Nation Branding and Country Image. The case study of the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council region

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Keywords: Nation, brand, country, image, GCC, hexagon, Anholt, media, content

THESIS SUMMARY

The present work presents the study of nation branding processes in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, for its six member-states, namely: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and their country image as presented in the Romanian press. Thus, the general research objectives are to identify in each of the GCC country the main elements for building nation brands and to compare these processes in the GCC countries. Moreover, another general objective is to analyze the country image as presented by the Romanian press for each GCC country based on the nation brand components and to compare the country images of the six GCC states as they are presented in the Romanian press. Ultimately, the aim is to identify the correlation between the nation brands of GCC countries and the country image of GCC countries, illustrated in the Romanian press. For this purpose, a mixed-methods design methodology was put in place, including both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research combines the descriptive analysis of the nation brand processes of each GCC country, while in the second part a content analysis- of the Romanian media- to assess in which way the GCC countries are presented in the Romanian press. The study of the press releases uses a frequency distribution analysis of news separated on Anholt's components of the nation brand redefined in a corresponding manner: governance, exports, tourism, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people. The research results indicated that mostly the media features governance, tourism and less culture and heritage, or even investments, immigration news. Saudi Arabia- as the largest state of the regional group is presented the most in the Romania media, followed by the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. It turns that a series of differences, as well as some similarities were revealed across the analysis at regional level, but also on a case-by-case analysis.

The current doctoral thesis pertains to the field of international economic relations and deals with a topic of great actuality and interest, especially as it aimed to characterize the country images of the state members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the activities undertaken by these states in order to render nation brands. This geographical region represents a poorly studied area in the international literature, and at the same time the topic researched represents a new topic for the region in question, illustrating the scientific relevance of the thesis in the field of economic international studies. The theme addressed by the research is important from two perspectives:

on the one hand, from the perspective of the efforts made by the respective countries in creating their country brand, and on the other hand, from the perspective of the reflection of the country images of these countries in the Romanian media through the study of frequency distribution of some elements of the model for nation brand belonging to Simon Anholt. The topicality and originality of the work lies primarily in the chosen topic, which in itself is of interest in the current period at the international level, considering the increase in global competition between countries and between companies. Secondly, the topicality of the theme is revealed as well from the perspective of the geographical region studied, a sub-region that is part of a wider geo-political region at the crossroads of the Middle East and the Far East that is extremely volatile, exposed to conflicts (including in the present period) with consequences on the GCC states' country images. That is why the study of the country brand for the countries of this region through the prism of their efforts in the sense, but also from the perspective of the reflection of images in this country in the foreign press is of real interest for scholars, but also practitioners, demonstrating the need for this research and leading to contributions of work in this direction.

The thesis approached the topic of the nation brand and country image for each member state of the Gulf Cooperation Council, together with the media analysis of the country image for each of them. These aspects are studied at a detailed level by combining the documentary research with the content research and by carrying out the research in two phases: in a first phase of the research (Chapter 4), the characterization of the aspects that contribute to the creation of a nation brand was considered (by using Simon Anholt's model), whereas in the second phase (Chapter 5) a media analysis was carried out, respectively an analysis of the Romanian press, through which it meant the identification of the country images of the GCC state, as it is reflected in the Romanian press, for each of the six countries studied.

The thesis is structured in five chapters that respect the scientific requirements and include all the elements required by a doctoral thesis, namely: table of contents, introduction, literature review, research methodology, own analyzes and interpretations of the results of the research and final conclusions. The research work conceptually delimited the concepts of nation brand and country image based on specialized literature. These are instrumented on the basis a conceptual model well recognized in specialized literature (Simon Anholt's model), through documentary research

in Chapter 4 and qualitative-descriptive research run, including content analysis of media excerpts in Chapter 5.

Within the content of the first chapter, there is a detailed recognition of the topic called nation brand, going through a literature review of the concept that has captivated international marketing scholars for the last few decades. It examined the multidisciplinary nature of nation brand studies, related concepts presented in the marketing literature and its definitions as presented in established academic studies. The second chapter provided the historical background and contemporary context for the countries under study. It presented a summary of the political and economic aspects of the GCC member states, noting geographic coordinates, some important historical data, and current leadership and trends. The third chapter dealt with the methodological aspects, the research methods approached to complete the research, being implemented a mixture of descriptive and qualitative analysis. This chapter introduced the conceptual model, continuing with the research objectives and the methodological framework and included the presentation of the methods used in the two types of analyzes carried out in the present research. The fourth chapter represents a first phase of the research analysis, comprising the case study, which is an interpretation of Anholt's six layers of building a nation brand, examined for each GCC state. This section provided with an overview of nation branding activities, following Anholt's model, in each GCC country. The fifth chapter provided a media analysis of the representation of the GCC states in the Romanian mass media. It provided with an illustration of the elements of each nation brand that are most persistent in the media for each GCC state. Some of these elements are salient, such as the representation of sporting events, politics and regional conflicts, tourist attractions.

Chapters 4 and 5 comprise the research findings, with each chapter focusing on a separate phase of the research. Thus, chapter 4 analyzes the results of the descriptive research carried out through documentation based on secondary data, while chapter 5 presents the results of the press analysis. The documentary research is descriptive in nature and uses numerous bibliographic sources and local and international reports with the aim of identifying GCC countries' efforts to develop a nation brand and characterizing the nation brand of each country in the region from the perspective of the existing situation at the national level in relation to each of the components of a nation brand. The second phase of the research uses the same conceptual model, yet for a

different type of analysis, namely a media analysis that aims to identify the country image of each GCC state included in the analysis of the Romanian press. The Mediafax website and the news published by this media portal over a period of more than 10 years were used as the main source for data collection. News was grouped by tone into positive, neutral, or negative news across each nation brand dimension for each state. Chapter 5 referring to the media analysis also includes a discussion of the research methods used which it describes in detail, and in Chapter 3 there is a reference to the data collection process and the research methods used. One of the methods often used and very relevant in the context of this research is the comparative analysis that is carried out in each research, as the final section both in chapter 4 and in chapter 5. The presentation of the results is carried out through tables, figures, contingency matrices, representing ways to summarize the research results very well, facilitating the understanding of the concept on which the work is based.

The landscape of the field of nation branding still remains vague and uneven, challenging and at times controversial. The thesis led the case in a multidimensional field as it analyzed the data and actions taken by each GCC State, with both political and economic implications. Within the final part of the thesis, some directions for future critical research on nation branding and its associated phenomena and implications are outlined, along with concluding remarks about the case-study itself. Methodological limitations and data gaps were highlighted, along with proposals to fill the gaps.