NATION BRANDING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CREATING THE US INTERNATIONAL IMAGE: LESSONS FOR THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Nation branding is a relatively new concept, it encompasses a term which was born in a context connected with the advancement of the informational age in International Relations discipline and also in the context of the ever-increasing cooperation of states amongst them, and specifically through the need of each state to boost its presence or visibility on the international relations arena. The formation of the research of the nation branding topic largely is due to the constant evolution of interdisciplinary discussions where academics realized that one or other topic is closely linked and correlated to other disciplines, for instance for our subject we can witness involvement of topics such as destination marketing, image of country, place branding, country of origin marketing, national history, human psychology and others. These subjects in effect, were firstly correlated to subject of political image of a state and in effect, it acquired various interpretations and finally developing into the concept of nation branding.The proposed goal of the work was to analyze theoretical-methodological and empirical process of nation branding, whilst highlighting the implications for state image in international relations – specifically the United States of America and the Republic of Moldova. In our research the terms nation branding, country branding and state branding are all used equally, and are being viewed as similar, however we specified that for the Republic of Moldova's realities, the preferred term would be country or state branding, as opposed to the term nation branding. The researcher W. Olins considers that national branding was undertaken from the earliest times of humanity when states were using their symbols, currency, hymns, and other attributes [6]. This much broader historical perspective, leading to the general conclusion, according to the author: definitions and terms of national branding was introduced recently, but practically speaking countries did a long time ago already.

Other prominent author basing on the notion of branding theory from marketing dimension subsequently resume that nation branding is to manage a nation brand as a total and umbrella concept to achieve that nation brand creation and "to sustain the performance outputs of a nation" [5]. The most prominent academician in the field is the British researcher - Simon Anholt, who claims that himself personally is the scholar who in 1996 conceptualized the term - brand of a nation. Therefore his conclusions is that nation branding is "a unique communication about a nation or country to the world through public diplomacy, trade, export promotion and tourism represents branding the nation (or nation branding)" [2].

There is no single or universally accepted definition of the term nation branding, however following the research on various interpretation, we came up with the following definition: a set of measures in the field of exports , tourism, culture , internal and external policies and investments to develop and implement the strategy of brand building of a state, aimed at improving the country's image, perceived as the local population and foreigners and activated by a variety of instruments (communication, marketing, public diplomacy, culture). In addition, American researcher N. Kaneva., comes to be the first to do an extensive work of literature related to the field of branding [4]. Her work has synthesized 186 sources of authors in the field. After comparing all articles in this domain, the writings were classified into 3 categories or dimensions/approaches to brand the state: the dimension of techno-economic, political and cultural.

In the techno-economic dimension we most sources, 56% of all writings. At the end of the day, it is crucial to identify why is so important to have a good nation branding, in the context of international image. A good nation branding will make a positive image of the state, which in turn will makes a significant influence on all areas of the country's international presentability.

A good nation branding process will enhance national image, and eventually will also be responsible to: get respect and recognition of the country, to create itself as a attractive destination for tourists, to enhance unity and identity pride of citizens, to expand the attraction of skilled professionals as well as foreign investment, to help change derisory opinions about that country and also break stereotypes, to elevate demand of local products, and others.

According to the best work describing the US as a brand, currently, America is the best and most widely known country brand ever, and the love people have for the United States the world over is immense and well documented [1]. At the same time, more recently, we also saw negative feelings in the world that people have for the US, which tried to be combated through different policies, especially after the 9/11 attacks.

The United States, having all the necessary tools to pursue a successful international image shaping campaign which is connected to soft power tools, is by us to be considered one of the most successful country that appliessoft power. American soft power has been efficient and national image has been strongly attractive and successful due to some cultural aspects, such as Hollywood, McDonald's, also by the values of american democracy, of the liberal american way of life, also of the american dream, american business model and others. Countries such as France, Italy, Germany, U.K, South Korea, Estonia, Latvia and others have applied same model of the American effort to utilize their culture, life values and national assets to the national image advantage.

The great stake is that it was understood, that all the assets and instruments available could be used in order to pursue a better and more effective foreign policy. Nowadays, the diplomatic process is unthinkable without mentioning the role of image and efforts to make someone's country known or positive in other country.

Here we believe is a great potential for the Republic of Moldova also, to learn from the experience of other states such as USA, in order to mobilize itself for some effective measures aimed at building its brand with a more positive and demanded image of the Republic of Moldova abroad as well as inside the country. To the researcher's interest, it is useful to understand that, America has never embarked on a coordinated international campaign to sell itself to potential overseas visitors or its own image. But the USA launched its first-ever branding initiative in 2012, called Brand USA [3]. This effort can be seen as the most recent in US history, where nation branding was institutionalized and an targeted effort, however as we mentioned before american life and culture, have long ago attracted the favorable perceptions.

Taking as reference the researches and results, we came up with some recommendations contributing to the knowledge, explanation and understanding of issues related to the process of forming a national brand, its components and the issue of creating the Republic of Moldova's nation branding: 1. Conducting a research program on the country's perception and of Republic of Moldova's citizens abroad. 2. The development of the creative component of the brand (slogan, visual identity, brand label, etc.). 3. Create a group of scholars and civil initiative, which would formulate visions and concrete strategies on national brand. 4. To organize international and national forums in the Republic of Moldova for discussions regarding the state brand development and image formation of the country. 5. Establish an office, department, agency or institution that has as main purpose the coordination and implementation of policies for national brand, it's work shall be multidisciplinary and its structure shall be within the Government competences.

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