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Promoting Identities: An Overview of the Development of Nation Branding in Latin America

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study analyzes and compares nation branding strategies implemented by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, since their first initiatives until 2020. Literature on nation branding in the countries under study is explored. The strategies implemented by each country were analyzed and compared. Argentina maintained a strategy focused on tourism but underwent logo and institutional changes. Brazil sought to stand out as a technological and innovative country. Chile focused on promoting investments and exports while creating a national identity. Colombia promoted international and domestic tourism, aiming to improve its international image and citizens self-esteem. Mexico maintained its logo and strategy of promoting tourism, investments, and exports until the dissolution of ProMexico under López Obrador's administration. Peru maintained a strategy focused on tourism and gastronomy. During their first two decades, nation branding in Latin America has been characterized by, firstly, being strongly associated with the interests of governments in power. Secondly, by having authorities as main actors, often to the detriment of citizens' perspectives. Finally, nation branding strategies in Latin America have privileged limited versions of national identity that have been perceived as appealing for international markets.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Nation Branding, International Tourism, Latin America.

INTRODUCTION

Nation Branding in the World

Since the beginning of the 21st century, governments and authorities worldwide have adopted nation branding strategies to intentionally create and promote a positive image of a country internationally. Definitions of nation branding vary, but they generally refer to a series of media initiatives, based on strategic communication, aimed at constructing, disseminating, and managing "new" or "improved" versions of national identity to achieve political, cultural, and primarily economic goals (Aronczyk, 2013). Nation branding has its origins in marketing and corporate branding (Hernández García, 2012). Its supporters, however, highlight that, although it has certain parallels with corporate branding, there are differences that stem from the public nature of regions, countries, and cities, particularly the complexity of the social systems each of them faces (Muñiz Martínez, 2019). Moreover, while they recognize the existence of previous initiatives for tourism promotion and investment (Bassols, 2016), proponents like Anholt (2007)—a British consultant considered the originator of nation branding—emphasize the need for a holistic, long-term, public and private strategy that involves tourism, economy, politics, investments, and culture, among others.

Nation branding emerged in a post-Cold War context, characterized by the apparent victory of neoliberalism, globalization, the proliferation of digital technologies, the expansion of promotional logic in the public sector, and the belief that solutions to social problems would come from the market rather than national governments (Jiménez-Martínez, Mihelj, & Sage, 2024). Unlike psychological operations or propaganda, which attempt to construct and communicate versions of national identity to prevent or promote armed conflicts (Taylor, 1997), nation branding is conceived by its proponents as a response to the competition between nation-states to attract foreign investment, companies, and university students, in addition to increasing the number of tourists and strengthening their so-called soft power (Arteaga Florez, Pianda Estrada, & Sandoval Montenegro, 2019). Despite the fact that nation branding was designed to attract foreign audiences, it has also been argued in favor of its use as a strategic planning tool to examine internal needs and promote local public policies (de San Eugenio Vela, Fernández-Cavia, Nogué, & Jiménez-Morales, 2013).

The global surge of nation branding has been accompanied by growing academic interest in fields such as business studies, international relations, cultural studies, and especially media and communication. In a widely cited article, Kaneva (2011) categorized these works into three groups: technical-economic, political, and cultural. The first two groups, which have so far constituted the majority, tend to celebrate the existence of nation brands and offer suggestions to authorities, companies, and strategic communication specialists on how to construct, communicate, and manage these brands. The third group, however, adopts a more critical perspective, questioning the presumed success of these promotional initiatives and stating that nation branding strategies are elitist, attempt to limit discussions on national identity, treat nations as units of economic production, and consider their inhabitants as mere consumers rather than citizens (Aronczyk, 2013; Castelló & Mihelj, 2018; Kaneva, 2011).

Most of the debates on nation branding have taken place among academics and professionals from the United States and Europe. Contributions from other regions of the world have been limited. This poses a significant gap, considering that nation branding was quickly adopted by governments of the so-called Global South, including Latin America, under the promise of greater economic development and increasing political influence at the international level (Aronczyk, 2013). In fact, since 2013, the Ibero-American Nation Brand Forum has been held annually, organized by the Ibero-American Council of Nation Brands (CIMAP), to promote initiatives, share experiences, and strengthen ties (Cimap, n.d.). Although studies focused on specific countries have been developed—several of them cited in this article—with few exceptions (e.g., Fehimović & Ogden, 2018), there have been limited discussions at a more general level that attempt to identify trends and establish comparisons at the Latin American level. Therefore, this work seeks to contribute to debates within this area.

