Academic paper

Testing country brand slogans: Conceptual development and empirical illustration of a simple normative model

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Abstract

Country slogans are important vehicles for development of country brand equity. In this paper, a simple normative model for testing country brand slogans is developed. A new slogan for Norway, 'Any decent doctor would prescribe Norway', is tested in order to illustrate the first stage of the model. The model may help marketers of country brands to reject bad slogans and identify slogans with a potential of building country brand equity — before expensive campaigns are launched.

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INTRODUCTION

Governments spend considerable amounts of money on advertising and promotion of their countries abroad.[1] Country campaigns are typically organised around a central advertising theme or slogan,[2] such as 'Amazing Thailand', 'Cool Britannia' and 'I love NY'. From the perspective of brand management, slogans are seen as one of several identity elements that serve to differentiate a brand.[3] Moreover, according to Keller, 'slogans can be extremely efficient, shorthand means to build brand equity'. Slogans can function as useful 'hooks' or 'handles' to help consumers grasp the meaning of a brand in terms of what the brand is and what makes it special. Powerful slogans can contribute to brand equity in multiple ways. They can play off the brand name (country) in a way to build both awareness and image.[4]

Slogans often become the battle cry

for the brand — in fact, the word slogan comes from the Gaelic term for battle cry.' However, some slogans are successful and others are failures.'' Defining effective country slogans is very difficult because country brands are much more complex than consumer and corporate brands. Country brand images stem from a blend of personal experiences with the country and/or imagery of its people, geography, culture and the social, political and economic conditions. Often these factors vary to a large extent between geographical areas within countries, thus the image people have of a country may heavily depend on the specific geographical area they have heard of or visited. Moreover, marketers of country brands cannot control the different sources of country brand images to the same extent as for consumer brands. Nevertheless, the controllable sources should be optimally exploited in order to obtain strong awareness and a clear-cut, favourable and differentiating brand image for the country brand. Country slogans are important vehicles in this effort.

This paper presents a normative model for how to pre-test country brand slogans. Based on a discussion of relevant criteria of effective testing, a simple normative model is presented. The model provides marketers of country brands with a tool for early evaluation of slogan effects. Finally, the first stage of the model is used to test a new slogan developed by the Norwegian Tourist Board: 'Any decent doctor would prescribe Norway'.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE COUNTRY BRAND SLOGANS

Research on slogans is found within a number of disciplines, such as politi-

cal psychology, sociology, education, health care, advertising, tourism and branding. Within the branding literature, a slogan is typically defined on the basis of its general purpose:

'Slogans are short phrases that communicate descriptive or persuasive information about a brand.'[8]

Applied to country brands, the purpose of a slogan is to communicate key descriptive features of a country, preferably in a persuasive manner. Specifically, on the basis of Keller's own role description of brand elements, the main purpose of a country brand slogan is to build brand image and brand awareness. Effective slogans should contribute to both factors. The following sections discuss potential effects of slogans on the image and awareness of country brands.

Awareness effects of slogans

There are two types of brand awareness — brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition requires that consumers can correctly discriminate the brand as having previously seen or heard.'' Brand recall relates to consumers' ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category or a purchase or usage situation as a cue.[10] Brand awareness can also be characterised according to depth and breadth. The depth concerns the likelihood that the brand will come to mind and the ease with which it does so in a given situation. The breadth of brand awareness concerns the range of purchase and usage situations where the brand comes to mind.

It is important to note here that a memorable slogan does not neces-

sarily increase brand awareness. Slogans can be remembered for a number of reasons: for example, they are more easily remembered if they are easy to repeat, or contain rhyme, rhythm or alliteration.[11] However, in order to increase brand awareness, slogans also need to be tightly linked to the brand name and what the brand stands for. Thus an effective country slogan should be stored with the brand name in memory in order to improve the 'top-of-mind position' of the brand within important purchase situations and/or extend the range of situations in which the country brand is activated.

Brand awareness is necessary in order to exploit the potential of a favourable brand image. There is little or no effect of even a very favourable and distinctive brand image if the brand is so low on awareness that it is seldom activated in evaluation processes.

