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# Much More Than an Image

## Living in a Competitive Clutter of the Branding World – Examples of Mexico’s and Peru’s Nation Brand

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This essay explores the concept of nation branding and its importance in shaping a country’s image and reputation on the global stage. It discusses this concept using the example of two Latin American countries, Peru, and Mexico. As nations increasingly compete on the global arena, branding strategies have become essential for projecting a positive image that attracts investment, tourism, and international recognition. Moreover, nation branding is steadily growing in importance and more and more countries around the world are devoting resources to developing their nation brand. By exploring the cases of Peru and Mexico, this study shows the components of nation branding in practice. In addition, the essay discusses the potential benefits of implementing a nation branding strategy, especially in an increasingly connected and competitive world. This paper aims to shed light on the complexities of nation branding and encourages a critical examination of the strategies used by countries in defining their national identity on the global stage.

**Keywords:** nation branding, nation brand, Mexico, Peru, positive image, identity

## 1. Introduction

Contrary to popular belief about unification, globalization – defined as the interdependence of economies, politics, and cultures – does not diminish the importance of nations. As Wally Olins stated, globalized structures naturally lead to greater competition.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, actions taken to stand out as an individual, company, or country have become more important than ever. New strategies have gained popularity. The definition of competitiveness for the western hemisphere has evolved. The need to distinguish oneself has increased due to the growing participation of developing countries in the market. In this context, the question of how and with what to compete on an international scale, has given rise to the concept of *nation branding*. Nation branding has become an answer not only for the most powerful actors in global politics but, more importantly, for those who have been marginalized, thus lacking an opportunity to leave a mark on the world. Latin American countries, due to their history, have struggled to gain importance in the areas of international politics, economy, etc. Peru and Mexico are among the prominent Latin American countries that are trying to break the circle by incorporation of *branding* to attract tourists and investment, boost exports, and enhance credibility. Therefore, these countries were chosen to be explored for their actions, the effectiveness of their implemented strategies, and the potential dangers in the context of the components and assets of nation branding. The authors seek to investigate nation brand in context. What image do Mexico and Peru want to promote? How has nation branding been used? Is nation branding a potential path to international recognition for Latin American countries? What are the possible disadvantages of nation branding?

## 2. Definitions of Brand, Nation, Nation Brand, Branding, Image, and Identity

Understanding the significance of a nation brand requires a retrospective examination of its origins. When names such as Balenciaga, Gucci, Dior, the United States, Peru, Paris, or Seoul are mentioned, they commonly evoke specific connotations. Typically, without hesitation, mental images linked to the cultural, geographic, or societal attributes of these entities emerge. These associations include various aspects ranging from culinary traditions and architectural marvels to literary contributions, cinematic representations, and their populace. Such mental constructs span a spectrum of sentiments, extending beyond intellectual considerations to encompass simple emotional responses. Balenciaga's brand image has been intertwined with recent controversies regarding allegations of promoting exploitative practices, specifically concerning issues related to child labor and abuse. Conversely, Gucci is renowned as emblem of luxury within the fashion industry. Similarly, Dior evokes notions of elegance, embodying affluent society. The United States is commonly perceived as a land where aspirations materialize, symbolizing the pursuit of dreams on a grand scale. Mexico, on the other hand, stands out as the capital of savory and

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Wally Olins after his speech at IE University.

spicy cuisine, and its iconic sombrero is a cultural symbol. Meanwhile, Peru is often mentioned as the heart of Incan heritage, known for its rich historical and cultural legacy. Paris is recognized for its picturesque and romantic ambience, often chosen as the perfect destination for couples in love.

In contrast, Seoul, the bustling epicenter of technological innovation, represents modernity and progress. These examples serve to illustrate the myriad correlations we routinely draw in our daily discourse. Indeed, these impressions are not arbitrary; rather, they reflect deliberate efforts by businesses and nations to project specific attributes and qualities aimed at capturing the attention and patronage of global consumers.