Objectives

The objective of the research presented herein is to explain, analyze, and compare nation branding strategies established by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru from their inception until 2020, when the international economy, particularly tourism, was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These countries were chosen due to their large populations and significant economic influence in Latin America. The research questions are:

1. What nation branding strategies did each country develop?

2. How do these strategies compare with each other?

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a comprehensive review of the existing literature on nation branding strategies specific to Latin America, along with analyses of previous studies on the selected countries, all published up to 2020. Government reports, institutional documents, academic research, and other sources that provided detailed information were examined. The data was systematically inspected using content analysis techniques and narrative summary to extract significant insights and patterns from each nation branding strategy. Finally, the results were compared based on the commonalities that emerged from the analysis.

A digital literature search was conducted in the library of the Universidad Panamericana, whose search engine integrates the databases Scopus, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Science Direct, SpringerLink, ProQuest One Academic, Jstor, and DOAJ. To detail the search process transparently, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement was applied. This involves explicitly detailing the systematic search process to identify items that meet the established eligibility criteria according to inclusion and exclusion conditions (Liberati et al., 2009).

The search was conducted using the following terms: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("nation branding" AND "Argentina" OR "Brazil" OR "Chile" OR "Colombia" OR "Mexico" OR "Peru"). The same search was conducted using Spanish and Portuguese terms. The exclusion conditions were: a) duplicate items, b) items that, despite containing the searched terms, lacked relevance to the purpose of the literature review, and c) items discussing nation branding strategies initiated by these countries after 2020. The exclusion criteria were applied manually, and duplicate items were removed and the abstracts reviewed. The same search and exclusion process was conducted with the advanced search in Google.

RESULTS

Summary of Nation Brand Strategies in Latin America

Argentina

Despite being called "the granary of the world" as the leading global exporter of food (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014), Argentina's international image was significantly affected by the economic crisis it experienced in 2001. However, under the administration of Néstor Kirchner in 2004, the country saw substantial increases in exports and economic recovery. That same year announced the launch of Argentina's first Nation Brand Strategy, which was defined as a state policy independent from political parties or the current government (Government of Argentina, n.d.-b). During its opening event, the Foundational Document of the Nation Brand was distributed, outlining the Nation Brand Strategy's definition, guidelines, and strategic axes. The objective was to engage all levels of public administration and the private sector. In parallel, the consulting firm Global News was tasked with monitoring international media coverage of the country.

This first strategy was in place from January 2004 to December 2010, encompassing stages such as foundation, consensus building with relevant institutions, design of the Argentine Brand, implementation, and consolidation. Among the milestones during this period was the establishment of the National Institute of Tourism Promotion (INPROTUR) in 2005, an independent organization under a mixed management model (public and private), aimed at pooling resources to promote travel and increase tourism. Other outstanding initiatives included the sponsorship by Club Atlético River Plate of a program focused on promoting exports in Argentina through soccer (Ramos & Noya, 2006), as well as the National Seminar on the Argentine Brand. During this time, the first version of the national brand was also launched, featuring the slogan "Más de una razón" (More than one reason) (**Figure 1**).

In 2008, Decree 2102/08 established INPROTUR as the enforcement and managing body of the nation brand, and Decree 1372 institutionalized the Argentine nation brand to standardize its image worldwide (Public News Portal of the Argentine Republic, 2008). However, the global economic crisis of the time led to a sharp decline in tourism, which was then the country's third source of income after agriculture and mining (Echeverri-Cañas & Estay-Niculcar, 2013). The following year, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administration hired the controversial and now defunct British public relations agency Bell Pottinger to position Argentina as a business center and tourist destination among audiences in Europe and the United States.

