

7. Nation branding and Visual marketing

Nation Branding Concept

Nation branding aims to measure build and manage the reputation of countries (closely related to place branding). Some approaches applied, such as an increasing importance on the symbolic value of products, have led countries to emphasise their distinctive characteristics. The branding and image of a nation-state "and the successful transference of this image to its exports - is just as important as what they actually produce and sell." This is also referred to as country-of-origin effect. Nation branding is still a developing field in which scholars continue their search for a unified theoretical framework. Many governments have resource dedicated to Nation Branding. Their aim is to improve their country's standing, as the image and reputation of a nation can dramatically influence its success in attracting tourism receipts and investment capital; in exports; in attracting a talented and creative workforce and in its cultural and political influence in the world.

7.1.1 Nation branding in practice

Nation branding appears to be practiced by many countries, including the United States, Canada, France, United Kingdom (where it is officially referred to as public diplomacy), Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand, Israel and most Western European countries. An early example of this was the Cool Britannia approach of the early days of the New Labour government (following the Britain (TM) pamphlet by Demos's Mark Leonard), though this has since been replaced by a more credible Public Diplomacy Board. There is increasing interest in the concept from poorer states on the grounds that an enhanced image might create more favorable conditions for foreign direct investment, tourism, trade and even political relations with other states. Developing nations such as Tanzania and Colombia are creating smaller nation branding programs aimed at increased overall image and with the case of Colombia, changing international perception.

7.1.2 Nation branding in academia

Nation Branding can be approached in academics as a field in social sciences, political sciences, humanities, communication, marketing and international

relations. Scholars such as Evan H. Potter at the University of Ottawa have conceptualized nation brands as a form of national soft power. All efforts by government (at any level) to support the nation brand - either directly or indirectly - becomes public diplomacy.

Anti-globalization proponents often claim that globalization diminishes and threatens local diversity, but there is evidence that in order to compete against the backdrop of global cultural homogeneity, nations strive to accentuate and promote local distinctiveness as a competitive advantage.

7.1.3 Nations Brands Index

The concept of measuring global perceptions of countries across several dimensions (culture, governance, people, exports, tourism, investment and immigration) was developed by Simon Anholt. His original survey, the Anholt Nations Brands Index, was launched in 2005 and fielded four times a year.

7.1.4 Monocle Soft Power Survey

Monocle released its third annual Soft Power Survey in 2012, ranking nations according to their soft power; the amount of attractiveness and thus influence a country has within the world. Ranking nations according to their standard of government, diplomatic infrastructure, cultural output, capacity for education and appeal to business, the list is calculated using around 50 factors that indicate the use of soft power, including the number of cultural missions, Olympic medals, the quality of a country's architecture and business brands.

7.2 Visual marketing

Visual marketing is the discipline studying the relationship between an object, the context it is placed in and its relevant image. Representing a disciplinary link between economy, visual perception laws and cognitive psychology, the subject mainly applies to businesses such as fashion and design.

As a key component of modern marketing, visual marketing focuses on the studying and analyzing how images can be used to make objects the centre of visual communication. The product and its visual communication become therefore inseparable and their fusion is what reaches out to people, engages them

and defines their choices (a marketing mechanism is known as persuasion). Not to be confused with visual merchandising, that is one of its facets and more about retail spaces; here, Marketing gets customers in the door. Once inside, merchandising takes over—affecting placement of products, signage, display materials, ambiance and employee staffing.

Harnessing the power of images and visuals makes a marketing plan more powerful and more memorable. Images — when done deftly – can turn concepts and intangible things into something concrete. That helps people envision a brand and its message in their mind's eye — and remember it when it comes time to buy.

Visual Marketing can be a part of every aspect of the Communication Mix. Marketing persuades consumer's buying behavior and Visual Marketing enhances that by factors of recall, memory and identity.

Growing Trends in the usage of Picture Based Websites and social networking platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, Timeline feature of Facebook justifies the fact that people want to believe what they see, and therefore, need for Visual Marketing.

Visual Marketing includes all visual cues like logo, signage, sales tools, vehicles, uniforms, right to your Advertisements, Brochures, Informational DVDs, Websites, everything that meets the Public Eye.

