

**BRANDING ROMANIA: A PESTEL FRAMEWORK BASED  
ON A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO COUNTRY  
BRAND INDEXES**

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***Abstract.** Branding Romania is an oft-told story within national public debates. During the past years, the urgency of promoting a coherent Romanian brand to international audiences has been spurred by various factors. Amongst these factors we note general pressures caused by globalization and information abundance, pressures of delivering a European Union congruent brand and nevertheless internal pressures related to social changes. The present paper employs a comparative analysis of two widely used country brand indexes, in order to reveal the dimensions upon which a complex branding strategy could be developed. In light of our findings, we use an adapted model of the PESTEL analysis in order to evaluate Romania's stance in the strategic branding process. The main emphasis lies on the interdependent and mutually-reinforcing spheres that could constitute the foundation of a consistent, long-term brand management.*

**Keywords:** brand, country brand indexes, country branding, PESTEL analysis.

## **1. Introduction and prior literature**

Whilst many think of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the era of digital, information and communication technologies, marketers across the world are well aware that this century is also the century of country branding (Anholt, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008; Moilanen, 2008). The concept of country branding, sometimes used by the overlapping terms of nation or destination branding, has gradually gained importance during the past decades. It represents a young field of research that deals primarily with planning, organizing and communicating the image of a country, namely image management (Anholt, 2007a). It has developed from or is related to public diplomacy, marketing, public relations and information management (Jones, 1986; St. John, 1994; Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesincee, 1997; Anholt, 2003). Moreover, country branding taps and is affected by economic, social, political and communicational dimensions. The importance of creating a coherent country brand has equally been acknowledged and disregarded by some countries (Anholt, 2007a). While countries such as Australia, Croatia, Germany or Spain stand proof to the power of an exhaustive, consistently supported country promotion, other countries risk falling behind for not pursuing branding strategies (Moilanen, 2008). It was empirically demonstrated that people do

not necessarily object the process and implications of branding, but rather find the 'brand' nugget as too shallow of a representation of historical and cultural legacies, natural landscapes, touristic attractions, language or people (Olins, 2002). In order to coax then, the brand concept has to brand itself.

The present paper attempts to enrich the research field concerning the process of branding Romania. First, we will briefly mention the importance branding yields across different sectors of a country's structure. Then, a comparative analysis of country brands indexes will be performed, in order to highlight the fields that are affected by and in turn shape a country's image. Next, we will introduce an adapted PESTEL analysis of country branding, underscoring the fact that what Romania lacks is a complex branding apparatus, centralized for efficient decision making, though decentralized enough as to flexibly tailor those decisions to various audiences, within ever-changing circumstances.

### *1.1. Why branding?*

The concept of brand, as well as the whole branding process, is multifaceted and complex. Country branding has risen to prominence from several fields, such as public diplomacy, marketing or public relations (St. John, 1994; Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesincee, 1997; Tuch, 1990). Public diplomacy mainly deals with conveying a positive image of a country to the international arena or interest groups of other countries (Tuch, 1990). However, while public diplomacy is concerned with transmitting a positive image of a country to international audiences, the branding process implies the construction, promotion and commercialization of such an image (Anholt, 2007b). It can thus be argued that country branding yields a wider impact span (Moilanen, 2008).

Country branding has also evolved from marketing, being analogous to corporative product branding. Nonetheless, destinations brands (be they countries, regions, cities or places) represent intangible products, and provide unique configurations of climate, environmental conditions, culture, language or touristic attractions. Country branding thus refers to how countries market themselves, by offering unique experiences, emotions and lifestyles in order to attract consumers, tourists or entrepreneurs (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004; Moilanen, 2008). Perhaps the most widely known practical implication of country marketing is the so-called 'country of origin effect' (for example Scott and Keith, 2005), which posits that consumers associate willingly or unknowingly the quality of the products with the production country's reputation per se (Anholt, 2003). On the macro level, one can argue that the same mechanisms are at stake when defining the relations between importers and exporters, the right places to outsource business functions, the countries' involvement in international trade, and others' exclusion from the international arena. One can even argue that the purported advantage globalization yields upon the development of destitute countries is an utopian idea, lest countries are a priori branded. Thus, by lacking a complex apparatus that screens for and

disseminates positive information, countries around the world will not be able to exploit their full potential and competitive advantages within the international arena (Moilanen, 2008).