The following decade began with what has been termed the Relaunch stage, aimed at creating a solid, distinct, and competitive image of the country (Echeverri-Cañas & Etsay-Niculcar, 2013). This concept incorporated the slogan "Argentina late con vos" (Argentina beats with you), which aimed to establish a direct connection with tourists. By 2012, Argentina had become the second most popular tourist destination in South America, after Brazil (INPROTUR, as cited in Echeverri-Cañas & Estay-Niculcar, 2013). That same year, the logo was modified, incorporating the yellow color to symbolize energy and contrast (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014). New market niches were proposed to segment tourist attractions: 1) Authentic (cultural tourism); 2) Active (adventure tourism); 3) Natural (birdwatching); 4) Gourmet (regional gastronomy); 5) High-end (luxury tourism). Additionally, medical tourism was identified as a potential area of growth.

Figure 1. Evolution of Logos and Slogans of Nation Brand in Argentina [Source: Government of Argentina (n.d.-a)]

In 2018, during the administration of President Mauricio Macri, the nation branding strategy underwent changes, symbolized by a new logo (**Figure 1**). Some of the changes included the publication of Decree 191/2018, which aimed to solidify the country's international image through the promotion of tourism, exports, and foreign direct investment. Additionally, the government involved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Investment Agency in nation branding efforts and granted licenses for the commercial use of the nation brand to companies and embassies (Casa Rosada, 2018).

Brazil

During the administration of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva (2003-2010), the Brazilian Institute of Tourism of the Federal Government (EMBRATUR) created the "Aquarela Plan" (International Tourism Marketing Plan for Brazil). The objective was to achieve the goals set out in the National Tourism Plan, which included positioning Brazil among the top 20 tourism destinations in the world (Ramos & Noya, 2006). Five segments were defined: sun and beach, ecotourism, sports, culture, and business and events. The Brazilian government established a working group integrated by SECOM (Presidential Secretariat of Communication), Itamaraty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Ministry of Development, EMBRATUR, and APEX (Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency). This group conducted interviews with tour operators from the 18 countries that visit Brazil the most, tourists within the country, and people who had never visited the country before. The highlights were Brazil's natural resources (75%) and the joy of the Brazilian people (52%). The preferred destinations identified were Rio de Janeiro, Carnival, Iguazu Falls, beaches, and the Amazon (Ramos & Noya, 2006).

In 2004, a contest was held to create the visual identity for Brazil's Brand, to serve as both a tourism logo and an identifier for exports (**Figure 2**). This new logo was incorporated into promotional programs, dissemination efforts, and support to market Brazilian products, services, and tourist destinations in international markets (Ramos & Noya, 2006). The following year, a cooperation agreement was signed between EMBRATUR and APEX for the former to participate in APEX's international trade events and missions (Khauaja & Emzo, 2007). Additionally, the Brazilian Tourism Office was opened to position the country as a tourist destination (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014).

Figure 2. Visual Identity of Brazil's Brand in 2004 [Source: Galgo (2012)]

Despite these efforts, nation branding initiatives in Brazil faced significant challenges. According to Anholt (2007), although Brazil had a strong image at the turn of this century, it was characterized by negative stereotypes when it came to doing business. The low internationalization of the country's economy was cited as one of the reasons that obscured Brazil's scientific and technological capabilities, hindering the attraction of investors and talent, as well as the establishment of international cooperation agreements (Correa da Silva Machado, 2021). In response to these perceptions, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs created the Innovation Diplomacy

Program (PDI) to promote the country as technologically advanced and innovative. Together with this effort, the FIFA World Cup organization and the Olympics in 2014 and 2016 aimed to transform Brazil's image, highlighting its strong economy, political stability, poverty reduction, and positioning Rio de Janeiro as a global city (Maiello & Pasquinelli, 2015; Rocha & Fink, 2017). However, both events were overshadowed by protests against their organization, concerns over the Zika virus, and the impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff (Jiménez-Martínez, 2020).

During those years, the nation branding project was left behind until it was revived by the government of Jair Bolsonaro, which launched a new version of the brand with the slogan "Brazil, visit and love us." This new logo emphasized the letter "z" in international promotion. However, it faced severe criticism for focusing primarily on tourism while neglecting investments and exports (Alarcón Rubiano, 2020). It was also criticized for alleged sexual connotations and for using a typography that infringed on copyright (Covarrubia, 2019).

