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NATION BRANDING AND ITS STAKEHOLDERS: ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN AND UKRAINIAN APPROACHES

This study analyses the phenomenon of nation branding in the context of Eastern European countries. The paper aggregates and interprets marketing efforts applied to the brand of Ukraine through the prism of current processes of globalisation and general economic trends. The research investigates country brand stakeholders and the roles they have played in the Ukraine's brand development.

Key words: *nation branding, place marketing, country brand, stakeholders, post-communist countries, country image*

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НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ БРЕНДИНГ ТА ЙОГО СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРИ: АНАЛІЗ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО ТА УКРАЇНСЬКОГО ПІДХОДІВ

Проаналізовано феномен національного брендингу в контексті Східно-Європейских країн; агреговано та інтерпретовано маркетингові дії, застосовані до бренда України через призму поточних процесів глобалізації та загальних економічних трендів. Крім того, визначено стейкхолдери національного бренду, а також їх роль у розвитку бренда України.

Ключові слова: *національний брендинг, маркетинг місць, бренд країни, стейкхолдери, посткомуністичні країни, імідж країни.*

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НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ БРЕНДИНГ И ЕГО СТЕЙКХОЛДЕРЫ: АНАЛИЗ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО И УКРАИНСКОГО ПОДХОДОВ

Проанализирован феномен национального брендинга в контексте Восточно-Европейских стран; агрегированы и интерпретированы маркетинговые действия, примененные к бренду Украины через призму текущих процессов глобализации и общих экономических трендов. Определены стейкхолдеры национального бренда и их роль в развитии бренда Украины.

Ключевые слова*: национальный брендинг, маркетинг мест, бренд страны, стейкхолдеры, посткоммунистические страны, имидж страны.*

Statement of the problem. Due to the rapid transformation of markets on the global arena, developed countries have applied marketing as one of the leading sectors of modern economy. In times, when access to capitals, talents, ideas and consumers is becoming easier, countries compete for the respect, trust, and loyalty of potential customers, investors, tourists, for the attention of media or governments of other countries [8]. Nowadays place branding and its image development receive increasing consideration [24], as globalisation sets new challenges for actors of international economic relations, requiring innovative approaches to the leadership on global markets of goods and service. Besides, researches and management of place branding concepts expand more beyond marketing domain, involving geography, demographics, urban planning and geopolitics, which examine the subject from a social, cultural, economic and political perspectives [23]. Hence, the practice of place branding as a strategic marketing tool has recently become an integral part of public administration [42]. Under those

circumstances, country brand creation is viewed as a topic of current interest which corresponds to the world conditions of development and competition.

Research and publications review. The phenomenon of nation branding has become a subject of interest among both domestic and international academicians or pratitioners since the rapid processes of globalisation. However, despite its popularity growth, there are some debates in the literature about place branding meanings, concepts and frameworks.

The intial establishment and reserch on nation branding was made by K. Dinnie (2008), S. Anholt (2007), P. Kotler *et* al. (1993), G. Hankinson (2009), M. Kavaratzis (2012), S. Hanna and J. Rowley (2011), N. Kudenko (2006), A. Pankrukhin (2006), D. Vizgalov (2008) and others. At the same time, contextual interpretation of stated problem was addressed by Szondi (2007), who explored nation branding in terms of current economic and social conditions of Eastern European countries, Kaneva and Popescu (2011), who analysed place marketing under the influence of communist past of countries, Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2001), who investigated relations of national identity under political circumstances.

Notably, in terms of domestic studies, Lyulchak et al. (2012) analysed nation branding in the context of international sport or cultural events, while Nagornyak (2008) assessed the initial attempts to nation brand and identity in Ukraine.

Gap in the literature. According to Merilees and others [31], fragmented literature provides the scope for investigating bonds between branding and multiple stakeholders involved into this process. At the same time, Kaneva [26] points out that there are wide perspectives in the analysis of the post-communist countries and their economies from the point of their relations' structure in administration and national identification. Thus, the current study addresses the gaps in the literature by identifying the wide spread actions related to nation branding in the former Soviet Union territories, contrasting roles of so far involved stakeholedrs and identifying main coordiation issues between them.