Image effects of slogans

Brand image can be defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory.[12] Brand associations are typically characterised according to their content, favourability, strength and uniqueness.[13] Brand image building can be viewed as the process of closing the gap between a desired brand image and the prevailing image in the memory of the target group.[14] To aid in this process, slogans should focus on some of the most important associations of the desirable image and try to increase the strength and distinctiveness (uniqueness) of these core associations. The most important associations usually refer to some kind of brand benefit.[15] Three kinds of benefits are dominant in the branding literature.

First, functional benefits refer to the problem-solving capacity of a brand. For consumer brands, the durability of an electronic product and the safety of a car are examples of functional benefits. This kind of benefit is probably more important for consumer brands than for country brands because functional needs are typically product category dependent.

Second, brands are associated with hedonic or experiential benefits.[16] This kind of benefit refers to the sensory pleasure or cognitive stimulation associated with a brand, eg the pleasure of a warm climate or the fun and excitement of its big city nightlife. Hedonic benefits are often prominent in country brand slogans. For example, the current slogan used to promote Thailand as a tourist destination, 'Amazing Thailand', suggests the potential of this country to amaze people with extraordinary experiences. Also, the British slogan, 'Cool Britannia', was an attempt to upgrade hedonic associations with the country.[1]

Finally, symbolic benefits refer to the signal effects of using a brand.[18] For instance, people driving a Mercedes signal something about themselves. Typically, Mercedes owners are believed to be relatively well off financially, politically conservative and successful in business. Thus, driving a Mercedes may partly be motivated by the self-esteem and identity effects of being associated with these characteristics.[19] Symbolic benefits are also relevant to country brands. Some countries have more status than others, and some country images may fit the self-concept of a person better than others. For consumer brands, people have been found to prefer brands with images that are congruent with their

self-concept.[30] The same effect is probably also found for country brands. For example, people considering themselves as experts on fashion and design could be motivated to tell others about their visit to Paris for reasons of self-enhancement or identity development.

Effective slogans are short phrases that, in a memorable way, describe or hint at core benefits of the country brand. The effect should be that these benefits become more strongly related to the brand name in memory.

From this discussion of desirable characteristics of country slogans, it is clear that slogans should make a contribution to both brand awareness and brand image. If the slogan effect is negative for one or both of these factors, brand equity could be hurt.

As previously mentioned, slogans are one of several identity elements that serve to differentiate a brand. For example, Keller[31] distinguished between six identity elements: names, logos, symbols, slogans, jingles and packages. Before any testing of new potential slogans, their specific roles compared to the other identity elements should be clarified. For example, elements other than the slogan (eg the logo) may take the main role in creating brand awareness. Hence, in this case, the major purpose of the slogan would be to function as a 'hook' for core brand associations (or vice versa).

PRE-TESTING COUNTRY SLOGANS: A NORMATIVE MODEL

Despite the importance of the topic, few guidelines are found in the literature for how to test slogans empirically. In this section, a simple normative model for testing country brand slogans is developed. The pre-

vious discussion led to the conclusion that slogans should possess three characteristics: they should be memorable, they should build brand awareness and they should build brand image. The model depicted in Figure 1 contains a number of steps that marketers need to take in order to test whether slogans possess these three ideal characteristics.

Stage 1

The model is divided into three stages. In stage 1, qualitative and individual in-depth responses are needed to provide an early indication of the image-and awareness-building potential of the slogan. Stages 1 and 2 concern the same sample. About 20 respondents per target group should be sufficient, because the focus at this stage is not to make quantitative comparisons across target groups or obtain representative responses, but to discover relevant categories of responses in major target markets (see Zaltman[32]). However, because of the need to compare two subgroups within each target group, 30–40 respondents are recommended for each target market. Respondents are first asked to report verbally or in writing any thought or feeling that comes to mind when reading the slogan. Additionally, visual techniques such as moodboards should be used to elicit non-verbal associations.[33] For half the subjects, the country name is not revealed ($n = 15$–20 in each target group). Associations for the two groups can then be compared in order to reveal whether, and in what way, the slogan matches the country name. Specifically, it is useful to check whether more (or less) favourable and

