# A theoretical study on country brand and its management

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a theoretical study that seeks to clarify the concept of country brand, differentiating it from country image and country-of-origin effect, and looking in detail at its management, exploring its complexity and differences in relation to brand management of products and services. Based on the literature, we found that the country brand is derived from a management process known as country branding, which seeks to differentiate between the nation and its offerings in the international market based on its culture. This process ranges from the creation of the country brand to its communication to the various target audiences. It is more complex than for goods and services, and includes elements of the country's identity, positioning and image. Country image is often the focus of branding, as it consists of the associations of the country that international consumers hold in their memory and is considered a tool that can increase the power of the country brand. Thus, the study contributes both to country brand theory and management, and to governments, by providing relevant information to help define strategic actions in relation to country brand and image.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As competition involving export markets, qualified human resources, trade and international dominance continues to grow between nations, it has become necessary for countries to create and sustain strong country brands (Mugobo & Wakeham, 2014).

A positive and powerful country brand can provide a crucial competitive advantage in this globalized economy (Dinnie, 2015) and its success depends on an appropriate analysis of the work that has to be done, with careful preparation and planning of the brand structure and its communication (Castro & Giraldi, 2012).

This process is known as country branding. It involves the competitive management of tangible and intangible resources (natural resources, culture, history, society) of a nation (Rojás-Méndez, 2013). Through this process, a country brand can be created, monitored, evaluated and actively managed to improve the country's reputation in the international market (Fan, 2010).

Therefore, the concept of a country brand is of mutual interest to academics and professionals alike (Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013). This topic has increasingly aroused interest in studies for three reasons: excitement, controversy and complexity (Rojás-Mendez, 2013). The excitement emerges as a result of the limited theory that the academic community has succeeded in producing and validating. The controversy is linked to the diverse viewpoints and opinions that have emerged, and the conflicts regarding public and international issues of countries' policies. The complexity results from the multiple levels and dimensions that contribute to country branding, which go beyond the scope of products and companies.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to define country brand and differentiate it from other concepts in the country-of-origin literature (country image and the country-of-origin effect). The study also seeks to explore the management of this brand in detail, looking at its main differences in relation to

the brand management of products and services and its main objectives and elements.

To this end, a theoretical study of an exploratory nature was conducted, as exploratory research can be used to clarify concepts and improve the researcher's familiarity with the problem (Churchill, Brown & Suter, 2011), which is necessary for this theme.

In specific terms, this study is characterized as a literature review, consisting of critical evaluations of published material to define and clarify the problem, summarize the status of research, identify relationships, contradictions, gaps and inconsistencies in the literature and suggest the next step to resolving the problem (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010).

It should be highlighted that the components of literature reviews can be organized in various ways, such as the similarity of concepts or theories, methodological similarities between studies or according to the historical development of the research field (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2010).

In the case of this study, the components are clustered according to their conceptual relationships, with a view to clarifying the definition of country brand, together with its management (its objectives and elements). For this purpose, the main authors of brands and country brands were researched in the literature and the principal scientific databases and platforms (Web of Science, Scopus, Emerald, Elsevier and Google Scholar) using the following key words: country brand, nation brand, country branding, nation branding, country image, and country of origin image. These authors were therefore selected according to their number of citations and their theoretical contributions that helped to clarify the concepts of country brand.

Thus, the intention was to contribute to country brand theory, clarifying and differentiating concepts, and also contribute to governments, providing valuable information on the complexity inherent to country brand management that might aid the strategic development of actions to improve and construct this brand and its image.

## 2. COUNTRY BRAND

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (2007), a brand is a "name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies the seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers". Thus, the key to creating a brand, according to this definition, is to find a name, logo, symbol, packaging design or other feature that identifies the product and distinguishes it from others (Keller & Machado, 2006), in other words, define the elements of the brand to differentiate the product or services from those of the competition.

In practice, a brand is more than a name. It is constituted by a complex set of images, associations, meanings and experiences in people's minds (Fan, 2010) and can be characterized as a product, service or company viewed in combination with its name, identity and reputation (Anholt, 2007). It is an intangible concept that differentiates, simplifies and reduces the complexity of the decision-making process (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2008). Thus, successful brands generate sustainable competitive advantages and results in terms of higher profits and better performance (Chernatony, Malcolm & Wallace, 2011).

With the removal of international barriers and fierce competition for consumers and investments, brand management has become important to countries and products (Crescitelli & Giraldi, 2009), i.e., the concept of a brand has come to be applied to a variety of objects, including nations (Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

Indeed, it is believed that countries have always been brands, albeit inconsistently (Anholt, 2005). A country brand (or nation brand) can thus be defined as "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 15).