Aim of the study. This paper aims to investigate the state of country branding in Ukraine and draw an analogy with other Eastern European countries by means of secondary data analysis. Specifically, the present study examines and sums up nation branding attempts which have been undertaken in Ukraine. The research evaluates the main stakeholders involved into country brand creation, assessing their roles and the level of coordination.

Research results and discussions. After gaining its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has attempted to build a national identity and transform to market economy [32]. Szondi [40] argues that country brand development for transitional countries is an integral part of success of their political and economic evolution. In addition, nation branding initiatives provide former communist nations with the opportunities to produce their images that are aimed at new possibilities [27]. Importantly, the authors assert that countries like Ukraine face the imminence to reaffirm themselves on the global arena. Nevertheless, today economies of Central and Eastern Europe can benefit from country branding in regards with gaining a competitive advantage in the world marketplace [7; 35]. In essence, the phenomenon of nation branding has gained some attention in times, when Ukraine and similar countries found themselves on the new phase of development.

As main researchers of the topic imply, nation branding has been shifted from destination branding literature to holistic country branding strategies [24]. In the light of this, the first attempt to enhance the destination brand of Ukraine took place in 2005,

when a state tender for nation brand creation was announced. In 2007 the National Agency for Tourism and Resorts under the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine decided to promote tourism brand of the country «Snowy winters». Consequently, «Grand-Print Ukraine» company became a winner of the tender and received necessary funding for breakthrough into world information space, broadcasting commercials on such channels, as Euronews and National Geographic [4].

Targeted state branding programme in Ukraine was launched in 2010 during the preparation for the UEFA Euro 2012 [41]. At that time, image and brand creation were entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. In fact, world practice of place marketing considers international cultural or sport events as beneficial, emphasizing their positive impact on hosting countries. To demonstrate, such events attract attention of international community, establish new tourist and financial flows, develop infrastructure, create internal workplaces, and bring investments, raising and justifying an importance of place reputation. For example, XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi gave Russia opportunities to present a better country's image and reposition itself globally, activating positive associations in the minds of international community [34]. On the whole, the first branding techniques were applied in Ukraine, precisely, before the event of global significance.

Furthermore, the first presentation of the Positioning Strategy of Ukraine Abroad took place in 2011, created on the order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by CFC consulting company, which provides services in strategic communications [14]. The main message of campaigns, «Ukraine – is openness», presented Ukraine as the country open to reforms, tourists, global affairs participation and investments. Correspondingly, the basis of the developed brand was composed by marketers in regards to respectfulness as the inherent feature of Ukrainians, while the central platform of the strategy's sub-projects was «Ukraine. All about U» [3]. Such promotional campaigns as «Switch on Ukraine», broadcasting general country facts, «Ukraine Inspires», celebrating outstanding Ukrainians' achievements, «Ukraine, beautifully yours», demonstrating tourist or cultural potential, and «Ukraine. Moving in the fast lane», emphasizing changes in investment climate, were planned to implement for overall country representation on the global arena [3]. All projects and information campaigns made an attempt to promote nation values and distinctions.

The previous campaigns aimed at the country image development involved different stakeholders and had various focuses. However, visual information and implemented sub-projects that had been exposed to target audiences were strongly diversified. In essence, the analysis has showed that nation branding attempts had been implemented «in contrasts with established principles of communication and branding» [9, p.2], as marketing postulates usually stand for limited number of appeals communicated. Nevertheless, implemented activities can be correlated with destination branding approach, rather than holistic country branding. Correspondingly, Szondi [40, p.9] makes a clear distinction between these two concepts, defining a destination brand as a tool to attract visitors and increase tourist flow, while country branding aims to advertise «economic, commercial and political interests at home and abroad».

It is worth mentioning that the main message of the created strategy had been comprehensively developed according to the detected values and opinions of the residents of the country, although it was not maintained within the sub-projects. On the other hand, defining a brand platform, as a core essence of the country brand which is communicated to different audiences, it has been noted that the platform «Ukraine. All about U» was

successfully integrated within all elements of the strategy and became a connecting link among the sub-projects. However, target audiences were not clearly defined, while the strategy gave tourists opportunities to manipulate country's identity [9]. On the whole, it can be stated that the nation-brand identity of the country had not been accurately developed, thus, there were no solid foundation for the Ukraine's image communications.

