

# Two decades of research on nation branding: a review and future research agenda

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Despite the growing interest by scholars, practitioners and public policymakers, there are still divergent and fragmented conceptualizations of nation branding as the field is still developing. In response, the purpose of this paper is to review and synthesize nation branding research and to provide directions for future research.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors review peer-reviewed theoretical and empirical journal articles published during the last two decades – from 1998 to 2018. Selected journal articles on nation branding were subsequently synthesized for further insights.

**Findings** – The field of nation branding is fragmented and has developed in the course of the last two decades in different directions. This paper identifies key publication outlets and articles, major theoretical and methodological approaches and primary variables of interest that exist in the nation branding literature. The findings also highlight several research themes for future research.

**Originality/value** – This research fills a need to summarize the current state of the nation branding literature and identifies research issues that need to be addressed in the future.

**Keywords** Country image, Nation branding, Literature review, Nation brand personality

**Paper type** General review

## 1. Introduction

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. According to Fan (2006), nation branding concerns applying branding and marketing communications techniques to promote a nation's image. Despite the growing interest by scholars, practitioners and public policymakers, research on nation branding is still in the infancy stage, and the topic itself remains as a complicated and somewhat confused construct (Fan, 2006) and there is no single definition about nation branding. On the application side, different nations are now actively competing internationally to help market their countries' products and services as well as to capture tourists, foreign investment and international students, among other targets (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2013). On the research side, several research themes have received attention among both academics and practitioners in a variety of ways. The key themes of nation branding that are prevalent in the literature include nation-related country image (Elliot and Papadopoulos, 2016;



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Hakala *et al.*, 2013; Herrero-Crespo *et al.*, 2016; Heslop *et al.*, 2010; Kerrigan *et al.*, 2012; Sun *et al.*, 2016; Sun and Paswan, 2011), nation brand personality (D'Astous and Boujbel, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013, 2015), country reputation (Kang and Yang, 2010; Rojas-Mendez, 2013; Yousaf and Li, 2015) and nation brand strength (Anholt, 2005; Fetscherin, 2010). Despite the recent surge in interests among both academics and practitioners and growing publications, there are still divergent and fragmented conceptualizations of nation branding as the field is still developing. Thus, the purpose of this research is to map the field of nation branding by conducting a systematic review of publications, widely used methods, theories and research themes.

This review contributes to the existing literature in at least two ways. First, our review systematically examines both conceptual and empirical studies in the domain of nation branding that have been published between the years of 1998 and 2018 in referred business journals. Second, we attempt to fill the gap in the literature by identifying issues that may slow the advancement of research in nation branding and directing research efforts to areas where they will have the most impact, and thus aid more rapid advancement of nation branding research.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, a description of the research domain and the methodology used for approaching our systematic literature review is provided. After that, results of the review and analysis are presented in terms of articles published by journal, research themes of the articles reviewed, authorship and citations, methodologies used, geographic focus and sample type and size. Finally, areas for future research are outlined.

## 2. Research domain

In this paper, we reviewed empirical as well as theoretical studies published between the years of 1998 and 2018, to synthesize nation branding research literature. As “product-country image (country of origin)” and “place branding/destination branding” are reasonably well understood overall in research, this review does not include the aforementioned topics and only focuses on selected papers that are closely related to nation branding. The research questions we present are as follows:

- RQ1. How can we systemize and identify advances in nation branding research by going through key papers, theories, methodologies and variables of interest in existent literature?
- RQ2. What are the directions for future research and its implications?

## 3. Review design and criteria

A systematic literature review was appropriate based on the purpose of the research, which is to identify research gaps in current research and to offer suggestions for future research (Eteokleous *et al.*, 2016; Paul and Benito, 2018). Following the systematic search methods in the review articles, we searched for relevant literature in online databases such as EBSCO, Google Scholar, Scopus and in the reference list of articles we read. Keywords were selected based on the scope of the research and included the main keywords such as nation branding, nation brand, country brand, country image, country reputation, country identity, country-product image and country brand image. The database and reference search yielded 40 published articles on the topic of nation branding between 1998 and 2018. Following Lu *et al.* (2016), this review considered only published journal articles that were included in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List, which is widely used as a benchmark database of journals of international standard. Books and conference proceedings were excluded. After assessing the articles against these criteria, the final

data set comprised 32 relevant research articles. To provide a systematic review of research on nation branding, the review protocol focusing on bibliometric aspects – citations and publication outlet; research design – research type; methodology – data collection, sample size, statistical analysis, countries studied; and variables – dependent variables and independent variables was established. The protocol is in line with systematic review studies in the international business field (see [Canabal and White III, 2008](#); [Christofi et al., 2017](#); [Lu et al., 2016](#); [Paul and Benito, 2018](#); [Paul and Rosado-Serrano, 2019](#); [Rosado-Serrano et al., 2018](#); [Whitelock and Fastoso, 2007](#)). Due to sample size restrictions, vote counting was utilized to synthesize the findings and a narrative approach was adopted to investigate this research domain.

#### 4. A systematic review

The review first addresses the definitions of nation branding and different themes of literature, then shifts to the bibliometric aspects of the studies (i.e. publication outlets, citations). A description of the research setting and methods (i.e. countries studied, statistical methods, data collection, sampling methods and sample size, and variables studied) follows thereafter.

##### 4.1 Definitions of nation branding

Researchers differ on how to define nation branding and on which components constitute nation branding ([Fan, 2006](#); [Papadopoulos et al., 2016](#)). There is no consensus on defining the scope of what is a nation brand. The complexity of the concept and its confusion with other concepts, such as destination brand, place brand and country brand, have led to a lack of shared definition for what is meant by nation branding. The terms “nation” and “country” are often used interchangeably in the literature, although they are different ([Fan, 2006](#)). Despite the rising interest in nation branding, there are surprisingly few definitions of the nation branding construct. [Table I](#) lists some nation brand definitions in the literature. Such definitions provide a useful orientation for researchers in the nation branding field, although further conceptualization of the nation branding construct can be anticipated as the domain matures ([Dinnie et al., 2010](#)).