Thus, a country brand is derived from its culture (Dinnie, 2015) and it uses brand elements such as logo, name and symbols for this differentiation (Pappu & Quester, 2010). Like a brand of products or services that is created to be unique, competitive and add value to the customer, the country brand seeks these same goals, contextualized for a larger scenario, namely the nation (Anholt, 2007).

According to Fetscherin (2010), a country brand belongs in the public domain. It is complex and includes several levels, components and disciplines. It encompasses the entire image of a nation, including its economic, political, historical and cultural aspects (Fan, 2006; Fetscherin, 2010). Country images are

important stimuli for evaluation by consumers, as they spur associations and influence purchase decisions, not only regarding products but also tourism and investments (Heslop et. al, 2004; Giraldi, 2016), lending power and value to the country brand.

However, concepts are often confused in the literature. While a country brand is constructed and managed strategically and intentionally and does not exist by itself (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015), country image is composed of beliefs and people's impressions of places and represents simplified information and associations that people make of a place (Kotler, Haider, Hen, 1993).

In the same way that a brand image can be defined as "consumer perceptions of and preferences for a brand, as reflected by the various types of brand associations held in consumers' memory" (Keller, 2009, p. 143), country image encompasses a set of associations that link a given country to other information in a consumer's memory (Giraldi, 2016). It is related to the mental representation of a country and its population, including cognitive beliefs on the stages of economic and technological development of the country, and affective evaluations of its social and political systems (Wang et. al, 2012). Country image means how it is perceived by international consumers, whereas country brand refers to a managerial and strategic process known as country branding (Pappu & Quester, 2010).

Thus, a successfully established image is believed to be a helpful tool for country branding (Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013). A positive reputation is the expected result of this branding (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015). Nevertheless, the image does not always help to add value to the country brand. For example, people often form an image of a country based on negative and incoherent stereotypes, creating a negative image. Therefore, an efficient branding strategy should be implemented to ensure that these wrongful perceptions do not affect the value of a country brand (Dinnie, 2008).

Furthermore, it should be highlighted that a country brand can be used in the country branding process. In this respect, a necessary stage of planning for place marketing is to assess the brand and understand how it compares with competing images (Castro & Giraldi, 2012). For instance, when designing the logo and slogan of a country brand, insights can be obtained regarding the important points to be considered through the country's image overseas.

A strong country brand stimulates exports, attracts tourists, investments and immigration and consequently promotes the development of nations (Fetscherin, 2010). Therefore, interest in this theme is constantly growing, and studies have shown a growing trend in the last fifteen years, with publications by a number of academics like Gilmore (2002), Kotler and Gertner (2002), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), Anholt (2005), Fan (2006), Anholt (2007), Dinnie (2008), O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000), Crescitelli and Giraldi (2009), Fan (2010), Fetscherin (2010), Castro and Giraldi (2012), Dinnie et. al (2010), Pappu and Quester (2010), Rojas- Méndez (2013), Rojás- Méndes, Murphy and Papadopoulos (2013), Mamuti and Özgüner (2014), Matiza and Onu (2014), Mugobo and Wakeham (2014), and Knott, Fyall and Jones (2015).

In general, the theme is part of the field of research of the country of origin, which has questioned the so-called country-of-origin effect. In other words, it has explored whether the country of origin of a product influences its evaluation by consumers and, consequently, their purchase decisions (Andina, Gabriela & Roxana-Denisa, 2015; Dinnie, 2008; Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2010).

The country-of-origin effect is related to country brand and country image, as it is a specific marketing phenomenon through which consumers are consciously or unconsciously stimulated (e.g., by the "made in" label) and acts as an assessment criterion when forming their attitude to a product (Bloemer; Brijs & Kasper, 2009).

This stimulus may be derived from country image or country brand. Country image, for instance, can help marketing managers to develop unique sales propositions in which they project a rich set of symbolisms and images of the country onto products (Brijs, Bloemer & Kasper, 2011) to have a direct effect on consumers' assessments, decisions and behaviors, in other words, seeking to create a country-of-origin effect.

It should be highlighted that this effect does not only occur with regard to products, as is reported in most studies. The country of origin affects major decisions, such as where companies decide to build factories, set up operations overseas, sell their products or outsource their processes (Anholt, 2007).

