

Chapter 17

The Interconstruction of China's Nation Brand and National Image

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, the problem of national image becomes more prominent, and international brand marketing becomes one of the powerful ways for a country to enhance its national image. National branding is an active process aimed at enhancing the reputation of a country, while national image is something that exists in the perception of the audience. Since the reform and opening-up, China's comprehensive national strength has continuously increased, and the world's perception of China has become stronger. Chinese enterprises and brands have gradually overcome the stereotypical impression of being low-quality and cheap. However, in the increasingly fierce competition among major powers, it is urgent to construct China's national image through national brand marketing. China should implement a nation brand plan from a top-level design, involve the entire society, strengthen open communication with the international community, and further promote Chinese enterprises and brands to go global.

The formation of global village has led to an unprecedented level of interdependence between countries. In the era of globalization, nation brand holds tremendous economic value, as internationally recognized nation brand contributes to attracting foreign investment, increasing tourism revenue, and promoting the internationalization of products and services. Thus, national branding can enhance a country's global brand awareness and lead to substantial economic growth. From a national perspective, establishing a nation brand can effectively improve a country's national image. National image is crucial for a country's foreign relations and cross-cultural communication, influencing how other nations perceive and interact with it. Currently, all countries face competition in trade, investment, tourism, cultural exchanges, and so on. It is essential that nation brand and national image are built upon a country's comprehensive national strength. Currently, China ranks among the world's leaders in terms of comprehensive national strength.

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However, there is a need to strengthen the brand effect during external communication. The creation of a more influential national branding should be considered an integral part of China's modernization and a practical requirement to enhance China's soft power on the global stage.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of nation brand has a long history dating back to ancient civilizations. Throughout the ages, various civilizations and nations have endeavored to shape their own images to showcase their economic and social development, cultural characteristics, and deepen their understanding and knowledge of other civilizations and countries.

Evolution of National Image and Nation Brand

British designer Olins (2002) pointed out that historically, nations have successfully crafted new images by emulating the marketing strategies employed by businesses. Literatures on national image can be broadly summarized as the impressions and perceptions of a country by foreign governments or citizens. Kunczik (1997, p. 46), in particular, defines national image as a cognitive representation, which refers to an individual's genuine perceptions of a country and its people. Li and Chitty (2009) define national image as private frameworks in individuals' minds and public frameworks visible in the media. Some scholars analyze national images from the perspective of communication management, dividing them into three fundamental and interconnected analytical dimensions: the identity of the nation, the international communication processes of the nation, and the perceptions and attitudes formed towards the nation during these processes. National image evolves into the subjective attitudes of stakeholders towards a nation and its people, encompassing specific beliefs and general sentiments on functional, normative, apathetic, and sympathetic dimensions (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015, pp. 109–113). With the advent of globalization, informatization, and digitization, the connotation of a country's national image has become more enriched. As van Ham (2001, pp. 3–6) has mentioned, image and reputation are integral components of a nation's strategic interests. With traditional diplomacy fading away, politicians must find a branding position for their country and engage in competitive marketing.

Competition between nations has transcended the traditional military and economic domains, with the concept of comprehensive national strength becoming more diverse. Porter emphasized the industrial development and global economic competitiveness of a nation in his book *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. Porter (1998) designed the Diamond Model theory, summarizing four key factors that influence a country's industrial development: factors of production, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, and firm strategy. In 1996, Anholt coined the term "nation brand," suggesting that countries can be marketed and branded as products. Subsequently, Anholt (2007, pp. 21–28) introduced the concept of "competitive identity," highlighting that governments can establish and maintain a competitive national identity both internally and externally. Compared to Porter, Anholt supplemented the "brand" as a soft concept in national development.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 2000, p. 188). "Nation brand" refers to the brand constructed by a country. A country brand is a cross-disciplinary public domain (Fetscherin, 2010, p.

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