##### 4.2 Different themes of literature

We create a listing of the research themes in national branding (1998–2018). The themes identified are not intended to be definitive and mutually exclusive; rather they indicate the frequency of the keyword counts. Keywords are used to infer the underlying themes of an

Author (s)	Definition and dimensions
<a href="#">Fetscherin (2010)</a>	A country brand belongs to the public domain; it is complex and includes multiple levels, components, and disciplines. It entails the collective involvement of the many stakeholders it must appeal to. It concerns a country’s whole image, covering political, economic, social, environmental, historical and cultural aspects
<a href="#">Fan (2006)</a>	Nation branding concerns applying branding and marketing communications techniques to promote a nation’s image Nation branding counts several sources as its “parents”, including country of origin, destination branding in tourism, as well as public diplomacy and national identity
<a href="#">Anholt (2005)</a>	The nation brand is the sum of people’s perceptions of a country across the six areas of national competence: the cultural, political, commercial and human assets, investment potential, and tourist appeal
<a href="#">Kotler and Gertner (2002)</a>	The sum of beliefs and impressions that people have of that place. The image represents a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place. They are the product of mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts data of a place

**Table I.**  
Definitions of nation branding in the literature

article (Lu *et al.*, 2016) and within each of these themes, the review briefs the key research focus of the selected papers (Christofi *et al.*, 2017). Table II summarizes the research themes that emerge from the empirical studies reviewed in the literature. Nation branding research is not a single focus domain. We identify four main research themes: nation branding and country image and reputation, nation brand personality, nation brand strength and measurement, and nation branding and integrated marketing communications (IMCs).

The first theme in the literature deals with nation branding and country image and reputation. A country needs to manage its image and reputation strategically in order to achieve an appealing brand (Anholt, 2002). People often make judgments about multiple facets of a country through images of a country. Kang and Yang (2010) describes country reputation as perceptions of a country on the basis of personal experience and information receive. Articles by Hakala *et al.* (2013), Heslop *et al.* (2010), Kang and Yang (2010) and Wang *et al.* (2012) are examples of research focusing on country image and reputation. There are several main reasons why nations should manage their images: first, to promote the country in general and help create a positive image; second, to appeal to tourists; third, to add value to the products produced in the country; fourth, to attract foreign investment; and fifth, to attract talented residents (Hakala *et al.*, 2013; Stock, 2009). Consumers' thoughts about countries are on two levels: associations and beliefs about the country at macro level and associations and beliefs about its products at micro level (Pappu and Quester, 2010). Conceptually, the beliefs about a country and its people represent the cognitive component in country image research. The belief dimensions have been found to involve people character, country character, people competencies, and country competencies (Heslop *et al.*, 2010). Hakala *et al.* (2013) discuss the relationship between nation branding and country image and identify the sources of country image perceptions. Their results show that the country images are based on stereotypical views and these stereotypes should therefore be altered or reinforced, depending on their nature. O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy define stereotype as a biased view of a group or class of people. In a nation branding context, stereotype refers to placing nations and their people in categories and a nation's stereotype can be positive, negative, or just neutral. More recent studies have encouraged a multidimensional approach to measure country image and further decomposed country image into cognitive country image and affective country image (Elliot and Papadopoulos, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2012). Wang *et al.* (2012) define cognitive country image as consumers' beliefs of a country in terms of its levels of economic development, living standards, industrialization, technological advancement and so forth. Affective country image refers to the positive and negative feelings toward a country (Wang *et al.*, 2012). This theme has gained more attention in the nation branding domain. Despite the growing number of studies under this theme, more research is called to examine the multidimensional nature of country image and its impact on nation branding.

Themes	Number of studies	References
Nation branding and country image and reputation	12	Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016), Herrero-Crespo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Sun <i>et al.</i> (2016), Yousaf and Li (2015), Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013), Rojas-Mendez (2013), Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012), Sun and Paswan (2011), Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010), Kang and Yang (2010), Loo and Davies (2006), Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003)
Nation branding and nation brand personality	4	Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015), Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013), Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013), D'Astous and Boujbel (2007)
The nation brand strength	2	Fetscherin (2010), Anholt (2005)
Nation branding and integrated marketing communications	2	Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012), Dinnie <i>et al.</i> (2010)

**Table II.**  
Different research  
themes of literature  
(Based on empirical  
studies)

The second theme has to do with nation brand personality. Consumers attach personality traits to a brand, acquire brands for self-representation, and regard brands as a part of themselves (Kim *et al.*, 2013). In his seminal article, Aaker (1997) developed a five-dimension brand personality scale. Many studies have since used this approach to examine product brand personality in general; however, few studies have applied product brand personality concepts to nation branding. Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2013) refer nation brand personality as the human personality traits that internal and external audiences associate with a country name, based on perceptions of and experiences with that country's government, companies and institutions, product and other outputs, and people. Identifying nation brand personality and how it plays a role in attracting tourists, investment and in promoting the export of goods and services is a necessary step in designing the country's nation brand strategy (Kim *et al.*, 2013). D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) attempt to develop a specific country personality scale. In their study, traits generated from interviews with people who were told to describe countries were used and they identify agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and unobtrusiveness as the six dimensions of the country brand personality scale. There are two main limitations with the study by D'Astous and Boujbel (2007): they do not consider any second-order dimensions within their six dimensions and the exploratory stage of their work was done with only a small number of French-speaking Canadian residents, which raises questions regarding the external validity and generalizability of their proposed scale. Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2013) develop the trait set through a free elicitation process using several different countries as stimuli and using respondents from twenty different countries to generate the traits. In contrast with the scale developed by D'Astous and Boujbel (2007), Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2013) focus their study on the individual traits which could be used to develop positioning maps rather than on the dimensions comprising the complete trait scale. Their study identifies 209 personality traits including 113 as positive, 75 as negative and the remaining 21 as neutral. Further research is needed to test the appropriateness of the country personality scale and traits across different countries.