Brand and image are connected to how the world is perceived, how it should be perceived, and who it should attract. The word *brand* originates from a mark of ownership made by farmers on their livestock. Before it was associated with commerce, corporations, and businesses, it was used to distinguish products. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with globalization, it became clear that the term *brand* can be more flexible. Therefore, the original definition by the American Marketing Association has been broadened from a name, design, sign, symbol, or product that differentiates from other sellers to a deeper, more general level as “combination of characteristics and added values” (Dinnie 39). In this context, the term *brand* can be used in every area of mass communication where a subject is introduced and recognized by certain features, inducing desirable connotations. As mentioned in *Beyond Marketing and Diplomacy*, a brand has become an idea which lives in the imagination of the audience, encompassing feelings and mental overtone (Viktorin 1-4). Branding is the action through which the capacity of the techniques used, based on the marketing practices related to promotion and advertising, creates a “meaningful differentiation” (Dinnie 44).

The term *nation*, on the other hand, primarily derives from the Latin word for *people*. According to Benedict Anderson, an up-to-date description of nation would be *imagined communities*, not *defined entities*, created to share similarities. Individuals within a nation are supposed to have something in common, for example language, tradition, or history. It is a large group of people who may be, but do not necessarily have to, ethnically diverse. Adherence to a nation is considered a choice. Culture classified as national is dynamic and produced by citizens over the years (Karlsson 4-13).

The term *nation brand* concerning a nation, country, or state was coined by Simon Anholt. Initially, it was shown as tactic, not a planned action. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, branding tools started to be applied in the creation of a national image. In the chapter “The Relevance, Scope and Evolution of Nation Branding,” Keith Dinnie described it as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie 40). Similarly, Aaker defines a brand as an assortment of functional, emotional, relational, and strategic elements that generate a unique set of associations (Aaker 68-69). Therefore, a nation brand can exist within the public’s mind without engagement in nation branding.

Nation branding refers to the process by which a country promotes itself to the world. It involves creating a positive image and reputation for a country, not only to attract tourists and foreign investment, but also to strengthen diplomatic relations

and stimulate exports (Teslik). It is not just a logo or slogans. It is a comprehensive strategy that encompasses various elements, such as culture, history, values, policies, and communication channels (Fan 4-5).

The goal of nation branding work is to shape and enhance a country's image, reputation, and perception in order to positively influence its global standing and competitiveness (Brand Finance). Nation branding also aims to counter negative stereotypes, misconceptions, and prejudices while actively promoting the nation's strengths and achievements on the international stage.

It is an ongoing process that requires careful planning, consistent messaging, and the active involvement of all sides (Dinnie 15). By leveraging their unique attributes and effectively communicating them to the global community, nations can build a strong brand and reap the benefits of an improved reputation and economic growth.

As mentioned before, growing competition requires actions. Efforts that countries put into branding are a long-term investment/commitment to attract potential tourists, boost export, and stimulate capital flow. These are not the only advantages of an effectively developed nation brand. It also enhances currency stability, increase influence and credibility on an international level, as well as provides better foundations for nation-building. Finally, it is worth mentioning that nation branding can help discard hurtful stereotypes and erase misconceptions, "allow[ing] the country to reposition itself more favorably (...)" (Dinnie 43).

The complexity of nation branding is evident not only in its diverse interpretations and unclear definition among scholars. It reveals itself in its components, including stakeholders such as state (e.g., national agencies), and non-state (e.g., companies, branding experts, individuals) actors involved in nation branding. The target of nation branding can be the urge to gain political, economic, or cultural power among foreign nations. At the same time, the key to successful nation branding lies in domestic audiences and their perception, resulting in acceptance or rejection. Lastly, there are measures that depend on a variety of contexts and actors consciously or unconsciously participating in actions related to nation branding (Viktorin 17-19).

To sum up, *nation brand* and *branding* can be a visual image, *umbrella brand* (the same brand used for promoting and selling other products), or *co-brand*. It is related to a country's position, image, reputation, and identity, helps build competitiveness and enhance its soft power (Fan 4-6) (Teslik).

