

## Unveiling the Country's Brand Image in the Egyptian Context

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### **Abstract:**

In the era of globalisation and fierce international competition, countries' success, just like that of organisations, is attained through effective branding. Since then, country branding has gained popularity among researchers and practitioners. Having a favorable country brand image becomes essential for countries to attract tourists, enhance foreign direct investment, raise exports, and remain competitive in the international arena.

In fact, tourism is considered a vital market offering, so Egypt emphasises implementing a reform program in the tourism sector according to its vision for 2023. Country branding has a vital role in Egypt's sustainable development, particularly in the field of tourism improvement. This approach, "country branding," has strong national importance for Egypt since developing a favorable country brand image will support tourism

growth. Despite its crucial importance to achieve a competitive advantage and support the economy through the development of the tourism market in Egypt, little research has been conducted to thoroughly explore it. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual understanding of country branding approach, its importance, and the dimensions of country brand.

**Keywords:** Country branding, Country image, cognitive image, affective image, tourism, Egypt.

#### ملخص البحث:

وفي عصر العولمة والمنافسة الدولية الشرسة، يتحقق نجاح البلدان، تماماً مثل نجاح المنظمات، من خلال وضع العلامات التجارية الفعالة. ومنذ ذلك الحين، اكتسبت العلامات التجارية للدول شعبية بين الباحثين والممارسين. وأصبح الحصول على صورة إيجابية للدولة أمراً أساسياً لكي تجتذب البلدان السياح، وتعزز الاستثمار الأجنبي المباشر، وترفع مستوى الصادرات، وتظل قادرة على المنافسة على الساحة الدولية.

وحيث ان مصر تشدد على تنفيذ برنامج إصلاح في قطاع السياحة وفقاً للرؤية المصرية ٢٠٢٣، فان صنع العلامة التجارية للدولة له أهمية في دعم قطاع السياحة المصري. وعلى الرغم من أهميتها الحاسمة في تحقيق ميزة تنافسية ودعم الاقتصاد من خلال تطوير سوق السياحة في مصر، لم يجر سوى القليل من البحوث لاستكشافها بصورة شاملة. وبالتالي، فإن الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو فهم لنهج العلامات التجارية للبلدان country branding وأهميته وأبعاده. وفي هذا السياق يقتصر هذا البحث على قطاع السياحة المصري.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العلامات التجارية للدولة، صورة الدولة، الصور المعرفية، الصور العاطفية، قطاع السياحة، مصر.

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary international competition, countries' success, just like for organisations, is attained through effective branding. Branding is very widespread for commercial organisations; however, its application for countries is still new and in the developmental stage. In the past decade, the marketing of countries as tourist destinations has gained rapid attention because of the increased competition among countries to attract tourists. Additionally, interest in country branding has grown substantially among scholars, public policy makers, and local authorities (Sahin and Baloglu, 2014; Kavartzis and Hatch, 2013; 2021). Several causes have contributed to the increased attention given to the nation branding concept. Some of the main causes encompass the fierce competition among countries in the context of globalization to grasp foreign tourists, enhance foreign direct investment, and raise the exports of the country's products (Anholt, 2007). Countries are now viewed as brands that seek innovative solutions to gain a competitive advantage (Maria-Irina and Anca-Georgiana, 2018). Since then, researchers and practitioners (Morgan et al., 2011) have embraced country branding as a tool of competitive advantage (Che-Ha et al., 2016).

Central to country marketing and branding theory is the country image concept (Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016). Also, branding a country is related to its international image as perceived by people outside its borders (Fan, 2010). In the

marketing literature, several terms such as " country brand ", " country image ", "country brand image " " nation brand " have been used interchangeably (Handayani and Rashid, 2016; 2018).Promotion of the country's image is essential in order to strengthen its destination branding process, help the country define its identity, attract tourists and investors, and create country loyalty. In fact, the term nation brand has been widely utilised, particularly by practitioners; however, academic researchers have not yet agreed upon a solid conclusion about what the nation brand is and how to implement it. Besides, most of the studies focus on the country's brand concept from a western perspective.

The research is conducted considering the context of Egypt's tourism because Egypt's image has been marred by some challenges in the last few years, leading to a reduction in the volume of international tourist arrivals from 12.88 million in 2019 to 3.62 million in 2020 (UNWTO, 2023) .In order to rekindle the country's tourism sector and face the fierce competition among countries for tourists, country branding has rapidly evolved as a new approach that can enhance sustainable tourism development.