The third theme revolves around the measures of a country brand. Examples are papers by Fetscherin (2010) and Anholt (2005). A strong country brand can create positive country image and country perceptions, and stimulate exports, attract tourism, investments and immigration. There are two approaches to assess a country brand: the consumer-based brand equity approach and the company-based brand equity approach (Fetscherin, 2010). Aaker (1991) defines customer-based brand equity as the value that consumers associate with the brand measuring the dimensions of brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other propriety assets. In other words, the consumer-based brand equity approach is a bottom-up approach in assessing brand value and emphasizes the value that consumers place on it (Keller, 1993). Following this type of approach, Anholt (2005) uses the Anholt Nation Brands Index (NBI) to measure the power and appeal of America's brand image by surveying 10,000 consumers in ten countries on their perceptions of America's cultural, political, commercial and human assets, investment potential and tourist appeal. The second approach is company-based brand equity. Proponents of this approach have studied the financial aspects of the brand equity measurement and define brand equity as the total value of a brand which is a separable asset (Atilgan *et al.*, 2005; Fetscherin, 2010). According to Fetscherin (2010), the company-based brand equity approach is a top-down approach of measurement estimating how well the country performs in terms of exports, attracting tourism and attracting FDIs as well as immigration. Fetscherin (2010) constructs and presents a country brand strength index which assesses the strength of a country brand based on objective secondary data and represents an alternative measurement to the existing subjective survey-based measurement index (NBI). Future research should explore for a more complete and complex measurements that incorporate both objective second data and subjective primary data.

The fourth theme focuses on nation branding and IMCs (Dinnie *et al.*, 2010; Kerrigan *et al.*, 2012). Paper by Dinnie *et al.* (2010) is an example. In a qualitative exploratory study, Dinnie *et al.* (2010) examine the extent to which the key organizations engaged in nation branding activities and investigate the nature and frequency of coordination and collaboration between the different organizations that participate in the formulation and implementation of nation branding strategy. Their study identifies seven dimensions of interorganizational coordination in a nation branding context including sector, organization domicile, mode, strategy formulation, nature, frequency and target audience. The “sector” dimension emphasizes the need for interorganizational coordination at the public sector organizations as well as at the private sector organizations, which play an important role in helping the country achieve nation branding goals. The “organization domicile” dimension states that the country’s export promotion organizations (EPOs), investment agencies (IAs), national tourism organizations (NTOs) and embassies should engage with organizations of their own country as well as those from the host country. The third dimension “mode” describes the distinction between formal and informal types of coordination practices. The “strategy formulation” dimension refers to the degree of coordination that should occur between the home and host country. Policymakers should maintain balance between a centralized approach on the one hand and a decentralized approach on the other. The fifth dimension “interorganisational coordination” refers to two types of coordination: symbolic and substantive coordination. Symbolic coordination is motivated by delegation visits and may last only as long as the delegation’s visit while substantive coordination refers to interorganizational coordination which are usually held at the country’s embassy and which may develop more enduring collaborative relationships. The “frequency” dimension implies that the frequency of joint meetings should not be determined on the calendar interval but on the basis of issue or purpose. The seventh key dimension “target audience” represents two segments of audience: business and consumer audiences. The different organizations (EPOs, IAs, NTOs and embassies) need to communicate effectively with both business and consumer audiences. Communicating the country brand is a challenging task. Public and private organizations as well as national policymakers need to understand how to build, manage and protect a country brand as well as how to coordinate country branding efforts. Dinnie *et al.* (2010) only examines the process of a coordinated approach, therefore, future research should also examine the outcomes of such an approach.

The theoretical and review studies on nation branding published during the last two decades have been summarized in Table III.

#### 4.3 Journals

Table IV shows the distributions of articles by journal. The 32 articles on nation branding were published in a wide range of journals and reflect two decades of research in the area of nation branding. Among the 11 journals that published the 32 articles, *Journal of Brand Management* published the most (31 percent,  $n=10$ ), followed by *International Marketing Review* (12.5 percent,  $n=4$ ), *Journal of Product & Brand Management* (12.5 percent,  $n=4$ ) and *Corporate Reputation Review* (12.5 percent,  $n=4$ ). *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Macromarketing* and *Marketing intelligence & Planning* each published two articles (6 percent). The remaining four journals published single research article on the topic. The wide range of journal coverage shows the diverse interests of researchers and publishers. The ABDC classification (ABDC, 2019), which has a broad and international coverage, has been used to assess research outlet quality. According ABDC 2019, eight journals are ranked as A or A\* level and the rest three journals are ranked as either B or C level. In total, 72 percent of articles were published in A\* or A journals, 28 percent in B or C journals. Table IV reveals a strong presence of brand management journals (e.g. *Journal of Brand Management* and

Citation	Major research focus	Major research contributions/findings
Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2016)	To address a neglected area in research, nation branding, for the purpose of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI)	Each of the two areas is characterized by lack of consensus as to the principal factors that affect investor and nation decisions and actions, resulting in several knowledge gaps that need to be addressed by new research along the lines suggested in the study
Osei and Gbadamosi (2011)	Explore how Africa has been branded, and to suggest ways the continent could be re-branded to attract both international and domestic investments	The suggestion for re-branding Africa as a viable continent for global business transactions is strongly emphasized in the article
Fan (2006)	To examine the concept of nation branding, focusing on the central question of what is being branded	It differentiates nation branding from product branding and draws comparisons between nation branding and product-country image
Gilmore (2002)	To examine how thoughtful brand positioning gives a country a competitive advantage over other nations	It advises that the positioning derived should be rich enough to translate into sub-positionings to target diverse groups and that it should be substantiated in terms of what the country can actually offer
Kotler and Gertner (2002)	To examine how widely held country images affect attitudes toward a country's products and services and ability to attract investment, business and tourists	It assesses the role of strategic marketing management in promoting the country's image, attractiveness and products
Olins (2002)	To examine the history of the nation as a brand	It concludes that it is not the concept that they detest so much as the word brand, which appears for some people to have trifling and superficial implications unworthy of the national idea
Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002)	To review the research on product-country images and discuss the multifaceted nature of country equity	It concludes that country-based marketing is often underused or misdirected due to inadequate understanding of the meaning of country branding, and suggests approaches for strategy development as well as pointing to knowledge gaps that call for additional research
O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy	To examine, first, the extent to which the notion of a brand is applicable to a nation; second, the mechanisms by which a nation's image influences attitudes toward its products	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
Anholt (1998)	To propose that a number of emerging markets have the potential to product global brands	It argues that exporting brands is part of a package of development which, together, can significantly accelerate the process of emergence from the third world

**Table III.**  
Summary of  
conceptual and review  
studies

*Journal of Product & Brand Management*) as the primary outlets for nation branding research. Considering the potential of this research domain, more high-quality research articles about nation branding should be published in top tier international marketing journals such as *International Marketing Review* and *Journal of International Marketing*.