In the paragraph above, image, identity, and reputation were mentioned. Hence, it is necessary to differentiate between those constructs. Whetten and Mackey suggest that image is what is projected, how people see and perceive a country, reputation is feedback from others, and identity is self-perception, which bonds people within nations, the question how the country wants to be perceived "refer[red] to coherent or distinctive characteristics of certain entities" (Fang 97-103) (Dan Kärreman 408-423). Anholt indicated six dimensions of nation branding: people, heritage and culture, tourism, governance, exports, and investment and immigration. The created hexagon is now used in Nation Brand Index (NBI) developed by Anholt and IPSOS (Dan Kärreman 408-423). A country, in order to compete effectively on the world stage, requires high-level partnerships and communication between these components. Finally, nation brand is not entirely controllable, it can be influenced, but the marketing activities towards a strong nation brand should not be dedicated to its management alone (Dinnie 48).

### 3. The United States, the Historical Leader in Nation Branding

The United States of America has long been considered a leader in nation branding. From its inception as a new nation to its current global presence, the U.S. has shown exceptional prowess in cultivating and projecting its national image on the world stage.

One of the earliest examples of U.S. nation branding can be traced back to the struggle for independence from British rule. As the thirteen colonies sought to establish a new identity, American patriots actively and effectively used symbols, slogans, and propaganda to mobilize support for their revolution.

Taking this a step further, the emergence of the U.S. as a leading global power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century further solidified its position as a leader in nation branding. During World War II, U.S. nation branding efforts reached new heights. Through its highly effective propaganda campaign, epitomized by the iconic “I Want YOU for U.S. Army” recruiting poster featuring Uncle Sam, the country successfully engaged its citizens in the war effort (Passey). This strategic communication not only inspired and motivated Americans, but also created a strong and highly desirable image around the world, reinforcing the U.S. position as the leader of the free world.

But can the U.S. currently be called a leader in nation branding? According to the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI) of 2022, the United States currently ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in the world (Ipsos 2022). Moreover, we can see a year-on-year decline in the U.S. score in the above-mentioned ranking. Declining U.S. national branding refers to a gradual decline in the positive image and perception of the country on a global scale.

One of the main reasons for the deterioration of the American national brand is the growing political divisions in the country. Polarizing politics and civil unrest have demonstrated internal divisions and raised concerns about the stability and unity of the nation. These issues can negatively affect the overall perception of the U.S. abroad. As the U.S. score worsens, the opposite trend is noticeable for countries in the Latin American region, such as Mexico and Peru (Ipsos 2022). Let us take a look at how these countries are strengthening their ranking year after year.

### 4. Nation Branding in Latin America

In Latin America, the concept of nation branding gained prominence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as countries sought to differentiate themselves from their regional peers and to create a positive image to attract investment, tourism, and cultural recognition.

One of the key drivers of nation branding in Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was tourism (Miño Navarrete 52). Recognizing the region’s natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and historical significance, countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina sought to leverage their unique attractions to attract foreign visitors. Governments launched campaigns to present their countries as exotic, vibrant, and friendly destinations that appeal to potential travelers.

Moreover, nation branding has played a key role in shaping Latin America’s cultural identity and international perceptions. Latin American literature, music,

and cinema have made significant contributions to the region's branding efforts, showcasing its rich cultural heritage and artistic achievements (Miño Navarrete 53). Authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Isabel Allende, along with musicians such as Carlos Santana and cultural phenomena such as tango in Argentina and samba in Brazil, have helped shape global perceptions of Latin America as a center of creativity and expression.

## 5. Peru's Nation Branding

Jonach Sachs, the author of *Story Wars*, storyteller, and expert on creativity, once said that brand is a story unfolding across all customer touch points. What story Peru wants to tell during its growing engagement in nation branding? A core idea of nation branding is to identify and draw attention to features that distinguish the country from others, providing it with a "competitive edge" on the domestic and international market (Dinnie 139). This uniqueness is especially preserved and found in people, culture, and geography. Peru is the 19<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world, the third in South America. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after the civil war, the era of *fujimorismo*, and the Alejandro Toledo scandal, Peru entered a phase of relative stability followed by consistent economic growth. In the first decade alone, Peru managed to double its GDP from around USD 51 billion to USD 121 billion (World Bank Data). Moreover, according to the World Bank, Peru's Gini coefficient improved over the past decade from 55.1 in 1998 to 41.6 in 2019 (World Bank Data).

