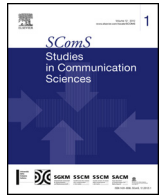




Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Studies in Communication Sciences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/scoms



The constitution and effects of country images: Theory and measurement of a central target construct in international public relations and public diplomacy[☆]

Alexander Buhmann

Department of Communication and Culture, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1st April 2016
Accepted 21 October 2016

Keywords:

International public relations
Public diplomacy
Country images
Behavioral intentions

ABSTRACT

The article introduces a model for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images. The model combines well-established concepts from national identity theory and attitude theory with a model from reputation management. The model is operationalized and tested in two surveys. Results show how different cognitive and affective dimensions of the country image affect each other and how they ultimately bear on the facilitation of behavioral intentions. Lines for future inquiry in country image research are suggested.

© 2016 Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research. Published by Elsevier GmbH. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In times of globalization, countries are increasingly observed by global media and publics. They are rated and compared according to their economic development, political stability, effectiveness and morality of their national and international politics and the attractiveness of their culture (Werron, 2014). As an antecedent of people's behavior toward a country, the country image, i.e., "the cognitive representation that a person holds about a given country" (Kunczik, 2003, p. 412), can critically influence foreign direct investment (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Kunczik, 2002; Wee, Lim, & Tan, 1993), the prosperity of national tourist industries (Chon, 1990; Gertner, 2010; Tapachi & Waryszak, 2000; Walmsley & Young, 1998), the attractiveness of domestic labor markets (Papadopoulos, 2004) and educational systems (Gertner, 2010; Srikanthoo & Gnoth, 2002), as well as the stability of international relations and the degree of a country's political influence in the international

system (Gilboa, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002; Sun, 2008; van Ham, 2008). Furthermore, country images have a major effect on the success of exports (Dichter, 1962; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993) because they influence the way people evaluate the quality of products and services (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993) and, by implication, affect peoples' willingness to pay (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1996).

Under these conditions a country's "favorable image and reputation around the world [...] have become more important than territory, access, and raw materials" (Gilboa, 2008, p. 56). As a consequence, practices of communication and image management are increasingly applied on the level of the nation state system in international public relations and public diplomacy (Dinnie, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Snow & Taylor, 2009; van Dyke & Vercic, 2009). The respective communication professionals need to have knowledge of their target groups (Vos, 2006) and in an international public relations context this means knowledge of how publics perceive a foreign entity (organization or country) and how they behave toward it (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). The growing importance of country images has raised the need to analyze and compare these constructs and their effects. In research, various facets of the phenomenon have been studied in the different fields of business studies (Dinnie, 2014; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), social psychology (Brown, 2011; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), political science (Leonard et al., 2002; Wang, 2006b) and communication science (Golan & Wanta, 2003; Kunczik, 1997). But sound conceptual models and appropriate measurement instru-

[☆] The present article summarizes the results from my Ph.D. research conducted at the University of Fribourg between 2011 and 2015. In part, results have previously been published in journal articles coauthored with Diana Ingenhoff (c.f. Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015a, specifically literature review and model; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015a, specifically pretest; Ingenhoff & Buhmann, 2016a, specifically discussion of data analysis method) as well as in a cumulative thesis (Buhmann, 2016). I am grateful for the guidance and support from Prof. Ingenhoff. Further, I am thankful for the Young Researcher Award from the Swiss Association for Communication and Media Research (SACM), which prompted the publication of this summary article. I thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive comments.

E-mail address: alexander.buhmann@bi.no

ments to analyze and compare the constitution and effects of country images in different groups and contexts are rare. Most existing models lack theoretical foundations, cannot be applied to different countries or the comparative analysis of country images in different groups, often fail in comprehensively capturing all relevant dimensions and refrain from clarifying the internal structure of the construct (Magnusson & Westjohn, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2004; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). In international public relations and public diplomacy, there is no widely accepted model and measurement instrument available. While the practitioner literature strongly relies on aggregated indices (such as the Nation Brands Index, Best Country Score, or Country RepTrak), academic literature (much like the seminal works of Kunczik, 1997 or Nye, 2004) favors a conceptual or historical focus. Furthermore, we see that Papadopoulos' (2004) statement of a strict segregation of research on country images between the different disciplinary perspectives is still true and there remains "great need for integrative studies that would merge the available knowledge across the various fields" (2004, p. 47).

These challenges raise the question of how available knowledge from the different fields can be consolidated in order to derive an integrative model for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images for international public relations and public diplomacy research. In the following, three steps are taken to deal with this question: first, advances in the aforementioned research fields are introduced in a comprehensive literature review to show the central lines of research in studying country images, characterize their respective level of analysis, and outline the underlying conceptual understandings of the construct. Second, an integrative model of the country image is presented by combining concepts from national identity theory and attitude with a model from reputation management. Third, the suggested model is operationalized and tested in two sets of surveys ($n = 640$, pretest survey; $n = 463$, main survey). Subsequently, the implications, originality, and limitations of both the model and the empirical study are discussed.