#### 4.4 Citation analysis

Citation count was used to assess the influence of scholarly work (Lu *et al.*, 2016). In addition to total number of citations for a particular article, it is important to include the average citations per year because this controls for the age of an article. Based on Google Scholar

Journal title	Number of articles	References	Percentage of total (%)
<i>Journal of Brand Management</i>	10	Sun and Paswan (2011), Caldwell and Freire (2004), Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003), Gilmore (2002), Kotler and Gertner (2002), Olins (2002), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002), Anholt (1998)	31
<i>International Marketing Review</i>	4	Herrero-Crespo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Dinnie <i>et al.</i> (2010), Fetscherin (2010), Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010)	12.5
<i>Corporate Reputation Review</i>	4	Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013), Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013), Kang and Yang (2010), Loo and Davies (2006)	12.5
<i>Journal of Product &amp; Brand Management</i>	4	Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2016), Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015), Yousaf and Li (2015), Rojas-Mendez (2013)	12.5
<i>Marketing Intelligence &amp; Planning</i>	2	Osei and Gbadamosi (2011), Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013)	6
<i>Journal of Macromarketing</i>	2	Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012), O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy	6
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	2	Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016), D'Astous and Boujbel (2007)	6
<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	1	Rodner and Kerrigan (2018)	3
<i>Journal of Advertising Research</i>	1	Anholt (2005)	3
<i>Journal of Global Marketing</i>	1	Sun <i>et al.</i> (2016)	3
<i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i>	1	Fan (2006)	3
Total	32		100

Table IV.  
Journal list

citation, Harzing's Publish or Perish bibliometrics software (Version 6; Harzing, 2017) was used to analyze total citations and citations per year. Table V shows the top 25 articles in terms of total citations. The top 10 accounted for about 85 percent of total citations of all 32 articles. The top 5 most cited articles were (in decreasing order): Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), Fan (2006), Olins (2002), Gilmore (2002) and Caldwell and Freire (2004), with over 500 total citations each. When we averaged the citation score, we found some minor changes with regard to the ordering of this list. For example, the most cited article and a seminal piece in nation branding domain, "Branding the nation: what is being branded" (Fan, 2006), was published in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, where the author examined the concept of nation branding. The second most cited article, "Country Equity and Country Branding" by Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), was published in the *Journal of Brand Management*, where the authors explored the multifaceted nature of nation branding. The rank of third to fifth place was not changed.

#### 4.5 Review of nation branding research methods

**4.5.1 Countries studied.** According to Table VI, of the 20 papers analyzed, 12 were multiple countries in scope, i.e. the sample was drawn from multiple countries (60 percent). Eight papers had a focus on specific country (40 percent). In terms of countries examined in the 20 papers, 8 were multiple countries in scope and 12 papers focused on a single country. Among the 12 single country studies, the USA, China, Canada and South Korea were found to be the most common countries examined. It becomes clear that the nation branding research domain has evolved over time in terms of the areas covered in research. Table VI summarizes the countries used in all the studies.

**4.5.2 Statistical methods used.** The statistical method most commonly used in nation branding research is factor analysis. Factor analysis was used in a total of six studies (19 percent). This type of analysis is logical for studies examining the dimensions of nation branding, which is a multidimensional and multifaceted construct. Other statistical methods



Authors	Type of article	Citation count	Citations per year	Ranking by citations per year
Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002)	Review piece	901	56	2
Fan (2006)	Conceptual paper	681	57	1
Olins (2002)	Opinion piece	675	42	3
Gilmore (2002)	Conceptual paper	592	37	4
Caldwell and Freire (2004)	Empirical	510	36	5
O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy	Invited commentaries	386	21	7
Anholt (1998)	Conceptual paper	276	14	9
Fetscherin (2010)	Empirical	225	28	6
D'Astous and Boujbel (2007)	Empirical	224	20	8
Anholt (2005)	Empirical	187	14	9
Loo and Davies (2006)	Qualitative	127	11	11
Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002)	Empirical	103	6	15
Kang and Yang (2010)	Empirical	92	12	10
Dinnie <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Qualitative	88	11	11
Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Empirical	58	7	14
Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Empirical	56	4	16
Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Empirical	48	10	12
Rojas-Mendez (2013)	Empirical	48	10	12
Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Qualitative	45	8	13
Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016)	Empirical	24	12	10
Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Review piece	20	10	12
Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Empirical	18	4	16
Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Empirical	17	6	15
Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Empirical	16	3	17
Sun and Paswan (2011)	Empirical	12	2	18

**Table V.**  
Most cited papers on nation branding during the last two decades (citation counts as November 20, 2018)

**Note:** Papers with citations less than 10 were not included

used were structural equation modeling (in five studies), ANOVA (3) and MANOVA (1), and non-parametric test (1). A summary of the statistical methodology used in nation branding research is presented in Table VII.

*4.5.3 Main methodologies used in the literature.* Table VIII demonstrates the frequencies with which different methodologies were used in the studies analyzed. The categories selected are based on previous literature reviews in the international marketing area (Lu *et al.*, 2016; Rosado-Serrano *et al.*, 2018) and adapted. The analysis presented in Table VIII reveals that survey has been the most popular methodology used in nation brand research (50 percent). Researchers may consider using alternative data collection methods to explore an understanding of a nation brand. A qualitative research methodology is more likely to reveal factors that have not been investigated that influence nation branding research. Conceptual and review category is the second most frequent type of article (32 percent), indicating that the nation branding field is still relatively new and developing. Case study and interview method each counts for 6 percent.

