. Some themes of the region’s image are very positive, others are very negative, but the majority of the images are mixed or neutral.

Previous research revealed similar results in how people portray Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. Surveys conducted by the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance have shown that the majority of people outside of the region have no impression of the region at all, while some view it positively and far fewer have a negative image. Insiders tend to be more positive in the anonymous surveys, which may signify that people with negative attitudes tend to be much more vocal in computer mediated communication. My CMC and media analysis of this research showed that residents of Northeast Ohio tend to be more negative than outsiders, and the insiders tended to be more negative. However, crediting the negative images found in the analysis is difficult because much of the negativity was ranting, incoherent, and derogatory. The negative portrayals often involved poor-performing professional sports teams, political corruption, and winter weather, but other people contradicted these images by stating their satisfaction with the weather, and citing the Cuyahoga County government reform of 2011 as a sign of good things to come in the political landscape of the region. Some economic dissatisfaction still exists in terms of the lost manufacturing jobs in the region since deindustrialization, but the outside media has a very positive image of the region and shows a bright outlook for the future in terms of economics and the business climate.

Marketers have attempted to reimage the region for the last few decades. The 1990s brought about physical and esthetic changes to Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, including new stadiums, entertainment districts, and improved infrastructure. The
underlying social and economic problems were never addressed, however, and these problems persisted into the 2000s. Just before the 2007-2010 Great Recession, the region formed numerous collaborations that aimed to not only create temporary fixes for the area’s ills, but build an entirely new economy with goals of regional prosperity for decades. As these large partnerships formed, others formed to market these changes, in particular, the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance. Large private sector institutions, small businesses, and governmental entities are collaborating in the 16-county region of “Cleveland Plus” to not only market or sell the perks of investing in this place, but actually creating changes and marketing those changes. The marketing does not work with the assumption of “sell what we have,” but it seems to sell in efforts with creating actual changes, unlike the strategies of the past.

Other previous research has shown that many outsiders base their impression of the region on media and actual experiences. With that said, many of the interviews in this research indicated the significance of actual positive experiences that influence tourists and conventioneers to return or hold large events in the region. The landing of the 2014 Gay Games by Cleveland and Akron can be seen as a monumental accomplishment in a region suffering for so many decades, especially when noting that cities like Boston and Washington, DC lost to Northeast Ohio in the bid.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, concluding to one specific model place marketing and branding in Northeast Ohio is difficult, but it is quite obvious that regional cooperation is imperative in its goals. The makeup entities of the regional marketing organizations have their own goals, but the overall objective as a region is to create a
prosperous, vibrant, and successful region for decades. All of these organizations have their own objectives, but as a whole, the collaborative efforts of the Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance have far-out goals of creating and promoting a prosperous region over the next several years. Positive aspects are marketed, such as uniqueness, accessibility, affordability, and good work/life balance. The negative images, especially the ranting and derogatory images shown in Chapter Three, are often ignored in the marketing. The controllable economic objectives are being addressed, solutions are being sought, and the positive effects are marketed. As mentioned in Chapter Four, I cannot assert that ignoring some of the negatives is an effective method of place marketing.

Time will tell the success or failures of place marketing in the Cleveland Plus region. The completion of several large-scale inner city and downtown projects in Cleveland, Akron, and Youngstown in particular is being seen as a good indicator of future success, but again, I cannot conclude that these massive projects will actually have a permanent positive effect on the region’s economic future. In the 1990s, Cleveland’s future was seen as bright after massive redevelopment and construction projects downtown, but the negative images still exist.

Today, the region is attempting to transform and use its strengths in healthcare (Cleveland/Akron/Canton), biotechnology (Cleveland/Akron), and software development (Youngstown) to anchor future success. If the region’s current population can embrace these new trends and steer away from the Rust Belt ideology and presumption that the glory days of the middle twentieth century could return, a collective positive identity
could be formed. With that said, perhaps the region’s marketing efforts should address the internal negative perception that Northeast Ohio’s own residents still have, since it is their negative voices that often overshadow positive attention. Future marketing could attempt to perform the challenging task of reversing these images. Or perhaps these negative images do not even matter. If the economic situation improves to the level of prosperity that the Sun Belt experienced before the Great Recession, with sustainability added, many of the negative images could vanish.

There is a vast amount of research in place marketing and place image, and this research sought to bring the two together to examine the former industrial region of Northeast Ohio. I determined the place image of the region using computer mediated communication, media portrayals, and previous surveys. Then, taking into consideration these images, I investigated the marketing efforts in the region that attempt to attract residents, business investment, tourism, and build local resident confidence. Future research could use this approach to look at other cities or regions within the Rust Belt, or even carry it to more prosperous areas of the Sun Belt or destination cities to determine if people truly have positive images of these “attractive” places. In terms of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, potential research could explore more in-depth the images that people hold of the region later in this decade, and compare those to the 2000s. Since computer mediated communication in the form of Web forums, blogs, and social networking will likely continue to grow, it would be interesting to see how the region’s image of in this respect evolves over the next several years. In addition, research could attempt to
quantify the return on investment from place marketing in the future as compared to present profits.
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