The acknowledgment that the management of information is of utmost importance towards countries' development has come with the technological revolution and information abundance (Anholt, 2007b). When exposed to a wide array of information, people employ several cognitive techniques in order to set priorities and distinguish relevant from irrelevant information (Gilovich, Keltner and Nisbett, 2006). Thus, due to lack of time or high opportunity costs for constructing educated opinions, people rely on stereotypes, clichés, ethnocentric considerations or information short-cuts when making decisions in even mundane human activities: social interactions, interpersonal relations, work sphere, political affiliation, consumer behavior etc. (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981; Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky, 1982). Relying on stereotypes or inaccurate information can in turn lead to social tensions, discriminative behavior, mercantilist consumer attitudes, flawed communication processes or even educational problems within a society (Gilovich, Keltner and Nisbett, 2006).

### *1.2. How to measure country brands*

One of the leading, widely used brand hierarchies in the literature is the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, coordinated by the renown branding scholar Simon Anholt. The index is compiled on an yearly basis and measures the efficiency with which countries construct, develop and sustain their country brands. In 2008 50 country brands were assessed, based on their brand performances in tourism, investment and immigration, culture, people, exports and governance (GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media [GRPAM], 2009). These six general indicators are broken into other sub-indicators, which are later operationalized in the form of survey questions (GPRAM, 2009).

The survey runs yearly in 20 developed or developing countries. Based on the answers, a hierarchy of nation brands is compiled for each of the six variables, the aggregation of which determine the final hierarchy. For the 2008 hierarchy, Romania ranks 41<sup>st</sup> out of the total 50 country brands investigated. Though the index does not allegedly measure the genuine performance of the countries in the six domains outlined (e.g. sheer tourism revenues) but rather the brand efforts, there are still some methodological controversies. In particular, it is unclear how can country efforts be measured by respondents' opinions. It is thus hard to differentiate between countries with a traditionally strong brand (e.g. Italy, France) from countries with a recent branding surge, and quantify the respective efforts. In other words, the index does not capture to the full the development of a country's image since it does not control for historically held brand strengths. Moreover, one can argue that there is an obvious association between a country's development level and the hierarchy rank, again suggesting that the efforts per se are not fully grasped (GPRAM, 2009). A simple

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correlation between the country brands scores and the per capita GDP of the respective countries reveals a strong and significant positive relation,  $p < 0.005$  (two-tailed),  $r = 0.701$  (Table 1 below). Thus, the overall development level of a country significantly relates to the success of the brand itself, though as Anholt (2008) posits the relation is mutually-enforcing and no causality effect can be delineated.

*Table 1*

**Correlation between the NBI scores and the respective per capita GDP**

		Score received on the NBI	GDP (PPP) per capita
Score received on the NBI	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	50.000	49
GDP (PPP) per capita	Pearson Correlation	.701**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	49	49.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Data taken from the The Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, 2008 Report (GPRAM, 2009) and from the World Economic and Financial Surveys (International Monetary Fund, 2009).

Another widely employed such index is the Country Brand Index (CBI), compiled yearly by the brand and strategy consultancy FutureBrand (FutureBrand, 2009). The methodology of this index is more complex than that of the Nation Brands Index (NBI), encompassing three tiers of brands research. The first tier is a general survey run in nine countries (similar to the NBI), the second is a qualitative hospitality experts survey (interview-based), whereas the third component is represented by secondary expert research (FutureBrand, 2009). The operationalization is based on a twofold scheme, covering both the supply side of the country brand (what the country can offer) and the demand side of the actual or potential tourists, foreign investors, residents or citizens of the respective country (what is expected) (FutureBrand, 2009). The general survey comprises 30 attributes, among which we note: authenticity, history, culture, infrastructure, touristic attractions, business environment, technological advancements, environmental protection and similar others (FutureBrand, 2009).

Similar to the Anholt-GfK Roper Index, the FutureBrand CBI acknowledges the distinction between brand in general and tourism as a particular brand form. Tourism is generally considered to be the most visible manifestation of a country brand, and perhaps the most valid measurement of the branding's effectiveness (FutureBrand, 2009). Romanian branding strategies have made no exception to this

belief. Across time, several programs, built on different themes, aiming at various audiences, have attempted to stimulate touristic activities. Tourism has been both extolled as key to all problems and treated as the root of all societal evils. What the present analysis will show is that there are multifarious facets to a problem, and multiple factors that affect a country's image, thus employing a unilateral perspective to branding by using tourism will not only be flawed, but also ill-willed.

