

Treating the Nation as a Brand: Some Neglected Issues

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After discussing the concepts of nation and image, this article considers (1) the extent to which the notion of a brand is applicable to a nation, (2) the mechanisms by which a nation's image influences attitudes toward its products, (3) the choice processes in which country of origin is most likely to play a significant role, and (4) the extent to which the image of a nation can be manipulated. One conclusion is that the reputational capital of a nation with respect to a product category will influence choice more than a nation's overall attractiveness, though fragments of a nation's imagery may nonetheless be successfully exploited.

THE NATION AS A BRAND: AN ESTABLISHED TRUTH?

Any nation can be viewed as a brand as it can be viewed as a compound of contemporary and historical associations that have relevance for marketing. This is commonly accepted, and the notion of the nation as a brand has an instant and even populist resonance. For some brands, identity is bound up with their national affiliation: brands of Swiss chocolate, French perfume, Italian sports cars, and Japanese electronics are instantly meaningful partly because the sponsor nations do function as a brand—a brand moreover that can signify an entire cultural history. The logo of Mercedes Benz is an icon of nationhood, and Mercedes Benz conjures up a certain “idea” of Germany. A nation can also function negatively as a brand. Blind tests quoted in European ads for Skoda cars showed that they outperformed many expensive rivals. However, judging from sales, price and quality were not enough to rescue Skoda from the negative impact of its national origins. (Skoda has since been taken over by Volkswagen.)

That the nation's image is a factor in buying decisions has long been accepted. For example, the nineteenth-century historian Ernest Williams (1896) argued that the “Made in Germany” label was a marketing advantage. Today, there are consulting firms in the business of offering help to governments

in determining what the national brand should stand for and how it should be promoted. For example, a brochure titled “Debate: A Global Brand for Germany,” produced by Wolff Olins, a firm of image consultants, points out that although historically brands are associated with products and corporations, the techniques of branding are essentially applicable to every area of mass communications.¹ The brochure even goes so far as to argue that political leaders, to inspire, need to become brand managers of their parties and preferably of the nation.

If a nation is commonly perceived as having attributes that carry over into everything done there, then the country of origin becomes a factor in the image of any product from that country. Many scholars have sought to assess the marketing impact of this. An early article by Schooler (1965) described an experiment in which Guatemalan students were asked for their perceptions of the quality of cloth made in four South American countries. There were significant differences, even though all the cloth came from Guatemala. Other research claims that people rate buying risk according to country of origin (Lumpkin, Crawford, and Kim 1985). And for Johansson and Thorelli (1985), the tractor-buying process of American farmers is a consequence of hierarchical stages, each of which may be influenced by the country of origin of the tractor. But this literature has limitations. Frequently, respondents are not asked to purchase a product but state an intent. As the authors point out, intent and purchase are by no means the same. Taking buying action consists not just of going into gear but actually pressing the accelerator. Inevitably, studies only survey a few products at best, and this limits attempts at generalization.

Even if we accept that the concept of a brand has applicability to a nation, a nation is not a product, and the national image is very much bound up with the social concept of the nation. The concept of a nation consists of a people inhabiting a fixed territory, sharing key elements of a common culture



(values, beliefs, norms, institutions), and possessing a sense of common interests. A nation-state, on this view, can be composed of several nations. Thus, the United Kingdom is a single state but embraces at least two nations in that the Scots can be viewed as a separate nation. On the other hand, the Germans are a single nation but, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, were formed into two states and before Bismarck into many states. The image of other nations is first and foremost an image linked to that nation's people and culture. We think about a nation in terms of the people and their culture rather than think about the nation in the abstract, divorced from people and culture. This, in effect, means that the images of most nations will be vague because there is a general level of ignorance of countries other than one's own.

