Country branding as a special type of place branding – An overview of the related terminology

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Abstract: Country branding has become a 'hot topic' in the last two decades, and country image centers, country brand councils were set up all over Europe simultaneously. While the practice of the field is quite developed, its theoretical framework is lagging behind. For this reason, the present study systematizes concepts and terms related to country branding as a special type of place branding. Terms such as nation branding, state branding, destination branding, location branding, territory branding and region branding occur, while the similarities and differences of these expressions are also discussed. The study systematizes the related literature and analyizes the most relevant country case study articles with titles that include country branding, place branding or related terms. As a result of the systematization of the relevant terminology, country branding can be managed more consciously, and country competitiveness may be increased.

Keywords: country branding, nation branding, place branding

1. Introduction

It has been two decades since the concept of country brands and country branding appeared in international literature. Very soon, organizations specialized in country branding were established all around the globe with great hopes, but only a few successful examples are known, and their primary focus is destination branding.

As a matter of fact, country branding and destination branding are not the same: while the latter only deals with the attraction of tourists, the former is also engaged in attracting investors to the country, increasing the sales of national products in foreign markets, enabling an increasing number of talents to study in the country, or even settle there, and, last but not least, the development of the country image.

Terminological misunderstandings may be further increased by the frequent appearance of the terms nation branding, state branding, place branding, location branding, territory branding, and region branding.

Therefore the primary aim of this research is to identify all the synonyms and related terms that can be replaced/standardized by the terminology of country branding.

In this connection, the most relevant country case study articles have been examined, providing interesting findings regarding the variety of ways they mention country branding and related terms in their titles.

2. Various terminologies associated with country branding

Destination branding is the term most often confused with nation branding, country branding, sometimes with state branding, or, in a broader sense, place branding. The book that is usually considered the first serious comprehensive literature of the latter is "Destination branding – Creating the unique destination" edited by Morgan, Pritchard and Pride. It was first published in 2002, well before the first country branding book, and right when the abovementioned special issue of Journal of Brand Management was published.

One of the classical definitions of destination branding is associated with the names of Ritchie and Ritchie (1998. 17), and Blain, Levy, Ritchie (2005. 337), who state that "*destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk*". Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice, as opposed to an alternative option. Therefore it is important to note that "destination branding" is always about travelling or tourism, because a destination is actually a target of tourism (Sziva 2015).

On the other hand, **"place branding"** covers much more. Anholt (2004, cited in Kerr 2006. 278) defined place branding as *"the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural developments of cities, regions and countries"*, asserting that holistic place branding *"encompasses everything a place wishes to sell"* (Lodge, 2006: 9).

As Hanna and Rowley (2008), or Piskóti (2012) suggest, the concept of "place branding" is considerably more complex than that of "destination branding", although we have to add that the latter is rather complex in itself.

The perplexity of the tourism destination concept is based on a myriad of different products, services and experiences, which are all managed, distributed and 'consumed' by different stakeholders (hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, transportation companies, local authorities and residents, destination management organizations, tourists, etc.) with a variety of ownership forms, and often without an appropriate hierarchy with a set of rules for stakeholders to adhere to (Konecnik–Go 2008; Konecnik 2002).

Or, as Törőcsik and Somogyi say (2009: 23): *"The problems of destination branding can basically be characterised by diversity. A destination is not a uniform product; it has several ingredients (accomodation, catering, tourist attractions, entertainment, cultural locations, natural and built environment)"*, which are factors mostly unaffected by the creators and managers of the term destination brand. *The key aspect of branding is that an emotional link between the product and its customers must be established. In the case of destination branding, atmosphere, the behaviour of inhabitants, and the personal impression of visitors are of outstanding importance."*

Having examined the brand management of countries, we can state that it can be interpreted as **"destination branding"** (when the only aims are the attraction of tourists, increasing the number of overnight stays and the amount spent in the destination country, and the return of the tourists, of course), or **"place branding"** in a broader sense. In the case of countries, we use more concrete terms for the latter: nation branding, or country branding.

