

The nation brand molecule

José I. Rojas-Méndez

Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – The paper's aim is to determine, by means of an extensive exploratory study and the metaphorical use of a molecule, the set of dimensions and facets that exist in people's minds in regards to a country brand, and at the same time to compare the results with the dimensions used by practitioner-led sources to measure the same construct.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 532 graduate students living in 20 different countries freely reported the concepts they associate with different country names. The construction of the nation brand molecule was carried out in three steps: generating the inventory of all the associations made by participants in relation to country names; classifying the inventory; and mapping the molecule.

Findings – The nation brand molecule (NBM) which encompasses all the associated concepts that give shape to the overall molecule was developed. Seven dimensions, with their corresponding facets, were identified: economy, tourism, geography and nature, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government.

Research limitations/implications – First, the sample was significantly biased towards graduate students. Second, the free elicitation process was requested mainly focused on nation brand personality, so there still may be some country facets not included in the NBM. Finally, this study does not have a hierarchy or relative weight of each of the molecule's dimensions.

Practical implications – The seven dimensions identified here match some of those used by private sources to measure country brand. However, this study uncovers two dimensions that are not considered by either of the private sources: geography and nature, and science and technology. This may demonstrate that what should be measured is not exactly what has been measured, and therefore indicates a potential content validity problem of the private measures currently in use.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to explore the dimensions comprising the nation brand construct at a multinational scope. Although practitioner-led indexes have been widely used for many country-branding projects, they only show what is being measured but not what should be measured in regards to the country brands, and therefore this paper fills the gap that exists in the current state-of-the-art.

Keywords Positioning, Country identity and image, Nation brand dimensions and facets, Nation brand molecule, The resource advantage theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the last decades marketing academics and practitioners alike have shifted their focus away from product brands to corporate brands (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Ward and Lee, 2000), and more recently towards nation brands (d'Astous and Boujbel, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013). As a consequence of this shift some authors have suggested that nation brand may be seen and treated as a product or corporate brand (Olins, 1999; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Anholt (2002) argues that a more useful metaphor is to view countries as corporate brands rather than product brands. Parallels between corporations and countries seem to be more evident: corporations have logos, jargons, culture, and employees, while countries have flags, languages, culture, and citizens, respectively. This is also reinforced by the fact that a nation brand has a multidimensional nature and diverse stakeholder interactions (Hankinson, 2004; Trueman *et al.*, 2004).

Still, the nation brand concept is much more exciting, controversial and complex than corporate brands (Dinnie, 2008). The excitement emerges as a result of the limited theory that the academic community has been able to produce and validate. Controversy materializes from conflicting viewpoints and opinions due to the strong influence of countries' public and international affairs policies. Complexity results from the multiple levels, dimensions, and disciplines contributing to country branding that go beyond traditional products and corporate branding.

Practitioners and academic researchers recognize that the nation brand domain emerges at the intersection of academic disciplines, such as urban policy, tourism, public diplomacy, international relations, and, more recently, marketing (Anholt, 2007; van Ham, 2002), which reinforces the idea that nation brand is a complex phenomenon. Complexity is also evident because, in addition to physical attributes, countries have populations and their own history and meaning to foreign consumers, visitors and investors.

Even though we have been witnessing a significant increase in the attention paid to nation brand research in the last few

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years, the whole area is still in its infancy (Fetscherin, 2010). The main focus of academic literature has been on conceptual or descriptive research citing specific cases (Gertner, 2011), while practitioners have examined strategic implementation (Jacobsen, 2010). It seems that “place branding has been more accidental than a continuous and deliberate planned action” (Endziņa and Luņeva, 2004, p. 94).

Because of this notion of complexity, the task of managing a country brand turns out to be a very challenging one. Recent history shows several cases where significant resources have been wasted on ineffective nation branding campaigns. Of course, some of those failures may have occurred because of the use of an inappropriate communication strategy with the target audiences. Others, however, were not successful because they were based on very common concepts that did not highlight unique features that identify and differentiate the country. This highlights the need for nation brand managers to have a more comprehensive picture of all the aspects that can be used to develop an integral marketing strategy in order to achieve an effective position of the nation for its different target audiences. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to determine the set of dimensions and facets that exist in people’s minds in regards to a country brand in general and, at the same time, to compare the results with the dimensions used by practitioner-led sources to measure the same construct. In order to accomplish this objective, an extensive exploratory study was conducted in twenty countries, and a metaphorical approach was employed to create a nation brand molecule, where all the identified dimensions and facets take the form of atoms clustered in an organized way that shows how people see a nation brand in general.

Literature review

A brand is defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitor” (AMA, 1960). From this definition it is clear that the main rationale of any brand is to identify and differentiate itself from competitors. Over time, the concept of brand has developed in response to changes in the business environment (Knox and Bickerton, 2003) thus deepening and widening the brand domain through the application of branding to activities other than manufacturing (Hankinson, 2010). As a consequence more encompassing definitions of brand have emerged. For instance, de Chernatony and McDonald (1992, p. 237) define a brand as “an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique, sustainable added values, which match their need most closely”. This holistic definition of brand maintains the original rationale of serving to identify and differentiate, while also advocating that nowadays the concept of brand is applicable to a wide variety of objects, including places like cities, regions, and nations.