Figure 3. Visual Identity of Brazil's Brand in 2019 [Source: Embratur (2019)]

Chile

The first nation branding strategy in Chile began in 2004, when ProChile launched a campaign to position the country abroad and facilitate exports to the United States, the European Union and Asia. Following a public tender, the American branding consulting firm Interbrand was awarded a contract of $150,000, with $100,000 funded by the government (Adlatina, 2004). However, the total budget for the nation branding project was $25,000,000 (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo-Gómez, 2014). The project aimed to persuade importers, investment banks, financial analysts, consumers, and foreign tourists, and sought to position Santiago as a business city.

The strategy was proposed as state policy and aimed to involve the government, opposition, entrepreneurs, and workers for a period of 10 to 15 years. Its objective was to portray Chile as a country with spectacular and diverse geography, professional and warm in its interactions, and with strong and stable institutions. It was launched in November 2005 with the slogan "Chile sorprende, siempre", which was translated into English as "Chile, All Ways Surprising" (**Figure 4**). The slogan had a dual meaning in English–"Chile, always surprising" and "Chile, surprises in every way"–and aimed to communicate that Chile exceeded expectations and distinguished itself from neighboring countries because it is a secure place and possesses natural beauty. However, the strategy received criticism because the country is known for its predictability. Moreover, while surprises may be appealing for tourism, they are counterproductive for promoting exports and attracting foreign investment (Jiménez-Martínez, 2017)

Figure 4. Logo and Slogan of Chile's Brand in 2005 [Sources: Galgo (2012); Fruitnet (2010)]

As of 2007, Michelle Bachelet's government began to develop the "Chile-Imagen País Project," for which Simon Anholt was hired. Anholt visited Chile in 2009 and, after several meetings with politicians, businessmen, and other figures, stated that "no one can imagine a Chilean" and that the country needed to be less silent to bridge the gap between perception and its supposed reality (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 134). That same year, Imagen de

Chile was created, an autonomous non-profit foundation funded publicly to manage Chile's Brand. The foundation was tasked with supervising and coordinating communication activities and strategies for ProChile (Export Promotion Bureau), CIE Chile (Foreign Investment Committee), Dirac (Cultural Affairs Directorate), Sernatur (National Tourism Service), and Turismo Chile (Chilean Tourism Promotion abroad). As a result of Anholt's advice and the establishment of the Imagen de Chile Foundation, a new nation branding concept was launched in 2010 with the slogan "Chile hace bien," translated into English as "Chile is good for you." The previous logo was updated and appeared without a slogan this time (**Figure 5**). This launch coincided with a period of significant global media coverage for the country following the successful rescue of Chilean miners trapped in a mine in August 2010.

Figure 5. Logo of Chile's Brand in 2010 [Source: Vanoni Martínez, Omaña Guerrero, & Pérez Espinosa (2018)]

As in the previous slogan, "Chile hace bien" also sought to communicate at least two messages: Chile is stable and reliable, and Chile is an exporter of fruits, wines, and quality products that benefit those who engage with it through tourism, investment, or products. This new campaign had an initial budget of ten million dollars, which was criticized for being low for such initiatives (Santiago, 2010). However, the following year, $44.6 million was allocated, combining contributions from various institutions (Echeverri-Cañas, 2014). This new campaign was also criticized for being self-complacent and arrogant, particularly for Latin American audiences. It was argued that the campaign lacked emotionality as it did not involve the country's inhabitants and focused solely on the economy (Aldunate Wagner, 2013). Studies pointed out that promoting Chile as a trade partner was more relevant than promoting it as a tourist destination (Alarcón Gutiérrez, 2015). Despite efforts to attract international press attention, the most extensive foreign coverage was given to unexpected events such as the 2010 earthquake and the miners' rescue–both managed efficiently and generated a positive media image–or the 2011 student protests, which portrayed a rather negative image (Jiménez-Martínez, 2013).

In 2014, a new strategy was launched focusing on emotional aspects, in which Imagen de Chile Foundation collaborated with FutureBrand (La Segunda, 2014). Building on the narrative established with "Chile sorprende, siempre", the following elements were added to the brand as identifiers of Chileans: a land of extremes that has shaped the character of its inhabitants, a commitment to progress not hindered by adversity or natural disasters, a stable legal framework and openness to the world, and the coexistence of modernity with tradition (Alarcón Gutiérrez, 2015). The strategy was encapsulated in the phrase "Chile atrae por la vitalidad de sus contrastes" (Chile attracts with the vitality of its contrasts), emphasizing that it was not a new slogan (Alarcón Gutiérrez, 2015).