Figure I A normative model for pre-testing country brand slogans
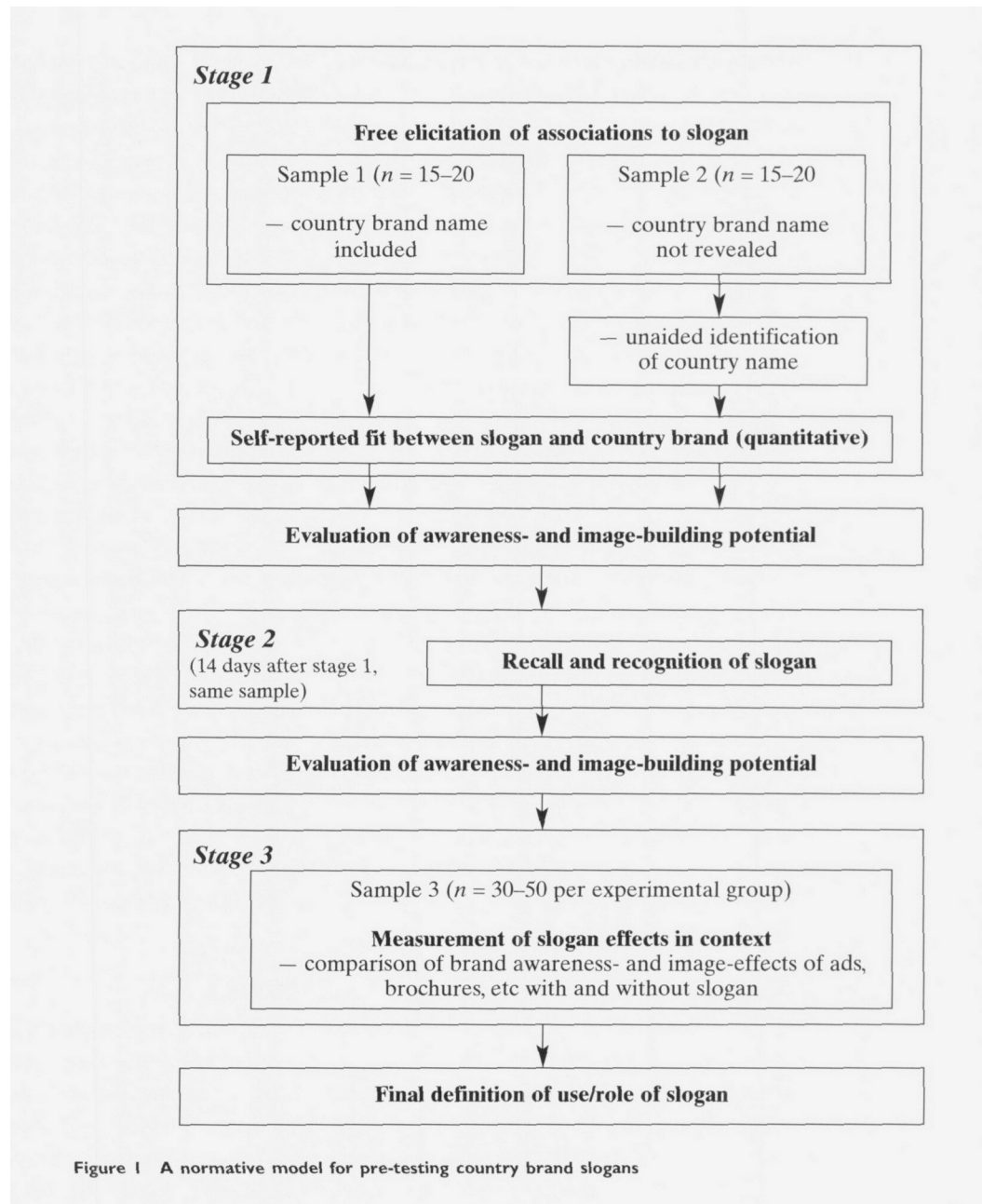
relevant associations are evoked with or without the name included. These results provide useful input to the understanding of the self-reported fit scores later in the measurement process.

