

Are we talking the Same Language? Challenging Complexity in Country Brand Models

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The purpose of this paper is to review recent research into country brand models and identify the most common and shared dimensions. Based on the literature review, this study establishes a conceptual framework to consider the complex interaction between the core constructs of country branding, country brand models and country image. This paper attempts to show that there is no acceptable, concrete, and universally theoretical-recognised definition either in the academic literature or in the business and trade arena. The paper is divided into three parts with the first focusing on country branding constructs, branding strategies, as well as the importance in the global economy and competitive arena worldwide of the country brand. The second part reviews the conceptual origin of the main country brand models in the last decades. The third part discusses the country image construct, and identifies this as the country brand reflection. The paper summary draws the analysis together to present the exploration of the country brand model dimensions. The purpose of the paper is to determine the most common dimensions in the main country brand models. The findings are that: tourism is the most supported by five models; followed by governance and investment by four models); and exports and immigration are supported by three models. Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers insight for researchers, country brand strategists, and communications professionals to rethink the country brand being adopted to comprehend a country image and to invest in either public relations, promotion and advertising worldwide. The country brand models discussed in this paper may be applied to other future investigations regarding the need for a conventional and consistent country brand model, including new dimensions related to the multiple stakeholders and specific country variables.

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Introduction

In the global economy arena, a country's image has become a central issue for competition and export growth. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that developing countries are exposing themselves purposively or not. Every brand identity reflects an image in the target-market by means of any kind of communications and marketing activities (Kotler & Keller, 1993) or by any kind of experience with the brand (Kapferer, 2004; Shimp, 2007). Similarly, a country brand echoes its image abroad or to a target-country using country branding strategies or not, by just performing its role worldwide, economically. Invariably, people feel that their own identity has to do with image of their country (Cevero, 2013) and every country creates an image at people's mind (Anholt, 2007; Kotler & Keller, 1993). This study supports the brand as a conveyor of information for economic impact, whose contents of information vary according to the audience the brand is addressing to (Lindemann, 2010), since "countries, as well as individuals, can be brands" (Lindemann, 2010, p.7). However, Sevin (2011) believes that the place itself needs to change in order to transform its own perception, as well as Anholt (2007) and Dinnie (2009). Following the brand principle of Kapferer, which is widely accepted and fitted to a country brand dimension "brand is a plan, a vision, a project" (2004, p.113), whose strategic planning needs to be estimated in a process of long term development and maintenance. Precisely, every country has an image and exploring its reflection is constant an interrogation to be challenged in order to improve its brand position and advance in markets internationally.

Over the last thirty years, theoretical studies are emerging rapidly and in order to promote a place are steadily achieving prominence (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Dinnie, 2009; Rainisto, 2004; Kavaratziz, 2010; Gertner, 2011; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) yet, place branding is still an "unexplored" field (Hildreth, 2010). Emphatically, a place which can be any place, once it can be market or promoted, for instance, a country, a city, a university, a house, a building, an airport, a highway, a street, a park, a stadium, a circus, a beach, etc. Any kind of place reveals its own an image on purpose or not, planned or not and controlled or not. Based on this eclectic and wide scenario, country is the chosen place to be investigated in this paper. Additionally, both "nation brand" and "country brand" are discussed as conceptual synonymous terminologies in this study, using "country" as a standard term. Correspondingly, Fetscherin (2010, p.467) indorses that nation or country branding "are used interchangeably in the literature." The reasons will be explained in the literature review, which are grounded on previous studies. However, a collection of researchers treat nation branding as more political, economic and diplomatic application (Aronczyk, 2013; Rojas-Méndez, 2013; Anholt, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001). As Anholt (2007) has pointed out that, the government's entire involvement is a requirement when promoting a country and it should be also related to international relations and public diplomacy. Similarly, Jansen (2008, p.121) affirms that the terminology

for this kind of promotion - nation branding is more appropriate when it is “an applied communication practice that is supported by public policy and funding, and encouraged by international development and trade organizations including the United Nations, World Bank, World Trade Organization and others”. Conversely, for Lucarelli & Brorström, the terminology “place branding” means “a mature and genuine research domain” (2013, p.66).