The Idea of Image

Next the idea of an image. The term *image* is used loosely in marketing as a synthesis of impressions. Cognitive psychologists offer more guidance, particularly Kosslyn's (1980) seminal work. As Kosslyn demonstrates, people do have quasi-pictorial representations and use such representations in cognitive processing (thinking). This is not surprising, but some psychologists were apt to claim that what we really recall are propositions, that is, representations in the mind of beliefs and assertions. In fact, from around 1915 until the late 1960s, imagery and mental representation generally were felt not to be a fruitful topic for psychologists. It was claimed that when consumers think of a brand, what they recall are beliefs and claims about the brand, and these are used in cognitive processing. Kosslyn shows that both imagery representations and propositional representations tend to be recalled. This is an important distinction since we will argue that pure imagery representations are tied to affect-driven choices using the likability heuristic while propositional representations link with belief-driven choices based on a nation's reputational capital. Sometimes, the relative speed with which the two types of representation (imagery or propositions) are processed determines which type of information dominates in thinking. But imagery representation and propositional representation feed into each other. Thus, the more occasions a brand name is recalled, the more the information in the image of the brand is decoded into belief statements about the brand. Moreover, once we accept that all images serve as data structures in memory, seeking to recall certain types of information almost compels a recourse to imagery. Thus, if asked whether a certain make of car is of a certain shape, imagery of the car inevitably comes to mind. Imagery plays a role in mental simulations and is useful in reflecting on the consequences of action, say, in buying a house.

Cognitive psychologists point out that an image is not a "picture in the head." Images lack many of the properties of pictures as, unlike a picture, images are constructed from previously processed information. An image, unlike a picture, is

interpreted by the "mind's eye," not by the human eye. Cognitive psychologists reject the idea of images being stored as single wholes as if in files from which they are retrieved. An image is constructed at any one time into a single whole from more elemental parts so that the image recalled will vary with context and orientation. An image is not something static but has elements that fade in and out while only the vaguest image is retained without sustained effort. What is not in long-term memory already cannot be recalled. Thus, the consumer may have a vivid image of the house he or she is about to buy but, if asked to count the steps up to the front door, may not be able to do so. An image cannot reveal to the consumer what he or she does not already know. Forming a mental image of the house is radically different from seeing the actual house.

Stereotypes

When countries have an international presence, it is common to talk of "stereotyping" with respect to the nation's image. When used in sociology, the word *stereotype* means a biased (usually prejudicial) view of a group or class of people—a view that is resistant to change or correction from countervailing evidence. But a nation's stereotype can be positive, negative, or just neutral, though the stereotypic attributes associated with a nation need have no carryover effect on a specific product (Elliott and Cameron 1994). Yet stereotypes play a role in the overall image of a nation. What is the image of a country such as Holland? The stereotype enters into that image. There are the kitsch symbols such as clogs, tulips, dikes, and windmills; at the more sophisticated level, Holland may be a compound of Rembrandt, Phillips, clean homes, the early Dutch Empire, and a society whose great open liberalism congeals into sleaze.

The origin of consumer attitudes as lying in national stereotypes has long been accepted by scholars (Reiersen 1966). In a study of the New Zealand car market, Lawrence, Marr, and Prendergast (1992) claim the use of national stereotypes to be a convenient heuristic to simplify consumer choice. But Johansson, Ronkainen, and Czinkota (1994) see such stereotypes as leading to erroneous consumer perceptions of foreign products. Stereotypes about the people of a nation can in fact arise from the association with their products (e.g., Hungarians viewed Japanese as trustworthy and likable on the basis of their products) or, alternatively, may arise from an image of a people applied to their products (e.g., Hungarians rated Swedish products almost as highly as American products, even though few Swedish products at the time were sold in Hungary) (Papadopoulos, Heslop, and Beracs 1990).

This discussion of nation and image has implications. The consumers' views of the nation as a brand will be a composite of beliefs based on experience (where it occurs) and/or emanate from the imagery of its people and the social, political, and economic conditions prevailing at the time. However, most buyers in most countries have probably no distinct

image of any foreign country that is not the image of the region (e.g., Asia or South America). With around 20 to 30 percent of the people of Western democracies being functionally illiterate, we assume much too easily that people have strong beliefs and sharp images of other nations in the world. (A current American joke is that God makes wars to teach the Americans geography!) This would seemingly offer an opportunity for most nations to build their own brand for projection onto the world. But this costs money, and to date, countries have not found it easy to do so.

Although studies such as those discussed form a useful backdrop to any discussion on the nation as a brand, the focus of this article is on questions that have been relatively neglected in the literature:

- To what extent is the notion of the nation as a brand analogous to the branding of products?
- What are the mechanisms by which a nation's image influences perceptions of the nation's products? Which are being used?
- In what choice processes is country of origin most likely to play a significant role?
- Can a nation's image be exploited or manipulated to influence sales of the nation's products and, if so, how successfully?