In the next step, the subjects to whom the country name has not yet been revealed are asked to guess which country the slogan is about. This question gives an indication of the probability of correct identification of the country. The content of the slogan should lead respondents to think about the right country. However, this measure will tend to favour the large and well-known countries. Thus, finally in stage 1, respondents in both

groups are asked to rate the fit between the slogan and the image of several countries, including the focal country (eg on seven-point Likert scales with 'very good fit' and 'very poor fit' as scale anchors). High fit is needed in order to ensure that people store the slogan and its association together with the brand name in memory. Thus the probability that the slogan is stored correctly in memory together with the country name is tested twice by two complementary measures.

This first stage is quickly performed and not very costly due to the low number of respondents required. Nevertheless, this stage is very useful as an early check of the potential of the slogan. If the most prominent associations evoked by the slogan are not in accordance with core associations of the desired image, and fit scores and identification scores are low, the slogan should be revised and the first stage repeated for a revised slogan. Ideally, several slogans should be tested and compared at this stage.

Stage 2

If the results of stage 1 are satisfactory, one can proceed to stage 2. This is a surprise test on the phone where recall and recognition are measured among the same respondents who participated in stage 1. This test is needed because the first stage does not measure the memorability of the slogan as such, only its fit with the country image. The test at stage 2 should be conducted two or three weeks after stage 1. Respondents are first asked whether they can recall any slogan for any country. If the slogan for the focal country is not mentioned, respondents are asked if they remember the slogan

for this country. Finally, respondents who did not recall the slogan are asked to indicate whether they recognise a number of slogans listed, including the specific slogan tested. Other slogans are not included for the purpose of comparison (established slogans will naturally have an advantage over new ones) but in order to facilitate a list for the recognition test. The performance of the focal slogan is compared with previous results for similar slogans using the same methodology. This evaluation must take into consideration the media exposure of both the focal country and competing country brand slogans in the test period as compared to previous tests.

If recall and recognition scores are good, the slogan is ready for stage 3. In this stage, how does one factor in the likelihood that other country brands may have had very heavy media exposure as opposed to a limited period of time in a research situation? The point is that the comparisons can therefore at best be qualitative in nature.

Stage 3

The third and final stage focuses on slogan effects in the proper context, that is in adverts, brochures, etc. This testing should be performed in a laboratory setting in order to control any extraneous factors that may influence responses to brand communication. For every communication element, eg an advert, respondents are assigned randomly to either a 'slogan group' or a 'without slogan group' (30–50 respondents per group). This testing is important because the effect of a slogan could be different in the context of an ad than when it is standing alone.[24] For example,

the British slogan 'Cool Britannia' might have worked better together with a picture of some modern and fashionable architecture in London than alone as a separate statement. Similarly, the effect of a slogan could be much stronger, and different, when used as a pay-off at the end of a commercial designed to fit the slogan than as a stand-alone phrase. However, the tests performed in stages 1 and 2 are necessary in order to evaluate whether the slogan may have an independent positive effect on brand equity.

The slogan effect in context is measured in terms of its effect on brand awareness and brand image one or two weeks after exposure to the communication elements. Right after exposure, subjects respond to common measures of attitude toward the stimulus (ad, commercial, brochure, etc.). One or two weeks later they are phoned and subjected to measures of brand image, awareness breadth (number of evaluation situations in which the country brand is evoked) and awareness depth (top-of-mind position in each situation). The effect of the slogan is found by comparison of the two experimental groups (one group exposed to communication elements with the slogan, the other without the slogan). If important associations are stronger in the slogan group, and/or this group has greater awareness breadth or depth, the slogan is likely to contribute positively to country brand equity. In this manner, the contribution of the slogan to new ads, brochures, commercials etc is tested. The results of these experiments will finally define the role of the slogan in relation to other identity elements and communication variables.

EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATION

In spring 2001 the Norwegian Tourist Board launched its new slogan: 'Any decent doctor would prescribe Norway'. The stated purpose of this slogan was to build the notion of Norway as the country for recovering from stress and obtaining peace of mind through beautiful and peaceful nature experiences. In this section, the first stage of the model is used to test this slogan.