The first attempt at using the branding strategies appeared in 2002, amid political turmoil, with the establishment of the Commission for the Promotion of Peruvian Exports and Tourism – PromPerú, a structure within the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism – MINCETUR. Their mission and goals, as described on their official page, include increasing commercial exchanges, sustainable development, and "(...) the promotion, guidance and regulation of foreign trade, tourism and handicrafts (...)" (MINCETUR). PromPerú is responsible for the application of promotion strategies in which Peru would be viewed as a potential land of prosperity for business and a tourist destination.<sup>2</sup>

A new game about image and reputation appeared, as Vam Ham said, and Peru wanted to be one of the players. Peruvian investments into branding processes are starting to have an impact, showing new opportunities for entrepreneurs. It was a matter of time before Peru advanced from general promotion to having more structuralized, better-organized publicity. The idea of creating one brand which would represent the whole country emerged. It was necessary to re-brand, re-fresh, maybe even re-invent Peru's reputation and make its image more recognizable. Not only was this seen as needing a supportive stroke, but national identity was also divided into many pieces, at some points filled with disappointment, anger and lack of unified perspective: "(...) Peru's identity hung in the balance between the traditional Andean world and the perceived modern 'progress' of coastal Lima" (Welch 2-11).

<sup>2</sup> More information on the official website of Peru.travel: [www.peru.travel/en](http://www.peru.travel/en).

## 5.1. Brand P(@)eru

The earlier mentioned idea came to fruition in 2011 when PromPerú announced the launch of the Peru brand, followed by various campaigns. The brand was crafted with the support of experts from FutureBrand, “the global community who use unique methods to deliver positive brand-led business transformation.” A new slogan was introduced, reflecting the diversity and migration history: – *Peru: Country for Everyone* or *There is a Peru for Each and Every One*. According to the official FutureBrand-Peru website, the new positioning expresses Peru’s flavor, color, and living history. Future Brand and PromPerú defined the most important attributes of the country related to “culture, gastronomy, natural beauty and the birth of South American civilizations” (FutureBrand). The name of the country represents the brand as well. It has been a tactical and thoughtful choice ensuring that Brand Peru remains neutral and inclusive. The brand’s design, featuring a “P,” is associated with the unique Nazca lines, geoglyphs made in the desert by indigenous people preceding the Inca Empire. The leading color, red, embodies “energy, courage, strength and vigor” (Perú Info) (Durand 10-15). Peru is described as “multifaceted, specialized and captivating.” On the official PromPerú website, the initial goal behind creating Peru’s brand is described as one to “(...) [effectively] transmit the value proposition, promote tourism and exports, and attract investments” (Perú Info). PromPerú focuses its stimulation of the Peru brand on the three main areas mentioned in the official website: exports of Peruvian products to the international market, tourism as an unforgettable experience, and investments related to attracting new projects and investors. Research conducted by both PromPerú and FutureBrand identified a few aspects that are the greatest strengths of the country. First is nature and landscape. Peru is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. It has the second largest part of the Amazon Forest. As the CEO of PromPerú said, it offers a huge variety of views from mountains and highlands to beaches and the ocean, creating a range of possibilities for every kind of tourist. The second strength is culture and heritage, characterized by archaeological discoveries related to ancient civilizations, beautiful and unique architecture, vibrant indigenous traditions, as well as music and art influenced by culture hybridization. It is also worth mentioning the Amazon, Kuélap, Choquequirao, and the Colca canyon. The third and most prominent strength, due to a recent victory of a Peruvian restaurant in the ranking of the World’s 50 Best Restaurants, is gastronomy (Collins). The already mentioned biodiversity represented by, for example, 4,500 varieties of potatoes, is a significant advantage for Peru’s cuisine (BIOFIN, UNDP). Peruvian essence is captured in dishes through a mixture of various ingredients, influences, and chefs’ creativity. These strengths form the foundation of promotion and help shape the strategies for developing the Peru brand. In order to improve Peru’s image, the brand operates on different levels in collaboration with Peruvian companies, startups, celebrities, and citizens. Consequently, anyone can apply for the use of the Peru brand to differentiate a company, product, or event. Products under the Peru brand’s patronage include Alpaca del Perú, Pisco (called the spirit of Peru), Peruvian coffees, and superfoods. Brand Peru is active on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X), dynamically working and launching online campaigns (Perú Info).