*4.5.4 Sampling method and sample size.* Regarding sampling methods, 89 percent of the articles used non-probabilistic methods, most frequently taking the form of convenience samples (see Table IX). Another 11 percent employed probabilistic methods. In total, 53 percent of the articles uses student samples. The heavy reliance on convenience sample and student sample may raise the concern of poor generalizability. With regards to sample size ( $n$ ), 37 percent of the articles has  $n < 250$ , 10 percent has  $n$  between 250 and 500, 26 percent has  $n$  between 500 and 1,000, 26 percent has  $n > 1,000$ . There is a large range in sample sizes (i.e. smallest size  $n = 10$ , and largest size  $n = 10,000$ ).

Region	Sample subject's country	Target country examined	Percentage of total by region (%)	Two decades of research on nation branding
Multiple countries	20 countries 31 countries 18 countries Multiple countries >10 Multiple countries 10 countries 7 countries 4 countries US, French, Swiss China and USA South Korea and Canada ASEAN	26 countries 6 countries Norway USA India USA 9 countries Spain Finland China 5 countries ASEAN	60	
North, South and Latin America	USA USA Canada USA Venezuela	South Korea China 11 countries 24 countries Venezuela	25	
Europe Asia-Pacific	Pakistan China Saudi Arabia	Pakistan USA and Canada USA	15	<b>Table VI.</b> Countries of focus
Africa Total number of articles			100	

Analysis	Number of articles	Percentage of total (%)	<b>Table VII.</b> Statistical methodology used in the nation branding literature
SEM/LISREL	5	16	
Factor analysis and regression	6	19	
ANOVA	3	9	
MANOVA	1	3	
Non-parametric test	1	3	
Modeling	2	6	
Interview	2	6	
Case study	1	3	
Conceptual and review papers	11	34	
Total	32	100	

*4.5.5 Variables studied.* We identify dependent variables and independent variables commonly used in the empirical studies (Table X). This allows us to identify which relationships have been tested the most, as well as variables that should be included in future research.

## 5. Discussions and future research directions

In this section our objective is to outline some underdeveloped or emerging research areas and make suggestions for future research in three areas: theory, methodology and context (Christofi *et al.*, 2017; Paul *et al.*, 2017).

**Table VIII.**  
Main  
methodologies used

Main methodology used	No. of articles	References	Percentage of total (%)
Conceptual and review articles	10	Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2016), Osei and Gbadamosi (2011), Fan (2006), Dinnie (2004), Gilmore (2002), Kotler and Gertner (2002), Olins (2002), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), Anholt (1998)	32
Case study	2	Rodner and Kerrigan (2018), Loo and Davies (2006)	6
Survey	16	Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016), Herrero-Crespo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015), Yousaf and Li (2015), Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013), Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013), Rojas-Mendez (2013), Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013), Sun and Paswan (2011), Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010), Kang and Yang (2010), D'Astous and Boujbel (2007), Anholt (2005), Caldwell and Freire (2004), Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003), Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002)	50
Interview/Content analysis	2	Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012), Dinnie <i>et al.</i> (2010)	6
Secondary data	1	Fetscherin (2010)	3
Mixed method	1	Sun <i>et al.</i> (2016)	3
Total	32		100

**Table IX.**  
Sampling method and  
sample size

Author	Sample type	Sample size
Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016)	Convenience sample	656
Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Convenience sample	1,437
Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Convenience sample	16
Dinnie <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Convenience sample	10
Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Convenience sample	1,194
Kang and Yang (2010)	Convenience sample	530
D'Astous and Boujbel (2007)	Convenience sample	174
Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (2002)	Convenience sample	103
Herrero-Crespo <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Student sample	208
Sun <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Student sample	342
Yousaf and Li (2015)	Student sample	415
Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Student sample	175
Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Student sample	1,221
Rojas-Mendez (2013)	Student sample	532
Sun and Paswan (2011)	Student sample	810
Anholt (2005)	Representative	10,000
Caldwell and Freire (2004)	Student sample	186
Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003)	Student sample (random sample)	1,400
Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Snowball sample	561

### 5.1 Theoretical perspectives

*5.1.1 Definitions and conceptual frameworks of nation branding.* Nation branding is a new concept with barely two decades of mostly conceptual research and one of the major challenges to nation branding is the terminological confusion that prevails in this field (Fan, 2006; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2016). There is a lack of conceptual clarification on how to define nation branding and the use of terminology is not always clear. Nation brand, nation branding, country brand, country reputation and country image have been used somewhat interchangeably when they should not be. The precise meaning of these terms remains largely undefined and there is clearly no consensus on what they mean. In addition, there is a lack of a coherent and explicit theoretical base in the research domain. Although a few

Themes	Article	Major research focus	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Findings
Nation branding and country image and reputation	Elliot and Papadopoulos (2016)	To explore the multidimensional nature of place image and its influence on buying behavior by incorporating product, country and tourism variables simultaneously	Affective country image (ACI), product belief (PB), destination belief (DB), product receptivity (PR), destination receptivity (DR)	Cognitive country image (CCI), affective cognitive image (ACI), product belief (PB), destination belief (DI), Product familiarity (PF), destination familiarity	Results reveal how the subcomponents of country image are related; cognitive country image has the greatest influence on product evaluations; affective country image has the greatest influence on destination evaluations; and notably, product beliefs influence tourism receptivity, supporting the hypothesized cross-over effect from product-country image to tourism destination image
	Herrero-Grespo <i>et al.</i> (2016)	To analyze how country image affects the dimensions of country brand equity in the higher education sector as well as interrelationships between these dimensions	Image of country's universities, awareness of country's university, perceived quality of country's university, Loyalty toward country university	Country's image, image of country university, awareness of country university, perceived quality of country university	The results indicate that the country image affects the perceived quality and awareness of the universities in the country. Additionally, a hierarchy of effects between the dimensions of country brand equity was found. In particular, loyalty toward the universities of a country is positively influenced by their perceived quality, which is affected by image and awareness of these universities
	Sun <i>et al.</i> (2016)	The main focus of the paper is to fill the gap by examining the relationship between country, institutions and resources, country image and export based on institution theory and resource advantage theory	The country's exports	Cultural factors, economic factors, Product factor, industry factor, infrastructural factor, geographical factor, political factor	This study examines the relationships between the antecedents of country branding and the outcomes of country branding; that is, country image and exports. Although not all of the key factors are significant in the model, this study offers information on which factors are more important to the countries included in the model