2. Literature review

A first set of studies addressing the perception of countries can be found in the 1930s and 1940s (Child & Doob, 1943; Katz & Braly, 1933; Klingberg, 1941; Kusunoti, 1936). Since then the multitude of their possible economic, cultural, and political effects have led to a high number of studies across a range of scientific fields. This has produced a plethora of definitions of closely related concepts (such as country image, country reputation, country brand, country identity) and divergent specifications of their dimensions. The substantial corpus of literature can be systemized by coarsely distinguishing between the following four main research perspectives (see Table 1 for an overview).

2.1. The communication science perspective

From the perspective of communication science, country images are studied as discursive phenomena in personal, organizational, and (mass-)mediated communication. The construct has attracted attention in analyses on media content and effects, and—to a lesser extent—on public relations.

So far, communication science has mainly focused on mass-mediated country images. Analyses of the dynamics and patterns of the international news flow reveal the (unequal) salience of countries in international news (Chang, 1998; Golan & Wanta, 2003; Jones, Aelst, & Vliegthart, 2013; Weaver, Porter, & Evans, 1984; Wu, 1998), show the effect of mass-mediated country images on the formation of public opinion about foreign countries (Manheim & Albritton, 1984; McNelly & Izcaray, 1986; Perry, 1987;

Salwen & Matera, 1992; Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, & Willnat, 1992; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004) and underscore the gatekeeping role of foreign editors in forming these mediated country images (Marten, 1989). The central role of mass media in the formation of country images has stimulated numerous content analyses evaluating images of certain countries as portrayed in foreign media (e.g., Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah, 1985; Steenhoff, 1996; Wu, 1997). The conceptualization of the country image in these works is predominantly unidimensional (e.g., covering valence from positive to negative tonality) or based on (stereotypical) topics and themes found in media content.

In the field of public relations, which has a strong focus on corporate image and reputation, the study of country images has so far received relatively little attention (Kunczik, 2003; van Dyke & Vercic, 2009). Some researchers have shown a positive effect of public relations activities on country images in U.S. news coverage (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, 1985; Manheim & Albritton, 1984; Zhang & Cameron, 2003) and on public opinion (Kioussis & Wu, 2008). Others have addressed the potential and challenges of communication strategies for the cultivation of country images and brands (Kunczik, 1997; Volcic, 2008) as well as country reputation (Wang, 2006b, 2008). Only few have addressed questions regarding the conceptualization of the country image construct in detail. Passow, Fehlmann, and Grahlow (2005) and Yang, Shin, Lee, and Wrigley (2008) successfully applied a model of corporate reputation in analyses of country reputation. In contrast to the concepts from country-of-origin research, these works not only focus on functional aspects but also stress the importance of normative dimensions, such as the social and ecological responsibility of a country. Despite these advances, there is still much to be done in applying more recent models from the field of public relations, specifically communication and reputation management (e.g., Eisenegger & Imhof, 2008; Thiessen & Inghoff, 2011), to the conceptualization and specification of country images. These newer works led themselves well, because they can be expanded beyond the corporate focus as they draw on more generalizable models including functional, normative, and affective dimensions.

2.2. The business studies perspective

This perspective is mainly interested in consumption behavior. Different marketing-based concepts have been developed in the fields of nation branding and country-of-origin research.

In country-of-origin research, the study of country images has a long history, starting with the works of Dichter (1962) and Schooler (1965) (see Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999 for an overview of the field). Most of the studies have conceptualized the country image as an attitudinal construct, suggesting a plethora of dimensions and variables (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). An important factor in many of the studies is the evaluation of the state of a country's economy (e.g., Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Wang & Lamb, 1983) as well as of its political system (e.g., Allred, Chakraborty, & Miller, 1999). Heslop, Papadopoulos, Dowdles, Wall, and Compeau (2004) also suggest the work-training and competencies of the people as an important factor. Another factor often referred to is the degree of technological advancement (e.g., Desborde, 1990; Kühn, 1993; Martin & Eroglu, 1993). Despite the substantial body of research in this field, the theoretical foundation and empirical testing of the dimensionality of the country image is still labeled unsatisfactory (Newbury, 2012). When looking at the basic elements of the attitudinal construct, most studies have a strong emphasis on cognitive components and fail to consistently operationalize country affects (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). With a few exceptions (Brijs, Bloemer, & Kasper, 2011; Häubl, 1996; Heslop et al., 2004), researchers also largely refrain from clarifying the internal struc-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6576205>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6576205>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)