Equally important, attention to the strategy development was drawn in times of urgency, when negative associations of citizens of certain countries had put in jeopardy a successful hosting of the UEFA Euro 2012 in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the project wasn't fully performed, applying only certain visual logos and commercials, and soon after the event ceased to exist. Particularly, the information campaigns were insufficient to establish the relations with international communities, as none of them had raised the question of reforms or changes of the country perception by desired audiences [3]. Overall, taken actions did not represent a holistic branding strategy, but rather had only superficial character, showcasing picturesque landscapes and national motives.

It is suggested that one of the reasons of the strategy's unsuccess was the absence of holistic Ukrainian idea [5]. Stakeholders involved into the actual process of the brand development were represented only by marketing managers, thus, the created strategy was unfamiliar and unacceptable for other categories. Indeed, Kaneva [26] implies that in the process of post-communist countries branding important stages of classifying and controlling a social subject have been ignored. In such a way, it can be proved that there was a lack of attention to the society's insights which could cause image inconsistency both internationally and domestically. For example, to distribute the Turkey's nation brand across Europe, investigations of country perceptions had been made, followed by analysis of such brand dimensions, as tourism, export, investments, politics, people and cultural factors [28]. Particularly for Ukraine, this case can be relevant, as the country tends to maintain close relationships with the EU.

Comparatively, Szondi [40] reports the following challenges of the process of country branding in transition economies. At first, each Eastern European country suffers from late understanding of significance of nation branding. The politicised nature of such processes restricts the effectiveness of the phenomenon, which consequently leads to strategic approach absence. Furthermore, the lack of coordination between institutions and actors involved in brand creation causes communications inconsistency which relates to the past branding initiatives in Ukraine. Finally, problems of incongruity of the brand in minds of domestic audiences, and a shortage of transparency in creation processes slow the phenomenon development.

Lessons drawn from other post-communist countries help to consider different approaches and issues of nation branding. For instance, Romania attempts to create its brand from the point of myth-making [27]. In other words, they use legends and images meaningful for Romania's visitors. However, a wide range of communicated myths proves the absence of unified decision on the country's national identity, which is an essential part of a comprehensive strategy. The other example explored in the same research is Bulgaria, which refers to national symbols disconnected from historical background of the place in its brand communications. In such a way, the lack of contextualisation creates certain confusion among foreigners who are unfamiliar with related historical or cultural facts. Nevertheless, the essence of national identity among post-communist countries is a presentation of exotic points of differences and place distinctions in a modern manner [10]. Thus, the process of nation-brand identity de-

velopment and consequent image formation requires an accurate analysis of historical, cultural, geographical, social, political and economic conditions of the context.

The present-day political situation in Ukraine is not analysed within this study, however, it is agreed that it can be regarded as an opportunity for national identity metamorphosis, nation-brand identity development and country brand building. To support, national identity is transforming through times, due to events and experiences which change or update community's perceptions [13]. Nowadays, the population of Ukraine clearly states its position towards country identity determination and self-representation on the global arena. Correspondingly, Kaneva and Popescu [27, p.195] underline that the difference between nation branding in post-communist countries from others consists in its «ontological aspiration», rather than in profit seeking.

Recently several attempts to form a new brand vision of the country have been made. Firstly, new tourism brand of Ukraine was presented by the «WikiCityNomika» group, aimed to such brand values cultivation, as trust, dignity, responsibility, and geo diplomacy which are related to the Ukraine's potential of living «in between» [43]. The brand project consists of self-contained graphic elements, widgets and pictograms of the cities. It is worth mentioning that the message strategy had been adopted from previously created slogan «Ukraine. It's all about U», introducing analogical «Ukraine. As free as U», «Ukraine. As tasteful as U», «Ukraine. As young as U», or «Ukraine. As artistic as U». As for potential target audiences, they are defined as follows: business tourists, which are companies or sectors interested in collaborations, and private tourists, who come to the country for diverse cultural, historical or adventurous purposes. Importantly, nowadays the Ukrainian Club of hoteliers and restaurateurs «Hoteliero» is making further distribution of the project, using developed graphic elements and the message in the new promotional movies created for the embassies and consulates, foreign cultural centres and media, social networks and the official country's websites. It is expected that tour operators, agencies, airlines, and regional administrations will present Ukraine under this single tourism brand.