In other words, the simple association of a country's name is reflected on the products and services associated with that country, also influencing decisions regarding investing, purchasing, traveling and doing business (Giraldi, 2016; Matiza & Oni, 2014). Therefore, the country-of-origin effect can be seen in relation to numerous offers from the country, which may be in the form of brands, products, technologies, services and even organizations (Durand, 2016). This has important consequences, since the success (or lack thereof) that results from a positive or negative country-of-origin effect means changes in economic, socio-cultural and technological conditions of a country, which in turn can affect the political, institutional, legal and administrative spheres (Durand, 2016).

The differences between the concepts that have been presented are illustrated in Figure 1:

differentiation (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2005).

The focus of branding of both products and services is the same: to build and leverage brand equity to construct a strong relationship between brand and customer (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). To Keller (1993), the key to increasing brand value is knowledge, formed by brand awareness (recognizing and remembering the brand) and brand image (associations with the brand). This implies that equity occurs when customers are familiar with the brand and have strong, favorable and unique associations with it in their minds, generating a response that is different from the marketing of the brand. Aaker (1992) claims that brand equity is reflected in a global preference for the brand over similar alternatives, and five assets are the source of creating this equity and preference: brand loyalty, brand name awareness, perceived brand quality, brand

**Country brand**

- This is an intentional and strategic managerial process intended to differentiate the country and its products for its target audiences, grounded especially in the country's culture.

**Country image**

- This has to do with the associations that consumers hold in their memory with regard to the country and its elements, such as the economy, politics, technology and people. In other words, how the country is perceived by international consumers. It is a perceptual, associative and unintentional process.

**Country-of-origin effect**

- This is how the country-of-origin stimuli influence consumers and their attitudes. It is related to both country image and country brand, as these stimuli may be derived from associations with the country (country image), or they may be the consequence of the efforts of the country brand, for instance, to communicate the country and its advantages.

**Fig. 1**
Differences between the concepts of country-of-origin, country image and country brand.
**Source**: Prepared by the authors.

After differentiating the concept of country brand, country image and country-of-origin effect, it is necessary to understand how these brands are managed.

## 3. THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTING AND MANAGING COUNTRY BRAND: COUNTRY BRANDING

Branding consists of the planning, implementation and monitoring of a brand concept during the brand's life (Shimp, 2009). It involves the process of endowing products and services with advantages that can be used to build a strong brand, such as loyalty and premium prices (Keller, 2003). It is a powerful form of

associations in addition to perceived quality and other proprietary brand assets, such as patents and channel relationships.

Keller and Machado (2006) claim that despite the growing recognition of brand equity, marketing practices have become more complicated and pose many challenges for brand managers resulting from the fact that customers are better informed, brand lines are more complex, markets are more mature, competition is growing and more sophisticated, differentiation is more difficult and brand loyalty is lower.

These challenges, especially those involving competition, differentiation and new communication options, show that branding is also important to countries. Thus, country branding is the strategy of using branding elements, such as name and logo, to create a distinct identity for a country to make it, and what it has to offer, stand out in international target markets (Pappu & Quester, 2010).

Country branding is based on the premise of the practical application of marketing practices and branding tactics, seeking to create a proposition of value for a nation and positively influence relevant perception of it among its target audiences (Matiza & Oni, 2014). Thus, it can be understood as a process that ranges from the planning and structuring of a country brand to its communication to different audiences using techniques and tools such as name, logo and publicity.

These techniques create significant differentiation for countries (Dinnie, 2008), as they do in the sphere of products and services. Therefore, this is an important tool in the development and maintenance of a nation's power (Fan, 2010). In other words, managing a country brand means seeking to create and improve the value of this brand, or country equity, consisting of dimensions of awareness, associations, perceived quality and country loyalty (Pappu & Quester, 2010).

In this respect, it should be highlighted that the central activity of country branding is managing country image (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015). In other words, country branding is concerned with applying branding and marketing communication techniques to improve a country's image (Fan, 2006), seeking to alter the image that people overseas have of a nation and align this image with reality (Fan, 2010), as well as managing the country's image and reputation internally (Matiza & Oni, 2014).

Furthermore, awareness of a country and its perceived quality should be highlighted in country branding. Specifically, for a country to have equity in the minds of consumers, these consumers first have to be aware of the country (Pappu & Quester, 2010). This awareness indicates people's knowledge of the country and its products, and branding has to serve as a tool for increasing this awareness or changing or enhancing stereotyped views (Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013), which are directly linked to country image. Meanwhile, perceived quality may be viewed as a way to differentiate a country's products and

indicate their superiority because they were manufactured in this country (Pappu & Quester, 2010). The role of country branding is to ensure that the country is perceived as the manufacturer of quality products, which can improve the country's image and increase its exports. For example, it is no surprise that many governments act decisively to maintain a reputation in a certain sector, with quality control legislation (as in the case of the French government with wine) and taking action against copycats around the world. This is the case of the British government and its attempts to preserve the reputation of Scotch whisky (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000).

