

Ing. Katarína Kleinová, Phd. - Ing. Johana Ťrgeová, Phd.

COUNTRY IMAGE AND BRANDING OF SLOVAKIA

The paper points at some points of country marketing, for example how European countries could be successful in the situation of global competitiveness, not only taking into account their history or culture but also in the area of product image, such as a country of origin.

Country in its own is also a way of a brand. Most countries communicate with the rest of the world on several levels and so they create their images whether knowingly or randomly. Political decisions of the government, the ways of attracting foreign investors and skilled workforce, export of products, export of culture, promotion of tourism and ultimately inhabitants themselves of the country are also either positively or negatively involved in creating the country image.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to show how Slovakia is perceived as a brand. To finding out the image of Slovakia there were used several methods. First, we analyzed the image of Slovakia based on our own consumer research and on the other hand we evaluated the perception of the country by the outside world on the basis of selected international coefficients.

Branding has become the aspect that is more often related not only to companies and their products but also to countries themselves. It concerns mainly developed world economies - it means countries that endeavour to gain international acceptance but also countries that are trying to achieve recognition of their brands.

COUNTRY MARKETING: REPORT ABOUT GLOBAL BRAND POSITION

Brand is generally defined by a way of perception and acceptation. Brand image characterizes a complete impression that the brand creates in the minds of customers. To build the image of the country and to achieve the desired state there are sometimes necessary decades of years. Replacing the generations of people is often needed to do the actual change of the country image. The time must pass that people take a fancy to the country, appear and identify themselves with its identity.

In order to create reputational capital through economic, political and social promotion of the interests at home and abroad Simon Anholt developed the concept of Nation Branding.

The benefits of branding countries can not be doubted because it:

- provides a connection between the political, social and economic pillars,
- defines how the country is perceived by people who live in it and how is perceived by the world,
- increases the country's capacity to achieve its purposes through foreign policy, foreign direct investments, trade, tourism, etc.,
- creates a trouble free connection between the strategic plan of the country and its marketing,
- provides a unified platform that creates synergy, allowing the reciprocal promotion and alignment between public and private sector.

From the foregoing results it can be concluded that the branding of the country has become almost a necessity for survival of the state with its national interests on the world stage, in the struggle with increasing competition. Effective Nation Branding can positively contribute to the brand and the image of the country, respectively towards its goals with regard to attracting tourists, stimulating investments, increasing export, attracting talent, qualified labour force and students. It also helps to erase mistaken ideas and stereotypes about the country and allows favourably repositioning considering to the target audience. [1]

COUNTRY IMAGE AS A PRODUCT COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

As the image or reputation of the country has longstanding character in contrast to the rapidly changing reality, so one of the main reasons why countries decide for Nation Branding is that the image no longer corresponds to reality, is outdated and no longer can support economic, political, whether developing goals of country or the prevention from this delaying of image. This is possible to achieve with strategic approach to the brand management of the country. Creating exceptional, aspiration, and motivating brand strategy of the country is one of the fundamental assumptions of its future success and competitive advantage.

In one public opinion poll Slovak people labelled their country as agricultural, corrupt, romantic and folklore. According to Marián Timoracký, who speaks about the strengths and weaknesses of the brand Slovakia, first of all there should exist integrated and clear vision of what this country wants to mean, simply what it wants to be. Unfortunately for now there is no such material in Slovakia. Someway a number of institutions, representative offices abroad, ministries, and government, businesses and interest associations are trying to promote Slovakia. But there is no common concept, no one coordinates it and it is fragmented.

In the long run, the country image is building for a long time. Small and newly established countries such as Slovakia are unknown for the people in the world. From a global perspective they are all uninteresting countries. So, if we want to be superior to other countries, it is important that we should try to have a good, attractive agenda that will take our country more attractive.