One of the crucial foundations of Brand Peru that is often mentioned is the support of its own people. Isabella Falco, the *Director of Communications and Country*

*Image at PromPerú*, emphasized in an interview with TPBO the importance of the nation's support and approval. Without Peruvians believing in the values presented by the brand, further development would not be possible (TPBO Falco). Many activities of Brand Peru aim to strengthen national identity, which leads to strong brand. Cuevas' provocative words, "un peruano no nace, un peruano se hace" ["Peruvians are not born, they are made"] are relevant here (Cuevas 101). In theoretical studies of nation branding, one of the goals is not only international recognition but also national one. Branding becomes an opportunity to professionalize identity management by "(...) transformation of a certain brand values into a reason for national pride and patriotism" (Vela 153). According to information from the Brand Peru website, the brand builds an identity system and commitment with the country. The use of a multicolor palette is meant to represent the diverse facets of the country (Perú Info). Brand Peru is perceived as a symbol uniting the whole country. In the official video *Marca Perú 2011*, the journey in search of a more unified national identity is presented. We can hear phrases such as "being Peruvian gives luck" and explore what it means to be a Peruvian (Aguirre 56). "Brand Peru is a symbol of identity for Peruvians, it is a [way] of expressing pride in who we are and what we have as a country," Falco declared in the earlier mentioned interview (TPBO Falco).

However, Raul Matta Augire is aware of the restrictions imposed by promoting certain narratives. These narratives are often based on positive stereotypes already existing in consumers' minds. Identity can be, as Aguirre said, frozen by certain expectation not necessarily reflected by reality (Aguirre 57-59). Nation branding works with the annexation of local communities to an idea of a nation but is centralized and created by the country's elites. As a result, the most attractive features are promoted, monopolizing the brand strategy, and possibly excluding the ideas of diversity. According to Jordanova, mentioned by Aguirre, the neocolonial discourse, enforced by the economic strategies of neoliberalism promoted by Washington Consensus, place non-Western cultures below Western ones (Aguirre 54).

On the other hand, Olins was convinced that the opportunity that nation branding offers helps end Western hegemony rather than maintain it (Cuevas 107). Brand Peru seems to be more aware of the need to move towards equity, advertising those features that were previously neglected and forgotten at its inception. The latest tourism promotion video (2023) *Start your adventure in Peru* demonstrates how the appreciation of indigenous culture is reflected in the appreciation of the indigenous language (Youtube PromPerú). Another example is #OrgulloPeruano, included in posts about accomplishments in every area, from sports to science. Nation branding strategies in Peru reflect different ways of embracing Peruvian heritage, people, and businesses. Nevertheless, the focus on Lima, the capital city, and centralization remains visible.

Brand Peru is often mentioned as an example of successful country branding. It was called an "emblem of ambition" (Blake). The image existing before the branding was mostly linked to economic and political instability. According to the FutureBrand Country Brand Index published in 2019, Peru ranked 37<sup>th</sup> out of 75 countries, gaining 12 positions compared to 2014 (FutureBrand). In the The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index 2022, it ranked 38<sup>th</sup> out of 60 countries, up from 40<sup>th</sup> in 2021 (Ipsos). Falco, one of the architects of the brand's strategy, said: "[The creation of Brand Peru] was a means of showcasing the values the brand wished to be associated