In general, to Fetscherin (2010), country branding is linked to four main fields: place branding, country of origin, country image and country-product image. To Matiza and Oni (2014), the theoretical foundations of country branding stem from country of origin, country-product image, destination branding and country identity. Place marketing is actually a broader field. Its principles can be extended to any place, including a country. The other fields are common to the authors, indicating that country branding has actually become stronger with the evolving discussions on country of origin and country image, spurred by phenomena such as globalization.

Indeed, Dinnie (2008) claims that country branding emerged as a result of globalization, falling trade barriers and the intersection of two themes: national identity and country of origin. The former involves academic disciplines such as political geography, international relations, political science, political philosophy, international legislation, sociology and history. The latter includes marketing, consumer behavior, communications management, brand management and export marketing.

Thus, country branding is much more complicated than the branding of goods and services (Crescitelli & Giraldi, 2009), as it is a broader field than traditional marketing and branding and includes other themes, such as international relations and public diplomacy (Anholt, 2007).

Moreover, it is not possible to apply all the principles of product and service branding to countries because countries are not for sale, are not easily confused with other countries and do not move as quickly as consumer goods (Anholt, 2006). Country branding includes other difficulties such as the complexity and diversity of their populations:

tourists, investors and residents (Gilmore, 2002). There are also difficulties such as the important role of three groups in the process: government, industrial groups and individual companies (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002), compared with only one group of consumers and companies in product and service branding (Keller & Machado, 2006; Fan, 2010).

Therefore, to a manage country brand, it is necessary to define and deliver incentives, as well as manage the factors that can affect buyers. These factors are image, attractions, infrastructure and people and institutions (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 2006). The main differences between country branding and product/service branding are shown in Table 1:

industries in the world (Fetscherin, 2010, Herget, Petrů & Abrhám, 2015), representing 3.1 % of global GDP in 2014, with a greater impact than some of the largest manufacturing sectors, such as the automotive and chemical sectors (WTTC, 2015). This means it is a key sector for country brand management, especially as a means of promoting the development of nations.

In the case of tourists, a major challenge for country brands is the variety of demand in tourism (Nikolova & Hassan, 2013). There are also diverse motives for this demand: business, leisure, medical treatment, sport and culture (Mugobo & Wakeham, 2014). Therefore, managers have to understand that different places attract different tourists (Kotler &

**Tab. 1**
Differences between product/service branding and country branding.

|  | Country Branding | Product/Service Branding |
|---|---|---|
| **Focus** | Leverage country brand equity, mainly through improving country image. Other factors must be managed: attractions, people and institutions. | Leverage brand equity of products or services, differentiating them from the competition, increasing sales and developing relationships with consumers. |
| **Differentiation** | Country culture. | Features, benefits (functional and emotional) of the product or service. |
| **Stakeholders** | Governments, industrial groups and individual companies. | Company. |
| **Target audiences** | Tourists, investors, consumers, possible residents, companies. | Consumers (target segment). |
| **Origins/Disciplines involved** | Political geography, international relations, political science, political philosophy, international legislation, sociology, history, marketing, consumer behavior, communications management, brand management, export marketing. | Marketing, consumer behavior, brand management and communications management. |

**Source**: Prepared by the authors.

There now follows a detailed description of the objectives of country branding in terms of target audiences.

## 2.1 Objectives of country branding
Country branding should attract tourists, stimulate investments and increase exports, as well as attract talents, which could be viewed as a long-term goal (Dinnie, 2008). In this respect, Anholt (2007) prefers the term competitive identity to describe the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy, with trade and the promotion of investments, exports and tourism.

Tourism has become a global industry. It is stable and one of the fastest-growing and important

Gertner, 2002), and shape their country brand strategies accordingly.

Thus, the competitive environment also needs to be more closely analyzed, as tourists have numerous destinations at their disposal (Kotler & Gertner, 2004), including developing regions, where the demand for services is growing (Herget, Petrů & Abrhám, 2015), and demands in these locations are the same as everywhere else, including beautiful scenery and hospitality (Dinnie, 2015). Consequently, in addition to factors such as price, marketing can focus on modes of transport and accommodation and cultural heritage of the country, including its people, values and way of life. This shows that the country, its

characteristics and branding can often be used to gain an advantage (Hurn, 2016).