Why is it important to have a good image? Just the image, reputation of the country, has a significant impact on the development of tourism, flow of the foreign investments and even export of our products. Today, when the competition between countries is more sharpen, an investor is considering all the pros and cons. [2]

Slovak products are, as for exceptions, absolutely unknown in the world. That is the result of the survey organized by HN between sixteen Commercial Counselors at the Slovak Embassies. Many people argue that Slovakia does not have any image in these countries. Majority of our agents has experience that to this day there still remains a good sound of "Made in Czechoslovakia" and the image of former products is still present. But while the Czechs are trying to move up with current products such as succession brands of Czechoslovakia, we are up to fail. We and the quality of our work are very well known in Russia, Belarus, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Somewhere on the halfway of knowledge about us remain the countries of The Baltic Sea. We are obtaining the popularity of our products also in Austria or Germany.

In Austria the image of Slovakia prevails as a country suitable for tourism, spa vacation, visitation of opera or the utilization of gastronomy. Slovakia is there generally known as a country producing cars and building on longstanding tradition of engineering production. In Norway, we are well known with the name of Slovakia, especially among the businessmen. According to them, Slovak workers are more responsible than those from other V4 countries. This creates a good image for our products. But ordinary Norwegians are still confusing Slovakia and Slovenia or persist also good image of Czechoslovakia. In Germany, we are also perceived relatively well, especially after joining the EU and after overcoming of prejudices and raising the level of information. Greeks know practically nothing about Slovakia. In Ireland, Slovakia is adopted with the early embarrassment, but many Irish companies have great experience with us. In Belarus, the Slovak production is perceived as highly competitive. Belarusians associate Slovakia in many aspects with Czechoslovakia. In Romania, Slovakia is seen very positively and Romanian entrepreneurs often welcome our partners rather than from traditional western markets. The reason is good quality and wide range of our products and services. In Bulgaria we are perceived as a progressive country with higher incomes and thus higher living standard. There still persists the image of quality of Czechoslovak products which has a positive impact on the image of Slovak products. In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania we are known as a country with good skiing and cheap meal. [3]

SLOVAK POSITION IN THE COUNTRY BRAND INDEX

How to evaluate the image of a country? Which brand does Slovakia have now? There are used two approaches in the world. One of them is the Country Brand Index which is calculated based on the strengths of the country brand and the second is the Nation Brand Index which is based on a survey of fifty selected world countries. But there are also other scales which evaluate the country image. In recent years the East-West ranking was started to publish which is based on the number of reports of about 200 world countries, including Slovakia.

Anholt developed the Nation Brands Index (NBI) in 2005 as a way to measure the image and reputation of the world's nations. This powerful tool can help to understand measure and build a strong national image. The Anholt Nation Brands Index measures the power and quality of each country's brand image by combining the following six dimensions:

- Export – determines the public's image of products and services from each country and the extent to which consumers seek or avoid products from the country.
- Governance – measures public opinion regarding the level of national government competency and fairness.
- Culture and heritage – reveals global perceptions of each nation's heritage and appreciation for its contemporary culture, including film, music, art, sport and literature.
- People – measures the population's reputation for competence, education, openness and friendliness, as well as perceived levels of potential hostility and discrimination.
- Tourism – captures the level of interest in visiting a country and the draw of natural and man-made tourist attractions.
- Investment and immigration – determines the power to attract people to live, work or study in each country and reveals how people perceive a country's economic and social situation.

Each country's score across these six dimensions is succinctly captured in the Nation Brand Hexagon. [1]

Scheme 1 The Nation Brand Hexagon



Source: www.gfkamerica.com

The 2010 Nation Brands Index survey was conducted from July 7, 2010 to August 4, 2010 in 20 major developed and developing countries that play important and diverse

roles in international relations, trade, and the flow of business, cultural, and tourism activities. The survey results are based on respondents' ratings of 50 nations on questions in six mentioned categories. The Nation Brands Index 2010 overall results are as follows: United States, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Australia, Sweden. [1]

