Chapter 22
Communicating Nation Brands through Mass and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Nation branding efforts are the means through which many countries attempt to influence how foreign publics perceive them. However, in a media landscape that now includes not only traditional one-way media but also two-way social platforms, countries undertaking these efforts are presented with a series of new challenges. This environment makes it more difficult to manage the issues associated with a nation brand, challenges countries to better communicate their advantages, and allows the public to create its own, potentially competing, messages about a country. Building on previous work on nation and destination branding, this chapter discusses the changing media environment in which nation-branding efforts are taking place, and—through a combination of DICTION®-assisted, manual, and qualitative content analyses—provides evidence of the new media landscape in which nation branding is taking place. The challenges and opportunities created by this new context are detailed, and potential avenues for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the global experience economy, nations compete against each other for the attention of investors, tourists, businesses, consumers, foreign governments, and international media (Anholt, 2006). In an attempt to stand out among competing and contrasting voices, nations use branding and marketing tools to promote a unique and favorable image to their national and international publics (Fan, 2006).

Today, a nation's brand or image has become a valuable asset and a source of competitive advantage (Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005). Thus, many nations are involved in brand-building initiatives, which leverage their image on one or more of the unique economic, cultural, political, and human resources that they possess (Anholt, 2004). Governments engage in these initiatives because they understand that public opinion of a nation significantly affects the success of its international business, foreign investment, and

tourism initiatives, as well as its diplomatic, cultural, and economic relations with other nations (Anholt, 2006; Nuttavuthisit, 2006). Additionally, these efforts allow nations to communicate a coherent image across different channels and to different publics.

A nation brand is a multidimensional construct reflecting the core values of a nation that should be communicated to home, host, and transnational publics in a clear and consistent fashion (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Skinner & Kubacki, 2007). One of the most often promoted characteristics of a nation brand is its attractiveness as a tourist destination (Volvic & Andrejevic, 2011). This feature allows for connecting with people all over the world who have an interest in learning more about the country.

Of the various channels that nation branders and country reputation managers use, online media are considered one of the most effective, especially for tourism promotion (Avraham & Ketter, 2012). In particular, social media, which allows for participation and interaction with target audiences, has rapidly emerged as a popular platform for nation branding efforts (Bruell, 2008; Garcia, 2008; Munar, 2011). These new media also allow for two-way communication, contributing to a sense of personal identification with destinations, and transforming users into active participants (Bruell, 2008; Avraham & Ketter, 2012; Garcia, 2008; Pavlik, 2007). While branding through traditional media follows a linear model of communication where end-users are considered passive recipients of information, doing so through social media "is about building a relationship and conversation with your audience" (Drury, 2008, p.275).

Given this new context for nation branding, this chapter focuses on how countries use social media to communicate strong, unique, and favorable nation brands to their various target publics, as well on the challenges that efforts of this type would represent. First, recent literature on nation branding and destination promotion is reviewed. Then, current challenges and opportunities for

nation branding are presented through case studies by Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Jain & De Moya, 2011). Lastly, potential solutions for addressing these challenges are discussed, as well as areas for future research.

BACKGROUND

Nation Brands and Country Reputation

Countries employ a variety of approaches to gain an advantage over competitors for trade, tourism and foreign investment. In their efforts to showcase their uniqueness to foreign audiences, they actively engage in managing their image (i.e. what they project) and reputation (i.e. how they are perceived). Traditionally, a country's image is significantly shaped by the way it is portrayed in the media (Hanan, 2006). Consequently, how the media portray a country affects the way people feel about it; in other words, it affects the country's reputation (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004).

A country's reputation is "the aggregate of stakeholders' images of a country" (Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005, p. 311). The Fombrun–RI Country Reputation Index (CRI) evaluates a country's reputation based on the perceptions that foreign audiences have of its emotional, physical, financial, leadership, cultural, global and political appeal (Passow & Fehlmann, 2005). Similarly, a nation brand is defined as "the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture / language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands and so on" (Fan, 2010, p.98). A key distinction between these concepts is that a country has a reputation in the mind of foreign audiences whether it attempts to manage it or not (Fan, 2008); while a

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