

THE COUNTRY BRAND- AN OBJECTIVE THAT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCOMPLISH

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ABSTRACT

In a world where everything is a brand, countries cannot make an exception, even more so as they find themselves in an almost constant competition trying to attract tourists, investors, talents and credibility. A powerful brand attracts quality however, in order to be strong, a brand must also be positive, attractive and sustainable. Next to the brand, the country's image represents one of the key-elements of promoting any country. Although Romania finds itself quite far from having a well-articulated brand and country image, efforts are being put in this direction and we hope that, in a not so distant future, they will be put to practice and have the desired effects.

KEYWORDS: *country brand, country image, promotion, tourism, touristic brand, touristic marketing, Romania.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex world, not just companies, but countries as well are involved in a constant competition on all levels (Fetscherin, 2010; Ceptureanu et al., 2017) and, as such, the term "country brand" became more and more common in marketing literature. As we also suggested in our PhD thesis, the building of a country brand is currently one of the most critical problems for Romania. The need to create it is easy to understand once we look at the definition of the country brand: "the country brand is the image of that particular country, the impressions it produces, the beliefs and opinions we build about a country". (Stoiciu, 2006). In the field we are studying in our PhD thesis – that is, tourism –, equally as important as the country brand is the destination brand, the latter one being defined as *a name, a symbol, a logo, a keyword or any graphical sign that identifies the destination and, at the same time, makes it stand out.* (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). From a certain perspective, *destinations represent nothing but products associated to the country's touristic brand.* (de Oliveira Santos & de Moura Engracia Giraldo, 2017). A region with an efficient brand highlights elements such as: nature, sceneries, good weather, relaxing environment, accessibility, infrastructure, but also historical vestiges, monuments of art, regional culture, accommodation facilities for tourists, regional cuisine, it stimulates the regional economy and can contribute to the sustainable development of the entire region. (Stăncioiu et al., 2011; Ceptureanu et al., 2018). It is a scientifically proven fact that *destinations that lead to attitudes more positive than the average can strengthen the national touristic brand, while destinations that lead to attitudes below average can weaken it.* (de Oliveira Santos & de Moura Engracia Giraldo, 2017) The word "brand" does not have an equivalent in Romanian, which is why it is used in its English form (Arhip & Arhip, 2016). With regards to the country brand, Romanian literature has often assimilated it to country marketing and country image. In this context, it is necessary to state that "every country has an image that transforms over the years, and this image also influences the perception towards the products and services that the country has to offer" (Stoiciu, 2006). But still-what is a country brand? It is a set of programs that differentiate one country from another and

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whose purpose is to offer an identity to that particular country by building a real, positive and attractive image for it. (Popescu, 2007). In order to be profitable, *the country brand must come together in a summum and a synthesizer of individual and local/regional brands that support the development of a nation.* (Stăncioiu et. al., 2011). We must also remember the fact that *the identity of a country is what constitutes its set of national values and references.* (Stoiciu, 2006). Another aspect that needs to be specified is that *a strong and coherent country brand needs to be connected to this system of values, to evoke a perception of the national values that the majority of the population can relate to both inside the country and abroad; the external perception and the one that is felt by the country's inhabitants must overlap, be articulated on a symbolical level and coherent.* (Stoiciu, 2006).

2. BRANDS CREATION

The creation of a country brand requires that both politicians and individual citizens understand the concept and, having understood it, take the next step, which is putting the concept into practice. However, the building of a brand cannot be made at random; it must be based on planning and the exhaustion of several stages (Morgan et al., 2002), as shown in the figure below:

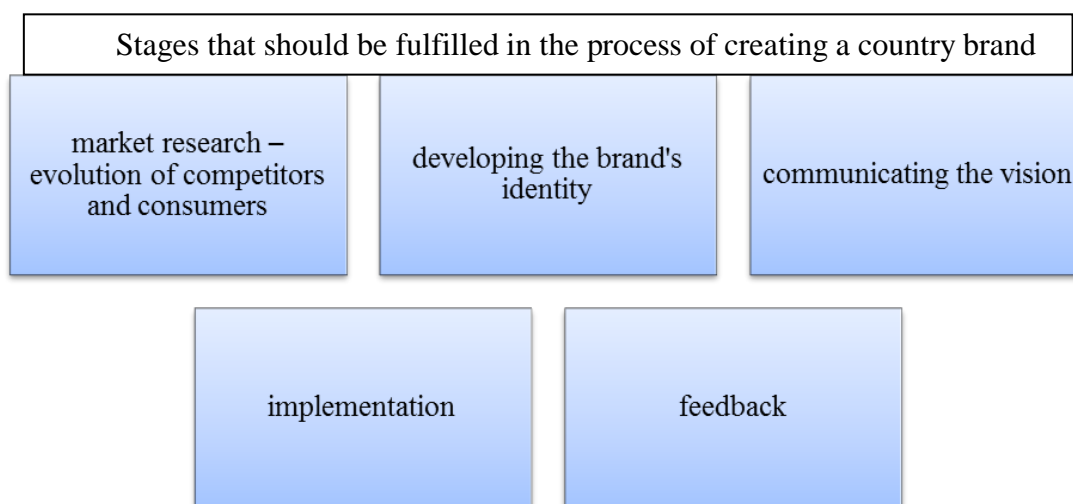


Figure 1. Stages that should be fulfilled in the process of creating a country brand