As it has been mentioned before, the fathers of the **"nation brand"** and **"nation branding"** terminology were Anholt (1998), and Dinnie (2008). In addition, we should also mention the name of a third British expert Olins, who published his book *"Trading identities"* in 2000. **"Nation branding"** can be defined as a means to measure, build and manage the reputation of countries, including the application of corporate marketing concepts and techniques to countries, in the interests of enhancing their reputation in international relations.

It must be pointed out that the aims of "nation branding" (and "country branding") are far more complicated than those of "destination branding". According to Papp-Váry (2009), these activities include:

1) Stimulation of tourism, attracting tourists to the specific country, and increasing their spendings and overnight stays.

2) The promotion of investments arriving in the country.

3) The development of export, and improving the sales of the country's products in foreign markets.

4) A more significant role in international organizations and foreign policy.

5) Improving the well-being and comfort of citizens, increasing pride and patriotism in a good sense.

The difference between the two terms is also well represented by the fact that only one dimension of the **Nation Brand Hexagon** concept created by Anholt (a tool that demonstrates how people see a country) deals with tourism; the other five aspects include export, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people, and even governance (foreign and domestic policy). However, the reason of this difficulty is that each dimension is usually dealt with by dedicated organizations, but no organization is handles them all at the same time. For example, in the case of Hungary:

– the organ in control of tourism (currently the Hungarian Tourism Agency) promotes the country among holidaymakers and business travellers

– the organ promoting investments (HIPA – Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency) tries make the country attractive for foreign companies and investors

– cultural institutes (e.g. Balassi Institute) builds cultural relations with other countries, and promotes the cultural products and services of the country

– there are dedicated organizations for the support of export (e.g. HEPA, the Hungarian Export Promotion Agency)

– and, finally, in terms of governance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (among others) deals with the presentation of the country's policies in the best possible light.

The list above only includes the most important organizations. In most countries, several other bodies, government organs, ministries, special interest groups, NGO's and companies promote an aspect of the country that is most important for them.

Although the majority of these official and unofficial, national and regional, political and commercial organizations operate independently of the others, they often communicate conflicting, or even opposite messages about the country. As a result, the country image created by them inconsistent, and the general reputation of the country stagnates, or even gets damaged.

Therefore several countries are experimenting with the creation of a single umbrella organization for the coordination of these activities. In the case of Hungary, for example, the Country Image Centre (Országimázs Központ) played this role between 2000 and 2002, and the Country Brand Council (Országmárka Tanács) was active for a few years starting from 2009.

In terms of terminologies, while "**nation branding**" became the most popular expression in international professional literature and practice (which is clearly demonstrated by a Google Scholar search or an ordinary Google search), "**country branding**" is also often mentioned. "**Nation branding**" and "**country branding**" basically mean the same thing, but in countries where "nation" and "country" do not overlap completely, the use of "**country branding**" is preferred.

Hungary is also an example of this – branding the country is a challenge itself (see the work of the Country Image Centre or the Country Brand Council), but it is an even greater task if it is a nation of 15 million people inside and outside Hungary.

In other cases, the term "country branding" is used just for the opposite reasons (Gilmore 2002). In Spain, Catalan, Galician and Basque nationalities are very important, in addition to Spanish people (Castilians). Therefore, in a sense, it would be peculiar to see a Spanish nation branding effort. (And it would not be weird if the Catalan independence movement would launch nation branding activities regarding Catalonia).

At this point we must also mention that besides country branding and nation branding, there are examples of using the definition "**state branding**". As early as in 2002, a study by van Ham titled " The rise of the branded state" was published. However, this terminology may also be misleading in the sense that the word state may mean the country as a geographical unit, but it can also mean the institutional system itself. As Bíró explains the three terms above in a 2009 special issue of the Journal of Marketing és Menedzsment focusing on country image and country brand, *"A country is a geographically demarcated area, and a state is the organization of life in this specific area; however, a nation also includes a population that lives outside the country, stating that they belong to the country in terms of their origin."* (Bíró 2009. 59)

To make it even more complex, there are numerous other terms that are also used in connection with this topic. "**Country of origin branding**" is considered a term belonging to "country branding", and explores the context between country image and the export of products originating from that specific country (see for example Brodie–Benson-Rea 2016 or Malota 2008).