It should be highlighted that another challenge for tourism is that tourist products are linked to services, which confers a variable nature on these products, making it difficult for managers to ensure their quality and control them (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). This nature influences a tourist's consumer experience (Nikolova & Hassan, 2013), which is difficult to guarantee (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005), but fundamental when it comes to creating a competitive advantage to attract tourists (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

Furthermore, tourism is an image-oriented sector (Elliot, Papadopoulos & Kim, 2011), meaning that it can compete only in terms of image, given that a destination has multiple features (Pike, 2008). This can make it difficult for branding managers to promote a single, positive and strong image.

Regarding exports, country brand is known to add value to them (Brand Finance, 2016), and for this reason nations can attempt to improve their exports through their country branding. First, to promote exports, a company must consider its geography, institutional environments and resources when it projects its country branding and export strategies to create a competitive advantage in the global market (Sun, Paswan & Tieslau, 2016). Therefore, it must emphasize its communications structure and economic development, as these significantly and directly aid exports (Sun, Paswan & Tieslau, 2016).

Second, nations attempt to project an image or set of values to help them export their products and services (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2000). For example, there are campaigns to promote exports, such as "100% Colombian Coffee" (Papadopoulos, Essoussi & El Banna, 2016), which uses Colombia's image as a quality coffee producer. Swiss watches and Scotch whisky are other cases of how companies benefit from a country's name to promote their product internationally (Fetscherin, 2010). In this respect, an attempt is often made to construct a country image using the existing reputations of brands or industries, trying to expand this effect to other brands or industries (Sun, Paswan & Tieslau, 2016).

Furthermore, to organize these branding activities to generate exports, there are export promotion organizations (EPOs) (Dinnie et. al, 2010). In Brazil, for instance, the Brazilian Agency for the Promotion of

Exports and Investments (Apex-Brasil) promotes Brazilian products and services overseas and attracts foreign investment to strategic sectors of the Brazilian economy (Apex-Brasil, 2017). To achieve these goals, Apex-Brasil promotes trade to value Brazilian products and services internationally, as well as prospective and trade missions, business rounds, support for Brazilian companies to attend major international fairs and visits by foreign buyers and opinion makers so that they can become familiar with the Brazilian production structure and other business platforms that aim to strengthen the Brazil brand (Apex-Brasil, 2017).

Concerning foreign investments, these have grown in size and importance since the nineteen fifties (Aharoni & Brock, 2010) and because of their various benefits, countries around the world compete intensely for them (Sirr, Garvey & Gallagher, 2012).

In this respect, country brand, when developed through a branding project, can increase foreign investment in a country (Kilduff, Núnez & Tabales, 2014), and serve as another way to differentiate the country on the international scene. Country branding is a tool to promote the country that creates a positive impact when it comes to attracting foreign direct investments and affects the general economic position of a nation (Mamuti & Ozguner, 2014). Generally, attracting investments is based on building country image as an attractive place to invest, attempting to improve the perception of potential investors and companies (Sirr, Garvey & Gallagher, 2012).

As for talent, it is believed that a strong and positive country brand attracts specialist foreign workers and students from other countries, who will gain experience in the country and share these experiences with their families and friends, who in turn will use this information to create and shape their perceptions and images of the country (Kilduff, Núnez & Tabales, 2014). Thus, managing country brands in this respect is important, not only to attracting talent but also to forming the country's image in the minds of international consumers.

In general, it should be noted that these objectives of country branding are difficult to achieve, as they involve different audiences and cooperation between companies, government and the population of a country.

Moreover, country branding should involve three key elements: the identity, image and positioning of the country brand (Dinnie, 2008), which will be addressed in the following section.

## 2.2 Elements of country branding: identity, image and segmentation and positioning

In the same way that product branding consists of constructing a brand based on the segmentation and positioning of the brand, its identity (Keller, 1993) and image (Roy & Barnerjee, 2014), country branding also involves elements of country brand identity, country brand image and segmentation and positioning (Dinnie, 2008; Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015), as discussed below.

*Country brand identity*

A brand identity is a series of associations with a brand that a strategist aspires to create or maintain (Aaker, 1996). It is constructed internally and emerges unilaterally in an organization. It is what the managers want the brand to represent (Aaker, 2007).

Brand identity is a unique set of associations that implies a promise to consumers (Ghodeswar, 2008) and is constituted by what consumers see before them: the logo, the slogan, the packaging and design of the product (Anholt, 2007). In other words, the physical appearance of the brand (product, performance and associated services), brand personality, brand equity and its implicit relationships/associations (Kapferer, 2001).