Source: adapted from Morgan et al., 2002

As suggested in our PhD thesis, the building of a country brand represents a long and extremely complex process. Over the years, *branding has been approached in a variety of perspectives and with different intents and purposes.* (Kladou et al., 2016). Country branding is a controversial, but extremely interesting and complex phenomenon, which is why, despite being simple in theory, in practice it involves a significant amount of activity. (Dinnie, 2008). Country branding gradually became an essential part of the sustainability of a developed country (Fetscherin, 2010) and the creation of a country brand became a purpose even for less developed countries. The concept of country branding seems to attract not only politicians and policymakers, but also enterprises and consumers. The attraction is all greater as a better country brand has been proven to be extremely beneficial from an economic standpoint. (Aharoni & Grinstein, 2017). Even though we are aware of the need to create a country brand capable of attracting tourists and foreign investors, this will not solve the problems our country deals with. The building of a strong and positive brand is a first step, the rest is in the hands of each one of us, because every citizen can be an ambassador of his country,

anyone can promote his country, can describe it using commendatory terms to those he meets in order to incite their interest to discover Romania.

The concept of "brand", as well as the entire branding process, encompasses multiple and extremely complex aspects. (Bivolaru et al., 2009) The debates about building a country brand for Romania have been long and have involved experts from various fields: public relations, marketing, publicity etc.

In Romania, the first branding actions began in the mid 90's. Over the years, there have been several national promotion/communication campaigns, but all of them were doomed to fail.

As a brand, Romania is still poorly developed. There are still countries whose inhabitants know nothing, or almost nothing, about our country. From this perspective, efforts made towards creating a country brand and promoting a positive image of Romania have to be intensified.

The branding of Romania has often been mistaken for a debate about national identity. Personally, I think the debate about the creation of a national brand needs to start with our country's mid- and long-term development strategy as a European country, playing a part in important international organizations, with a rich culture and multiple landforms. We stand by our view, which we also expressed in our PhD thesis, that a national marketing campaign has to be based on integrated marketing:

- establishing clear objectives, transparent achievement indicators, realistic budgets assigned according to the objectives, the selection of the most interesting target audience, which requires knowing its characteristics, interests and expectations;
- elaborating a credible message for the target-audience and working with professionals in the design and execution stages;
- using all useful communication instruments with the purpose of achieving the objectives set (Stoiciu, 2006).

3. MAIN CAMPAIGNS FOR THE BRANDING OF ROMANIA

In table 1 are presented the main campaigns for the branding of Romania.

Table 1. Campaigns for the branding of Romania

No. crt.	Year	Campaign title
1	1996	<i>Eterna și fascinantă Românie – Eternal and fascinating Romania</i>
2	2001	<i>Fabricat în România – Made in Romania</i>
3	2003	<i>România mereu surprinzătoare – Romania, ever surprising</i>
4	2005	<i>Branding România – Branding Romania</i>
5	2007	<i>Fabulospirit – Fabulouspirit</i>
6	2007/2008	<i>România turistică – Touristic Romania</i>
7	2009	<i>Romania-Land of choice</i>
8	2010	<i>Explore the Carpathian Garden</i>

Source: author

The campaign *Eternal and fascinating Romania* was the first campaign that tried to promote the country generally, with a focus on tourism. It was a relatively simple campaign, hard to analyze due to the lack of press releases at the time, based on an album featuring maps and photographs that presented the country as a unique place, with values yet to be discovered. (Dolea & Țăruș, 2009). The album itself is a collection of 513 photographs accompanied by texts translated in French, English, Arabian, Italian, German, Japanese and Spanish. Although the album was initially planned to be printed in 97 000 copies and sent to 96 countries, only 10 000 copies were printed (Surcel, 2006).

The campaign *Made in Romania* was a program started by the Association for the Promotion of Products and Services in the context of an obvious and continuous decrease of internal production. The purpose of the program was to support local economic agents in the competition with imported products. It's more a campaign aimed at promoting Romanian products, rather than promoting the country itself, although it is self-explanatory that by promoting a product one implicitly promotes the country where it was produced.

For a better national and international visibility, the campaign also had a website (The site we are referring to is: www.fabricatinromania.ro) and the magazine *Made in Romania* had a monthly appearance, offering generous space to Romanian products and thus helping boost confidence in products made in our country.

The campaign was officially launched during TIBCO2001 (the campaign was launched on May 30, 2001) and the program featured several events:

- *Made in Romania for Agriculture*
- *Made in Romania for Medicine*
- *Made in Romania for IT*

Since the debut of the campaign, export has been a concern of the Romanian authorities, so that products made in Romania now go to almost 200 countries worldwide. The first 10 destination-states for Romanian exports are (<http://www.jurnaluldeafaceri.ro/fabricat-in-romania-cu-ce-produse-ne-mandrim-pe-pietele-externe>): Germany (with an overall weight in Romanian export of 19,9%); Italy (12,4%); France (6,7%); Hungary (5,4%); Great Britain (4,3%); Turkey (4,1%); Bulgaria (3,4%); Spain (2,8%); Poland (2,7%); Austria (2,5%).