THE NATION AS A BRAND: THE FRAGMENTED IMAGE

Multiple Meanings

The image of a nation is so complex and fluid as to deny the clarity implicit in a term such as *brand image*. Different parts of a nation's identity come into focus on the international stage at different times, affected by current political events and even by the latest movie or news bulletin. Moreover, national images exist at different intellectual and cultural levels, and for different audiences, they have different meanings according to class, demography, and so forth. Italy, for example, has multiple meanings, from Naples and the Mafia to Venice, Tuscany, and Chianti shire. Perceptions of nations also change. For example, Japan found itself localized in an image of high-volume excellence for mass markets but not as the home of luxury brands. Lexus has begun to change that. A *nation* conveys a range of meanings: the debris of history and the contemporary. It is multilayered, composed of folk images, historic images, and media history, while the contemporary media image creates a condensed snapshot. Unexorcised demons reappear to afflict a nation's image. Journalists noted how in the final soccer match of the 1998 World Cup, the multiracial French team triumphed over a German team that was entirely white and rather older. Bad images from the past sleep lightly and are easily awakened.

National origin is just one of many factors in a consumer decision, and it can perform different roles in that decision or none at all. Elliott and Cameron (1994) and Bilkey and Nes

(1982) claim that the general image of a nation is usually not relevant to a specific product. On the other hand, for Hong and Wyer (1989), the nation's image is a trigger to activate concepts that affect interpretation, a product quality heuristic, or a way of attracting attention to other product attributes (Bilkey and Nes 1982). Both claims can be accommodated on different occasions. Beliefs about a nation (e.g., quality of its products) can constitute subjective hypotheses that buyers may seek to confirm. And prejudices can be restricted to specific products and not to every product made in the country (Kaynak and Cavusgil 1983).

Incoherence

There is an inherent difficulty in having a coherent image of a nation as people edit out or rearrange certain attributes. Thus, we do not really connect Swiss chocolate with Swiss banking to be arranged into some coherent overall image of the nation. This is particularly so in the image of the United States, with its fault lines between hedonism and Puritanism, a constitution that celebrates the "pursuit of happiness" and a polity that gave rise to Prohibition, and a cultural ethos that gave birth to McCarthyism and Woodstock, the Californian surf, and the "Moral Majority." People will liken the country to only some of these images. A nation offers a fragmented set of images, so the key is to exploit the right fragments in line with the product and the target customer group, as was successfully done in the case of the (French) Clio car advertising in England (see below). Just as it is common to attach cultural images to brands marketed domestically, some of the nation's cultural images may be selected to promote the brand abroad.

It is possible that regions are as important in branding as nation-states: the idea of Latin America may be more important than any one of its regional components. Alternatively, nations with only the vaguest of images suddenly acquire a negative one. Thus, Belgium, with its two nations of Wallonia and Flanders, has no central definition, but political scandals and the well-publicized failings of its police and judiciary, as well as the Coca-Cola and chicken fiascoes, have endowed it with an unenviable image in the EC as in a tawdry state. This comes from the news media being the only source of information to which most people are exposed. National image can be a complete media creation when the media are the sole source of information.

It is into imagistic history that brands tap rather than use history in any truer sense. One need only reflect on the importance of the Hollywood movie industry in defining America for most of the twentieth century for the validity of this proposition to become apparent. Media can concoct an imagistic pool of symbols and stereotypes for marketing to draw from. In this way, the brand of a nation may follow a development path like a well-advertised brand of product. Perceptions of national success, whether in economic, military, or sporting areas, seem helpful in giving that nation's products more

visibility worldwide. It is not surprising that Nazi Germany and countries behind the “Iron Curtain” went all out to demonstrate sporting prowess.

The Idea of a Dominant Image

Although a nation is a cacophony of images, in certain cases, it is possible to speak of a dominant image, an image powerful enough to crowd out all the other meanings and resonance. Thus, in the case of the United States, although it is a hugely complex and contradictory society, observers may speak of a special connection to the attribute of freedom and the accompanying hedonism. These can transcend all the complexities. National brands may mobilize such a dominant image (if positive), and this possibility makes brand image for the nation real: a glance at advertising for Coca-Cola illuminates this proposition since the images such advertising distills from the complex property of Americanness lie clearly on the liberty-sensual axis.

Where there is a strong, dominant image of a nation, the nation’s products can be viewed as buyer-inferred brand extensions to the national “parent” brand, with the images of all a nation’s products being potentially influenced by where they originated. We say all products and not just foreign ones since buyers have perceptions of their own country that influence their perceptions of domestic products. In marketing a brand, we worry that a brand extension may dilute the parent brand image by association, but in the case of a nation, we may be worried that our product’s image may be diluted by being associated with the nation’s image.