Since the expression “nation brand” was coined by Anholt in 1996, the world has been witnessing numerous and significant efforts made by countries from all latitudes to position themselves in a positive way to their different stakeholders. The release of the book *The Marketing of Nations* by Kotler *et al.* (1997) reinforced the importance of the nation brand as a strategic concept. Since then, national

governments are resorting to traditional branding techniques to differentiate their country to gain a competitive advantage over potential rival countries in the belief that a strong country brand can contribute to the country’s sustainable development (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2001). A few decades ago only developed countries were engaged in nation branding strategies. Today, it is considered to be the norm even by emerging and developing countries that allocate significant budgets to build and maintain an attractive nation brand (Herstein, 2012). It is like accepting that the question facing nations is not whether to brand but rather how to brand (Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

Some of the reasons for the increased interest in the nation brand concept is the fierce competition among countries to attract limited international foreign resources to increase a country’s product exports (Loo and Davies, 2006; Papadopoulos, 2004), to attract foreign tourists (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2002), to enhance foreign direct investments (Papadopoulos, 2004), and to increase enrollment of foreign students (Martens and Starke, 2008). It is like seeing countries as brands competing in a gigantic supermarket (Anholt, 2002) with governments desperately working to create, promote, protect, and supervise their nation’s brand (Rawson, 2007). However, in a very competitive market this task is not an easy one, especially when a country wants to attract the right kinds of investment, tourism, trade, and talent (Aronczyk, 2008).

The resource advantage theory (R-A theory hereafter; Hunt, 1995; Hunt and Morgan, 1996) can be used here as a theoretical framework to investigate the importance of the determinant factors to develop a nation brand. This theory states that comparative advantages in a firm’s resources create a competitive advantage in the marketplace, which in turn will result in the firm’s superior financial performance. The latter is supposed to be the primary objective of the firm. The fundamental aspect of competition in this theory is “a firm’s ability to develop and maintain advantages in resources over its rivals” (Arnett and Madhavaram, 2012, p. 575). Interestingly, the R-A theory defines resources as the tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable it to produce efficiently (i.e. comparative advantages in resources contributes to efficient production) and/or effectively (i.e. efficient production that is more valuable) (Hunt and Morgan, 1996: 322). In R-A theory the concept of value, as it is also understood in marketing, refers to the sum of benefits that consumers perceive they will receive from a market offering. Under this theory, resources are both significantly heterogeneous (i.e. assortment of resources that might be unique) across competitors and imperfectly mobile (i.e. are not commonly, easily, or readily bought and sold in the marketplace).

Although nations are much more complex than a firm, the R-A theory can also be applied. A nation can also aspire to achieve superior financial performance (i.e. increase in country’s product exports, attract more foreign tourists, enhance foreign direct investments, etc.) by managing its tangible and intangible resources (natural resources, culture, history, society, etc.) in a competitive manner. Nation branding can result in a positive gain for countries as they obtain a distinctive image in a competitive global market. Consequently, like a firm, a nation should strive to identify its resources and potential critical dimensions (both positive and negative) in order to design, implement, and maintain the

appropriate brand image for its different audiences, which in turn will contribute to its success.

Until now a significant portion of the extant work in this field has been conceptual and theoretically oriented (Fan, 2006; Hanna and Rowley, 2011; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000; Yan, 2003), or it has had limited scope because it has been focused exclusively on one specific country (Gilmore, 2002; Loo and Davies, 2006; Ruzzier and de Chernatony, 2013; Wetzel, 2006). Both approaches have taken for granted the nation brand dimensions without validating them when developing or analyzing a nation brand.

However, as of now no empirical study in the public domain has focused on determining how many and which dimensions should be considered as part of a nation brand. Kotler and Gertner (2002) made a tentative proposition by saying that a place image is derived from a location's geography, history, art, music, famous citizens, and other features. Similarly, Loo and Davies (2006) mention products and services, political actions, arts, popular culture, sport, media, architecture and many more; Iversen and Hem (2008) allude to language, skin color, music, art style, customs and religion; Kaplan *et al.* (2010) cites geography, tourists attractions, natural resources, local products, residents' characteristics, institutions, and infrastructure; and Stokburger-Sauer (2011) brings up territory, people, natural endowments, economic, political and cultural values. These references support the idea that stakeholders do not consider a nation brand in isolation but rather as a multidimensional construct. The multiple dimensions and their interrelations offer a fertile area to use the metaphorical approach of a molecule to represent in a comprehensive way the nation brand concept. Though the concepts listed by these authors clearly belong to the nation brand domain, the list is by no means complete nor does it make accessible to country brand managers the relationship among those concepts.

Nations are social constructs, either real (Gellner, 1997) or imagined (Anderson, 1983) that contains people circumscribed together by a collective sense of national identity (Gould and Skinner, 2007). Brand identity is "a unique set of associations that the brand strategist aspires to create and maintain" (Aaker, 1996, p. 68) that originates through the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses embedded in the tangible and intangible attributes of the nation (Gaggiotti *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, brand image refers to the meaning that the stakeholders associate with the product [nation] based on experiences, impressions and perceptions of the functional, emotional and symbolic benefits of the brand (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). According to Gunn (1972) the image formation process can be separated in two parts: organic and induced images. Organic images are those that come from unbiased sources or even personal experience over which a country has no control whatsoever, while induced images are based on conscious effort of marketers to develop, promote and advertise a particular country. As noted by Kapferer (1992, p. 37), "identity necessarily precedes image".