Identity provides a direction, purpose and meaning to the brand, and is constituted by a fundamental identity (the essence, soul and central values of the brand) and an extended identity (dimensional elements) (Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 2007). The fundamental or central identity focuses on product features, user profile and product performance, while the extended identity centers on the brand personality, relationship and a strong association with the symbol (Ghodeswar, 2008). A brand with a strong identity gives clear and convincing assurances as to why consumers should buy it. It also offers a strong competitive advantage (Roy & Barnerjee, 2014).

Likewise, country brand identity is what defines the country brand, and is linked to elements such as history, territory, sport and folklore, thereby representing the essence of the nation (Dinnie, 2008). To this author, it is constructed based on components of national identity.

National identity encompasses the characteristics of a nation with regard to what its people perceive as essential, lasting and distinctive about the nation in the present, past and future (Fan, 2010). This identity can be considered a process of preparing, planning and communicating the name and identity of a country to construct its image and reputation (Hurn, 2016).

In the country branding process, identity plays an important role in brand creation (Hakala & Lemmetyinen, 2011), in terms of its management and communication. When building country brands, different nations emphasize the most appropriate components and communicators of identity for achieving the goals of their country brand (Dinnie, 2008).

These elements of country brand identity must show how unique this brand is, to be used during branding to communicate and divulge the brand internationally, creating associations in the minds of consumers and thus an image of this country and its products; an idea similar to that of Aaker (1996). This differentiation should be based on the singularity of the place: its culture, history and people (Dinnie, 2008).

Thus, among the aspects that can help to build country brand identity are the codes that express country brand identity, defined by Dinnie (2008): flag, language and icons. Moreover, the logotype and slogan of the country brand are the most visible and concrete visual and textual symbols that reflect the complexity and meaning of the brand, and are also fundamental for divulging and promoting the brand at the international level (Mariutti & Giraldi, 2012). The brand name must also be fundamental, given that some countries are known by more than one name (Dinnie, 2008). These elements of identity are the same as those of products and services, only contextualized for a more complex scenario, the country.

*Country image*

Regarding brand image, it is defined by Keller (1993, p. 3) as "consumer perceptions of a brand as reflected by the associations held in a consumer's memory". It represents what consumers think of a brand and the feelings that are highlighted when they remember it (Roy & Barnerjee, 2014), as seen above.

In marketing, this concept is related to, but different from, the concept of brand identity.

Whereas brand image means associations, images that are actually formed in consumers' minds, brand identity is the image that marketing professionals desire to create in consumers' minds (Groonros, 2004). Brand identity therefore precedes brand image (Pike, 2008), in other words, the perceived identity shapes the brand image in the mind of potential consumers and members of the channel (Roy & Barnerjee, 2014). Moreover, brand image can be transformed from time to time, unlike brand identity, which is harder to change (Kapferer, 2001).

Analogous to countries, Dinnie (2008) claims that country image is a consequence of country brand identity. This occurs because all countries have an identity, which carries positive and negative associations (Gilmore, 2002). These associations in relation to the country make up its image (Kotler, Haider, Hen, 1993; Giraldi, 2016), and are therefore linked to its identity, which is lasting. Moreover, country image can also be transformed, principally as the result of major events like the Olympic Games (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002).

Building a brand includes creating an image and communicating it internally and externally, grounded in the positive values of a country and relevant perceptions to promote its development (Domeisen, 2003). Thus, this image must be created and communicated by marketing professionals, emphasizing positive stereotypes related to the nation and minimizing negative impressions. In the case of the latter, they should seek other ways of compensating for the country's negative image, using other attributes to promote its products overseas, such as the quality and price of products (improving the country's image) or, in the case of products projected and assembled in different countries, selecting a nation to emphasize the image of the country, which is likely to have more positive repercussions in the target market (Laroche et. al, 2005).

Therefore, a well-established image is a tool that aids country branding (Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013). On the other hand, if a country is not well managed, it may be subject to a negative image or stereotype (Gilmore, 2002).

*Segmentation and positioning of country brand*
In the same way that product brands segment their consumer base, country brands must also segment their audiences to understand the existing images of

the nation and develop communications to contain negative perceptions and strengthen positive ones (Dinnie, 2008). In place marketing, segmenting target markets is essential (Hakala, Lemmetyinen & Kantola, 2013).

Moreover, after segmenting its consumers, a nation must position itself strategically in the international market, just as companies do. Positioning is the act of projecting the product and image of a company to occupy a differentiated place in the mind of the target audience (Kotler & Keller, 2006) and is part of company strategy. Establishing points of differentiation is the key task of brand positioning (Dinnie, 2008). This differentiation should highlight brands and offers to consumers, and should live up to their needs and expectations (Ghodeswar, 2008).