Once, a country is a place, place branding studies are taken in account in this paper, whose researchers discuss the theory for a place (Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013; Gertner, 2011; Go & Govers, 2011; Sevin, 2011; Ashworth & Kavaratziz, 2010; Maheshwari, 2010; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Dinnie, 2005; Kavaratziz, 2005; Rainisto, 2004).

Essentially, most scholars believe a country brand's subjects are closely interconnected with place branding or marketing strategies (Dinnie, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013; Zakarevičius & Lonikaitė, 2013; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Jansen, 2008; Kavaratziz, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993). As well, many activities from marketing and communications planning are being constantly combined with country brand strategies (Gertner, 2011; Kotler & Keller, 2006; Dinnie, 2005). Chan & Marafa (2013, p.237) highlight that place branding research “can incorporate a number of key concepts, including place identity, place image as projected by place marketers, place image and the value perceived by place users or consumers, user experience in the place, marketing and communications channels, and stakeholder relationships”, according to Kavaratziz (2005) and Anholt (2007). From the same and complementary point of view, these country branding strategies or tools signify place brand management, which “is dynamic as is its research domain” as stressed by Chan & Marafa (2013, p.241).

Country branding is not a new subject in academic discussions, although there has been considerable intensification and acceptance in the last decade (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2010; Cevero, 2013; Fetscherin, 2010; Szondi, 2007) in both the academia and corporate environments (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Dinnie, 2009; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Gertner, 2011; Go & Govers, 2011; Warnaby & Medway, 2013).

Literature Review

Country Branding in the Global Economy

In the light of Go & Govers (2011, p. xii), the global dimension of a country brand represents the country's reputation in the world, “in turbulent times, reputation is a territorial actor's most precious asset”, similarly confirmed yet again by Buhmann & Ingenhoff (2013, p.1), “in times of globalization and mediatisation, the image a country projects is becoming more important”. Consequently, countries have been developing strategies and promoting efforts to promote their image abroad and nationally. Therefore, globalisation is a worldwide development phenomenon, which goes beyond the

borders of the nations, businesses and individuals changing the actions, functions, and relationships between countries, between organizations and between people (Parker, 2007). Globalisation not only facilitates trades, transportation, rapid communications, and increased economy figures for a few countries; but also causes threatening negotiations among countries (Parker, 2007; Vardar, 2013). Take the case of both developing and developed countries, regarding globalisation's related effects, directly and indirectly, with the five most in-revolution-global arenas: economy, politics, technology, culture, and the environment in a twenty-first-century context of global integration (Parker, 2007; Aronczyk, 2013). There are effects of globalisation into places and all the "changes in their economic, cultural, and social mosaic" (Kavaratziz, 2005, p.329). According to Vardar (2013, p.7) globalization can be seen as a pendulum swinging and not equally for every nation. Having said that, "the identity of a country, the processes of international communication about countries, and the opinions and attitudes towards a country that form in these processes among relevant stakeholders" (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013, p.5). To illustrate this point, Szondi (2007) has investigated the evolution of country branding after countries of Central and Eastern Europe have joined the European Union in 2004. His study was a qualitative study, which involved strategic, operational marketing, branding and public relations plans and proposals as well as image research reports and findings.

Government offices play a relevant role in the maintenance and advertising of a country brand, which is continuously promoted with or without private sector participation. Several publics instantaneously perceive the overall image of the country itself or the products' brand from the country internationally. Furthermore, one of the most significant current discussions in country image studies is how international business, marketing and communications professionals can make it a differential tool for the development of countries, when successfully planned, applied and investigated. Applicably, preceding studies indicate the central purpose of the country/place branding strategies in order for a country to achieve in different area,, which are reported below:

- increases success of a country's businesses and foreign direct investments (FDIs), promotes tourism (Kotler et al., 1993; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013);
- supports exports (Kotler et al., 1993; Dinnie, 2005; Anholt, 2007; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Fetscherin, 2010)
- promotes public diplomacy and diplomatic relations (Kotler et al., 1993; Anholt, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009)
- offers a country sustainable development (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Fetscherin, 2010);
- strengthens citizens' identity and increases self-esteem (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013);
- stimulates immigration (Anholt, 2007; Fetscherin, 2010)

- Creates positive international perceptions and attitudes (Fetscherin, 2010)

In summary, Haigh (Brand Finance, 2013) says, “nations can adopt similar techniques to capitalise on the economic growth that comes with proper positioning of a nation brand. All nations should be working to actively realise this potential”. Finally yet importantly, “Like all brands, place brands are about relationships, beyond the customer. Lasting relationships are built on trust, which will hopefully all lead to greater employment, peace and prosperity for ‘places’” (Mihailovich, 2006).