(continued)

**Table X.**  
Summary of main  
variables studied in  
nation branding

Themes	Article	Major research focus	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Findings
	<a href="#">Yousaf and Li (2015)</a>	To show how the relative global status of a country influences its internal country reputation and resulting social cognition of citizens	Internal preferences about Pakistan, membership esteem, private collective self-esteem, importance of identity	Public collective self-esteem, internal preference about Pakistan	The higher the public collective self-esteem possessed by Pakistanis, the better the perceptions they hold of their own country. The better the perceptions Pakistanis hold of their country, the higher the membership esteem they possess toward Pakistan. The better the perceptions Pakistanis hold of their country, the higher the private collective self-esteem they possess toward Pakistan
	<a href="#">Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2013)</a>	Examining the country image of Finland among potential travelers and potential consumers of Finnish products	Level of awareness and selection of a travel destination	Personal experience, previous knowledge and stereotype view, demographic, previous country visit	Non-visitors base their country image perceptions on stereotypes. There are cross-cultural differences in levels of awareness among non-visitors. The number of countries previously visited influences the level of awareness of the country in question among non-visitors. The level of awareness among non-visitors has a multidimensional character. Product brand awareness is related to awareness of the country of origin
	<a href="#">Rojas-Mendez (2013)</a>	To determine by means of extensive exploratory study and metaphorical use of molecule, the set of dimensions and facets that exist in people's mind in regard to country brand and at the same time compare the results with the dimensions used by practitioner led resources to measure the same construct	Nation brand dimensions	Economy, geography and nature, tourism, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government	The nation brand molecule (NBM) which encompasses all the associated concepts that give shape to the overall molecule was developed. Seven dimensions, with their corresponding facets, were identified: economy, tourism, geography and nature, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government

(continued)

Themes	Article	Major research focus	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Findings
	Sun and Paswan (2011)	To empirically investigate the impact of perceived product quality on country of origin image, the relationship between perceived product quality, country of origin image and purchase intention	Country image, purchase intention	Perceived product quality, country image	This study empirically investigates the relationships between perceived product quality, country image and purchase intention
	Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Examining the views of the resident and foreigners of the host country before and after the mega event within the context of marketing theory on country image effects and psychology theory attribution	The Olympics as a destination event, the country and people of China, China as a destination for travelers and tourists	Time: before and after, country: two countries	Significant cross national and time differences and several interaction effects were found across three focal objects of image measurement. Large country differences are found. Despite how technically successful the Games might have looked, post-event assessments are overwhelmingly lower
	Kang and Yang (2010)	To compare effects of country reputation and the overall corporate reputation of a country on international consumer's product attitudes and purchase intentions	Attitude toward South Korean products, purchase intention about South Korean products, country reputation	Country reputation, attitude toward South Korean product, overall corporate reputation	Results of the study showed a strong effect of overall corporate reputation on positive product attributes and increased product purchase intention. The effect of country reputation was initially positive and significant on product attitudes and purchase intentions

(continued)

Themes	Article	Major research focus	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Findings
	<a href="#">Paswan <i>et al.</i> (2003)</a>	To empirically investigate the notion of brand loyalty toward the country, the state and the service provider and also to investigate the relationship between strength of the loyalty toward the three-country, state and service brands	Brand loyalty toward the country, the state and the service provider	The strength of loyalty toward the three: country, state and service brands, national origin, social class and educational level	The results indicate that brand loyalty toward the country is the strongest, followed toward the state and the service provider. As regards, the contingency variable, both social class and education were found to have a significant impact on the brand loyalty toward the service provider. The results of the national origin indicated the loyalty toward the country, the state and the service brands differ from country to country
Nation brand personality	<a href="#">Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2015)</a>	To examine the relationship between individual personality and nation brand personality traits	Intention to purchase products, intention to travel, intention to develop ties, overall attitude	Personality traits: Extraversion, agreeableness, consciousness, neuroticism, openness	Self-congruity theory is validated in case of extraversion, agreeableness and consciousness. IP and NBP was the significant negative predictor of the attitude and intention to behave toward the USA
	<a href="#">Kim <i>et al.</i> (2013)</a>	To identify the dimensions of nation brand personality	Nation brand personality dimensions	Leadership, excitement, sophistication, tradition and peacefulness. Determinant personality traits	The following five core dimensions of NBP were found: leadership, excitement, sophistication, tradition and peacefulness
	<a href="#">Rojas-Méndez <i>et al.</i> (2013)</a>	Explore the extent to which personality traits can be used to identify, differentiate and position a nation	Personalities of the Unites States and Canada	Personality traits	Results indicate that, compared with the USA, Canada enjoys a more approachable and a less arrogant image in China, while, in turn, the USA projects a much more vibrant personality than that of Canada
	<a href="#">D'Astous and Boujbel (2007)</a>	To develop a scale to position countries on human traits	Personality dimensions	General attitude, Product -country attitude, Travel destination	People would easily think of adjective that they use to qualify the personality of the country and they could also use likelihood of using various words of communication. The scale that was developed to synthesize people's country personality inferences is composed of six dimensions that were labeled: agreeableness, wickedness, snobblism, assiduousness, conformity, and unobtrusiveness

(continued)