with: creativity, diversity, fun-loving people, great cuisine, unique culture, and proud heritage." Additionally, Brand Peru was recognized as the "Trust Brand of the Year 2021," in the iTrust Consumer Brands ranking, which comprehensively measures trust using parameters such as image, reputation, satisfaction, prestige, credibility, and respect (Oficina de Comunicaciones). For the third consecutive year, the official tourist portal of Peru, peru.travel, was awarded as the Best Website of a Tourism Authority in Latin America by the World Travel Tech Awards in 2023. Following numerous prizes, Brand Peru appears to be extremely successful in integrating positive cultural ideas about what Peru and Peruvians represent. In 2023, the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) recognized five Peruvian towns (Chacas, Chavín de Huántar, Paucartambo, Pozuzo, and Taquile) among the World's Best Tourism Villages (Perú Info). Although, as many researchers say, Brand Peru was able to restore pride in being Peruvian and gain recognition on the international scene, thriving entrepreneurship emphasizing ethnicity still faces challenges (Hirsch 259-261). Voices against the popularization and oversimplification of identity are evident. Nation branding focuses mainly on what would be best for image and reputation, often forgetting that other dimensions should be taken into consideration.

## 6. Mexico's Nation Brand

As one of the largest economies and most populous countries in the world, Mexico has made significant nation branding efforts to showcase its unique identity and attract international attention (World Bank Data).

Mexico began working on nation branding as early as the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The event that put the spotlight on the developing country was the Olympic Games of 1968. It was a watershed moment and motivation to work on the country's image.

The 1968 Olympics, officially known as the XIX Olympic Games, were held in Mexico City. This sporting event not only showcased the athletic abilities of individuals from around the world but also became an opportunity for Mexico to enhance its nation branding globally (Wooldrage). Mexico had been preparing for the Olympics for several years, and the country saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate its economic development, cultural richness, and political stability to the international community. The Mexican government invested heavily in constructing state-of-the-art sports facilities, including the iconic Estadio Azteca, which hosted the opening ceremony and many of the events.

The Mexican government utilized the Olympics as a means to generate a sense of national pride and unity among its citizens (Castañeda 58). The branding initiatives focused on showcasing Mexico's rich cultural heritage, vibrant traditions, and warm hospitality.

Another milestone for Mexican nation branding was in 2010, when Mexican government launched the "Mexico: The Place You Thought You Knew" campaign (Ad News). The campaign aimed to challenge the preconceived notions and stereotypes associated with Mexico, showcasing the country's diverse cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and inviting attractions that have long been overshadowed by

negative headlines. The initiative was devised in response to the negative impact that continuing drug-related violence was having on Mexico's tourism industry. With media coverage predominantly focusing on crime, violence, and drug cartels, Mexico's image as a desirable tourist destination had taken a severe hit. The country needed a fresh approach to revamp its tarnished reputation and attract visitors back to its beautiful shores (Ad Tech Daily).

"The Place You Thought You Knew" campaign was executed through a series of visually stunning and emotionally captivating advertisements that highlighted Mexico's true identity. The message was simple yet powerful: Mexico is more than just turmoil, it is a vibrant land of rich traditions, breathtaking scenic beauty, warm and hospitable people, and a cultural tapestry like no other.

Nowadays Mexico's nation branding strategy focuses on promoting its rich cultural heritage, vibrant traditions, natural landscapes, and economic potential. The country boasts diverse indigenous cultures, iconic historical sites such as Mayan ruins and Aztec temples, and colorful traditions such as Dia de Muertos celebrations. These unique elements serve as the basis of Mexico's brand identity, reflecting a blend of ancient civilizations and modern influences.

Mexico is not limited to its historical legacy. It is a vibrant, ever-evolving country that harmoniously blends modern developments with tradition. From cosmopolitan cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey, to seaside resorts along the Riviera Maya and Baja California, Mexico offers a variety of experiences to suit all tastes. The country's Visit Mexico brand highlights its modernity, encouraging visitors to explore the vibrant cities and enjoy world-renowned culinary delights.

Moreover, Mexico has worked diligently to promote its economic potential to foreign investors. The country is a major player in industries such as automotive, aerospace, and electronics (Electronics Manufacturing in Mexico; Country Commercial Guide). With a young and dynamic workforce, a strategic geographic location, and a network of free trade agreements, including the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), Mexico is an attractive investment destination for both established corporations and startups.

Mexican authorities are also emphasizing sustainability in their efforts to brand the country. Initiatives such as the Pueblos Mágicos (Magic Cities) program aim to promote sustainable tourism by highlighting lesser known, culturally important cities.