Both indexes employ surveys, delineating the areas that are of importance towards a country's image. While the Anholt-GfK Roper NBI measures performance around six large dimensions, the CBI uses, along expert interviews and secondary research, 30 attributes for determining a country brand's stand. Both studies reveal of an intricate manner the importance of not awarding precedence to a particular dimension, but to rather tackle the branding process simultaneously from several viewpoints.

## **2. Methodology**

Branding Romania has been subject to plentiful campaigns, debates, governmental actions, advertisements and promotion schemes. A noteworthy study that holistically looks at these – mostly dispersed – branding attempts is that of Nicolescu, Păun et al (2008), who perform a SWOT analysis (strengths – weaknesses – opportunities - threats) of Romania's brand building. While the SWOT analysis is a fit tool to use with respect to product potentialities, it is at times broad and inexact. A more systematic and detailed SWOT framework that can be employed is the PESTEL analysis used in strategic management (the political, economic, social, technological change, environmental and legislative framework), with its variations of PEST, PEST-E, SLEPT and others as such (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004).

It is important to note that this type of analysis is an environmental analysis, usually performed in order to reveal the factors that help or hinder marketing dynamics of products (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). It is usually run under a PEST form of the external elements of SWOT. Since we deal with a country however, the very market characteristics that are analyzed – political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legislative conditions – determine the product (country image) itself, and thus represent the internal elements of SWOT. We thus find the PESTEL analysis to better fit the country or destination branding processes.

Since the PESTEL components represent the characteristics of the country itself, they also denote to a great extent the supply side of brands. By linking the demand side of brands (the NBI and CBI measurements) to the country components (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legislative), one will be able to identify the equilibrium point of the demand and supply side of brands, or the core branding characteristics. For this purpose, two coders assigned the two indexes' conceptual categories to the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legislative dimensions. Whilst acknowledging the fact that the six categories are not mutually exclusive, for the purpose at hand they were treated as collectively

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exhaustive. Each index category was assigned to one and one only PESTEL category, the one that was conceptually fit. Though both coders were trained to perform the coding of the same manner, the conceptual and operational definitions of the two indexes methodologies allowed for no coding ambiguities, thus averring the validity of the measurement (Neumann, 2000). Indeed, the inter-coder reliability Cohen test revealed that there were no significant differences between the two coding results,  $p < 0.005$ ,  $k = 0.678$ . As seen in Table 2 below, the high value Cohen's kappa yields ( $> 0.610$ ) proves substantial agreement between the two coders.

The 36 categories (6 from NBI and 30 from CBI) were distributed according to the dimensions they tackled. The mean average distributions of the two coders rankings are presented in Table 3 below. As one can see from the table, the PESTEL components that were mostly covered are that of the political, economic and social realm. This is why we deem a PES (or PES-E) analysis as to best fit the country strategic brand management.

Table 2

### Inter-coder reliability analysis

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.678	.091	8.134	.000
	N of Valid Cases	36			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					

Table 3

### Number of components of each PESTEL dimension

PESTEL dimension	Mean average of indexes components pertaining to the dimensions
Political	5.5
Economic	9
Social	12.5
Technological	2
Environmental	4.5
Legal	2.5

### 3. Results: A new branding strategy

As all brand measurements clustered around the political, economic and social dimensions, we decided to perform a PES analysis, briefly mentioning the remaining TEL dimensions. For the purpose of this paper, we will highlight the SWOT

components that should be looked at on the PES dimensions, specifying afterwards the objective indicators that measure performance on all six dimensions. We will thus construct a basic scheme that can be used to brand Romania, and most countries for that matter. Further studies that would ensure the creation of an exhaustive, six dimensional branding strategy, are nevertheless encouraged.

### *3.1. The political sphere*

Romania is a parliamentary unitary republic, its Constitution being based on that of France Fifth Republic. Freedom of speech and expression, and institutional checks and balances are guaranteed by the constitution. Suffrage is awarded on a universal basis to all citizens over 18 years of age (Freedom House [FH], 2009). Since the fall of communism, Romania has witnessed numerous internal struggles for power, ideological clashes, as well as all-encompassing reforms. Its democratic stability as well as commitment to democratic values (Romania has constantly received a score of 2 on a 1-7 Freedom House democratic scale, where 1 represents the most democratic environment) since the 1990s – is perhaps the core strength within the political realm at the moment. Its affiliation to the European Union as of 2007 provides undoubtedly the primary branding opportunity, and hence should constitute one of the pillars of the Romanian brand architecture (Nicolescu, Păun et al, 2008). Romania should not pursue an independent branding process than that of the European Union, but rather build upon it, whilst extolling its national characteristics. On the other hand, European Union reports have overly-emphasized the urgency for Romania to fight endemic corruption (FH, 2009). The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index attributes to 2008 Romania a score of 3.8 on a 0-10 scale, where 0 stands for the most corrupted environment. By strengthening its government, raising the anticorruption fight and transparency of political processes, Romania can mitigate the weaknesses it faces in present times and even overturn its brand into a vibrant, democratic, civil society, European Union type of image.