Given that previous nation branding strategies were criticized for focusing on commercial purposes, the new strategy defined a series of "emblematic sectors" to focus the country's communication on environment, culture, science and technology, tourism, foreign investment, exports, governance, people, and attracting human capital. These "emblematic sectors" were meant to relate to the four pillars of the nation brand, developing compelling stories and covering topics supposedly relevant to international audiences (Fundación Imagen de Chile, 2013). A series of 99 videos featuring personal stories narrated by Chileans from different regions of the country was produced under the audiovisual project "Atlas vivo de Chile" (Living Atlas of Chile), addressing some of the observations about the invisibility of Chileans that Anholt had expressed years earlier.

During the same period, between 2016 and 2018, the "Chile que te quiero" (Chile how I love you) campaign was developed, targeting the country's inhabitants, who voted on social media for their favorite symbol for each Chilean region (Miño & Austin, 2022). Throughout that decade, ProChile also participated in building the nation brand through the Sector Brands program, which held public contests to promote national productive sectors such as wines, salmon, fruits, and manufacturing. However, these initiatives were questioned following a series of protests that spread across the country in late 2019, leading to the cancellation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum and the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP25 (Miño & Austin, 2022).

Colombia

Colombia's Brand was conceived in late 2004, during the administration of President Álvaro Uribe. The objective was to highlight the supposed positive characteristics of the country, identify export products and

services, and eliminate associations with violence and drugs. Proexport (Colombian export promotion agency), the Vice Presidency of Country Image attached to it, and members of the private sector led this project. David Lightle, an American advisor in nation branding who had previously worked with New Zealand and Australia, was hired. After conducting interviews in Colombia and the United States, it was argued–similarly to what Anholt mentioned about Chile–that there was a gap between perception and reality, and that the problem stemmed from the country's image being associated with guerrilla warfare and drug trafficking. It was also concluded that Colombian identity had passion as its supposed common denominator. Therefore, the slogan "Colombia es Pasión" (Colombia is Passion) was created, along with the symbol of a heart with a flame (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Logo and Slogan of Colombia's Brand in 2005 [Source: Bassols (2016)]

Nation brand strategy "Colombia es Pasión" was in place from 2005 to 2011, with an initial budget of $429,700, 30% of which came from Proexport and the rest from the private sector through the sale of brand licenses (Echeverri-Cañas, 2014). However, the total budget amounted to three million dollars (Ramos & Noya, 2006). The brand was launched in 2005 and presented to local media and events at five soccer stadiums, where "a minute of passion" was organized and the logo was unveiled, this time featuring people on the soccer field. The strategy also included a website in Spanish, English, and German, as well as a brick-and-mortar store as of 2007 (Florez Torres, 2011). Other initiatives included the "Colombia es Pasión" cycling team and a song called "Somos Pasión" (We are Passion) (Colombia20pictures, 2012; Colombia, n.d.), participation of local celebrities in promotional campaigns, and the involvement of private companies such as Nacional de Chocolates, Movistar Colombia, and Avianca, who paid royalties for using the brand (Florez Torres, 2011).

The strategy had two facets: one aimed at the domestic audience, called "Muestra tu Pasión" (Show your Passion), which sought to motivate Colombians to increase national self-esteem and be part of the country's re-branding exercise. Along with the "Yo creo en Colombia" (I believe in Colombia) foundation, events were held for young people, media, and companies to convey a positive message about the nation. Additionally, the domestic tourism campaign "Vive Colombia, el país que llevas en el corazón" (Live Colombia, the country you carry in your heart) was launched, based on a previous initiative called "Vive Colombia, viaja por ella" (Live Colombia, travel through it). In parallel, another facet targeted foreign audiences, aimed at attracting foreign investment and tourism. In this area, the campaign "Colombia, el riesgo es que te quieras quedar" (Colombia, the risk is wanting to stay) in 2007 stood out, based on testimonials from foreign residents and designed to confront perceptions of insecurity that tarnished the country's image (Colombia Travel, 2010; Bassols, 2016).