### **6.1. Pueblos Mágicos**

The Pueblos Mágicos program was implemented by the Mexican government in 2001 to promote sustainable tourism and economic development in rural areas (Basurto-Cedeño and Cevallos 2). Selected locations undergo a rigorous evaluation process to determine their eligibility for the program, considering factors such as historical significance, cultural value, and tourism potential.

Once a locality is designated as a Pueblo Mágico, it receives financial support from the government for investment in infrastructure and tourism development (Enríquez Acosta and Vargas Ochoa 17). These funds help protect historic sites, upgrade public facilities, and promote local businesses.

What makes Pueblos Mágicos truly unique is their ability to transport visitors back in time. These towns provide a glimpse into Mexico's past through cobblestone streets, colonial architecture, and cultural traditions. Exploring one of these cities is like stepping into another era, where ancient customs and modern life blend seamlessly.

Each Pueblo Mágico has its own distinct character and attractions. Some are located amidst breathtaking natural landscapes, such as the Pueblo Mágico of Bernal, near the giant rock formation known as Peña de Bernal (Pueblos Mágicos). Others, such as San Miguel de Allende, are famous for their vibrant art scenes and festivals. The town of Tepoztlán is famous for its ancient pyramids and mystical atmosphere.

In addition to cultural and historical treasures, Pueblos Mágicos also offer outdoor activities for nature enthusiasts. Many are surrounded by picturesque landscapes with mountains, forests, rivers, and waterfalls (Pueblos Mágicos).

The Pueblos Mágicos program has been incredibly successful in promoting sustainable tourism and supporting local economies. These destinations have become must-visit places for both domestic and international tourists, offering a unique alternative to popular seaside resorts and cosmopolitan cities.

Mexico is a vibrant and diverse country with a rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and mouthwatering cuisine. However, it is often subjected to a range of stereotypes that may distort the true essence of the nation and its people. It is important to approach these stereotypes with an open mind and recognize that they are often oversimplified generalizations. When visiting Mexico, one realizes that not every man has a thick mustache and wears a sombrero. While sombreros are historically significant and still part of traditional celebrations and festivals, they are not everyday attire for Mexicans (Praise). Mexico is often associated with drug-related violence due to media portrayals of cartels and crime (Boullosa). While it is true that parts of Mexico have experienced challenges related to drug trafficking, it is important to note that this is not representative of the entire country. Much of Mexico is safe for residents and tourists alike, with beautiful landscapes, bustling cities, and welcoming communities.

It is crucial to reject stereotypes and misconceptions. Broad generalizations oversimplify a complex and diverse nation. The true essence of Mexico lies in its warm and hospitable people, rich cultural traditions, historical landmarks, and delicious cuisine. By understanding and appreciating Mexico's cultural diversity and complexity, we can move beyond stereotypes and foster genuine connections with this beautiful country and its people.

Mexico's nation branding can be described as relatively successful. Over the years, Mexico has worked to present a positive image to the world and promote itself as a desirable tourist destination, an attractive investment opportunity and a center of cultural wealth. According to the Nation Brands Index (NBI), Mexico's national brand is currently ranked thirty-first. Several factors contribute to the success of Mexico's nation branding.

The first is definitely tourism. Mexico has successfully positioned itself as one of the world's top tourist destinations (de la Mora 44-45). Each year, the country attracts millions of visitors who are drawn to its beautiful beaches, archaeological sites, vibrant cities, and diverse cuisine. Mexico's nation branding has effectively showcased its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and warm hospitality, making it a popular choice for travelers.

Cultural appeal is also key. Mexico's rich history, traditions, and vibrant culture contribute to the success of the national brand. Mexican cultural icons such as Day of the Dead celebrations, mariachi music, and world-renowned artists such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera have gained international fame. These cultural aspects have helped Mexico create a unique and recognizable identity, elevating its national brand.

Investment opportunities are another factor. Mexico has been successful in attracting foreign direct investment due to its favorable business environment and strategic geographic location (Mexico Country Performance). The nation branding campaign highlights Mexico's competitive advantages, including its skilled labor force, trade agreements, and access to global markets. As a result, Mexico has seen significant investments in various sectors.