To summarize, country branding has received increased attention in the international literature, particularly the destination branding approach. However, a deeper understanding of the perceptions of country images in the context of country

branding and their role in tourism is necessary. The aim of this research is to emphasise the significance of using a country branding approach in the context of Egyptian tourism. The paper is divided into several sections: an introduction, an examination of the country branding approach, a conceptualization of country image, and concluding remarks.

## **2. Literature review**

This review of literature on country branding focuses on the conceptualization of country image and its various components.

### **2.1. Country branding**

Academic research on branding of places has grown substantially. Several scholars have witnessed that countries, cities, and regions are increasingly turning to apply branding concepts and techniques in their effort to compete intensely in order to attract tourism, boost exports and enhance forging direct investment (Foroudi et al., 2016;2018; Cardinale et al., 2016). A growing number of researchers demonstrate that place branding can encompasses country of origin branding, nation branding, and destination branding (Kaplan et al. 2010).

There has been an upsurge attention in the place branding in general and in country branding in particular (Zhang et al.,2018). Ultimately, both academics and practitioners agreed upon the necessity to market and brand places (Hakala, et al.,2013), for

instance, several marketers have extended the branding principles to countries (e.g., Pappu and Quester, 2010).

Within the literature of place branding, several works are dedicated to country branding. Place branding is regarded as an umbrella approach to the field of country branding or nation branding (Same, S., & Solarte-Vasquez, 2014; Foroudi, et al., 2016). The theoretical foundations of country branding are based on the literature in the 1960s and 1970s which focus on the country image theory. The notion of country branding was firstly introduced in the 1990s followed by various academics and practitioners defined this concept (e.g. Fetscherin, 2010; Pappu and Quester, 2010). In an early attempt of defining it, Kotler and Gertner, (2002) considered country brand as the sum of beliefs and impressions that outsiders have about a place. Furthermore, Fetscherin (2010) added that country brand belonged to the public domain and it is related to a country's whole image which can cover historical, cultural, political, social, economic and environmental aspects.

Additionally, Pappu and Quester, (2010) referred to country branding as the strategy of utilizing the branding components such as logo and name in order to create a distinct country identity and in turn differentiate the country in the international markets. That was accepted by Foroudi et al., (2016) who argued that country branding depends on using some verbal and visual components (e.g., slogans and visuals and logo). Country brand is defined by (Dinnie, 2015, p.

15) as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences”. Surprisingly, few definitions of country branding concept are found in literature, however, these definitions provide an orientation for many scholars in this field (Hao et al.,2019).

In spite of the overwhelming support for the country branding concept, no consensus is found among researchers on how to define it and on which elements constitute country branding (Papadopoulos et al., 2016). The complexity of this concept and the confusion with other terms (e.g., destination branding) has caused a lack of shared definition for the meaning of country branding (Rojas-Méndez,2019; Hao et al, 2019).

A prevalent theme between the definitions of country branding depend on image building (Fan ,2006), clarifying that country image comprised of composite components, for instance, history , tourism , culture , geography and commercial products (Che-Ha et al.,2016). Secondly, the majority of definitions have common elements such as image, culture, people, stakeholders and information (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Lastly, country brand is regarded as a holistic and multi-dimensional construct (Fan 2010; Rojas-Méndez, 2013).

In the light of its importance, country branding is gaining popularity between researchers and practitioners due to several reasons. Firstly, country branding as a concept and practice was

first developed to attract tourism, empower investment, and promote exports (Zhang et al., 2020). Secondly, it is regarded as a strategic tool of achieving competitive advantage (Che-Ha et al., 2016 ;Echeverri at al.,2019) .Pappu and Quester,(2010) argued that a growing number of scholars have called for countries to launch their country branding programs so as to remain competitive in the international markets and have cautioned countries about the negative impacts that can occur if they ignore engaging in country branding. Additionally, country branding not only enables countries to strengthen their identities but also develop, maintain unique country brand images (Sun, Paswan, & Tieslau, 2016), and improved reputation in the long run (Foroudi et al.,2016). Lastly, country brand is viewed as a source of economic value and differentiation for countries (Echeverri at al.,2019).