"Colombia es Pasión" was not exempt from criticism. On the one hand, the logo was alleged to have sexual connotations, especially considering that the country is one of the main destinations for sex tourism worldwide (Nasser, 2012). Other comments included the similarities of the logo with the Sacred Heart (Restrepo, Rosker & Echeverri-Cañas, 2008), and that only large national companies were linked to the brand, thus reducing the original income expectations (Villa Araque, 2009). The campaign was also accused of lacking consistency and focusing too much on internal audiences (Echeverri-Cañas, Rosker, & Restrepo, 2010). Furthermore, despite these initiatives, in 2010 Colombia ranked last among 85 nation brands in the FutureBrand ranking, partly due to persistent connections with drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare.

The following year, during Juan Manuel Santos' presidency, a new branding initiative began with the creation of the Marca País Organization, independent from Proexport, linked to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism, and the Presidential High Council for Communications (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014). This organization defined four strategic cornerstones–culture, tourism, foreign investment, and exports–and launched a new strategy in 2012 titled "La Respuesta es Colombia" (The Answer is Colombia), accompanied by its corresponding logo (**Figure 7**). The strategy had a budget of approximately 3.8 million dollars and contracted Omnicon Solutions and WPP Colombia for its implementation (El Espectador, 2012). Two years later, the Marca País Organization merged with ProColombia – the new name for Proexport – and received a budget of 4.3 million

dollars (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014).

The new strategy was in place from 2012 to 2018 and aimed to communicate ideas of megadiversity, stability, sustainability, and economic projection, in addition to tourist attractions (Mangiarotti, 2019). The logo, which highlighted the letters "CO," was designed to prioritize its use in commercial initiatives, but it was launched within the context of an international economic crisis (El Espectador, 2012) and was criticized for its similarity to other visual identities (**Figure 7**) (Bassols, 2016). Promotion efforts focused on Europe, Canada, the United States, Turkey, Korea, and some Latin American countries considered important from a tourism and commercial perspective. A new campaign targeting these countries, titled "Colombia: Realismo mágico" (Colombia: Magical Realism) referred to the work of Gabriel García Márquez and also included video testimonials (Semana, 2015).

Figure 7. Comparison of Visual Identities of Colombia, Brazil, Moldova and Lima [Source: Bassols (2016)]

Although a few considered this initiative a success (Portafolio.co, 2014), the increase in visitors could rather be attributed to the fact that several countries withdrew their travel warnings on Colombia following reduced terrorist activity within the country (Bassols, 2016). In this regard, given the fact that the strategy was launched almost at the same time that peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC began, some have criticized that such strategy was conceived as a government policy rather than a State policy (Vanoni Martínez et al., 2018), aimed at attracting travelers instead of promoting business or exports (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014).

Mexico

The history of nation branding in Mexico began in 2005 under the administration of President Vicente Fox, when the Mexican Tourism Promotion Council (CPTM), established six years earlier, launched a strategy aimed at portraying Mexico as a diverse nation characterized by pre-Columbian treasures, Spanish colonial and mestizo heritage, cultural fusion, modernity, natural resources, and coastlines, among other features (Quiñones Montes de Oca, 2020). These ideas were communicated through the slogan "México: único, diverso y hospitalario" (Mexico: unique, diverse, and welcoming) and a logo designed by the consulting firm named Emblem (MBLM) Mexico, which received US$100,000 for its services (Ramos & Noya, 2006) (**Figure 8**).

Figure 8. Logo of Mexico's Brand in 2005 [Source: García (2012)]

The CPTM sought to integrate various public and private organizations into these promotional initiatives, so

that the nation branding strategy could be adopted across different economic sectors. A series of entrepreneurs, athletes, and artists were appointed as ambassadors of Mexico's Brand, among whom Guillermina Aguilar Alcántara stood out, an indigenous artisan chosen for this role. Two years later, in 2007, ProMéxico was established, a Mexican agency for promoting exports and investments, aimed at showcasing Mexico as a technological country with economic opportunities.

During Felipe Calderón's presidency period, the tourist campaign "Vive México" (Live Mexico) was launched in 2009, and the following year, the Marca México office was opened, mostly coordinated by the CPTM with support from other governmental and private institutions. The office initiated a program called "Imagen de Marca México" (Brand Image Mexico) with the purpose of promoting the country as a land of diversity and opportunities, for instance, through a tourism campaign titled "México, el lugar que creías conocer" (Mexico, the place you thought you knew) (López, 2017).