Secondly, during the revolution in the country a project of «Nova Kraina» has been launched with the aim of creation a common vision of the Ukraine's future, which is attractive for its population and supported by the national dialogue. Among main participants of the project are experts and scientists, community representatives and opinion leaders, entrepreneurs and politicians, all having equal rights and voices [33]. Since its launching, the national idea «Ukrainian Happiness' and motto «With mind and heart» have been created and communicated. Besides, the mission of the country is defined as «Ukraine is a cradle of new consciousness, forms, new senses and values of world community». Overall, the project represents itself a non-governmental civil platform responsible for reforms creation and implementation, considering future strategic orientation, economic direction, and social conditions.

Finally, brainstorming platforms, such as «Reinvent» [37] and «Ukraine: country and cities branding» [19] have been recently introduced to discuss current issues, problems and opportunities of the Ukraine's presentation on the global arena, where sector experts, marketing agencies, outstanding people, successful businessmen and different politicians take part. With establishment of social platforms, the consistency of the national identity and ideas is aimed to be achieved, revealing and building such a brand essence, which will be native and familiar for the residents of the country. To demonstrate, analysing and meeting social identities in brand communications can help to create coordinated and agreed behaviour of the main stakeholders [30]. The launch of such

projects can be considered as a positive trend for the Ukraine's development, however the lack of regulations between them and the absence of certain strategic orientations reduce their effectiveness.

Nowadays diverse international rankings and annual reports are used in order to evaluate dynamics of country brands and identify their influence or effectiveness. In essence, annual analytical tables, produced by different research companies and well-known marketers, motivate places to enhance their competitive positions by analysing their overall performance in relation to comparative nation brands. For the comprehensive understanding of the concept of place branding in practice, main international rankings and their areas of consideration are represented in the following table 1.

Table 1. Modern methodologies of country brands examination

Rankings/ Models	Institution/ Research company	Methodology	Areas of consideration/Variables
The most valuable nation brands	Brand Finance plc	Measurements of the strength and value of nation brands, based on the royalty mechanism [12]	Investments, Tourism, Products and Services, People and Skills
Country Brand Index	Future Brand	Quantitative research using Hierarchical Decision Model: analysis of perceptions of countries brands by residents, investors, tourists and foreign governments (Future Brand, 2013)	Value system, Quality of Life, Good for business, Heritage and Culture, Tourism
Nation Brand Index	Simon Anholt and Gfk	Qualitative research using online surveys of consumer attitudes towards nation brands around the world [21]	Nation Brand Hexagon: Exports, Governance, Culture, People, Tourism and Immigration/ Investment
Country Brand Ranking	The Bloom Consulting	Measurement of a country economic development, using statistical modelling and accompanying hard data [11]	Measurements of 4 variables: • Economic receipts and growth. • Online search demand. • Country Brand strategy rating in previous years (usage of the most accurate strategy) • Official website and social media performance
Nation Brand Perception Index	East West Communications	Analysis of countries mentions in global media sources every quarter, using text analysis system and perception metrics [18]	Number of country references or mentions, which defines the prominence of a country. Quality of media
Soft Power Survey	Monocle	Research is based on soft power and public diplomacy literature, using «standard data normalisation methodology» created for indices composition [25]	Government, diplomatic conditions, culture, education system, business environment, national brands and infrastructure
Wiesbaden Nation Brand Equity Model	The Research Centre Nation Branding	Research on interdependence between driving and profit factors, using image and identity measurements and analysis of nation brand wheel, which help to identify weak spots [39]	Outside image and self-perception identity, people, government, culture, exports, tourism, investments
Country RepTrak	Reputation Institute	Global study of ratings, measuring the link between country reputations and economic outcomes. The model analyses perceptions of a country by stakeholders, using online interviews [38]	Economy (high quality products and services, education, workforce, brands). Environment (lifestyle, culture, hospitality, nature). Government (business climate, policy, safety, effectiveness)

Source: integrated by the author.

Overall, uniting and analysing dimensions of such valuation methodologies, nation brands should carefully manage their performance in business, tourism, cultural, socio-economic, and political aspects. Moreover, rankings have a direct influence on nation branding strategies of countries, identifying critical success criteria on the global scale and setting standards that places have to maintain.

Even so, the Ukraine's brand does not occupy forward positions in the international rankings, Brand Finance [12] emphasizes the dynamic nature of its changes in the past years.