Country Branding Construct under Construction

Kavaratzis (2005) also believes that the application of marketing efforts were initially developed from the ‘place promotion’, then to place marketing and consequently, to place branding based on two distinct trends: from the place marketing theory and from the practice of city administrators.. On the other hand, Moilanen & Rainisto (2009) relies on the view that the foundation of place marketing/branding comes from “place selling” and from business management.

Although, there are many theory-based and practice-oriented propositions for this construct – country branding – it has still been conceptually an unlimited theory due to several reasons, which will be discussed in more detail in the literature review in the later paragraphs, considering a country as the place in question.

Firstly, the origin of country branding is well understood in the literature but still both a questionable and a controversial subject - because branding a place requires a more complex and multidimensional framework than a product (Dinnie, 2005; Dinnie, 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Kavaratzis, 2010; Warnaby & Medway, 2013) or even beyond its tangible and intangible features. As mentioned by Fetscherin (2010, p.467) “country brand belongs to the public domain; it is complex and includes multiple levels, components, and disciplines”. Diverse academic researchers have studied either country, nation or place branding even though there are several interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary literature publications (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Go and Gover, 2011; Gertner, 2011; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013).

Secondly, the concept of a place itself, which is very different from a either a product or a service marketplace characteristics and attributes from, around and within a place brand, when thinking about a region, city, a county, a province, a state or a country (Kotler et al., 1993). Mostly, once the concept of brand is concentrated into nations it means more than mere products because “nation brand ‘belongs’ to anyone, so it is to the nation’s entire citizenry” (Dinnie, 2009, p.15). Consequently, this theoretical and real-world differential is applied throughout country brand strategies.

Third, the considerable diversity of stakeholders directly involved with country branding are immense and diverse and include but are not restricted to

citizens, tourists, industries, investors, trade partners, politicians (Jansen, 2008; Kavartziz, 2010; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013), researchers, students, professionals, family members, athletes, among others. Maheshwari (2010, p.200) concludes his study about place branding saying that among the concepts which “contributes substantially to promoting the growth prospects for a place” is capability in terms of “revitalised brand image, brand management and stakeholders involvement as well”.

As a fourth point, country branding is relevant to public and private affairs along with political and government interest, which demonstrate how it plays an important role in the globalised arena. Dinnie’s (2009, p.13) observation is clear: “it is highly politicized activity that generates passionately held and frequently conflicting viewpoints and opinions”. Contemporary specialists agree that national governments are continuously improving their country branding management abroad (Kavartziz, 2005; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2009; Go & Gover, 2011), among branding consultants, public relations advisers, strategic communications experts, theoreticians and practitioners (Aronczyk, 2013; Zakarevičius & Lonikaitė, 2013). The branding of countries is receiving ever increasing government investment as the issue has a higher level of interest in political discussions and debates (Anholt, 2007; Szondi 2007; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009). Hence, “in the effort to respond to the demands of competition and attract the desired target groups, place administrators have recognized in marketing theory and practice a valuable ally” Kavartziz (2005, p.329) once “competition between places is global” (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009, p.8).

Fifth – of no less importance, however, is the fact of the lack of a conventional and wide-ranging model for country brand theory. This would be a milestone in the theoretical contribution as the number of publications on the topic is constantly increasing. “Looking at the attributes of the public culture, traditions, and landscape of a country, the association with one of the generic image dimensions appears to be less plausible. To make the multidimensional model of reputation—which has been developed in the context of companies—entirely suited for analysing country images, we need to further differentiate it by adding a dimension that captures beliefs regarding the aesthetic qualities of a country, that is its beauty and attractiveness as a cultural and scenic place” (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013, p.6). Additionally, country brand models or theories come from various interdisciplinary subjects, which confirms it is a multifaceted construct (Gertner, 2011; Go and Gover, 2011; Ashworth & Kavartzis, 2010; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013; Dinnie, 2013; Lucarelli & Brorström, 2013; Warnaby & Medway, 2013).