Reputational Capital

As we have said, what images come to mind will depend on the context as there is no sense of a composite, overall image of a nation coming to mind. The nation cannot be simplistically viewed as a brand writ large. This leads us to argue that in thinking about any nation, buyers will (1) hold some position along a continuum from like to dislike, and (2) buyers, in respect to buying a specific product, will have some sense of that nation’s reputational capital for producing whatever they seek from such a product. Reputational capital is embodied in propositions (beliefs) rather than pure imagery. Buying on the basis of reputational capital is belief driven, while buying on the basis of imagery representation is typically affect driven. In the case of buying on the basis of reputational capital, brands within the relevant product category will have attached to them differences in reputation even when originating in the same country. Thus, SONY brands had a price premium in the United States over Panasonic brands because of SONY’s superior reputation, a price premium absent in Japan.

The nation’s image can be a signaling device to telegraph meaning in a cryptic form, a meaning typically built up and nuanced over the years. A positive image can activate the

likability heuristic, which is like a signal saying, “Don’t think, act.” Constraints on time and resources oblige buyers to use information shortcuts to buying action: brand image is one such shortcut. However, if we accept that the nation as a brand will have a fragmented image, this means selecting the attractive fragments in the nation’s image that will resonate with the target audience.

The likability heuristic is far more likely to operate in respect to a product’s brand image than to the image of a nation because it is easier to give a unity and uniqueness to a product than to a nation. This is not to suggest that a nation’s image can never activate the likability heuristic sufficient for this to be determining. Consumers throughout the world buy American goods simply because they want to feel they are buying part of America. This relates to McCracken’s (1988) concept of “displaced meaning.” McCracken claims that people’s hopes and ideals remain alive through the strategy of displaced meaning as the strategy reconciles ideals with harsh reality by what amounts to wishful thinking that the idea will be a reality in the future (e.g., after we have socialism) or that the ideal is a reality elsewhere (e.g., in America). The concept of displaced meaning is similar to Campbell’s (1987) “dream longings.” The concept of displaced meaning or dream longings makes sense of the tactic of buying American as amounting to buying a piece of one’s dream world (and America is a dream world for perhaps most of the world). On the other hand, there are those who do not buy because of a negative image of the nation.

The concept of reputational capital is more tied to propositional representations (beliefs) than imagery representations and connects to Michael Porter’s (1990) claim about the home base being crucial to the firm’s competitiveness abroad. Porter takes to task the current popular view that the globalization of markets is making nations less important. He argues that four broad attributes are the attributes of the nation that is home to an internationally successful industry. These four factors relate to the question of why particular industries in particular nations obtain and sustain a competitive advantage against competitors in the rest of the world. They are described as follows by Porter:

1. factor conditions: the nation’s position in factors of production, such as having the skilled labor or infrastructure, necessary to compete in a given industry;
2. demand conditions: the nature of the home market demand for the industry’s product or service;
3. related and supporting industries: the presence or absence in the nation of supplier industries and other related industries that are internationally competitive;
4. company strategy, its structure, and industry rivalry: the conditions in the nation governing how companies are created, organized, and managed, as well as the nature of domestic rivalry.

If Porter (1990) is right and a company aspires to be dominant internationally, it should belong to the nation where that industry is dominant (i.e., reputational capital is high for that industry), so the four factors are in alignment. However, these four factors simply constitute an orienting model, in that they orient the reader to a useful classification of success factors. The truth is that companies have risen above the deficiencies of the home nation as Japan did after World War II. Porter's research simply illustrates his thesis rather than tests it. In fact, the four factors can be shown to be Porter's original five factors describing an industry's competitive structure (threat of entry, degree of rivalry, pressure of substitutes, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers), reinterpreted to fit the goal of explaining why particular industries in particular nations obtain and sustain a competitive advantage against competitors in the rest of the world (Porter 1980, 1985).

