

POLITICAL SCIENCES

NATION-BRANDING PROCESS AND THE SPECIFIC ROLE OF THE MEDIA

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-571-89-3_46

Under the conditions of globalization, a positive image of the state makes a significant influence on all areas of the country's life. Good state image ensures smooth integration into global market and international political system, helps to attract more foreign direct investments, tourists and secures that country will gain the support of foreign countries and international organizations in solving various economic, political and security issues. A positive national image tends to enhance unity and public spirit of citizens, because respect and recognition of the country promotes sustainable cross-border relations.

So, nation branding, the practice of governments in conjunction with public relations consultants and corporate businesses to promote a certain image of a nation-state, is a rapidly developing area of study. Given its short history over the past three decades, the amount of research has increased substantially in pace with the spread of the phenomenon.

Even though branding is normally used as a commercial service within the organizations of the private sector, its principles are easily applied on a national scale. State branding is about using strategic marketing to promote a country's image, products, and attractiveness for tourism and foreign direct investment. State branding implies that countries "behave, in many ways, just like brands... they are perceived in certain ways by large groups of people both at home and abroad; they are associated with certain qualities and characteristics" [1, p. 79].

State branding is relevant because consumers and investors continue to rely heavily on country images to make their economic decisions. Equally important, branding has become a central tool of country competitiveness because having a bad reputation or none at all seriously affects a country's ability to compete. Thus, effective branding of a country can give it a competitive advantage in world and opens many opportunities for developing countries [6, p. 14].

Of specific importance is the involvement of public in the image formation process. Only by creating favorable conditions for the public to influence the realization of international goals, it is possible to create a stronger feeling of national identity and promote social cohesion. However, if the government fails to achieve a common goal and create control mechanisms typical for brand formation vision in the private sector, the threat for national brand failure becomes real.

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The political approach to nation branding is made up of analyses based in international relations, public relations, and international communication, where the concept of public diplomacy is at times used interchangeably with nation branding. A political scientists argue that nation branding is rapidly replacing traditional diplomacy, and that contemporary politicians are faced with the task to find “a brand niche for their state,” engage in “competitive marketing,” assure “market satisfaction,” and create “brand loyalty” [6, p. 6].

According to J. Vincente, three things are clear: 1) state branding is no longer a choice but a necessity; 2) it is no longer conceived as a function to be performed individually by the state, associations or individual private companies, but as an integrative and concerted effort by all interested stakeholders; 3) if done effectively, state branding can provide ‘soft power’ [6, p. 9].

The fundamental assumption in country branding is that country names amount to brands and as a result convey images, help us evaluate products and services and make purchasing decisions. Thus, a powerful country brand translates into a better perception of the country, increased exports and inward tourism and foreign investment. As S. Anholt has point out, country brands still stand for a limited number of qualities (power, wealth, sophistication) so there is still plenty of space for countries to brand themselves with qualities such as ‘creativity, music, philosophy, trust, innocence, wisdom, challenge, safety and so on [3, p. 229].

Country of origin can be defined as the country that a consumer associates with a certain product or brand as being the ‘home country’ of the brand (Honda identified as a Japanese product), regardless of where the product is actually produced (i.e. Honda assembled in the US). Products bearing a ‘made in Germany’, ‘made in Switzerland’ or ‘made in Japan’ labels are commonly regarded as high quality, due to the reputation of these countries as top world manufacturers and exporters. Consumers continue to associate and evaluate given product lines (e.g. cosmetics, furniture, cars and fashion articles) with specific countries. French perfumes, German cars, Japanese electronics, are just some of the examples where national image is synonymous with quality, workmanship, durability, style or taste.

Following S. Anholt, there can be identified ten top places or countries as far as brand image is concerned: United States, England, Scotland, France, Germany, Japan, Scandinavia, Switzerland, South Korea, Italy. Of them, the US is considered by most people to be the supreme country of origin for the world’s three most valuable and profitable business sectors: entertaining, merchant banking and information technology. Beyond the ‘top ten’, we can find an array of minor-country brands countries whose appeal is limited to one or two kinds of products or a few brands : Ireland, Canada, Finland, Spain, Taiwan, Wales, Portugal, Belgium [2].

A single branding project, starting with a government tender, could very well be described with a model consisting of four recognizable steps: 1) evaluating current perceptions of a country, 2) arranging seminars about the value of nation branding for government representatives and other actors involved, 3) defining a core identity of the nation, and 4) producing material to communicate the new image [4].

The current process of globalization and the accompanying increase in economic competition for markets has underlined the need for countries to brand themselves on four different dimensions of state branding and in an integrated manner. *Tourism branding* “typically involves ‘mass-marketing’ approaches (media advertising) by government and industry associations, and both mass and more focused approaches (such as personal selling and incentives to travel agents) by associations and individual firms.” *Public diplomacy* comprises a government’s range of ‘interactions not only with its foreign counterparts but primarily with non-governmental individuals and organizations’ aimed at furthering its image and reputation through mutual understanding. *Export promotion* is primarily carried out by individual exporters, with government and industry associations acting as facilitators (ie. arranging trade fairs, country weeks at major department stores in target markets). *Investment promotion* activities by all three actors tend to be of a personal selling nature rather than a mass-marketing one (i.e. investment missions and handling of individual investors by government agencies). This being said, each country’s level of emphasis on each of these four dimensions will vary depending on its brand essence and competitive advantages [5, p. 310].

Since state branding is a long-term, cumulative effort, in order for a country branding campaign to stand any chance of success, it must rely upon an integrated marketing and communications campaign. Branding, marketing, and image production are communicative activities that presuppose some sort of mediation. This is the fourth and most “critical” phase of the nation-branding campaign process (following research/evaluation, training/education, and identification of the core brand value).

A better understanding of the role of the media in branding campaigns is important and can contribute to the critical analysis of nation branding and related activities such as soft power, reputation management, and public diplomacy. A more systematic analysis of the role of the media means studying the media in their own right as technologies (e.g., television, the Internet, the press, advertising spaces) and as organizations (e.g., corporations such as the BBC, Euronews, CNN).

Some research reveal the complex web of interests that are involved in branding campaigns (as in most large-scale communication endeavors And although the initiators of the campaigns among national political administration, corporate businesses, and communications experts might have ideas on the domestic effects of the branding campaigns, the media (e.g. large-scale international media corporations such as BBC Worldwide, CNN, and National Geographic) have an important part in what will be covered, how images will be constructed, and in which reception contexts they will be interpreted.

The mediation can, quite naturally, take many forms: advertising clips on national and/or international television channels and in the press and the production of portfolios of pictures, information leaflets, or lobbying (for example, by having print or broadcast media produce content about the country in question).

To summarize the media technologies are involved in state branding, they are : 1) the printed media such as directed to an international readership, 2) the special

media—such as the brand books produced to convince political administrations or corporate businesses of the necessity to brand the country, 3) television and television channels and streamed video services such as YouTube used as platforms for the distribution of mediated information, mainly organized by large-scale, transnational media corporations such as Euronews, the BBC, and CNN.

Four different agents and objectives of state branding can be exemplified in Ukraine: agents are found within the political administration, branding consultants as the communications experts, the representatives for corporate business, the media corporations as platforms for the other three groups of agents, some large-scale international media corporations. These four main types of agents are also internally heterogeneous, and they comprise competing interests and wills that must be negotiated in the daily business of their activities.

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