Method

A stratified convenience sample with participants from major target markets should be used to test slogans. This illustration, however, used a convenience sample of 103 respondents with a very broad representation of countries. In all, 18 different countries from Europe, Asia and North America were represented. The four countries with the largest proportion of participants were Germany (14.1 per cent), Australia (14.1 per cent), the USA (12.1 per cent) and the UK (8.1 per cent). Participants were recruited at international airports in Norway ($n = 24$), Greece ($n = 49$) and Australia ($n = 30$). Passengers were contacted at the gates for international flights to various foreign destinations and asked to fill in a short questionnaire; 103 usable questionnaires were handed in. Only the first stage of the model was used.

Respondents first wrote down associations to the slogan. Every second participant was given a questionnaire in which the slogan was presented without revealing the country name ('Any decent doctor would prescribe (country)'). After reporting thoughts about the slogan, these respondents

Table I Unaided identification and self-reported slogan fit

Country	Mean fit score* (standard deviation) n = 103	Unaided country identification** n = 49 (%)
Switzerland	4.99 (1.52)	6.7
Norway	4.98 (1.57)	15.6
Canada	4.97 (1.48)	4.4
Australia	4.57 (1.66)	4.4
Ireland	4.29 (1.51)	2.2
Spain	4.18 (1.82)	13.3
Germany	3.29 (1.48)	—
Thailand	3.22 (1.84)	2.2
USA	3.08 (1.70)	2.2
Greece	—	13.3
Spain	—	13.3
Italy	—	11.1
UK	—	6.7

*Seven-point Likert scale with anchors 'very good fit' — 'very poor fit'.
**Figures refer to the percentage of respondents guessing that the slogan was about this country.

were asked to guess which country the slogan was about. Next, participants in both groups were asked how well the slogan fitted their image of a number of countries (seven-point Likert-scale with anchors of 'very good fit' and 'very poor fit'). Finally, questions about their home country, age, gender, travelling experience, etc. were answered. The mean age of respondents was 33.8 years (range 18–78 years) and the percentage of females was 42.7.

Results

The first purpose of stage 1 in the model (see Figure 1) is to obtain an indication of whether the slogan matches the image of the focal country (Norway). Two measures are relevant for this purpose. First, in the group where the country name was not revealed, respondents reported what country they believed the slogan was about. The result for this measure is

reported in the last column of Table 1.

The other measure of fit was a self-report measure of perceived fit between the slogan and the image of several countries (see the first column of Table 1). The results in Table 1 show that the slogan 'Any decent doctor would prescribe Norway' fitted fairly well to the image of Norway according to these respondents. The unaided identification score of 15.6 per cent for Norway in the group where the country name was hidden is higher than for any other country. Moreover, the average fit score is 4.98 on a seven-point scale, which is equal to scores for Canada and Switzerland and higher than for any other countries. Notably, Canada and Switzerland are countries with images that overlap with Norway on several important dimensions (eg associations related to nature, wildlife, clean air, climate etc.). Also to be noted is the relatively high unaided identification scores for Greece and

Table 2 Associations to the slogan[a]

Category	Country name revealed (n = 54)	Country name not revealed (n = 49)	Significance of difference[b] (p-values)
Nature	1.470 (56.85)	0.620 (45.24)	0.032
Symbols	0.007 (53.21)	0.000 (49.54)	0.061
Medication and sickness	0.005 (49.36)	0.210 (54.00)	0.091
Physical appearance of Norwegians	0.050 (52.78)	0.000 (50.00)	0.106
Health and relaxation	0.350 (47.96)	0.640 (55.64)	0.111
Negative attitude towards the country	0.002 (52.21)	0.001 (50.67)	0.521
Positive attitude towards the country	0.270 (53.14)	0.260 (49.59)	0.412
Negative attitude towards the slogan	0.111 (52.65)	0.004 (50.15)	0.330
Positive attitude towards the slogan	0.005 (51.78)	0.004 (51.17)	0.781
Society	0.009 (51.20)	0.150 (51.85)	0.812
Geography	0.004 (51.35)	0.004 (51.67)	0.873
Norwegian products	0.04 (51.84)	0.004 (51.11)	0.671
Culture	0.200 (52.94)	0.110 (49.82)	0.374
Attitude towards Norwegians	0.180 (50.44)	0.210 (52.74)	0.561