### *3.2. The economic sphere*

The great disadvantage of developing or underdeveloped countries lies in managing their brands of an advantageous manner in order to gain or exploit competitive edges. What usually occurs however, is that people tend to rely on clichés or stereotypes when decoding the external environment (Gilovich, Keltner and Nisbett, 2006). In the country case, this implies that one risks mistaking a symptom for a cause, thus equating countries' poor development to the lack of potential, and not to circumstances. This is why it might often be the case that countries which own a significantly high potential growth do not receive enough attention from investors or entrepreneurs, due to their weak or negative reputation. It might as well be that some other countries enjoy the reputation they had accumulated centuries before, despite lacking competitive advantages in present times. It is thus necessary for all

governments to understand the necessity of competitively organizing the images of their countries, in order to speed up development (Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesincee, 1997; Anholt, 2007b).

A positive and vibrant brand can help expand tourism and attract foreign direct investments, which can in turn boost living standards, subjective well-being levels, productivity and labor satisfaction in general. One of Romania's weaknesses in this domain is the lack of a transparent business environment, due in part to red-tape and mixed regulations that had been implemented throughout the time under no long-term, coherent strategy. The Romanian brand is associated to few, if any international competitive industries. This is rather paradoxical, since in the era of technological advancements, knowledge and technology transfers take place easier and at a higher pace, making it possible for countries to skip through development stages and catch up with developed countries (Gerschenkron, 1962). Among Romania's strengths, we underscore cheap labor and production factors, which can significantly contribute to stimulating business ventures. Its major opportunity is the affiliation to the European Economic Area, which allows for the free flow of capital, goods, people and services. The greatest threat looming upon the Romanian business environment is the failure to deploy at full potential its competitive advantages, which in turn can affect its brand. Hence it faces a development – brand circular path, which can only be shaken off at the use of a coherent and consistent branding strategy (Anholt, 2007b).

### *3.3. The social sphere*

Romania has 18 official ethnic minorities, which own the right to use their mother-tongue when dealing with the authorities or administration in the areas where they constitute more than a fifth of the population (CIA Factbook, 2009). On the other hand, a 2008 Freedom House Report highlights the fact that this right is often not enforced, remaining only an official one. The same report shows that discrimination against the Roma minority continues to take place, with respect to access to housing, social services or employment. Though de jure they benefit of affirmative actions, they are rather discriminated de facto on a social basis (FH, 2009). This fact mandates for the adoption of social integration programs, perhaps following programs that other countries have successfully employed.

The Romanian brand threat lies in social atomization, though this problem can be mitigated through the establishment of social integration programs. Within the international arena, Romania must brand and exploit its historical artifacts, arts, literature and cultural legacy in order to better manage its whole image, as well the information flows related to it. The greatest threat it faces is not being able to communicate its image of a unique, attractive manner or failing to control information that might directly or indirectly, actually or potentially, harm its image.

*3.4. The technological, environmental and legislative sphere*

As we have previously mentioned, Romania has few traditional industries or clusters, the most notable being those of wood and textiles (Csaba, 2008). The GDP percentage spent on research and development is significantly low compared to that of other countries (CIA Factbook, 2009). It also well-known that Romania enjoys advantageous ecological and climate conditions, though touristic exploitation of these advantages are hindered by the poor infrastructure. The problem could be directly tackled by the establishment of a public-private long-term venture of building up (mainly) highways between the most important financial and industrial Romanian cities, and the rest of Europe. One could contract an external company under a convenient installment plan, which could be initially supported by Government bonds with an extensive maturity date. In light of the recent highway scandals, we believe it would not be far-fetched to request supervision by and best practices sharing with the European Union.