"**Location branding**" is often used in terms of cities, but it is also adapted for countries every now and then (Hall 2004, Morley 2009). The same can be said of the term "**territorial branding**" (van Ham 2002b). On the other hand, "**inter-territorial branding**" is usually used for clusters, but it is also mentioned in connection with countries, e.g. in a study by Pasquinelli (2013).

"**Region branding**" is another exciting term (Caldwell–Freire 2004). On the one hand, it can be interpreted as the branding of a region of a country, see the example of Catalonia mentioned above. On the other hand, it may also mean the branding of a region encompassing several countries. In the case of the Baltics, the latter use is usual, even if the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are sometimes unhappy about it. The Visegrad Four can also be viewed as the common branding of various countries, although the group is not currently considered as a branding effort. (However, the destination marketing campaigns of the Hungarian Tourism Agency – especially in Asian countries – suggest some Visegrad4 cooperation among Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland.) We may also mention "region branding" in case of a larger region, e.g. the "Let's Invent Central Europe" movement by Hankiss.

As we can see from the above, a great variety of interpretations exist in connection with the branding of countries. In addition, these are more overlapping than different from each other (Herstein 2012). Moreover, there are cases when destination is the subject of a wordplay and becomes **"Desti-Nation"** (Giannopoulos, Piha, Avlonitis 2011). It is no wonder that authors summarize and conceptualize the trends of the field again and again (Kavaratzis 2005, Berács et al. 2006).

3. Case studies on country branding using different expressions

It is worth using an overview table to summarize the terminologies associated withountry branding that have appeared in practice and the literature on country branding. The table below presents different case studies, and well demonstrates the diversity of branding terminologies.

Table 1

The appearance of various country branding terminologies in case studies

Terminology used	Examined country	Title of case study	Year of publication	Place of publication
Country branding	Spain	A country – Can it be repositioned? Spain – The success story of country branding	2002	Brand Management
Country branding	Poland	The country brand as a new challenge for Poland	2005	Place Branding
Nation branding	Latvia	Remaking the Nation of Latvia: Anthropological perspectives on nation branding	2005	Place Branding
State branding	South Africa	Selling the state: State branding as a political resource in South Africa	2009	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy
Destination branding	New Zealand	Destination branding and the role of stakeholders: The case of New Zealand	2003	Vacation Marketing

Destination branding	Singapore	Uniquely Singapore? A case study in destination branding	2007	Vacation Marketing
Location branding	Great Britain	Branding Britain	2004	Journal of Vacation Marketing
Country-of-origin branding	New Zealand	Country of origin branding: an integrative perspective	2016	Journal of Product and Brand Management
Territorial branding, and inter-territorial branding	Baltic countries (Baltic region) (among others)	Competition, cooperation and co-opetition: unfolding the process of inter-territorial branding	2013	Urban Research and Practice
Region branding	Baltic countries (Baltic region)	Region branding: The case of the Baltic Sea Region	2007	Place Branding
Place branding	Armenia	A place brand strategy for the Republic of Armenia: Quality of context and sustainability as competitive advantage	2005	Place Branding

Source: A summary by the author based on the terms discussed in the article

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to collect and systematize the synonyms of country branding and the terms associated with t. The theoretical significance of the writing is that it serves as a kind of starting point for further research in the field, and provides help for upcoming studies regarding the consistent use of related terminologies.

The practical significance of the study would be especially highlighted if organizations engaged in the building of country brands considered it while setting up the frameworks for their strategy.

Conscious country branding (a concept that goes significantly beyond destination branding and raising tourists' interest) may result in high added value in the long term: it may contribute to the stimulation of investment, the increasing of the turnover and exports of the country's products, and the attraction and retaining of talents. Country branding may even improve the country's position in foreign affairs.

As a result of the systematization of terminologies, the subchapters of strategic documents discussing the development of competitiveness may include country branding in a more conscious and focused way.

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