Albeit a relatively new academic concept, the origin of country branding can be traced from various themes in the literature as follows; country of origin, place branding or destination branding, country identity and public diplomacy (Fan, 2010; Hassan, & Mahrous, 2019). On one hand, the literature on country of origin and place branding tend to promote particular economic interests (e.g. export, tourism and investment) (Fan, 2010; Hassan, & Mahrous, 2019). Further, destination branding as a field has focus on the touristic theme of the attractive attributes, tourism-related products and services along with the geographical landscapes (Mariutti, &



Medeiros, 2018). On the other hand, country branding is concerned with treating country as a brand (Sun, Paswan, & Tieslau, 2016), throughout building, maintaining or altering the country's whole image which encompasses cultural, economic and political dimensions (Fan, 2006; 2010). Country branding is an endless research domain in which covers two fundamental constructs namely; brand identity and image (Same, & Solarte-Vasquez, 2014). Unlike identity, which can be perceived by country's people (Fan, 2010), country image reflect the perceptions by outsiders (Fan, 2010) that can or cannot match the reality or identity (Same, & Solarte-Vasquez, 2014).

In this respect, the notion of country branding is broadly accepted in the literature; however, different interpretations of this concept are found (Hassan, & Mahrous, 2019). Ultimately, country branding can be addressed through three perspectives (Pappu and Quester, 2010). Firstly, countries may attempt to develop an image in the international markets as producers of quality products (Pappu and Quester, 2010). Secondly, countries emphasize on the image-building as a favorable foreign direct investment location. Lastly, countries can make efforts to alter or improve their image in a tourism context (Dedeoğlu, 2019).

Given the critical importance of country branding, various practitioners have established distinct criteria to rank countries and assess their images, including the Anholt-GfK Nation Brand

Index and the Future Brand Country Brand Index (Zhang et al., 2018; Hassan & Mahrous, 2019). These indexes are considered leading measures for countries aiming to cultivate a favorable brand image and reputation. The Anholt-GfK Nation Brand Index evaluates the power and quality of a country's brand image based on six elements: export, governance, people, tourism, culture and heritage, and investment and immigration (Hassan & Mahrous, 2019). In contrast, the Future Brand Country Brand Index examines five core components: business environment, value system, tourism, heritage and culture, and quality of life (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Recent years have also seen the emergence of additional indexes, such as the Country Brand Strength Index and the Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking (Rojas-Méndez, 2013). However, despite their contributions, these country brand indexes often utilize diverse and at times conflicting indicators (Fan & Shahani, 2016), indicating a need for further research in this area

Basically, the recent years have seen an upsurge in interest toward country branding field. Notably, the terms of nation and country are used interchangeably in the literature (Fan , 2006; Rojas-Méndez, 2013 ;Hakala,et al.,2013; Mariutti, & Medeiros, 2018).The concept of the country- as –brand relates to building or altering or improving the country image in the minds of outsiders. In this respect, this approach seeks to bridge the gap between the country image and reality (Fan 2010). Hence, recent

publications consider country image related to country/nation branding (e.g. Hakala et al.,2013; Hao et al.,2019). In spite of the substantial body of country branding research, most works are strongly affected by practitioners (Gertner, 2011).

## **2.2. The conceptualization of country brand image**

Research on nation assessment dates back to the 1960s, when the concept of the country-of-origin image first emerged. This term is regarded in the first generation of country-of-origin research as ‘made in ‘country of a particular product (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). The country-of-origin effect is defined as the assessment of products manufactured in a specific country (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019). A bulk of publications have discussed this subject in several fields, such as international business, consumer behaviour, international marketing, and political and communication science (Buhmann, 2016; Zhang et al., 2016; Hahm, Tasci, & Terry, 2018). The approach to country of origin often emphasises product-country image research (Jenes, 2013; Choi & Cai, 2016). The scope of country of origin has been denoted to capture the link between the country and product or product category (Choi & Cai, 2016; Andehn, Nordin, & Nilsson, 2016). In the last decade, there has been increased interest in country image, particularly emphasising some related concepts (e.g., product image, product-country image, or country of origin image) and their potential impacts within international

business research (Jenes, 2013; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018; Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019).

The country-of-origin image or product country image has been extensively researched by various scholars (De Nisco et al., 2015; Lindblom et al., 2018), who adopt a product-orientated definition of country image as a picture or a stereotype that consumers attach to products of a particular country (Wang, 2017). The term "country of origin (COO)" was first coined by Nagashima (1970), followed by several scholars (e.g., Elliot et al., 2011; Choi & Cai, 2016) who have focused on the countries as the origins of products and referred to it as product country image, which is deemed to be the most common definition of national image applied within international marketing literature (Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018).