East West Nation Brand Perception Indexes rank all countries and territories based on how they are perceived in leading international media, published quarterly and annually. The indexes are based on analyzing millions of mentions in hundreds of thousands of news articles. The East West Global Index 200 ranks all 192 UN members and 8 major territories. The index analyses also if the country was mentioned in positive or negative way during the period. The results of Top 10 countries are shown in the following table. The most mentioned country in 2010 was the United States (4 180 999 mentions). Slovakia gained rank 83 with 13 643 mentions. [4]

Table 1 East West Global Index 200

TOP 10 2009		TOP 10 2010	
1.	United States	1.	United States
2.	United Kingdom	2.	United Kingdom
3.	India	3.	India
4.	China	4.	Australia
5.	France	5.	China
6.	Canada	6.	Israel
7.	Israel	7.	France
8.	Ireland	8.	Canada
9.	Japan	9.	Japan
10.	Russia	10.	Germany

Source: www.eastwestcoms.com/global_volume.htm

The next index is FutureBrand Country Brand Index, which is presented in partnership with BBC World News. It is based on more respondents across more countries and questions than ever before. Country brand strength is driven by perceptions of five key dimensions: Tourism, Heritage and Culture, Good for Business, Quality of Life and Value System. In addition, the strength of a country brand is determined in the same way as any other brand. It measured levels of awareness, familiarity, preference, consideration, advocacy and active decisions to visit. But the most important factors, the aspects that truly differentiate a country brand, are its associations and attributes – the things that people think of when they hear a place name, or look at a photograph or plan a trip. [5]

Year 2010 was Canada's year. Rising from second to first place, brand Canada displaced the USA. Other results of this index are shown in the next table.

Table 2 Country Brand Index - TOP 20 Country Brands in 2010

1. Canada	11. Germany
2. Australia	12. Italy
3. New Zealand	13. Norway
4. United States	14. Spain
5. Switzerland	15. Singapore
6. Japan	16. Maldives
7. France	17. Ireland
8. Finland	18. Bermuda
9. United Kingdom	19. Denmark
10. Sweden	20. Austria

Source: FutureBrand

Slovakia was in year 2010 on the place 79 from 111 examined countries. In comparison with other V4 countries, Slovakia was on the third place after Czech Republic and Hungary. [6]

Table 3 Country Brand Index – Comparison of V4 countries

	Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland	Hungary
Heritage and culture	83	18	62	50
Conditions for business	47	39	38	59
Tourism	79	55	80	83
Quality of life	55	41	50	62
Value system	47	34	43	59
Country total	79	43	82	66

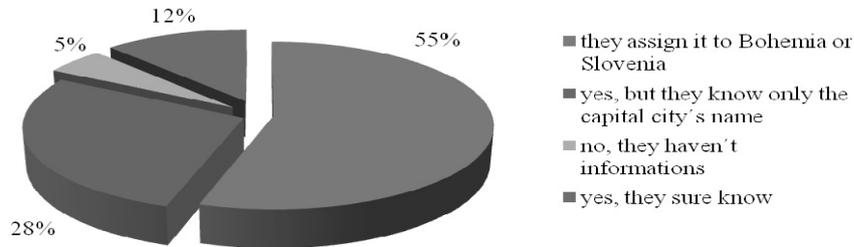
Source: FutureBrand

SLOVAK POSITION: IMAGE OF SLOVAKIA AS THE FOOD PRODUCT COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

In the comparison with Anholt Brand Index there was performed the research, targeted into consumer behaviour and perception's point of view on image of Slovakia. The secondary data was achieved by a questionnaire addressed to 978 Slovak respondents (378 from villages and 600 from cities) in all age, sex, salary and education segments. The research was realized during three years 2008–2010.

Many Slovaks mean that Slovakia is abroad replaced by Bohemia or Slovenia. On the scheme 2 it can be seen, that 55% Slovaks have this point of view.

Scheme 2 Do you think that the inhabitants of Europe know some basic information about Slovakia?