The legislative environment was not extremely enticing to potential consumers, foreign investors or transnational companies, especially before acceding to the European Union, though since 2007 alleviating measures have been implemented (FH, 2009). On the other hand, the still heavy bureaucracy often imposes additional costs, tempting many to turn to methods of corruption, bribery, nepotism and clientelism, as it is shown in the 2008 Global Corruption Report of Transparency International.

Table 4 below lists all the objective quantitative indicators that can serve as a performance appraisal of the major structures of the country, where branding is needed. We thus note the strong necessity for centralization, which means that the same nation brand image should be disseminated on a regional, national or international basis, in all domains that contribute towards or are affected by the brand. This is precisely one of the limitations FutureBrand have identified with respect to brand processes: „Countries generally approach marketing and branding in a decentralized way, which neither maximizes nor effectively leverages the power of the brand across the country, its ministries and its citizens” (FutureBrand, 2009).

*Table 4*

**Indicators of the PESTEL analysis**

PESTEL dimensions	Quantitative global indicators of measuring performance in the field
Political	- Freedom House score (civil liberties/ political rights) - Press Freedom score, Freedom House
Economic	- GDP/ GNI (PPP), per capita GDP (PPP) - GDP growth rate - Exports output - Balance of payments - Current account deficit

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PESTEL dimensions	Quantitative global indicators of measuring performance in the field
	- Foreign Direct Investment - Per capita tourism turnover
Social	- GINI coefficient - Literacy rate - Primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolment - UN HDI score - Level of generalized trust (World Values Survey, European Social Survey, General Social Survey)
Technological	- World Economic Forum: Global Competitiveness Reports
Environmental	- United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports - United Nations Environmental Programme - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Legal	- Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International - Global Corruption Report, Transparency International

### 4. Conclusion

When we talk about the brand of countries, regions, cities or places, we often refer to their image, reputation and identity, to the external way in which potential tourists, residents, consumers or investors perceive that specific place (Anholt, 2003). Country branding has gradually gained importance during the past years, having emerged concomitantly from public diplomacy, marketing, product branding, public relations and information management (St. John, 1994; Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesincee, 1997; Anholt, 2003). When compared to public diplomacy, branding ensures a wider span of management in general and controlling in particular (Tuch, 1990; Anholt 2007b; Moilanen, 2008). Marketing branding is needed because there are plentiful characteristics that locations hold, and thus their effectiveness rests upon the satisfaction the interplay of characteristics can offer. The economic sphere of a country is thus strongly related to the way in which the reputation or the image of a country affects the flow of capital, goods, services, factors of production or people. A proper and thorough communication process stemming from a country towards the rest of the world fosters a burgeoning environment for cultural discovery, touristic exploration, social interactions and networking. In light of the spheres related to branding, it thus comes as no surprise that the realms mostly researched by brand indexes are the political, economic and social ones.

The indexes presented in this paper reveal the consequential spheres to judging a country's image. As it has often been misunderstood within the Romanian public opinion forums, branding does not solely rest upon tourism, but rather affects the touristic field. Tourism can be thought of as the explicit form of branding, the visible iceberg tip built upon the country's overall positioning. A country's brand exerts influence upon and is influenced in turn by a wide range of processes spanning the political, social, cultural or legislative sphere. The present analysis has shown the

importance of employing a multidimensional framework for an exhaustive comprehension of country image determinants.

By employing surveys, both indexes reveal the areas of utmost importance to a brand. The present analysis stressed these areas as the political, economic and social ones. Hence, a PES analysis was found to be most appropriate for the „country industry”, but a full PESTEL analysis is nevertheless encouraged. The PESTEL analysis is useful not only due to its SWOT framework, but also because it offers a systematic, holistic view of the fields, and the respective organizations and institutions, that must be coordinated in order to offer a consistent, long-term image of Romania.

It is thus utterly necessary that the branding process to focus at the same time, through an integrated effort, on the fields that influence its success. In turn, the interdependent and interlinked branding realms should convey consistently the same message at a local, regional, national or international level (Anholt, 2007b). A large number of branding campaigns have been initiated in Romania during the past years, by institutions which did not communicate with one another, and have concentrated at turns on different country characteristics, giving rise to a segmented and incoherent image of Romania. (Nicolescu, Păun et al, 2008). This is why all the sectors that are affected by and can contribute to Romania’s image must undertake an integrated effort in order to induce a unitary vision of Romania. The indexes presented in this paper help us distinguish those spheres where the branding experts’ attention must lie, in order to contribute to the betterment of Romania’s international brand.

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