

## Chapter 16

# The Challenges of Nation Branding in the Digital Age: Case of Spain's Nation Branding Project, Marca España

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### ABSTRACT

*The concept of nation branding, the origins of the term, and how brand management is applied to obtain the expected results are investigated. Governments are driving nation branding projects, but some, like in the case of the Spanish project Marca España (ME), fail in detailing their objectives. Even when the objectives are weak, it is necessary to evaluate the performance of these projects. This is why some studies and indexes have been created. The indexes distinguish how a country ranks in various areas of study (economic, social, cultural, etc.), and the results are used to measure the efficiency of nation branding. Certain methodologies are used in this study together with various sets of data: from economic indicators and reputation indexes to the digital relevance of Spain.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nation branding (NB) is alive. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017 an article was published in The Guardian titled “How to sell a country: the booming business of nation branding”. It has been over twenty years now that the concept of NB started being studied through different disciplines: from marketing to political science. One of the consequences of its’ multidisciplinary approaches is that there is no unanimous

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consensus about a unique definition of NB. This paper wants to review the different definitions of NB and deepen into the concepts that converged to make it possible: the country of origin effect (COO), place branding and public diplomacy.

It is widely accepted that without globalization NB would have never existed. According to Dinnie the “challenge of distinguishing their product offerings from those of the competition has assumed critical importance for nations competing for both domestic and foreign consumers” (2007). NB was born to brand countries so they would acquire a competitive advantage respect its’ competitors. Establishing a link between countries and brands brought scepticism to the concept. Many of the authors reviewed are perfectly aware of the differences between a brand and a nation (Anholt 2007, Olins 2005, Fan 2006). However, they agree that countries can adopt marketing techniques to brand themselves and improve or enhance their image and reputation. Through NB they expect to achieve economic and/or political outcomes. Porter (1990) first wrote about the competitive advantage of certain products or services based on the country that produced them. A good country image is the ticket to business and political influence. Most governments know that and have decided to start NB projects. To coordinate all the actors involved (ministries, agencies, tourism boards...) they have relied on marketing agencies or consultants like Simon Anholt.

Yet, many NB projects fail, and it can happen for multiple reasons: from a weak coordination of its’ participants to a poor branding strategy or the rejection of its citizens because of its’ exclusiveness, as Fan claims happened with Cool Britannia’s failure (2006). Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that some of the NB strategies work. Spain is cited multiple times as a country with a solid brand due to a good branding strategy since Franco’s death (Anholt, 2008, Gilmore, 2002). This chapter focus on the (possible) effects of Spain’s branding project Marca España (ME) since 2012, when the country’s image was seriously damaged after the banking crisis and the spread of corruption cases.

Even if NB can work, it is difficult to quantify the success of a NB project. Is it possible to quantify the impact of NB when attracting tourists, foreign direct investment, talent, increasing exports or having a more influential role in the international scene due to NB? This research wants to study the plausible effect of ME in these years, focusing on tourism. In the last decade some indices have been ranking nations after considering various areas of study, one of them being tourism. The aim is to analyse if there are any patterns which indicate that Marca España has succeeded enhancing Spain’s image or reputation according to the different Indices. Has the position of Spain in the Indices improved while Marca España has taken place? Is there a correlation between ME and some of Spain’s economic indicators?

All big countries in the world need to be very active digitally if they want to try to influence, like USA and UK which both have a strong public diplomacy (PD) or to improve or maintain their reputation. What about Spain? Does the country have a strong presence in the internet? Is it among the highest searches? The research will have a deep look at the Digital Country Index, a study of countries’ worldwide searches which can help to determine the strengths and weaknesses of Spain in the internet.

## **Nation Branding**

Since the first time that the term “nation branding” was used, the concept has been the object of multiple studies and research. However, according to Fan (2006), the efforts of theorizing what NB is have not produced a commonly accepted single definition of the notion because of “concerns applying branding and marketing communications techniques to promote a nation’s image” (2006). One of the reasons which has been strongly pointed out as the cause of the scepticism around the theory of NB is the inclusion of

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