Knowing in what product areas a nation has reputational capital is analogous to a company knowing its core competencies because this is knowledge of its demonstrated capabilities. It is important for every nation to know this—through research. Not surprisingly, many governments act decisively to maintain a country's reputation in some product area, passing laws for quality control (e.g., the French government in wine) and taking action against those imitators around the world (e.g., the British government acting to preserve the reputation of Scotch whisky). But domestic companies often rest content with labeling "Made in . . ." and do not exploit sufficiently the nation's reputational capital. In the United States, where exports are not given enough weight, firms do not push enough the "Made in the USA" name, though the name has an aura for innovative products throughout the world. It was this innovative reputation that was so well exploited when the car wax Turtle Wax was franchised in the United Kingdom as a "new" protective car cleaning wax, leading to a more than 30 percent market share within four years. This case was a popular Harvard case study in the 1970s. (It had been suggested by one of the authors.)

It does not require us to have complete faith in the rational choice model to realize that when the information is available, the reputational capital of the nation in respect to the product category is far more likely to play a role in buying than any other beliefs or imagery of the nation. Nonetheless, some brand advertising is very adept at attaching highly favorable national/cultural images to the brand that are unrelated to any substantive reputation of the nation in respect to the product area. This is not surprising because a good deal of domestic consumer advertising focuses on associating a brand with the nation's cultural images.

Why the Nation Is an Awkward Brand

With respect to branded consumer products, a consistent brand persona (the public face presented to others) helps symbolize certainty and commitment to whatever the brand

persona suggests. But it is not easy for a nation, as opposed to a brand of product, to have a consistent persona because a nation is such a constellation of different images. Similarly, a key element with respect to products is brand personality, which is the set of "character" or behavioral traits that consumers attach to the brand. Again, it is less easy for a nation to develop a personality in this sense. Yet persona and personality can inject life into a brand and feed consumer fantasies so that loyalty (trust and sentiment) develops more easily. This is not easily accomplished with respect to a nation.

We conclude that the concept of national image does not lend itself to the sharp clarity of definition that is possible with the brand image of a product except in respect to specific product categories associated with the nation. A nation's image has too many potential references for it to be anchored to a hard core of social facts, as is possible in the case of the brand image of a product. A nation's image is more likely to be pressed into service as a risk indicator or a conjunctive rule to reduce options than to operate as an emotional pull. It is too difficult to put across an overall positive image of a nation that emotionally resonates with the consumer sufficiently to affect behavior over the whole range of a nation's products. Even campaigns to buy the domestic product rather than imports tend to fall flat for lack of emotional resonance (Ettenson, Wagner, and Gaeth 1998).

MECHANISMS BY WHICH A NATION'S IMAGE INFLUENCES PERCEPTIONS

Associationism

The short answer is that a nation's image influences the image of the nation's products through association. While there is no school of psychology called "associationism," the idea that if X and Y are closely associated, the image that one will rub off on the other or that both images will become fused is well established in psychology. Such association influences perception. Consider a study by Rozin, Millman, and Nemeroff (1986). Their experimental subjects were quite happy to eat fudge when it was molded into the shape of a disk but very, very reluctant to eat it when then molded into the shape of animal feces. Similarly, subjects were reluctant to eat sugar labeled "sodium cyanide" despite the fact that they had seen the sugar being poured from a sugar box and arbitrarily labeled with the name "sodium cyanide." The image arising from the negative associations generated an emotional reaction that the known facts (true beliefs) did not overcome.

Associative laws are commonly quoted to explain how such associations are formed, although these are too superficial to carry much explanatory power. However, they are sufficiently well known and quoted to receive mention here. One such "law" is that of contiguity, which claims that things that are together in space and time will become linked together.

Another so-called law is the one of similarity, in that stimuli with similar referents are likely to become associated. Again, in psychology it has been argued that stimuli that contrast or are particularly vivid will tend to get associated. A more well-known principle suggesting how the national image can rub off onto the products of the country is the halo effect, which is the tendency to allow one outstanding feature (e.g., the name of the country of origin) to influence the liking of a product. But the most well-grounded explanation for the forming or fusing of associations is that offered by neuroscientists Damasio (1994) and LeDoux (1997). Their work points to mechanisms in the brain that automatically classify things as “good” or “bad.” As people grow older, the repertoire of items categorized as good or bad grows exponentially, and just about anything contiguously associated with the good or bad tends to be also classified as good or bad. While this claim gives credibility to associationism (if such was needed), how effective an association is depends on how well the following are (or can be) exploited.

Conditioning. Conditioning suggests substance over image in that the country’s products come to be associated with positive or negative reinforcement. Products that perform beyond expectation act as positive reinforcers and vice versa.