The nation brand concept

A necessary step to identify a comprehensive list of those strategic dimensions that can be used to define the nation's brand identity and to work on aligning stakeholders' images accordingly, would be defining the scope of what is a nation

brand. Unfortunately, the complexity of the concept and/or its confusion with other concepts, such as destination brand which is more focused to the tourism field, has led to a lack of shared definition for what is meant by nation or country Brand (the terms nation and country are used interchangeably, although we recognize that they are different – see Fan (2006)). In an early attempt Kotler and Gertner (2002) define country brand as:

[...] the sum of beliefs and impressions that people (foreigners) have of that place. The image represents a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place. They are the product of mental processes to choose the essential information in a lot of information there.

Dinnie (2008, p. 15) defines country brand as:

[...] the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences.

Fan (2010, p. 98) defines this concept 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.

Also recently, Fetscherin (2010, p. 468) offers the following definition:

[...] a country brand belongs to the public domain; it is complex and includes multiple levels, components, and disciplines. It entails the collective involvement of the many stakeholders it must appeal to. It concerns a country's whole image, covering political, economic, social, environmental, historical, and cultural aspects.

A content analysis revealed that the most common concepts included in these definitions are: information, culture, image, people, elements and stakeholders. The multidimensionality of the nation brand construct is then endorsed.

The two most prominent measures to assess country brands both come from practitioner-led sources: the country brand index (CBI) from FutureBrand consultancy and the Anholt GfK Roper's Nation Brand Index (NBI). CBI measures five key dimensions: value system, quality of life, good for business, heritage and culture, and tourism. NBI measures six dimensions (the "hexagon"): exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people and tourism. Anholt and Hildreth (2004) state that the hexagon stands for the communication channels by means of which most of the countries send out messages about themselves.

In the last few years we have also seen the emergence of new models on the way of measuring a country brand. Among these are: the virtuous circle of creative country reputation (Morgan *et al.*, 2011); the Country Brand Strength Index (Fetscherin, 2010); and the Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking. However, these three new indexes are far less recognized than the two previously referred.

Although the CBI and NBI indexes have been widely used for many country-branding projects since 2005, they only show what is being measured but not necessarily what should be measured in regards to the country brands, and therefore a potential gap may exist in the current state-of-the-art. It seems that the process by which the CBI and NBI were derived have not been subject to rigorous academic review and validation. To the best of the author's knowledge, this paper is the first to explore in a comprehensive way the dimensions comprising the nation brand construct at a multinational scope. Thus this study will test the validity of

the nation brand dimensions already included in the extant literature and provide evidence, if sufficient, to represent truly the collective imagery about a nation brand.

Method

There are two ways to measure a nation brand: the stakeholder-based brand equity approach and the country-based (i.e. financial) brand equity approach (Atilgan *et al.*, 2005). A deep understanding of country brand from the potential stakeholder's point-of-view is essential for successful brand management; hence, this study acknowledges the stakeholder-based approach. The stakeholder-based brand equity approach focuses on the meaning of the brand and the value that stakeholders place on it. Given the early stages of research in nation branding (Dinnie, 2008), a qualitative research framework is adopted. To identify the associations made to countries by different stakeholders (i.e. consumers of products, international tourists, potential investors, etc.), an exploratory study with an inductive approach was employed. This study reports the free elicitation process done by 532 university master's students, living in 20 different countries, in regards to 26 countries used as stimuli reflecting different sizes (geographic area and population), cultures, languages, religions, and political regimes. The selection of countries used as stimuli included, by area:

- Europe (France, Germany, Spain, Russia, Italy, Denmark, UK).
- North America (USA., Canada, Mexico).
- South America (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Colombia).
- Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, The Philippines).
- Africa (South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria).
- Middle East (Turkey, Saudi Arabia).
- Australasia (Australia).

To reduce possible subject fatigue and boredom, which potentially could result in response bias effect, six versions of a five-country list were prepared and each respondent was asked to free-elicite for only five countries, whereas the USA was included for all participants because somehow everybody in the world has an opinion on it and consequently the list of associations could be enriched.

Participants were contacted in their classrooms by the author or a local collaborator, and were requested to voluntarily participate in an exercise lasting five to ten minutes designed to identify items that can be used to describe a nation's image or identity.

Once subjects agreed to take part in the exercise, they received printed instructions, in their own language, on how to approach the task. Participants were instructed first to think for a moment that every country is a living person, and second, to write down the traits that first come to their minds regarding the country names given to them. They were advised that there were no wrong answers and they could write both positive/or negative. The instruction sheet had enough space for participants to provide as many traits as they wanted.

Results

Table I shows the convenience sample of individuals participating per country. Most of the time the five countries listed corresponded only to foreign countries for

Table I Countries sampled in the exploratory study

Country	Language of data collection	Sample size
Australia	English	20
Chile	Spanish	43
China	Chinese	60
Colombia	Spanish	9
England	English	20
France	French	98
Germany	German	7
India	English	9
Iran	Persian	25
Ireland	English	36
Mexico	Spanish	30
Nigeria	English	19
Norway	Norwegian	19
Paraguay	Spanish	22
South Africa	English	27
The Netherlands	Dutch	19
Turkey	Turkish	10
USA	English	30
Vietnam	Vietnamese	21
Wales	English	8
Total sample size		532

the respondents ($n = 456$; 86 percent), but in some cases participants ($n = 76$; 14 percent) were asked to provide answers for their home country because they received a version of the five-country list where their home country was included.