According to Szondi [40] and his institutionalisation of image-making in the Central and Eastern European countries, among the first stakeholders which had been involved in destination branding were government bodies represented by national tourism organisations, export agencies, and private business companies which were interested in the country's brand promotion. As it can be seen from the previous subparagraphs, the main stakeholders involved into the first attempts to the Ukraine's country brand creation can be summarised as follows.

To analyse the stakeholders engaged into nation branding initiatives, it is worth examining lessons from other countries. Kaneva and Popescu [27] report that previously for the post-communist countries, branding initiatives mostly appeal to national elites, the needs of which could be met. Dinnie and Fola [16] identify such additional parties

Table 2. Ukrainian stakeholders involved into the previous nation branding attempts

Type	Organisation	Role	Coordination issues
Public	the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine	Introducing the criteria of the project, arranging necessary funding, briefing, and requirements settings.	Coordinated between each other on the basis of similar governmental nature, however there is an absence of control and monitoring of developed projects.
	the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine		
	the National Agency for Tourism and Resorts		
Private	Marketing, branding and consulting agency «WikiCityNomika»	Developing of semantic platforms, conducting brand sessions, tourism brand presentation.	Uncoordinated between each other. Poor control from public authorities. Importantly, only the National Agency of Tourism and Resorts has taken several attempts to collaborate with «WikiCityNomika» and «Brand House» in tourism brand creation and distribution.
	«Brand House» agency		
	«CFC consulting»	Research on perceptions of the country by international community, and based on it, development of the first nation branding strategy.	
	«Grand-Print Ukraine»	Creation and launching of the first information campaigns about Ukraine.	
Private	The club of hoteliers and restaurateurs «HOTELIERO»	Distribution of tourism brand, development of promotional campaigns, based on it.	These stakeholders are coordinated between each other, due to similar objectives of attracting tourists or visitors, and certain collaboration agreements.
Private	Ukrainian International Airlines	Participation in tourism brand development and distribution.	
Private	Travel agencies		
Private	Hotel chains and networks in Ukraine		

Source: integrated by the author.

to involve, as The Chamber of Commerce, Cultural Heritage associations, convention centres and congress offices, real estate agents, policymakers, key journalists, media commentators, and academic institutions. According to Hankinson [22], the majority of countries establish specific destination marketing organisations, which represent public sector and are responsible for control, monitoring and guiding the projects.

It has been noted, that in Ukraine there was no leading organisation that managed accompanying processes of the brand formation. This can be regarded as one of the main reasons of incomprehensive and non-competitive essence of the brand obtained in result. Notably, participation of citizens and opinion leaders, as ones of the main groups of stakeholders, has been very small as they were only partly involved into crowdsourcing platforms. In addition, export promotional organisations, being important actors of country brand creation and distribution [36], were not involved into these activities in Ukraine. Thus, the fully inclusive stakeholder approach had not been provided, being another challenge of the country branding in Ukraine.

Conclusions and directions for future research. To conclude, countries in the Central and Eastern European region have recently started developing their brands and implementing related activities in their overall state strategies. However, attention and understanding of the concept's significance are growing considerably, due to the consequences of globalisation, world economic conditions, strong competition on the global arena and urgent need of self-repositioning for post-communist countries. To demonstrate, dynamic changes in the annual international rankings of nation brands, which examine places performances and reputations, support the growing interest towards implementation of the phenomenon.

Particularly for Ukraine, the country had made certain attempts to create its nation brand, although nation branding initiatives were of tactical, rather than strategic nature and were more related to the concept of destination branding. In general, the Ukraine's past experience reaffirms the fact that creation of nation branding strategy does not comprise only information campaigns, messages, or PR-activities and visual elements implementation, but is a complex interconnected performance of all state functioning departments. Analysis of the country's stakeholders who put efforts to the previous Ukraine's brand development clearly demonstrates the idea of the necessity of holistic and inclusive approach towards the nation brand creation and its participants. To clarify, the lack of management of involved parties and a notable absence of certain categories of stakeholders have negatively influenced the country's brand performance. Nevertheless, the political situation in Ukraine today can become a ground of national identity transformation and new brand-identity development.

The further studies can be focused on exporation of the Ukraine's population self-identification aspects, details of global marketing strategy development for the country or strategic brand experience of other post-communist countries.

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