Product country image (PCI) is recognised as a broader concept than the country-of-origin concept (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005), which refers to consumers' perceptions about countries from the perspective of product evaluation and selection (Nadeau et al., 2008; Elliot et al., 2011). A main hypothesis of this approach based on several studies is that if customers are not familiar with foreign products, they will tend to depend on their perceived country of origin image (COO image) in order to form their view about products (Lindblom et al., 2018). Additionally, the marketing literature has widely applied the concept of

country image in the assessment of a foreign country's product image, which is referred to as product country image (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

Researchers argue that a country's image positively influences both product assessments and product image (Lee et al., 2015; Costa et al., 2016). In a study by Hakala, Lemmetyinen, and Kantola (2013), it is stated that country image is deemed to be a vital extrinsic cue in the evaluation of products and, in turn, can affect purchase decisions. A favourable image of a country can lead to a favourable reputation for a whole product category (Hakala et al., 2013). Additionally, Wang (2017) asserts that numerous marketing scholars have proven the beneficial influence of a country's image on consumers' preferences and purchase intentions, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the country-of-origin effect.

In spite of the voluminous research dedicated to the concept of product-country image, only a small proportion addressed the overall image of a country. Most early definitions of country image have denoted the image of products connected to the country and vice versa (Choi and Cai, 2016; Wang, 2017; Yang and Yun, 2020). In other words, the first approach to country image definitions was strictly focused on product attributes.

On one hand, some studies have confused the definition of a country image with the concept of a product country image or a country-of-origin image (Jenes, 2013). On the other hand, other scholars have addressed the importance of separating the concepts, namely, the national or country image, the product country image, and the tourism destination image, and scrutinised the relationships among them (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011). Consequently, some confusion has been found in the academic literature since the two concepts of general country image and the image of a product's country of origin relate closely to each other in country branding theory and affect each other in some studies (Roth-Diamantopoulos, 2009; Jenes, 2013). According to Mossberg & Kleppe (2005), there is a substantial overlap between these concepts, where the country image concept is deemed to be an image source for product-related country associations. Although the country image definition excludes products, the image of a country can be associated with particular products (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005).

In the 1990s, academics focused on the product country image (PCI) or country of origin image (COO). However, in recent years, there has been a shift towards a more generic perspective, separating the overall country image from the PCI or COO (Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017). A country's image encompasses everything people can associate with the country

and its residents, not just its products (Brijs, Bloemer, and Kasper 2011). This shift has resulted in a broader definition of country image, which includes a comprehensive assessment of a country's economy, technology, politics, culture, and people (Yang & Yun, 2020). Through this second approach, country image is widely recognised as an overall impression and belief that people hold about a particular country (Kotler et al., 1993; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Additionally, country's image is considered a mental map or knowledge structure linked to countries (Nadeau et al., 2008; p. 87). Recently, Zhang et al. (2018) are consistent with Kotler et al.'s (1993) definition, referring to the national image as a general concept that incorporates various components such as culture, politics, economy, technology, history, and traditions.

Furthermore, various scholars began to consider the image as a vital aspect in the marketing and branding of places (e.g., Foroudi et al., 2016; Sun, Paswan, & Tieslau, 2016; Mariutti & Medeiros, 2018). Country image is considered the most fundamental construct in the theory of country branding (Same & Solarte-Vasquez, 2014). In the literature, the concept of country image has been given new labels (Jenes, 2013), including country brand (Anholt, 2005; Luna-Cortés, 2018) and place image (Foroudi et al., 2016; Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2016).

Additionally, in the previous academic approaches to country marketing and country branding, terms like country brand image, country brand, and country image have been used interchangeably (Jenes, 2013; Hakala et al., 2013; Same and Solarte-Vasquez, 2014; Handayani and Rashid, 2016; Mariutti & Medeiros, 2018.; Handayani & Rashid, 2018). With the appearance of the concept of country as a brand, country image is defined in a broader and more complex scope (Jenes, 2012). Consequently, extensive literature provided different definitions of country image from a country branding perspective (Fetscherin, 2010; Wang, 2017; Cublillo-Pinilla et al., 2017; Echeverri et al., 2019). Country brand image is complex and involves multiple disciplines, levels, and components, covering several aspects (e.g., political, economic, social, environmental, historical, as well as cultural) (Fetscherin, 2010).