Following the metaphorical approach suggested by Lederer and Hill (2001), the nation brand molecule (NBM) was developed which encompasses all the associated positive and negative atoms (i.e. concepts) that give shape to the overall molecule. The process of creating the NBM was carried out in three steps: generating the inventory of all the associations made by participants in relation to country names; classifying the inventory; and mapping the molecule.

Inventory generation

Participants had no problem in articulating their ideas, and the exercise produced a total number of 7,289 expressions in the form of adjectives, nouns, verbs, names, and short sentences in ten different languages:

- 1 German;
- 2 Norwegian;
- 3 Dutch;
- 4 Vietnamese;
- 5 Chinese Mandarin;
- 6 French;
- 7 Persian;
- 8 Turkish;
- 9 Spanish; and
- 10 English.

Participants conjured up a wide variety of elements that form the image of a nation. On average, each participant contributed 2.7 expressions per country. In very few cases respondents were unable to elicit any expression as a result of the lack of familiarity with a particular country. Since the common language for analysis was English, all responses

coming from non-English speaking countries were translated by bilingual collaborators. The combined list of 7,289 expressions was condensed in order to eliminate repetition and delete words that were the same but offered in different formats (e.g. adjectives, nouns, adverbs). This step resulted in 1,700 expressions remaining, with frequencies ranging from 1 to 126.

Inventory classification

All the expressions provided by respondents were content analyzed by two coders with the aim of grouping them into macro categories (i.e. dimensions). From the analysis, seven main dimensions were identified and inter-coder agreement on categorizations was over 90 percent and Cohen's kappa, which excludes pure chance agreement between coders (Grayson and Rust, 2001), was 0.81. This kappa coefficient indicates substantial agreement. All disagreements between the two coders were resolved by discussion with a third person not involved in the initial categorization process until consensus was achieved. The seven dimensions identified by this inductive approach are:

- 1 economy;
- 2 tourism;
- 3 geography and nature;
- 4 culture and heritage;
- 5 society;
- 6 science and technology; and
- 7 government.

Mapping the molecule

Country brand associations consist of multiple concepts (atoms) that create a network of interrelated pieces of information, opinions, perceptions, and beliefs that eventually shape the NBM. Therefore, an additional content analysis was done in order to agglomerate the related concepts and thus uncover potential sub-dimensions or facets within each one of the seven main dimensions. As a result, a preliminary version of the NBM emerged. In order to test for content validity of this initial version of the NBM, a Delphi method using an iterative process was adopted. The Delphi method is a systematic and interactive method established on the assumption that the opinion of a group of experts is more reliable than that of an individual expert (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963). Thus, five experts in sociology, psychology, history, business and linguistics were invited to assess the content of the molecule. For each round the experts received a sheet with the molecule comprising the atoms (i.e. dimensions and facets) and their interrelationships. The experts were required to review the molecule and indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the labels given to the dimensions and facets, justifying their replies. Once all the reviews were received back, a modified version of the NBM was prepared following the experts' suggestions. Then the modified version was sent to the experts again and the process was repeated. Three rounds with the experts were needed until general consensus was achieved. Figure 1 shows the final version of the NBM.

Explaining the nation brand molecule

Since the main purpose of this study is to determine the set of dimensions and facets that exist in people's minds in regards to a country brand in general, the following sections will explain each of the uncovered dimensions and facets

comprising the NBM presented in Figure 1. When appropriate, and with the objective to illustrate the points made here, some quotes from the data collection are inserted. Most of the times the quotes are not long statements, but specific references to, for instance, places, people, sports, food, animals, etc., as reported by respondents when thinking about a particular country.