Another important element is gastronomy. Mexican cuisine, known for its vibrant flavors and diverse ingredients, is becoming increasingly popular worldwide. Mexico's nation branding has capitalized on its gastronomy, showcasing traditional dishes such as tacos and enchiladas. This recognition has led to the establishment of Mexican restaurants in major cities around the world, further promoting the country's image and identity.

Sporting events are another important element. Mexico has successfully hosted major international events, including the FIFA World Cup, Formula One races, and annual marathons (Wood). These events contribute to the country's economy and enhance its national brand, demonstrating Mexico's ability to organize and host large-scale events.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Mexico continues to face problems such as drug-related violence, which can negatively impact its nation branding efforts (Herrera Lasso and Pérez Esquivel 22). In addition, economic inequality and corruption can make it difficult to present Mexico as an attractive place to do business and invest (Mexico Country Performance). However, the government, along with various organizations and initiatives, continues to work to address these challenges and further strengthen the country's national brand.

## 7. Summary

Previously, the concept of a nation brand was perceived in a more superficial manner, primarily focused on its image. Currently, its significance is increasing, leading to additional inquiries into its nature, constituents, tactics, and ethical considerations. Despite the extensive studies on nation branding, multiple approaches exist, ranging from cultural to economic and political. A nation's brand is linked to the expectations and ideals it represents, conveyed through many channels. In today's era of branding, there is a need for a tool that can effectively construct, mend, or realign the image, reputation, and identity of a nation. The concept of nation branding offers governments the chance to promote themselves through various means. The primary goals of participating and utilizing branding tactics are to differentiate the distinctive resources of a nation in order to effectively compete on the global platform (Dinnie 14).

The significance of nation branding and its impact can be observed through the examples of Peru and Mexico. Both Latin American countries are renowned for their cultural legacy, encompassing historical civilizations such as the Inca and Aztec,

as well as their gastronomy and abundant natural resources. Their narratives were crafted by selecting and emphasizing these distinctive characteristics, developing stories that have successfully navigated challenges and resonated with audiences. The implementation of branding strategies enabled both countries to effectively increase their competitiveness in the global market. The implementation of Peru's promotional strategies is particularly remarkable. The creation of a ministry, signs, campaigns, and more indicates devotion and determination. It is worth noting that although Peru and Mexico share many similarities, the manner in which their images were established differs. The disparity lies in the foundational aspects of the countries, including geographical characteristics, economic conditions, and rates of development. Peru established a distinctive identity by combining its most iconic features while cultivating new ones. The concept of a nation brand was employed to enhance its image by creating instruments such as *PromPerú*.

Mexico, although widely known, has not yet made significant efforts to develop its own brand. The term "nation brand" is employed in this context to uphold the established reputation and represent Mexico in prevailing trends. Specific enhancements and a shift in focus towards adopting sustainable practices were exemplified by the Pueblos Mágicos. In comparison with Peru, Mexico's promotional strategy appears fragmented rather than exhibiting a cohesive international approach. The paper demonstrated that countries effectively<sup>3</sup> promoted their distinctive characteristics, establishing a platform for Latin American countries to gain recognition and visibility. Undoubtedly, the implementation of nation branding initiatives has raised concerns regarding the maintenance of diversity. Simon Anholt, who strongly believes that the images of places are indeed central to their progress and prosperity, stated that it often reduces them to "the weak, simplistic, outdated, unfair stereotypes" (Anholt). As a policy advisor, he acknowledges the need for promotion but warns that solutions should evoke trust by showing the richness of a country instead of reducing it to a brand (Anholt).

When governments engage in superficial nation branding, it can be likened to applying makeup, which enhances appearance and hides flaws, but these are merely surface-level changes. Once washed away, it reveals a superficial layer that does not actually heal wounds. However, when applied intelligently and with awareness of a nation's unique characteristics and limitations, it can bring out the best and contribute to improvement. Therefore, what criteria should be used to determine success, and how can we distinguish between promotion and "selling out"?

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<sup>3</sup> In terms of established goals: better recognition and gained trust.

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