Additionally, Cubillo-Pinilla et al. (2017) described the country's brand image as how it is projected to other people (Cubillo-Pinilla et al., 2017). Inspired by the Anholt nation/country brand index, Wang (2017) stated that country image incorporates cultural stereotypes, broad countries' impressions, and idiosyncratic beliefs about the products of these countries. Additionally, country image is formed by mental associations, impressions, and perceptions present between various stakeholders in a particular country (Echeverri et al., 2019). Hakala, Lemmetyinen, & Kantola (2013) demonstrated



that country brand image can incorporate three terms: country or origin-related, general country-related, and culture-related (e.g., culture and people).

Accordingly, in the literature, different scholars and researchers addressed country image in several disciplines, such as international marketing and tourism, communication (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019). Nonetheless, there is no consensus on a clear and universal definition of country brand image (Zhang et al., 2018; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018). Researchers have provided various definitions of the concept, which has evolved over time. However, the inconsistent domains can cause confusion with other concepts (Hao et al., 2019) like destination image, national stereotype, product country image, national identity, and country reputation.

In spite of the dissimilarity in the definitions of country brand image, some common aspects are found in the literature. Firstly, there is a general consensus that countries themselves could be perceived as preferred brands (Sun, Paswan, & Tieslau, 2016; Hao et al., 2019), and emerging countries can alter and improve their country's brand image (Sun et al., 2016). Secondly, in the literature, country image is a complex concept that can be recognised through two main perspectives, focussing on the broader "general" country image and the country of origin image or product country

image (PCI) (Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018; Dedeolu, 2019; Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019; Wang, 2020).

In sum, it is revealed that each country has its image positioned in the minds of outsiders (Fan, 2006, 2010; Gupta et al., 2018). Most countries pay more attention to the image they project on international markets (Echeverri et al., 2019). Furthermore, the concept of country-of-origin image or product country image has been extensively explored in the academic literature, whereas the country brand image examined in the domain of country branding is a relatively less developed area (Hao et al., 2019).

### **2.3. Dimensions of Country image**

According to recent literature, country brand image is operationalised through the following two components: cognitive image and affective image (Herz & Arnegger, 2017; Yu & Zhang, 2020; Wang, 2021). The cognitive image component refers to consumers' beliefs and opinions regarding a country's economic development, education level, technological advancement, and so on. On the other hand, the affective image component refers to consumers' emotions and feelings towards the country, including its culture and people. Additionally, Kang, Kim, and Lee (2018) argued that people can hold consistent cognitive and affective images of a particular country. For example, Chinese have held negative emotions and feelings towards Japan for some historical problems and crises;

however, they view Japan as a creative and developed country. Some scholars have added another dimension to country image that is named conative image (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Koubaa, Methamem, & Fort, 2015). This component refers to consumers' behaviours and interactions towards the country. However, the current consensus in the literature has operationalised country image as a two-component construct consisting of affective and cognitive dimensions (Lindblom et al., 2018; Kang, Kim, & Lee, 2018).

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, the notion of country branding and its country image has received significant focus in both academic studies and real-world implementations. The literature demonstrates that the development of national branding has become a strategic instrument for nations seeking to improve their reputation and distinguish themselves in a competitive global environment. Despite the recognition of the importance of country branding in the marketing literature, little empirical research to capture the true meaning of the concept has been conducted. Additionally, most research focused on the impact of country image on consumers' choices of products from that country. Although the concept of country-of-origin image or product country image has been extensively explored in the academic literature, the perceptions of country images examined in the domain of country branding are a relatively less developed area (Hao et al.,

2019). Moreover, their role has not been thoroughly considered in the tourism context (Dedeoğlu 2019). To date, the research related to country brand, and its dimensions in Egypt has been narrow and limited in scope, especially in the context of tourism.

In light of the current political and social difficulties experienced by Egypt, it is essential to comprehend the intricacies of country branding in order to revive tourism and stimulate economic development. The decrease in tourist arrivals in Egypt highlights the immediate necessity to utilise country branding tactics to modify perceptions, regain competitiveness, and eventually improve the country's image on the global stage.

Future studies should strive to fill the current gaps in the literature by broadening the scope to encompass comprehensive insights into the country's brand image in other situations, such as tourism, investment, and cultural diplomacy. By acquiring a more profound understanding of how to strategically plan and execute country branding, countries may actively control their public perception, improve their worldwide standing, and progress towards their goals in a rapidly changing international environment.

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