The small number of local producers attracted by the program, as well as poor awareness and promotion, led to the failure of the campaign, so the program was suspended after only four years of existence.

Romania, ever surprising was the first international campaign of promoting our country. It is basically a commercial clip featuring the main touristic attractions. The campaign was ordered by the General Direction for the Promotion of Tourism, and it was commissioned to the Ogilvy&Mather Advertising agency.

The declared purpose of the campaign was to improve the image of Romania abroad and attract as many foreign tourists as possible. The objectives of the campaign were *changing the perception and attitude towards Romania, especially in the EU and the US, and presenting Romania as a desirable tourist attraction*. (Popescu & Corboș, 2013).

The Ministry of Tourism, the initiator and promoter of the campaign, organized several promotion tours in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Scandinavian countries, in the Middle East and the Baltic countries.

It was a campaign that, besides having its own website (the website we are talking about is www.romaniatravel.com), was broadcast on TV (the TV stations where the message was visible: Discovery, Euronews, Eurosport, ProTv, Antena 1, TVR 1, Prima TV and MTV Romania.) as well as featured on street banners, with the purpose of changing foreigners' perspective on Romania in general, with a focus on Romanian tourism.

During this campaign, the project *Romania- Land of wine* was launched, a project that had the purpose of promoting wine-growing areas in our country. The program included Murfatlar, Niculițel, Valea Călugărească, Vinju Mare, Potelu and Ostrov wineries.

Despite it costing 1.7 billion dollars, the campaign did not have the desired effect neither internally, nor externally. Internally, the media especially found that the motto "ever surprising" had negative connotations, in the sense that it surprises in an unpleasant way. (Dolea & Țăruș, 2009).

Branding Romania. The idea was launched in 2005, and the responsibility of building a country brand was assigned to the Agency for Governmental Strategies.

The project duration was meant to be 8-12 years, during which time studies were supposed to be made to determine the way in which Romanians were perceived in countries like Italy, Spain and Germany. Among the achievements of the project are a visual identity manual and a website.

Fabulouspirit. The concept was elaborated in December 2006, and the campaign started next year. One of its purposes was to somehow mark the adherence of Romania to the European Union. The campaign in itself was designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the goal of promoting Romania's image in the European Union.

The campaign tried to create a positive image of Romania in the world, as the country was promoted as having spiritual, life-loving people.

The basis for the campaign's strategy were successful Romanians (Henri Coandă, Constantin Brâncuși, Nadia Comăneci etc.) and their achievements.

Touristic Romania is a program designed in July 2007 by the representatives of the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce, Tourism and Liberal Professions, as well as those of the World Tourism Organization. (Dolea & Țăruș, 2009).

Romania – Land of choice is a campaign launched in Paris in 2009 which, at the time, had a negative echo in the press due to the motto it used.

Explore the Carpathian Graden is the motto of the tourist brand of Romania, which was launched in Shanghai. The objective of the project was to create a positive image of Romania.

As was the case with other campaigns for the promotion of our country, some people were again displeased with the motto, which didn't have the power to contribute to the creation of a strong national brand due to the fact that, in the minds of potential tourists, the mountains are a detail which is not yet clear.

As shown in our PhD thesis, the campaigns for promoting the country externally did not stand by themselves, they were backed up by internal campaigns. The objective of the latter ones was to improve the image of Romania as a touristic destination among Romanians, and there were three such campaigns:

- The campaign *A journey is a life lesson. Choose internal tourism* began in mid-2006 and lasted until the autumn of 2007. Its purpose was to encourage Romanians to rediscover the country they live in.
- The campaign *Tourism in Romania* (August 1- December 25, 2009) was aimed at determining Romanians to spend their winter holidays in the country, as it is well-known that Romanians have special traditions linked to these holidays.
- The campaign *Rediscover Romania* started on April 1, 2011, and looks to increase the number of tourists that spend their holidays in the country. It is a campaign initiated by Petrom and its partners (Dacia, BCR, ROMTELECOM, Paralela45, the Museum of the Romanian Peasant and Igloo), aimed at drawing the awareness of Romanians towards lesser known places (to avoid referring to them as ignored altogether).

The project has its own website (<http://www.redescoperaromania.ro>) and brings together all the most beautiful places in Romania.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A first conclusion that can be drawn from our paper is that, despite several attempts, Romania still is a country that does not have a country brand.

Another conclusion is that the necessity of promoting the country's image is increasingly critical; the image should be real, positive and, last but certainly not least, attractive.

The third conclusion, which we have also suggested in our PhD thesis, refers to the impact that ordinary citizens can have in promoting the country's image; it is a well-known fact that one man can promote a product (or a country, in this case) a lot better than a thousand images ever could.

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