Themes	Article	Major research focus	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Findings
Nation brand strength and measurement	Fetscherin (2010)  Anholt (2005)	To construct and present a country brand strength index (CBSI) which assesses the strength of the country brand based on objective secondary data To measure the power and appeal of America's brand image by surveying 10,000 consumers in 10 countries on their perception of America's cultural, political, commercial and human assets, investment potential and tourist appeal	Country brand strength index  Nation ranking and nation brand image	Exporting, Tourism, Foreign Direct investments, Immigration, Government environment The cultural, political, commercial and human assets, investment potential, and tourist appeal	This paper presents a standardized instrument for measuring the strengths of a country brand. The proposed composite index yields standardized results to measure the strengths of the country brand and enables us to compare it with other country brands The findings show that while US exports, investment, immigration, tourism and people rank relatively high among the other nations indexed. The global opinion of US governance and culture and heritage are very low
Nation branding and integrated marketing communication	Kerrigan <i>et al.</i> (2012)  Dimmie <i>et al.</i> (2010)	To conduct a critical appraisal of the Incredible India Campaign, a Nation Branding campaign, which has been running in India for approximately 10 years The focus of the paper is to examine the extent to which nation branding activities of export promotion organizations, investment agencies, national tourism organization and embassies follow the principle of coordination that characterizes an integrated marketing communication approach	Qualitative study: The image of India as a country brand and as a tourist destination  Qualitative study: key dimensions of interorganizational coordination in a nation branding context	Globalization and national cultures  Sector, organization domicile, mode, strategy formulation, nature, frequency and target audience	Rather than reflecting the complexities of India's cultural and spatial identity, the Incredible India Campaign has focused on presenting an "imagined" India  Seven key dimensions of interorganizational coordination in a nation branding context emerge from our results. These dimensions include sector, organization domicile, mode, strategy formulation, nature, frequency and target audience

Table X.



theories (e.g. social identify theory, self-congruity theory, resource advantage theory, attribution theory) were used in the literature, the large portion of extant nation branding research has been fragmented and lack of theoretical bases. Future research should continue to introduce new theoretical perspectives and integrate theories, potentially introducing new forms of models.

*5.1.2 Nation branding and country image.* The need for nations to actively manage their image has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Dinnie *et al.*, 2010; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; O'Shaughnessy and Jackson, 2000). A country's image is multifaceted and may carry both factual and affective information (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Country image has been predominantly studied from a consumer perspective. According to Pappu and Quester (2010), consumers' perceptions about countries are on two levels: associations and beliefs about the country at macro level and associations and beliefs about its products at micro level. The literature falls into three categories: product related (country of origin), nation related (the nation as a whole) and culture related (the culture and people of a nation) (Hakala *et al.*, 2013). Product-country image is a subset of the country image (Kleppe *et al.*, 2002). The concept of nation brand refers to the nation as a whole; it describes the country's intangible assets without any explicit links with a product (Fan, 2006). For the purpose of this research, the studies on product-country image (country of origin) and destination image were not included. While the concept of product-country image and destination image has been studied quite extensively in the context of country of origin effect, country image defined in the domain of nation branding is relatively less developed area. The multidimensional nature of the country image construct (nation related) was evident in the literature (Hakala *et al.*, 2013; Jin *et al.*, 2018; Pappu and Quester, 2010); however, there is no consensus on the dimensions of and the operationalization of the country image construct in the nation branding context. In addition, images are mental schemata that reflect both cognitive and affective associations stored in memory (Elliot and Papadopoulos, 2016). Kumar and Paul (2018) found positive perception about the brand America in the minds of consumers help American laptop brands to create mass prestige in Indian market. Previous research emphasizes the role of feelings and emotions in attitude and country image formation (e.g. Li *et al.*, 2014; Paul, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2012), future studies could explore this further and develop an integrated model of cognitive and affective country image dimensions in the context of nation branding.

*5.1.3 Nation branding and nation brand personality.* Recent nation branding research in marketing has proposed that brands, like human beings, are represented in consumers' minds in terms of personality traits (D'Astous and Boujbel, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013, 2015). An important step in developing a national brand strategy is to assess a country's brand personality among citizens of foreign countries (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2015). In their seminal piece about nation brand personality, D'Astous and Boujbel (2007) develop a valid instrument to measure people's personality images of countries, which is composed of six dimensions that were labeled: agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity and unobtrusiveness. Rather than focusing on the structure and measurement scales of nation brand personality, Rojas-Méndez *et al.* (2015) examine the relationship between individual personality and brand personality and test the validity of self-congruity theory in the context of nation brand personality. There are two major limitations with this stream of studies. First, one limitation of these studies is the proxy used to measure nation brand personality, future research may alternatively use a nation brand personality scale developed explicitly for countries (Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2015). Second, the construct of brand personality contributes to consumers' self-concept at an individual level. Aaker (1997) argues that consumers can utilize brands as symbols in expressing themselves because they are able to see human personality traits in the brands. A natural extension of self-congruity theory is to test the match between the

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self-concept of the consumer with nation brand. However, to date there appears to have been little research that examines whether the congruence of nation brand personality and the stakeholders' self-image affects their attitude toward a country. This area represents considerable potential for future research and calls for an approach based on the constructs of nation brand personality and self-image in the context of the nation branding research domain.

*5.1.4 Nation branding measurement.* The Country Brand Index (CBI) and the NBI are two prominent measures to assess country brands both come from practitioner led sources. CBI assesses five key dimensions: value system, quality of life, good for business, heritage and culture, and tourism. NBI covers six dimensions: exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people and tourism. Although the CBI and NBI indexes have been widely used for many country branding projects, it seems that the process by which the CBI and NBI were derived have not been subject to rigorous academic review and validation and the two indexes demonstrate what is being measured but not necessarily what should be measured in regard to nation branding (Rojas-Mendez, 2013). Fetscherin (2010) proposes an alternative measurement based on objective secondary data to assess the strength of a country brand. The proposed composite index yields standardized results to measure the strengths of the country brand and enables the marketers to compare it with other country brands. To test the validity of the nation brand dimensions already included in the extant literature and identify a comprehensive list of those strategic dimensions that can be used to define the nation's brand identity, Rojas-Mendez (2013) explores the dimensions comprising the nation brand construct at a multinational scope and identifies seven main dimensions: its economy, geography and nature, tourism, culture and heritage, society, science and technology, and government. These seven main dimensions overlap four dimensions with the National Brand Index and share some similarity with the CBI. Each index has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, future research, using a more complete and complex measurements, is needed to examine the construct of nation branding. Future research may also examine the level of importance of each dimension of nation branding since few studies have examined a hierarchy or relative weight of each of the dimensions.

