Chapter 45

Country Brand Management:
Assessing the Role of Social Media in Creating the Image of Marca España (Spain Brand)

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ABSTRACT

In the recent years the country brand has become a strategic asset for the nations. Rather than showing the culture and traditions of a place, the name of a country acts as a differentiator from everything that comes with the territory, increasing the value perceived by the customer in any product or service by having a specific origin. Because the fact that a product is "typical" of a place allows the name of the place to become a geographical indicator of quality. So Nations use the brand country as a tool to promote their products, attract investments and promote activities like tourism. For this reason, they are developing public policies aimed at the construction, promotion and consolidation of the brand image of the country. This book chapter analyzes how the Spanish Government has used the social media to create and consolidate the Spain Brand image with the aim to establish an image of Spain as an economic and political power among the first countries in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, from the marketing point of view brands have been defined as a strategic intangible asset. As a source of competitive advantage, brands have been managed in order to create and consolidate organizational brand equity. In this sense, Kotler and Armstrong (1996) show that the combination of brand name and brand significance has become a core competitive asset in an ever-growing number of contexts.

Nowadays, the brand concept has been expanded, exceeding the organizational and business context. Thus, in the current economic climate, there is a lot of talk about country brands; not only how these influence the national and supranational economic decisions,[1] but also the way how they are perceived influences on consumer behavior toward the country and the products that originate from it.

According to Keller et al., (2011), both corporate and product or service brands, have a social and emotional value to the user as country brands. So they have personality and speak for the user, and enhance the perceived utility and desirability of the product, organization or country. But besides, brands have value to investors and organizations, thus consumer preferences and loyalty translate into organizations' financial gains, market position, brand reputation and equity.

In the special case of country brands, these effects are seen in improving credibility and brand reputation of both the country and its products. Thus, country reputation is likely to influence people's decisions related to purchasing, investing, changing residence and travelling (Laroche et al., 2005). The reputation depends on the Country image. Image is defined as the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. The images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected to a place, while reputation refers to how a particular brand (whether for an individual or a company) is viewed by others. A favorable brand reputation means consumers trust your company, and feel good about purchasing your goods or services. An unfavorable brand reputation, however, will cause consumers to distrust your company and be hesitant about purchasing your products or services.

There is a product of mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts of data about a place (Martin & Eroglu, 1993).

The ability of country brands to create value has led governments to design policies aimed to the creation and consolidation of a strong and positive country brand image. Traditionally, the management of the country brand is based on a careful communication strategy, with a double objective: (1) link the country brand to positive associations with different origins and natures, (2) create a positive opinion in consumers and an attitude towards the country brand.

During the past decade, the rapid evolution of the internet, and especially in the social media, has offered new opportunities and challenges to the country brand management. They provide the opportunity to connect with consumers using richer media with greater reach (Thackeray et al., 2008). The interactive nature of these digital media not only allows brand managers to share and exchange information with their consumers, but also allows consumers to share and exchange information with each other. Besides, managers have the opportunity to shift relations with consumers from dialogue to trialogue, in which consumer engage in meaningful relationships with one another and with the country brand (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). But among the challenges came the opportunity for consumers to use the social media besides the obvious use of searching information and communicating with boundaries, it is nowadays possible to use social media to express feelings and thoughts.

Considering the last ideas, this book chapter proposes to analyze how the Spanish Government has used the Internet and social media to create and consolidate the Spain Brand image. For that, the chapter is divided into two different sections. The first one reviews the theoretical framework about the country brand image concept, and how social media networks are used in the construction of communication strategies. The second section presents the case of the Spain Brand, identifying the different associations that make up its image, and analyzing the communication strategies used in the network as well as the results it has obtained in recent years.

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