Analogously, the positioning of a country brand is part of the country brand strategy (Brand Finance, 2015) and derives from its values, which is the most complicated part of the branding process because positioning needs to be challenging, differential and, most importantly, translated to other audiences, and countries have diverse stakeholders (Gilmore, 2002). Country brand managers must adopt a more holistic approach when developing their positioning strategy, as this strategy must allow the country to differentiate from what its competitors are offering (Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

In this respect, a connection can be glimpsed with country identity, as this reflects what is unique about a country and should therefore be the basis for its positioning. In practical terms, Gilmore (2002) suggests the use of the diamond model to position a country brand effectively in the international scenario. This diamond contains the macro trends, stakeholders, competitors and core competencies. Macro trends represent the political, economic, cultural and population trends and lifestyle of the country. Stakeholders include the present and future residents of a country, the workers, tourists, investors, students, media, governments and buyers of national products. Competitors include other regions and countries. Core competencies involve the country's physical and human assets.

An alternative to help develop effective positioning strategies to increase the country's competitive advantages is to identify the dimensions of its brand personality, which are related to a country having a series of human characteristics

associated with consumers. These associations can affect their intentions in a relationship with a specific country (Rojás-Mendez, Murphy & Papadopoulos, 2013).

A nation that is committed to developing proactive branding runs the risk of being positioned anywise by its competitors, making it increasingly difficult to control its economic future (Gilmore, 2002). For its positioning to be effective, a nation has to deal not only with strengthening its positive side and dimensions, but also with reducing any negative image that consumers may have of it (Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

Furthermore, country branding can be used to reposition a country as part of its national economic development strategy (Mugobo & Wakeham, 2014). This repositioning is known as "re-branding" and can be achieved successfully with great potential for

occurred over a period of twenty years, and not only the result of branding campaigns (Fan, 2006). This means that branding is a powerful tool, but if a country cannot change its social, economic and political bases, as well as its strategy, branding actions will not work, especially those linked to publicizing and divulging the country at the international level. Therefore, countries must understand that branding involves a long-term commitment (Dinnie, 2008).

Finally, considering the three elements of country branding, it can be seen that the positioning of a country functions as an element that connects country-brand identity and its image, a view similar to that of Pike (2008). Furthermore, by revisiting and furthering discussions on this topic, it is possible to reflect on these relationships and the way in which country branding encompasses these elements, as shown in Figure 2:
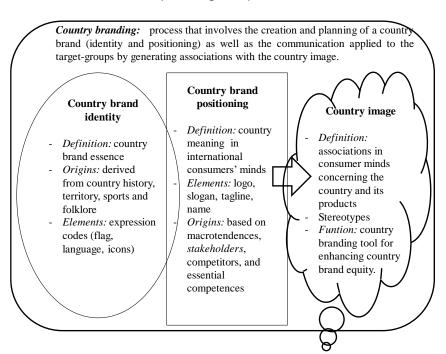


**Country branding:** process that involves the creation and planning of a country brand (identity and positioning) as well as the communication applied to the target-groups by generating associations with the country image.

**Country brand identity**

- *Definition:* country brand essence
- *Origins:* derived from country history, territory, sports and folklore
- *Elements:* expression codes (flag, language, icons)

**Country brand positioning**

- *Definition:* country meaning in international consumers' minds
- *Elements:* logo, slogan, tagline, name
- *Origins:* based on macrotendences, *stakeholders*, competitors, and essential competences

**Country image**

- *Definition:* associations in consumer minds concerning the country and its products
- Stereotypes
- *Funtion:* country branding tool for enhancing country brand equity.

**Fig. 2**
Relationship between country brand identity, country image and country brand positioning.
**Source**: Prepared by the authors.

nations, especially in cases where they are stereotyped beyond reality (Dinnie, 2008). This process is directly related to country image, as changes in image and perceptions allow a nation to reposition itself to achieve a competitive advantage in tourism and business (Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015).

Spain is an example of a country that successfully underwent this repositioning process (Gilmore, 2002). However, it should be highlighted that the change that occurred in Spain with regard to its national image is the result of fundamental changes in its political, economic and social system that

Figure 2 shows that country brand identity is the desired image of a country and its brand. In other words, it is the image that branding managers wish to create in the minds of international consumers. It is the basis for positioning, as it seeks to differentiate the country from its competitors and create meaning in the mind of consumers. Identity is the essence of the nation, that which makes it unique: its history, people, sports and culture. Thus, a country's positioning strategy, also established by the country brand managers, uses elements of the country's identity and essence (history, territory, people, sports

and culture) to construct a strong differentiation in the mind of international stakeholders.