Link to the social norms of the target audience or its values or valued images. Persuasion here eschews facts and arguments and resorts instead to the presentation of symbols that stand on their own as effective persuaders, just as the country’s flag might do in battle. This way of using symbols to persuade is what Mayhew (1997) calls the rhetoric of presentation, in which the display of symbols outweighs discursive argument. It is not uncommon for advertising to link a brand to the social norms assumed to characterize the nation (e.g., Swiss bank advertising cashing in on the reputation of Switzerland for rectitude), values assumed to operate (patriotism in America being exploited by the “Buy American” campaigns or linking brands to the assumed lifestyle of the country, just as the lifestyle of Californians is pushed in selling yachts and leisure products), and images of tradition and old-world elegance (exploited in tourist advertising for Britain). Nations try to project a certain image or set of values to help exports or tourism. Scotland has an agency called “Scotland the Brand,” which allows its “Made in Scotland” label to be used by Scottish products that pass its screening for quality. The agency seeks to associate Scotland with the values of integrity, inventiveness, tenacity, and independence of spirit, which it assumes relevant audiences believe about Scotland. But such linking requires being based on research, not just being assumed. Unfortunately, too many advertisers just take for granted that they already know what values and so on of the nation resonate and have credibility with their target audiences. In the brochure mentioned earlier by the Wolff Olins

organization, it recommends that *diversity and unity* be the central idea for the new national German brand. This connects to the idea that Germany is now in a position to relax and be more human, with an expanded image that incorporates more than industrial achievement but shows Germany as an exciting and surprising country where different peoples can live and work together. The question arises as to whether such claims have credibility abroad.

Link to a feeling of solidarity with others. Appealing to a feeling of solidarity with others is bound to incorporate some value appeal, but the solidarity appeal is more usefully understood as an offer of affiliation. Mayhew (1997) claims that all persuasion presupposes that the persuader and the target audience share a common interest—not all interests in common but the interest relevant to the appeal. For Mayhew, an attempt to persuade is an offer of affiliation and its acceptance an act of affiliation. While shared interests may not currently form the basis for any solidaristic identification, they may become so through rhetorical appeals. Nations use solidarity appeals constantly when appealing to their own nationals for citizens to have a certain image of themselves or sense of national identity as this helps govern the country. This latter point reminds us that national image is not just for external consumption but is used to infuse a nation with a sense of pride that helps unite it. In other words, the promotion of a national image can exploit the need to feel a sense of national solidarity. In some cases, this can lead to extreme nationalism and chauvinism. It is interesting to see how appeals to nationalism (rather than the less antforeigner stance of patriotism) can be effective. At the time of this writing, there is the success of Hyundai’s “Buy Korea Fund,” which in just a short time has become the nation’s largest unit trust fund, with the investors being mainly ordinary citizens. The slogan, based on a nationalist appeal, resonated with the public despite government-expressed suspicions about the fund (Burton 1999). Historians have shown that Americans of the Revolutionary era came to have a sense of solidarity from a shared sense of being an especially sentimental and benevolent people, as possessing more compassion and friendliness than other people. Gordon Wood (1999), the historian, argues that this image helped sustain a republican government. But, in general, this is a difficult appeal to orchestrate by any nation, while an offer of solidarity, if rejected, is quite a blow to the national ego.

Link to position and prestige. A persuasive appeal can be linked to prestige, which Mayhew (1997) views as drawing on the “influence of hierarchy.” In general, those higher in the social hierarchy, celebrity hierarchy, or knowledge hierarchy have an advantage in persuasion. While there may be some questioning of an argument, compliance is often driven by a desire to identify with the prestige position. This is why all organizations concerned with persuasion look for prestige

spokespersons who will endorse their position since to endorse a position is to accord it something of the prestige of the spokesperson. Brand advertising may seek to exploit the prestige of a nation in respect to its product category. We have already discussed this when talking about a nation's reputational capital. But what is less talked about is how products can seek to avoid being associated with a country that does not have the prestige. In fact, a country may adopt a brand name simply because it sounds as if the product was produced in a country considered more likely to produce it well. Thus, the Germanic-sounding name *Haier* on household appliances is the name used by a Chinese state-owned company selling to the West. It is also not uncommon to subtly mislead the consumer about the origin of, say, a fashion product made in the Far East by using a label that has instructions in French and English.