Economy

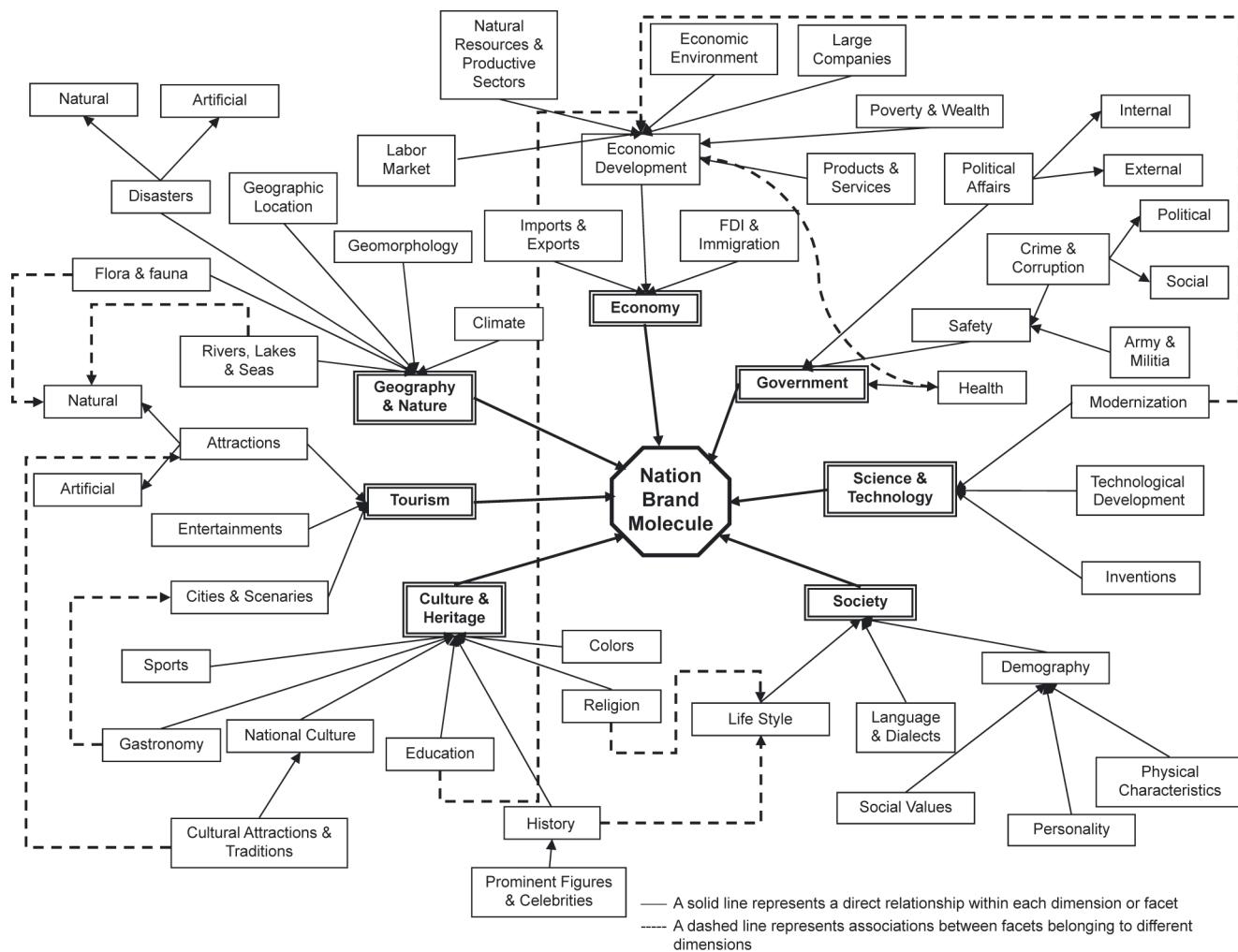
The economy dimension encapsulates all the aspects related to how a country manages its resources. The answers provided in this dimension of the NBM were grouped under the following three facets: economic development, foreign trade, and foreign direct investment and immigration.

The economic development facet covers the main economic aspects of a country that are usually perceived by locals and foreigners. Among these are natural resources and productive sectors, economic environment, large companies, products and services, labor market, and wealth and poverty. In regards to natural resources and productive sectors, respondents mentioned countries like Saudi Arabia which are known worldwide by their production and abundant oil reserves, Chile as a leader in the cooper production, and Colombia and Brazil as coffee producers. Within the product and services facet several generic products were associated with countries: rice, cars, perfumes, meat, milk, etc. Countries like Argentina were mentioned as large producers and consumers of meat, while Japan was associated with car manufacturers and France with perfumes. The economic environment mainly comprises the different economic stages that a country might be undergoing: growth, recession, crisis or depression. Large companies refer to those that have achieved worldwide recognition such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola from the USA, Daewoo and Hyundai from South Korea, Lego from Denmark, and Sony and Toyota from Japan. Wealth and poverty expressions were also associated with country names representing the access, or its difficulty, to products and services that satisfy basic needs which in turn affect the quality of life of the individuals. Expressions such as poverty, unemployment, famine, and poor quality of life were repeatedly associated with countries holding an image of a struggling economic (Ecuador, The Philippines and Nigeria). In contrast, industrialized and wealthy were adjectives commonly linked to countries like the USA, Germany, Canada, and Japan.

The Foreign Trade facet denotes the activity of buying/selling products and services to/from other countries. Some of the expressions mentioned by respondents were open / closed to imports, commercial openness, world manufacturer, commercial center, etc. The USA and Japan were associated with countries very open to imports and exports, while most of the respondents signposted China as the world manufacturer.

FDI and immigration is the capacity exercised by a country to attract scarce resources in a permanent way. It seems that today all countries are striving for an investment-friendly image. This facet can be observed to be present when foreign citizens are willing to move to live and work in a new country, as well as when the international business community assesses a country as an ideal or good destination for their foreign investment. Despite the fact that those interested in FDI are more rational than tourists in their decision making process, they are still affected by the image projected by a country.

Figure 1 The nation brand molecule



Tourism

Tourism is probably one of the most prominent dimensions by which travelers develop an image of a particular country. According to the World Tourism Organization (2012) receipts of international tourists in 2011 (exports from tourism) totaled US\$ 1.2 trillion representing almost 6 percent of the world’s exports of products and services. Under the NBM’s dimension, respondents in our study listed an extensive range of expressions related to this dimension, which can be summarized under three facets: attractions, cities and places, and entertainment.