*5.1.5 Nation branding and foreign direct investment.* Nation branding counts several facets including exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, people value system, and tourism (Rojas-Mendez, 2013). Even though other facets of nation branding, in such areas as tourism, country image, exports, and public diplomacy, have been addressed at least to some extent in existing studies, this is not the case with the intersection between nation branding and foreign direct investment, where research is scant (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, more research is needed to address the point of intersection between the two fields and to do so within the known limitations of each.

*5.1.6 Nation branding and integrated marketing communications.* The concept of IMCs is well established in the marketing literature. Although marketing communications are managed in a holistic manner to achieve strategic objectives at firm level, it is far more challenging in applying an IMC approach in a nation branding context. Dinnie *et al.* (2010) attempt to investigate the nature and frequency of coordination and collaboration between the different organizations: EPOs, IAs, NTOs and embassies, that participate in the formulation and implementation of nation branding strategy. Focusing on a nation brand campaign at country level, Kerrigan *et al.* (2012) consider nation branding as a mechanism for communicating between a nation and the rest of the world and explore the "Incredible India" Campaign, a Nation Branding campaign which has been running in India for approximately 10 years. Future studies should investigate the degree of coordination that is associated with a country's nation branding strategy, primarily export promotion, inward investment, tourism and public diplomacy. Future studies should also examine the outcome of a coordinated approach and campaign-specific content of such an approach (Dinnie *et al.*, 2010; Kerrigan *et al.*, 2012). In addition, both multiple-country studies and in-depth, single country

case studies are required to analyze the interorganizational coordination in a nation branding context (Dinnie *et al.*, 2010).

5.1.7 *Nation branding and country art and culture.* Art and culture have been used to transform a national image globally and prior studies have shown the significance of supporting and exporting art and culture ranging from film, television, literature and music (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). South Korea is a good example of how recent industrial and cultural policy results in a popularization of its national brand (Huang, 2011). Studies on nation branding and the arts are limited and have focused on the strategies and implications for specific places, rather than nations, with a focus on visiting rather than the evolution of the nation brand (Rodner and Kerrigan, 2018). Given the acknowledgment of the importance of art and culture in establishing and communicating national identity, future research should explore the role of art and culture in establishing and communicating a nation brand.

### 5.2 *Methodological perspectives*

In total, 32 percent of the studies reviewed in the domain illustrate but do not empirically examine nation branding. This is partially the consequence of the absence of an integrated conceptual framework with precise definitions that would allow for operationalization and measurement of key constructs in the domain. Therefore, there is a need for empirical studies to provide more normative guidelines for nation branding.

The majority of nations branding literature examine the external audience of a country brand with two exceptions by Heslop *et al.* (2010) and Yousaf and Li (2015). Yousaf and Li (2015) discuss the nations branding from an internal perspective and focus on the perceptions people hold of their own country. Heslop *et al.* (2010) examine the views of residents and foreigners of the Olympics and the host country before and after the mega event within the context of marketing theory on country image effects. Internal audience act as an ambassador for their nation brand and communicate a desired experience to the external audiences. Therefore, more work is needed particularly to examine the domestic population or the internal audience of a country brand.

The other major methodological concern is the potential of poor generalizability. Our review shows that there is a heavy reliance on student samples and convenience samples, thus the results of these studies should not be generalized to other contexts until further research is done. Most of the studies have included a homogeneous sample for research, future studies should be conducted with a more heterogenous sample (D'Astous and Boujbel, 2007; Heslop *et al.*, 2010; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013).

In terms of methodologies used, surveys have remained the most popular method. Attention has been brought to the limited number of case studies in the literature. A more insightful application of the case study approach may result in the identification of evidence fostering newer interpretation of nation branding strategy. Also, more research in this area should be based on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods and techniques.

Longitudinal studies would greatly enhance the literature's understanding of nation brand and the evolving of country image, as well as the long-term effects of country image on nation brand strength and national brand equity (Kerrigan *et al.*, 2012; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2013). The lack of such studies could be due to the difficulty of scholars interested in nation branding in collecting longitudinal data. However, this method will allow researchers and practitioners to better understand the consequences of a successful/unsuccessful nation brand strategy. Longitudinal studies will also allow for testing of the temporal stability of findings and exploring more deeply how the macro environment may impact the valence of nation branding.

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### 5.3 Context-related perspectives

The existing body of nation branding research covers a limited number of countries and regions. National contexts are chosen primarily because of data availability, future research should be motivated by theory-based rationale for the inclusion of countries. The geographic focus could be extended to take into account more diverse geographic coverage. In addition, both multiple-country studies and single country studies are required to provide in-depth understanding in a nation branding context (Dinnie *et al.*, 2010).

Two decades of  
research on  
nation  
branding

## 6. Limitations and conclusions

Our findings should be seen within the context of certain limitations. First, our review is comprehensive but not exhaustive. The databases used and the filtering process adopted may have omitted some relevant studies. Second, our study selected articles published in academic journal only and conference proceedings, monographs, dissertations, chapters and books were not included. Third, while this review presented strong coverage of publications related to nation branding, a meta-analysis of existing studies would enable scholars to determine which factors affect various aspects of nation branding. Fourth, due to sample size restrictions in this research stream, the themes identified in this study are not intended to be definitive and mutually exclusive. Future research should frame the review's results in terms of theoretical focus and identify distinctive thematic areas of research.

The main purpose of this paper is to make contribution to the body of knowledge in nation branding by presenting a systematic literature review of the nation branding field. The academic studies from the last two decades dealing with nation branding have been selected and then examined, as basis for an overview of the state-of-the-art of this research domain. In this review, we have identified the most cited articles and primary outlet for nation branding research. We have also identified trends in terms of research themes, samples, geographic area studied, statistical methods and variables of interest used. In addition, this paper highlights certain gaps in the nation branding literature and provides new and promising directions for future research in this intriguing field of study.

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