Examples

While all the above ways of making an association compelling are used, the focus by governments is usually on an association with core values. Governments think in terms of what the country stands for, on the grounds that this alone can act as a unifying theme. There is obviously some logic here. But some such themes can represent wishful thinking or at least a normative goal rather than something realizable. Thus, the "Cool Britannia," launched in the 1990s, whereby it was hoped that British exports could piggyback on the ephemeral fashion image of Britain, seemed to be premised on the belief that such an image would give rise to a strong likability heuristic among foreigners for British products.

Companies feel they have more leeway than governments to select some attractive attribute of the nation with which to associate their products. A recent episodic (serial) "soap opera" advertising campaign in the United Kingdom illustrates this. The campaign went from 1991 to 1998 and brilliantly exploited distinct images of the relaxed French lifestyle and countryside to promote the Renault Clio car (Lay 1999). The ads held a strong nostalgia for British audiences. In the United Kingdom, Clio's yearly sales went from 21,000 to 58,000 cars. The Clio ads illustrate how researching the attributes associated with the foreign nation by the target audience in the country to which the product is to be exported and taking the most appropriate attractive images of the nation to attach to the product can be effective in overcoming negative views of other attributes—and the British do have many negative views of the French and France. Chris Powell (1999), chairman of the BMP DDB advertising agency, quotes a study by his company that found that Britain was still seen as staid, old-fashioned, undynamic, and uncommercial and better at the arts than any commercial activity. He claims that the perceived attribute of "honesty" provides a "wonderful rock of trust" on which the country can build a modern commercial reputation. We are given to believe that honesty is one of the values upheld by the British that will resonate abroad. Powell,

in the same article, recognizes that many people make exaggerated claims for the powers of marketers and government.

IN WHAT CHOICE PROCESSES IS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LIKELY TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE?

One approach to thinking about the significance of country of origin is to consider which of the choice processes is likely to most take account of country of origin. One classification that is consistent with the findings from consumer protocol statements whereby people just talk "off the back of their heads" before buying, during buying, and after buying is the following: (1) picking, (2) affect-driven choice, (3) habit, (4) choices based on singular evaluation, and (5) decisions involving trade-offs (O'Shaughnessy 1987). The idea of collecting such protocols is based on the belief that if marketers want to understand how consumers reason when buying, they need to examine how consumers reason about the actual choices before them.

Picking. Picking behavior is analogous to what occurs in picking a cigarette from a packet. Whatever reasons enter into choice, they are so instantaneous that they remain unknown. If any rule of choice does apply in respect to picking, it is the availability heuristic in that the brand bought may be that which comes most readily to mind, which may, on occasions, be the brand whose country of origin resonates most with the buyer. But this is just one possibility.

Affect-driven choice. Here liking dominates buying. This liking can be intrinsic liking in that consumers choose simply on the basis of taste, aesthetics, feel, smell, or sound. Alternatively, choice is based on the likability heuristic in which buyers check their feeling first and, on this basis, make a choice. It is often a puzzle how buyers do make choices when so badly informed. The likability heuristic is one answer. In acting on the likability heuristic, buyers can be influenced by country of origin. But this is not likely to be common because the overall national image is apt to be so diffuse. However, this is not to rule out the dominance in buying of some specific (liked) attribute of the nation.

Habit. When the buyer continues to buy the same brand, the purchase is, by definition, a habitual buy. It can only be said that country of origin might have been a factor in the initial purchase.

Singular evaluation. The consumer may choose a product or brand without evaluating alternatives, simply saying to himself or herself, "If it appeals or if it fits what I want or been looking for, I will buy it." Alternatively, even if the buyer does evaluate alternatives, it may be done serially and not simultaneously (Klein 1998). Although country of origin may be a factor in singular evaluation, it is not a process that necessarily gives any particular weight to country of origin.

Decision making. Decision making occurs when no single option is superior to the others in every respect, and there is a need for deliberation on the relative merits of the options to decide trade-offs. We suggest that country of origin has the most impact here. It is not uncommon for a buyer to trade off a lower price for country of origin, as when the Japanese camera is chosen instead of the Chinese brand, although both appear equivalent in other respects. Country of origin is most likely to become more of a factor in high-involvement product decisions in which the product is key for the function for which it is to be bought and there is risk attached to buying. (Sometimes marketers speak of high-involvement products, but this assumes that high involvement is an objective property of the product instead of a function of perceptions.) In high-involvement product decisions, the reputational capital of the nation of origin is more likely to be considered rather than the gut appeal of the nation itself. In other words, more belief-driven decisions occur with high-involvement products than affect-driven buying decisions. In other words, propositional representation is more likely to be important than imagery representation. Much business buying from abroad involves high-involvement decisions; hence, not surprisingly (as we have seen), such buying is particularly sensitive to country of origin.