The facet of attractions can be classified into two sub-facets: natural and artificial. Among natural touristic attractions respondents mentioned beaches (Ibiza in Spain and Copacabana in Brazil), tropical forests (in Brazil), volcanoes (Fuji in Japan), rivers and falls (Seine in Paris, Nile in Egypt, Amazon in Brazil, and Niagara Falls in Canada) and other natural wonders that are enjoyed by tourists (the Grand Canyon National Park in the USA). Artificial attractions encompass museums (Louvre in France), monuments (Eiffel Tower in France, Moai statues in Easter Island-Chile, and Tower of Pisa in Italy), castles and palaces (The Palace of Versailles in France), buildings (the twin

towers in the USA, the pyramids in Egypt, the St Basil’s Cathedral in Russia), famous squares (St. Mark’s Square in Venice-Italy, the Red Square in Moscow-Russia, Tiananmen Square in Beijing-China, Central Park in New York – USA), ancient ruins (Chichen-Itza in Mexico and Machu-Pichu in Peru), and numerous other icons that have been designed and made by humans in a way that nowadays capture people’s interest (i.e. Great Wall of China).

The second facet of tourism is cities and places. Respondents easily associated country names with specific cities and places within them. Cities like Paris (France), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Istanbul (Turkey), Madrid (Spain), and Rome and Milan (Italy) were frequently named when their corresponding countries were mentioned.

The facet of entertainment relates to the recreational activities that can be carried on in a country including traditional festivals, carnivals, and entertainment centers. Events known worldwide such as the Oktoberfest in Munich-Germany, the Carnival of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, the Festival of San Fermín in Pamplona-Spain, and the Cannes Film Festival in France are widely recognized by people. As for the world famous entertainment centers, respondents mentioned Walt Disney in Orlando and the city of Las Vegas in the USA.

Geography and nature

Nations are also associated with tangible elements of their own geography and nature. The main facets under which it is possible to classify respondents' opinions are: climate, geomorphology, geographic location, disasters, flora and fauna, and rivers, lakes and seas. In regards to climate there were many expressions that revealed how easily respondents identified this facet: sunny, warm, hot, cold, wet, dry, and tropical. Countries like Brazil were frequently associated with the benefits of its sunny, tropical and hot climate. In contrast, Canada was quickly associated with cold weather.

The second facet of the geography and nature dimension is labeled geomorphology and involves all the expressions related to landforms or physical characteristics of a geographic territory. Expressions such as mountains, deserts, valleys, island, extensive territory, and large and small country were stressed here. The third facet refers to the geographic location of countries, usually from the perspective of the respondents. Respondents offered here words such as neighbor, distant, isolated, north, south, and center of the world.

The fourth facet deals with flora and fauna representative of the countries. Some of the words referred to by respondents were: shrubs, vegetation, flowers, daisies, forests, trees, horses, camels, kangaroos, bull shark, and wildlife. When people were requested to list associations with Australia they immediately mentioned kangaroos. On the other hand, when they thought of South Africa, wildlife safaris emerged as a natural association.

Disasters comprise the fifth facet of geography and nature. Natural phenomena such as rain or wind become natural disasters when they exceed a limit of normality. Some natural disasters mentioned by respondents were: flood, heat wave, hurricane, earthquake, volcanic eruption, drought, storm, tornado and tsunami. Words like these are associated with certain countries, for example, the Hurricane Katrina with the USA and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami with countries located in that region, in particular, Thailand. Artificial or man-made disasters are those that occur because of negligence or error-disrupting life circumstances causing blackouts, wars, fires, nuclear disasters, etc. Japan is still associated with the nuclear bombs that were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while Russia is associated with the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster although the disaster was geographically located in the Ukraine.

Lastly, the facet of rivers, lakes and seas combines related words such as Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Amazon River and others. Specific examples are the Nile River in Egypt, the Amazon River in Brazil, Niagara Falls in Canada, and beaches in Greece and Turkey. The fact that some of the answers listed here are the same as those listed for natural attractions in the tourism dimensions reflects how dimensions and facets are interconnected in the NBM, thus adding another element to its complexity.

Culture and heritage

Culture and heritage is an important NBM dimension that actually permeates all areas of behavior. Culture can be seen as an intangible differentiating marker among countries that relates to the way people live and interact with one another in a given society. As such it includes facets such as national culture, history, gastronomy, education, religion, sports, and colors.

The first facet of culture and heritage is labeled national culture. Culture can be seen, in a broad sense, as all that is cultivated by man as it involves the sum of human productions, both materially and spiritually. In this study it includes as a sub-facet of cultural attractions and traditions such as music, folklore, and handicrafts. Here it is possible to cite as examples the St Fermin Running of the Bulls in Pamplona and the Bunol Tomato Fight near Valencia, both in Spain.

History is the second facet of the culture and heritage NBM dimension. It refers to past events that have the distinction of being unrepeatable in time, including important events and times that give identity to a country and make it distinct from others. Some of the expressions listed by respondents were: ancient civilization in the case of Egypt, Peru (Incas), and Mexico (Mayas). The sub-facet of prominent figures and celebrities relates to famous and infamous individuals from different backgrounds that had been recognized as having a significant achievement or impact within a country. These characters stand in politics, sports, music, religious, among others. For example, some of the personalities mentioned were: The Beatles from England, Maradona from Argentina, Pele from Brazil, Hitler from Germany, and Pinochet from Chile.