Research Expedition about Country Brand Topics

Firstly, there is an emphasis in the literature on the need for more field research of all aspects of place branding (Kavartzis, 2005; Gertner, 2011). Even though many research areas have done country brand studies, there are only a few about country image (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Pharr, 2005; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Buhmann & Ingenhoff,

2013). For Gertner (2011, p.101) one of the reasons is that in order to gain respect, an academic discipline must advance from a descriptive to a normative point with more quantitative investigations, based on collecting primary data and the use of testable models of hypotheses. Warnaby & Medway (2013, p.349) point out that even though investigations are being highlighted, this literature shows a lack of research about place image once “the field has not reached a point where we can say that a robust theory is under construction”.

A recent published review of place branding methodologies by Chan & Marafa (2013) analysed articles published in three main periodicals from 2000 to 2011. In this review, they have identified 111 published papers with 117 locations used as case studies, “within the 111 studies on place branding, 36 (32.4%) were related to cities or regions, 75 (66.7%) studied countries and only 1 (0.9%) studies both scales” (Chan & Marafa, 2013, p.240).

Hankinson (2010, cited in Chan & Marafa, 2013, p.241) supports the need for future studies based on “place image evaluations, brand equity studies, stakeholders’ satisfaction investigations and brand impact assessments” so does Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) and Chan & Marafa (2013).

Exploration for Country Brand Models

A considerable amount of literature has been published on country brand models and their attempt to investigate a country image abroad, either more business-related, research-focused or even both. These studies are focused strictly on business from a corporate and business environment, due to the need of country brand valuation or in order to help them to recognise the countries’ ranking and its improvement or even well maintained image level. Taking into consideration that “the image object of the country is conceived of as the unity of a nation and its state” (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2013, p.5) for the same reason, “the public impression of a country is important as a source of national pride”. There are models to evaluate a country position considering variables and dimensions among others countries’ variables, which are from either corporate or scientific fundamentals. Previously, there are many models and indexes to measure brand, even country brandings, which are worth considering and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Country Brand Models

Model	Author	Concept Variables or Dimensions
The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index SM (Hexagon Model, 2002)	Simon Anholt (2007)	Exports, Governance, Culture and Heritage, People, Investment and Immigration and Tourism
The FutureBrand Country Brand Index	The FutureBrand Team (2013)	Quality of Life, Value System, Heritage and Culture, Good for Business and Tourism
Brand-Bonding Spectrum - BBS	Mihailovich (2006)	It focus on relationships once it shows different levels of cooperation between the House brand (nation brand) and the product brands (e.g. companies, products, people, events or places.)
The East West Nation Brand Perception Indexes and Reports	Experts Perceptions Metrics and East West Communications	Analysing countries from news articles. Global Media Sources were surveyed between - almost 5 million references to the 242 countries
Nation Brand Architecture Model - NBAR	Dinnie (2009)	Tourism; Exports; Inward investment, Talent attraction, Sports; Regions cities and landmarks; Products and services; Sector-specific; Skilled workers and University students; National teams and clubs; and Cultural and Political figures.
Country RepTrak TM	Students from Lugano and Fombrun	Advanced Economy, Appealing Environment, Effective Government, Supportive Behaviour Dimensions and Self-Image
CBSI - Country Brand Strength Index	Fetscherin (2010)	Export, Tourism, FDI, Immigration and Governance
Nation Brand Molecule -NBM	Rojaz-Méndez (2013)	Economy, Tourism, Geography and Nature, Culture and Heritage, Society, Science and Technology, and Government.

Source: Developed by the authors' based on the literature review.

However, besides those specific country brand models, there are other measurements and evaluations about a country brand image or reputation, its development and success, which can contribute for towards a country's improvement. They are worth considering, for instance: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), The Competitiveness Indexes by the World Economic Forum, the Human Development Index (HDI), and, Gallup poll (public domain) and the United Nations statistics etc.