[a]The numbers refer to the mean number of associations mentioned for each category when only the five associations first mentioned are taken into account. Numbers in parenthesis are mean ranks from the Mann-Whitney test.
[b]Significance tests are based on the Mann-Whitney non-parametric test.

Spain. The analysis of slogan associations indicates that these scores could be due to the idea among some study participants that a doctor would advise patients to visit warm countries (notably this response is found only in the group where the country name is not revealed).

The second purpose of stage 1 is to examine the content of slogan associations in order to evaluate how the slogan matches the country image; in this section 254 different associations were reported. Based on repeated readings and grouping of associations, 14 categories of associations were developed. Results are reported in Table 2. For the purpose of comparison, scores are reported for the two groups (with and without country name) separately. Since the homogeneity of variances was not equal in the two groups for many of the 14 categories, the Mann-Whitney

non-parametric rank test was used to test group differences. Both common means and mean ranks are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the strongest associations evoked by the slogan are associations to nature, health and relaxation, and Norwegian culture and people. Further analysis of the specific content of associations showed that these were largely very positive associations. For example, the nature is typically described as wild and beautiful and Norwegian people as friendly. When comparing the thoughts of the group to which the full slogan with the country name (group 1) was exposed with those of the other group where the name was hidden (group 2), several interesting differences emerge. First, as already indicated, some members of group 2 associated the slogan with a warm climate. Also, as expected, significantly more associations about Nor-

wegian nature are reported for group 1 than for group 2 ($p < 0.05$). Likewise, members of group 1 tend to have more associations with cultural symbols (such as the trolls, Vikings and the Norwegian flag) than members of group 2 ($p < 0.1$). For group 2, however, more thoughts are reported about sickness and medicine than for group 1 ($p < 0.1$). This is important because this category of associations is largely negative. Thus it is noted that the somewhat risky focus on doctors and illness implied by the slogan does not seem to have a negative impact when the country name is known. Overall, the content of slogan associations is in accordance with the stated purpose and could be expected to strengthen core associations of the country brand image. However, the results indicate that the country name should be exposed very explicitly in order not to evoke negative associations with doctors and illness.

The results reported here would imply that the slogan would qualify for further testing at stages 2 and 3. Ideally, several slogans should be tested and compared at the first two stages, and only the one with the best scores taken further to the last stage.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations of the empirical study reported here should be noted. A convenience sample was used for the purpose of illustration. When using the model on a real case, care should taken to represent major target groups only. The presence of Australians in this sample may have biased the results, since this group of people know very little about Norway and do not represent a target group for the Norwegian tourism industry. Also, slogans should be translated into relevant languages. For the purpose of convenience, this slogan was only tested in English.

Some limitations of the model should also be noted. The present model focuses on empirical documentation of the awareness- and image-building potential of country brand slogans. Several steps should be taken to evaluate slogans before they are empirically tested. For example, a semantic evaluation of the slogan (eg evaluation of rhyme, rhythm and alliteration) would reveal something about its awareness-building potential. Also, country brand slogans should be relevant to several export industries, not only to the tourism industry. This should be taken into account both in the conceptual development of the slogan and when sampling respondents. Moreover, slogans should be protectable, in both a legal and a competitive sense. In terms of competitive considerations, the slogan should not to be easy to imitate by rival country brands. The issues mentioned here should be addressed before the empirical testing takes place. Future research may add a conceptual evaluation stage on top of this model in order to incorporate these issues.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, a simple normative model for testing country brand slogans was developed. A new slogan for the Norwegian Tourist Board was used to illustrate the first stage of the model. The results indicate that the proposed model can be a useful tool in evaluating the potential of country slogans to build both brand awareness and brand

image — the two major sources of country brand equity.

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