Gastronomy, the third facet, was also frequently used when providing associations with countries. High quality cuisine and wine from France, pastas and pizzas from Italy, tequila, tacos and food in general from Mexico, seafood and wine from Chile, vodka from Russia, Pisco from Peru and Chile, and beef from Argentina were just some of the expressions evoked by respondents.

Religion is understood as a set of beliefs or dogmas about divinity, feelings of veneration and fear of it, moral standards for individual behavior and social and ritual practices, especially prayer and sacrifice to worship deities. This facet includes names of different religions, as well as concepts related to the faith of the people. Catholicism was associated with Italy, Spain and Portugal, and Islam with Saudi Arabia.

The facet of education embraces all those terms connected with professionalism and secular educational level shown by individuals from a particular country. Japan is a country associated with high educational level and hard-working students, Germany is related with a high level of professionalism, and Mexico with a low level of secular education.

Sport is another facet that emerges from the culture and heritage dimension. Sport activity is currently one of the most important pastimes worldwide, which is evident by the huge coverage it receives by the mass media. In this study, respondents linked this facet with terms like football passion (Argentina, Spain, Brazil and Italy), surf (Australia), tennis table (China), hooligans (England), and wrestling (Turkey) among others.

The colors facet was created due to the linkage made by respondents between countries and specific colors. Those mostly mentioned are: yellow (Australia), blue (France), white (Canada – perhaps due to the unconscious association with snow), black (Nigeria and South Africa), and red (China and Denmark).

Society

Society is the set of individuals who share behaviors and goals by interacting together in a cooperative way that forms a

group or a community. This dimension is one of the most dynamic among those forming the NBM due to the significant impact of citizens in the creation of a country's identity and image. Needless to say then that countries interested in developing their brand should begin by considering what their citizens think about their own country brand. This dimension contains the following three facets: demography, language, and life style.

Technically speaking, demography refers to the statistical study of the population. Although individuals do not perform that deep an analysis, they are still able to relate certain characteristics they see as outstanding among the citizens of a country. A set of sub-facets emerges here which covers physical characteristics, personality and social values. Among the physical associations made by respondents are:

- tall (the USA);
- fat (the USA);
- beautiful (Brazil and Colombia);
- blonde (Denmark and Germany); and
- different races based on biological visible features (Asians for China, Japan, and Korea; Arabs for Saudi Arabia, and black for Nigeria and South Africa).

Positive and negative personality traits were mentioned several times for the countries used as stimuli in this study:

- Workaholic (China, Korea and Japan).
- Arrogant (The USA and Japan).
- Friendly (Australia, Brazil and Mexico).
- Disciplined (Germany).
- Talkative (Argentina).
- Mysterious (Egypt and Saudi Arabia).
- Romantic (Italy, Spain and France).
- Fierce (Turkey).
- Conservative (Russia).
- Posh (England).
- Innovative (The USA).
- Passionate (Colombia and Spain).
- Relaxed (Mexico and The Philippines).
- Peaceable (Canada, and Denmark)

Just to mention a few.

From the previous list it is evident that respondents used country stereotypes to create the corresponding national character. Social values are the sub-facet that includes those abstract standards that are believed to be important and desirable to keep the cohesiveness of a group. Among these, respondents linked peace with Canada, friendship with Australia, Confucius with China, and love with France.

Language is the second facet of the society dimension, under which we group those expressions connected to the human capacity to use complex systems of communications including voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. Among these respondents mentioned: strange accent (Australia), speak fast (Chile), and many languages (China).

Lastly, lifestyle emerges as a facet that covers all the expressions related to the way people live. Life style is shaped by different aspects and may include views on politics, religion and health. Respondents elicited associations like conservative (England), adventurer (Australia), trendy (Italy), sophisticated (France), ecologist (Germany), simple (Denmark), family oriented (China), and fun-lover (Brazil).

Science and technology

The science and technology dimension is related to the development of equipment and processes, new products and alternatives to meet the needs of people. Three facets are identified here: technological development, modernization and inventions.

The technological development facet refers to technological advances, the quality of technology and communication technology, both current and projected.. Respondents tend to associate some technological expressions with specific countries. For example, the reliability of products (Germany), style and design (Italy), product innovations (Japan), and technology-oriented (The USA).

Modernization refers to the evolution of a country to a superior technological level that has left behind the traditional way of doing things. This facet includes the use of words like modern (The USA and Japan), advanced (Germany), and underdeveloped (Nigeria and Ecuador).

Inventions, the third facet of the technology dimension, relates to the creation of new products, tools, and processes that contribute to the country's development. Respondents frequently elicited expressions like inventive with England, The USA, Japan, South Korea, and Germany.

Government

The Government dimension encompasses all institutions and political or administrative agencies operating in a country, and the vision of its leaders. Governments exist to ensure peace, justice, access to health and education, and national security to people under their jurisdiction. Three facets were identified here:

- 1 political affairs;
- 2 health; and
- 3 safety.