Summary

This paper has given an account of the reasons for the widespread use of country brand models in order to comprehend or evaluate a country image abroad. Even though, the complexity exists in country brand models, the challenging is to discover an integrated understanding with stakeholders' realities and a customized approach based on theories and contexts.

Consequently, six models out of the eight identified in the literature review were considered. That is because the two that were removed have no specific dimensions mentioned in their development concept, which are The East West Nation Brand Perception Indexes and Reports and the Brand-Bonding Spectrum.

Accordingly, the models evaluated were Nation Brand Architecture Model (NBAR); Nation Brand Molecule; The Anholt Nation Brand Index; The Future Brand Country Brand Index; Country RepTrakTM; and Country Brand Strength Index. Surprisingly, it is significant to note that three nation brand models and three country brand models were recognized in the literature review as the main theories regarding the country brand comprehensions. As an additional reflection, an interesting point is that the overall dimensions from either nation brand models or country brand models are slightly diverse.

More specifically, about their own singularities, the NBAR model is the most diversified one, presenting the most diverse kinds of dimensions. On the other hand, the Country RepTrakTM model has to some extent a psychological value. However, the Nation Brand Molecule –NBM is the only one that mentions Technology, which touches a valuable dimension in the globalization era.

Taken together, these qualitative analyses suggest that the following dimensions are agreed among the country models presented and critically reflected upon. Clearly, most country models purpose are related to the authors' theories mentioned in the literature review, as showed next.

The first dimension most considered was "tourism", which is supported by five models (Kotler et al., 1993; Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001; Kotler & Gertner, 2004; Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013).

The second and third positions were "governance" and "investment", being supported by four models. Following the principles of Kotler et al. (1993); Anholt (2007); Jansen (2008); Moilanen & Rainisto (2009), Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2001) and Fetscherin (2010).

The fourth was "exports" (Kotler et al., 1993; Dinnie, 2005; Anholt, 2007; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Fetscherin, 2010) and "immigration" (Anholt, 2007; Fetscherin, 2010), which were both supported by three models.

The next most cited is "culture" and "heritage" which is mentioned by three models, and which can be associated to the country brand models and strengthens citizens' identity and increases self-esteem (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Ruzzier & De Chernatony, 2013);

This is followed by “economy” (Kotler et al., 1993; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Anholt, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009; Fetscherin, 2010) and “people” by two models. The dimension “people” can be slightly included in the culture and heritage dimension regarding the authors’ principles references.

“Science”, “technology”, “quality of life”, “value system”, and “sports” were supported by only one country brand model.

Even though, none of the country brand models cited about “creating positive international perceptions and attitudes” (Fetscherin, 2010), this principle is deeply inserted in any country brand model once the main purpose is to be positively exposed in the target market.

Based on these reflective insights, the findings of this study suggest that there is inconsistency among the country brand models examined. Chan & Marafa (2013), Lucarelli and Brorström (2013) and Fetscherin (2010) accurately support the need for country brand models, as seen in this paper literature review and confirmed as well. Likewise, a new model of the country brand management regarding not only based on integrated dimensions but also on specific branding strategies is required to keep the development of both practice and research in the country branding field and to reflect the current global economy

Regarding the limitations of this paper, one of the most important limitations lies in the fact that each country is unique in many dimensions; therefore, there are many stakeholders involved and many variables to be integrated. Both country and nation brand models were evaluated even though they can show disparities. Another limitation is while a range of models are presented and discussed this is not exhaustive from all of those available within the broader fields of academic debate. Further research regarding the role of country brand models would bring greater insight and support specifically to developing countries competing in the global arena.

As a final point, the findings will possibly add knowledge to and enrich researchers’ publications, government authorities’ actions, business planning, communicators’ schemes, and the sectors investigated. Consequently, this study aims to provide further fruitful considerations and productive knowledge for future investigations in different contexts and/or countries. Summing up, this paper intends to contribute to the field by providing texture and integrity to country brand considerations in both the current and future framework of the expanding international economy, the advancement of the global marketing, diplomatic relations, academic interchanges and national sustainability itself.

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