The result of this positioning, and how these elements are perceived by consumers, shapes their associations and images of the country, which may often be based on stereotypes. This country image may prove to be a helpful tool when it comes to country branding, generating value for the country brand and the country-of-origin effect, as seen above.

Furthermore, it can be said that country branding ranges from creation and planning to the communication of the country brand. This creation and planning include knowledge of the country brand identity and its elements, which in turn are analyzed to trace the positioning of the country brand. Having defined the positioning, the country brand managers communicate the positive and relative points of the country through branding actions. From this communication, international consumers form the country image.

Some final considerations of the work will now be given.

## 3.  FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In a competitive and dynamic international scenario, countries are increasingly seen and acting as brands. Thus, this study presented, through a theoretical review, the main concepts related to country brand and its management, seeking to differentiate it from country image and country-of-origin effect. It also sought to describe this brand management in detail, exploring its main differences in relation to the product and service brand management, its fundamental goals and main elements.

First, the country brand concept was shown to be related to, but different from, the concepts of country image and country-of-origin effect. A country brand is derived from a nation's culture and values, and is linked to an intentional and strategic managerial process to differentiate the country and its products in the eyes of its target audiences. Country image is part of a perceptual process. It is constituted by consumers' associations with a country. It is how consumers perceive the country and its characteristics, acting as a tool to increase the power of the country brand. Meanwhile, the country-of-origin effect occurs when consumers incorporate a stimulus of the country (which may be derived from its country brand or image) as a criterion in their attitudes to the products and services supplied by that country.

The managerial process of a country brand is called country branding. It ranges from the creation to the international communication of the country and its brand and its fundamental purpose is to attract tourists, stimulate investments, increase exports and attract talent. However, it is much more complex than product and service branding, as it involves more stakeholders (governments, industrial groups, companies), more target audiences (tourists, investors, possible residents), and is derived from several theoretical disciplines, such as political geography, international relations and marketing.

It is also necessary to consider three fundamental inter-related elements: country brand identity, country image and the positioning of the country and its brand. The first is the essence of the nation, the image that the country desires to form in the mind of its consumers. It is based on culture, history and people, and is the basis for the positioning of the country in the international scenario. Positioning uses elements of identity (logo, slogan and name) as well as communication tools to differentiate the country from its competitors and create meaning in the mind of international consumers. As these elements, which reveal characteristics of the country, are perceived by international consumers, they constitute the country image.

Thus, it was possible to understand and clarify core concepts associated with country brand and its management, illustrating its complexity. Important information was also obtained for country brand managers to aid the construction of this brand, which is an ongoing process.

Future studies can use these clearer definitions to measure country image, country brand and country-of-origin effect more accurately. Another aspect highlighted in this study is the goals of country branding, which can be used to bridge another theoretical gap in future research, namely how to develop a competitive country brand to achieve these important and complex goals.

Thus, new works could investigate the creation and construction of country brands, with in-depth case studies, conducting interviews with the people in charge of managing these brands to gain a better understanding of the process, its advantages and disadvantages and its stages in order to map its

competitive differential. Another approach would be to measure the country-of-origin effect accurately, based on the concept presented here to gauge how country brand and country branding can influence the behavior of international consumers, i.e., how it can attract tourists, investors, buyers and residents to a country.

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# Um estudo teórico sobre marca-país e sua gestão

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### RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta um estudo teórico visando esclarecer o conceito de marca-país, diferenciando-o de imagem de país e efeito país de origem, e também detalhar sua gestão, explorando sua complexidade e suas diferenças em relação à gestão de marcas de produtos e serviços. Fundamentado na literatura, verificou-se que a marca-país deriva de um processo gerencial, o country branding (gestão de marca-país), que objetiva diferenciar a nação e suas ofertas no mercado internacional com base em sua cultura. Esse processo engloba desde a criação da marca-país até sua comunicação para os diversos públicos-alvos, é mais complexo do que para produtos e serviços, e deve considerar os elementos de identidade, posicionamento e imagem de país. A imagem de país muitas vezes é o foco das ações de branding, pois consiste nas associações sobre o país que os consumidores internacionais sustentam em sua memória e é avaliada como uma ferramenta fundamental que pode aumentar o poder da marca-país. Assim, foi possível contribuir tanto para a teoria de marca-país e sua gestão, quanto para os governos, fornecendo informações relevantes que auxiliam na delimitação de ações estratégicas em relação à marca-país e a sua imagem.