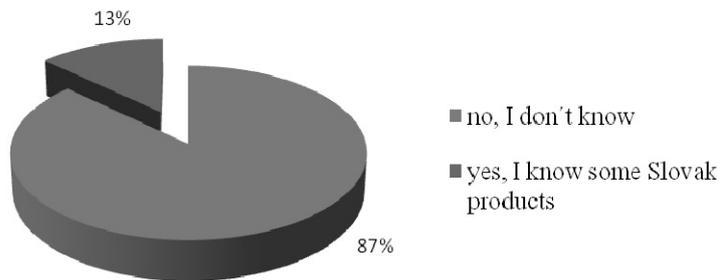


Source: Own research

Country branding means much more than adding a "Made In" label to a product. A product's country of origin constitutes an important piece of branding that, in many cases, can be so influential that it overtakes the brand's other reputation builders. If I told you that the next supercar came from Germany, you probably wouldn't be surprised. You would probably be immediately curious about it, expecting the fictional vehicle to be of superb engineering and design quality, expensive and solid. Now imagine I will surprise you by revealing that the forthcoming supercar is actually a product of Greece. Your impression of the car will be totally different, your assumptions inspired by the apparent personality the country of origin communicates to your perceptions. Having the wrong country label on your package won't destroy your brand, but I'm convinced that having the right "Made in" label will save you a substantial amount of marketing money.

Rome wasn't built in a day. I'm sure we'll get there. The question is how long can we afford to wait? The rewards can be enormous. The next scheme 3 shows, that 87% of respondents think, that Slovak product aren't well-know abroad. That could be true, because if you find some Slovak product in the supermarket you can read on the opposite site of packing Made in EU not Made in Slovakia - that's the marketing stage of Slovak producers, how to be success on foreign markets.

Scheme 3 Do the foreign tourists know Slovak products?



Source: Own research

On scheme 4 we can see the position of the Slovak respondents on how the country is promoted abroad. 47% of Slovaks believe that Slovakia has a lack of publicity in international media. Up to 35% of Slovaks were unable to assess their views on this issue. Mainly because of the fact the Slovaks are mostly simple people, which are incomparable with the tourist experiences of other citizens of the world. Therefore they do not know whether Slovak products are on store shelves in stores, whether is any agency in any major city and offers "last minute" to Slovakia, or sold in bookstores books about the country, whether or not students learn the geography and that Slovakia is also part of Europe. Slovaks awareness is reflected in their opinion that their country is not offered in travel agencies, as a tourist destination and also that there is a lack of promotion of Slovak cultural products. Just a lot of Slovaks describe its attributes as an agricultural country, corrupt or romantic folklore.

Scheme 4 Do you think that Slovakia is enough promoted abroad?



Source: Own research

CONCLUSION

From a marketing perspective, country of origin is a way to differentiate the product from the competitors. The country of origin has an impact on consumers' quality perceptions of a product, as well as ultimately preference for and willingness to buy that product. Furthermore, several studies have shown that consumers tend to have a relative preference for products from their own country or may have a relative preference for or aversion against products that originate from certain countries (so-called affinity and animosity countries). The effect of country of origin is however debated with some studies questioning the relevance of academic research on country of origin effects for business managers. Overall, academics seem to conclude that the country with which a product is associated with, the so called country-of-association significantly impacts consumers' product evaluations and choice.

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SUMMARY

The article is result of many author's point of view and own research, which could show how is the country marketing important not only for domestic economy or life style but also for business, cultural and general presentation's options on the global market. Slovakia isn't well known in the comparison with Canada, USA or Switzerland. Imagine France without fashion, Germany without automotive excellence or Japan without consumer electronics. There's no arguing that the image we have of another country says a lot about how we view it as a tourist destination, a place to invest or source of consumer goods. Slovakia has a long way to be in the group of Anholt Brand Index and so we need strong well known possibilities and marketing strategies to be successful and perceived by positive meaning of world - people.

CONTACT ADDRESS

Ing. Katarína Kleinová, Phd., Ing. Johana Úrgeová, Phd.
johana.urgeova@fem.uniag.sk, katarina.kleinova@fem.uniag.sk
Department of Marketing
Faculty of Economics and Management
Slovak University of Agriculture
Trieda A. Hlinku 2, 949 76 Nitra, Slovak Republic