One final comment here. While it is all too true that the less developed nations of the world are apt to denigrate their own country's products in favor of those from the more technologically advanced countries, there is still a tendency, with notable exceptions, for Europeans to like European brands, the Japanese to prefer their own brands, and Americans to choose their own brands.

HOW FAR CAN GOVERNMENT MANIPULATE THE NATION'S IMAGE?

The Failure of Cool Britannia

Various attempts have been made to promote national image. At the moment, the "Very Well Made in Taiwan" campaign seeks to create a more sophisticated international image for the country and reposition it in public perception away from being a commodities manufacturer. Organizations such as the British Council survive partly because of the belief that a nation's image must be nurtured, and there have been many attempts to "corporatize" the nation—as with Lord Robens's "Great Britain Ltd." The current British government embarked on a program popularly called "the rebranding of Britain" or "Cool Britannia." This program, coordinated by the Foreign Office, sought to reposition Britain as a bold modern state. This became an object of satire and an example of the kind of problem national rebranding exercises can encounter. The British government has now embarked on a new international multimillion-dollar national

image campaign to be run by a coalition of private companies. A MORI poll in thirteen countries found that attempts to change Britain's image have not so far succeeded, with British Council sources saying there is general ignorance and vagueness about Britain and what it is like. As *The Economist* says, "But the most poignant fact to emerge from this survey of 13 countries is that two years of New Labour's attempts to project a more modern, dynamic, creative image of Britain have not yet made much impact" ("Rebranding Britain" 1999). History does not augur well for such campaigns. Thus, the "Buy Australian Made" campaign (Fischer and Byron 1997) or the "Made in USA" campaign (Ettenson, Wagner, and Gaeth 1998) were ineffective.

Limitations to Manipulation

Jarvis (1989), a political scientist more interested in international politics than business, points out that conflicting images of a nation and its intentions give rise to disagreements in other nations about how to treat that nation. He claims that an important instrument of stagecraft is being able to affect other countries' images of one's own country and therefore their beliefs. Every country tries to project a desired image, and this means trying to estimate how significant countries will see them and interpret what they are doing. While the Wolff Olins brochure on Germany stresses the need to be truthful, Jarvis acknowledges that many states want to project a misleading image and put across information that would be provided by a state that actually does fit that image. But target audiences are more likely to be impressed by information that the government cannot manipulate for purposes of deception. Thus, information that Germany does not give citizenship to those of "non-German blood," even if born in Germany, and that even those of German blood returning from German communities settled in Russia are treated as foreigners is incongruent with the diversity and unity theme. Similarly, the images of German violence against foreigners are also hardly consistent with the proposed image. What we are saying here is that the observer-dependent image of a nation cannot be divorced from some core of observer-independent facts.

The discussion by Jarvis (1989) and the Wolff Olins case of Germany raise the issue of trying to be all things to all people. When a government proclaims what the nation stands for, there are many audiences. The values that appeal in general may not be the values for foreign buyers or just for some and not for others. Does this mean that governments should have their own agenda and pursue it regardless or try to promote what the nation stands for in a way that, if it does no good for exports, at least does no harm? The answer is probably yes. Individual exporters may choose to follow the Clio lead and select the most favorable attributes of the nation to attach to their export products. For business-to-business marketing, reputational capital is crucial. With buying criteria firmly

rooted in technical and economic criteria, there is a need to demonstrate proficiency rather than just declare it or attach fantasy imagery to it (Lehmann and O'Shaughnessy 1982).

CONCLUSION

A nation cannot be treated simply as a brand writ large. The overall image of a nation is far too nebulous for that. If a marketer is to exploit the image of a nation, it should ideally be the nation's high reputational capital in respect to the product category. When deliberated evaluations of alternative makes or brands occur, the focus needs to be on this exploitation of a nation's reputational capital. Alternatively, the marketer can seek to attach to the marketer's brand some fragments of the nation's image that will resonate positively with target audiences. In this, a marketer has a number of approaches to establishing a strong association to establish affect-driven choices, while a knowledge of the actual choice processes used can be a guide to the likely influence of imagery versus reputational capital.

NOTE

1. Obtained from Wolff Olins, 10 Regents Wharf, All Saints Street, London N1 9RL.

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