7.2.1History

Table showing the evolution of Visual Marketing in terms of Time-Perception-Critical interpretation – Paolo Schianchi

The roots of this way of interpreting objects lie in Susan Sontag's essay Notes on "Camp", written back in the nineteen sixties; the author points out that objects are not interesting in themselves but rather in the way they are represented, being the result of a series of considerations that touch upon the object's history, its symbolism, its manifestation and realization in the eyes of the beholder. As it developed, visual marketing highlighted the masking of an object, which instead of just being a product, turns into the star of its own 'production", so it changes from itself into something else, at the precise moment it enters the market. According to Paolo Schianchi, architect and designer, an Italian visual marketing academic:

“(...) Objects are: real, as what we see; visible - what they are made from; perfect - their classic identity; communication - their bond with taste; form and function - container and content; emotion - the story they can evoke; critical operation - the language that consecrates and exposes it; industrial operation - making them active and productive; image - the what and the how; anonymous - merely because it exists (...)“

All of these components – that belong to and define an object from the viewpoint of the market and of the consumer – are the research and planning nuances that encompass the scope of visual marketing.

So, this branch "(...) acts on several levels of the design of an object: the idea (objects have to meet certain functions and be neutral, round, sharp-edged, eccentric shapes etc.); the communication (for a certain period in one geographic zone, then turned into a luxury item, at another time disguised as eco-friendly etc.) and in the end, the exhibition – in a trade fair, in a showroom and at other events (the object is approachable but its context drops it into atmospheres as an unusual industrial find, an emotional dispenser of functions, unapproachable art and design object, etc.). (...)".

In the words of Umberto Galimberti, Italian philosopher and psychoanalyst "(...) Even when there is no lack of money, the desire – now defined by fashion – does not refer so much to objects as to the myths surrounding them, and often the only thing being consumed is the myth itself..... (...)".

This concept is taken up again by Gillo Dorfles in his book "Il feticcio quotidiano" (The daily fetish): "(...) This is why I believe I can say that it is now possible to talk about a new ergonomic standard, not connected to the height of a desk or to the pneumatic quality of padding but to the creation of that “mythical image” that a design object must present if it is really right for the purpose it was designed for (...)"..

The mythology that covers objects to the point of becoming one with them is decoded, in this branch through the study of various visual and verbal languages belonging to the groups of interest.

So visual marketing draws the attention away from traditional targets to focus on “...interest groups that are no longer broken down by age, gender, education or any other personal records and social contexts but by type of involvement, whether it be sports (golf or football fans), personal (wine connoisseurs or collectors), cultural (art and classical music lovers), etc. All these groups contain visual, verbal, sound, gesture, olfactory and formal codes that they refer to and use to communicate... ” So, the expressive group behaviors lie behind the new sub-alphabets whose decoding can be used to create direct marketing methods with the group itself.

One of the people inspiring this almost anthropological approach is Marc Augé, who in his book “Le temps en ruines” (Time in ruins) notes that: “the world where image is omnipresent requires the reality to be reflected in its image...”. Paolo Schianchi’s research underscored how the act of putting together the image of the reality generated by each interest group is composed of language sets made of words, sounds, images, smells and shapes that give rise to various sub-alphabets when combined differently. If correctly decoded, these expressive elements become the means to get in touch with a group and direct a message inside it. This aspect of visual marketing helps to create targeted marketing campaigns that go straight to the users’ emotions and representations of reality, using their own expressive language

The roots of this principle lie in Vilém Flusser's “Into the universe of technical images” (originally published as *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*), where he claims: “ ... all ethics, all ontology, all epistemology will be excluded from the pictures, and it will become meaningless to ask whether something good or bad, real or artificial, true or false, or even what it means. The only remaining question is what I can experience...”. This is how the author introduced the concept of the expressive emotion at the origin of visual and verbal sub-alphabets, which belong to each individual at the moment they become part of an interest group. Visual marketing has taken these concepts onboard and to communicate a product to a group it decodes their emotional and individual languages, because we now know that everyone lives “... a double life, where each person is the representation of themselves, becoming inseparable from the physical person, as objects are from their image...”

Visual Marketing consultants plan around this, moving from the design of the object to its visual display, and in so doing creating the mythology around it. Theories on visual marketing have been developed by author and professor in Consumer Science, Michel Wedel.