The facet of political affairs refers to the responsibility to manage, resolve disputes and create social coherence for all the parties involved. Domestic or internal political affairs are related to political parties, political stability, regimes and type of governments that exist in a country. Words like democracy (The USA), theocracy (Saudi Arabia), communism (China), and monarchy (England) were offered by respondents. External political affairs focus on a country's degree of interaction and dependence on other countries and alliances. Typical words for this facet were imperialist (The USA, and Japan), invader (The USA, and England), dictator (Chile), and peace-keeper (Canada).

The health facet is related to the state of physical, mental and social development of the people, as well as with the various diseases that afflict them. Words like obese (The USA), healthy (China), and clean (Canada) were frequently offered by respondents.

The facet of safety relates to the public order prevailing in a country that contributes to the harmonious conviviality of people. Within this facet there are two sub-facets that emerge: crime and corruption, and army and militia. Crime and corruption may include political and social aspects. Typical expressions here were corruption (Colombia, Mexico, Nigeria, The Philippines, and Brazil), mafia (Italy), drugs (Colombia), and drug trafficking (Brazil and Mexico). Lastly, army and militia is related to guerilla (Colombia), nuclear weapons (The USA), war-loving (The USA, England, and

Saudi Arabia), and militarism (Germany and the USA), among others.

Conclusions and implications

This research has used the metaphorical approach of a molecule to uncover the dimensions and facets, and their intricate relationships in the context of a nation brand in general. Results of this study have demonstrated that a nation's brand to a large extent is shaped by its economy, geography and nature, tourism, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government. These seven main dimensions match with some of those used by practitioner-led sources to measure country brand. In fact, our results share five dimensions with the Anholt's hexagon: tourism, government, culture, society, and economy. Anholt uses separate dimensions for exports, and investment and immigration, while in this study both are classified under the economy dimension. Similarly, The FutureBrand index shares four dimensions with both the Anholt Index and the results presented here (government, culture and heritage, society, and tourism).

This study ascertains two dimensions of the NBM that are not considered by either of the practitioner-led sources:

- 1 geography and nature; and
- 2 science and technology.

This may demonstrate that what should be measured is not exactly what has been measured, and therefore signposts a potential content validity problem of the practitioner-led measures currently in use.

In an effort to promote a country, many will rely on the geography and nature of the country. However, a recommendation arising from this study, which is consistent with the multidimensionality of the nation brand molecule, is that nation branding strategies should not be developed as silos based on one or two specific dimensions exclusively without considering the impact on, or by, other relevant concepts. Therefore, nation brand managers should embrace a more holistic approach when developing an international positioning strategy, which at the same time allows their country to differentiate from what competitors are offering. The positioning statement must have sufficient depth to be translated into multi-faceted sub-positions that have relevance and meaning to each stakeholder group (Gilmore, 2002). Developing a country brand strategy based on stakeholders' point-of-view can lead to greater revenues, lower costs, price premiums, customer loyalty, purchase intent, and higher profits. The seven dimensions of the NBM should be used by countries to leverage their names when creating and implementing branding strategies. Usually developed countries tend to have stronger brand images than developing countries, which are not only based on their geography and nature, but also on their powerful economy and high level of science and technology. The reality of developing countries is totally different since they generally face more challenges to find the right positive dimensions and facets (i.e. atoms in the molecule) on which to leverage their country names. By using the NBM, developing countries in particular, may be able to identify their main differentiators to help their target markets to reduce the blurred image they may have just because of a country's location within a region.

Countries from Latin America, Asia and Africa could be benefit immensely from using the results of this study.

All in all, the purpose of identifying the relevant nation brand dimensions is to help countries to work on a more solid ground when trying to establish a clear and distinctive image different from potential competitor countries. Interestingly, as this study has shown, the set of expressions provided by respondents contain both positive and negative facets about a country. Therefore, for their positioning, nations have to deal not only with fortifying those already positive dimensions and facets, but also with reducing any negative image held by their stakeholders.

Limitations and further research

This study is constrained by limitations which could be addressed in future studies. First, the sample was significantly biased towards graduate students, which did not necessarily result in a problem since the respondents were able to articulate a considerable number of concepts associated to a country. Nevertheless, future studies may consider the inclusion of individuals from the general population that could better represent all nation brand stakeholders.

Second, the free elicitation process focused mainly on nation brand personality, so there still may be some country facets not included in the NBM. However, based on the results presented here, it seems that people do not necessarily have limited boundaries when thinking about a country name. Still a wider question such as "please write down all the thoughts about country 'X' that come spontaneously to your mind" may reveal some additional facets to those highlighted in this study.

Finally, since respondents were not requested to report the level of importance of each expression provided, this study does not have a hierarchy or relative weight of each of the molecule's dimensions. Further research to overcome this limitation is the logical next step to complement the NBM.

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About the author

José I. Rojas-Méndez is an Associate Professor of International Business and Marketing at Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, Canada. He received his PhD in Marketing from Manchester Business School, England. His research interests include nation branding, advertising, cross-cultural issues in business, and international marketing. His work has previously appeared in several journals including *Journal of Business Research*, *The Journal of Advertising Research*, *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, *Journal of Global Marketing*, *Corporate Reputation Review*, and *Journal of Food Products Marketing*. He serves on six journal editorial boards, including *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Food Product Marketing* and *European Business Review*. He has taught international business and marketing related courses in diverse countries including Canada, China, Germany, France, Mexico, Chile and Argentina. José Rojas-Méndez can be contacted at: jose_rojas@carleton.ca