After decreeing 2011 as the National Year of Tourism, the Mexican government hired Simon Anholt as a nation branding advisor for 18 months (Villanueva Rivas, 2013). Anholt's assessment was that Mexico had historically focused on its economic, labor, cultural, and academic relations with the United States, allegedly missing out on economic opportunities offered by globalization. Moreover, it had apparently lost control of its narrative, leaving it in the hands of U.S. media, which, as he stated, boiled the country down to a caricature of a tropical, violent, corrupt territory (Anholt, 2012, p. 124). The Mexican government responded with a new strategy focused on tourism and culture, sustainability, and economy and investment, targeting successive phases first in the United States and Canada, then Europe, and finally some Asian countries (Díaz & Pérez, 2012). Despite these changes, it is noteworthy that–unlike other Latin American countries–various governments retained the logo introduced in 2005 (**Figure 9**).

Figure 9. Logo of Mexico's Brand in 2010 [Source: Galgo (2012)]

Through public relations strategies with international media, online campaigns, and celebrities, an attempt was made to communicate a positive version of Mexico based on the aforementioned guidelines. The results seemed successful, as the country was recognized as a competitive place according to indexes from the World Economic Forum and the World Bank (Díaz a& Pérez, 2012). However, violence persisted within Mexico's borders, affecting its image negatively.

The economic reforms initiated by the government of Enrique Peña Nieto appeared to start a new stage, to the extent that international analysts spoke of a "Mexican Moment." With its National Development Plan (2013-2018), the new government proposed promoting Mexico's value in the world through economic, tourism, and cultural dissemination (Méndez-Coto, 2016, p. 90). More specifically, the purpose of the plan was to construct a positive narrative abroad through a strategy of public and cultural diplomacy. However, these efforts were overshadowed by the still unresolved disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa in 2014, whose brutality and lack of clarity regarding the role played by state agents drew significant attention from international media (Villanueva Rivas, 2019).

During the remaining years of Peña Nieto's administration, the CPTM and ProMéxico spearheaded initiatives to promote Mexico in a positive fashion. In addition to promoting Mexican businesses and efforts to attract foreign investment, other endeavors included financial support to Cirque du Soleil to produce a Mexican-themed show, sponsorship of Formula 1 races and National Football League games in Mexico, as well as participation in the Universal Expositions in Milan, Italy, and Astana, Kazakhstan (Villanueva Rivas, 2019). Another significant milestone was the relaunch of the "Hecho en México" (Made in Mexico) label in 2017, aimed at positioning

Mexico as a competitive country with high-quality products (Baños Rivas, 2017).

The CPTM and ProMéxico, however, were dissolved in 2019 during Andrés López Obrador's administration. Their functions—such as hiring public relations agencies, advertising campaigns with airlines, or participating in international events—were transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute to Return Stolen Goods to the People, but no additional financial or human resources were allocated for these tasks. To continue with international promotion strategies, the Cultural Diplomacy Council, the Tourism Diplomacy Council, an ad hoc Council for Science, and support for sports diplomacy were created and enhanced (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2022). Critics argue, however, that the closure of ProMéxico meant the loss of the primary arm for nation branding promotion in Mexico (Murphy, 2021).

Peru

In 1996, the Commission for the Promotion of Peru for Export and Tourism (PromPerú) was established to plan the country's promotion strategy for investments, tourism, and exports. However, the Marca Perú strategy began in 2011, during the government of Ollanta Humala, with an initial campaign aimed at boosting domestic and international tourism (Jiménez Mendoz, 2016). This strategy was driven by PromPerú and implemented by FutureBrand, who received twelve million Peruvian soles (about 900,000 US dollars) and created a Peru logo with the Nazca lines representing the letter "P" (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10. Logo of Peru's Brand [Source: García (2011)]

The new brand was promoted on airplanes worldwide and on giant billboards in New York (Echeverri-Cañas & Trujillo Gómez, 2014). PromPerú also launched the "Peru, Nebraska" campaign through the promotional video "Peru meets Perú," where a series of Peruvian personalities traveled to the town of Peru in Nebraska, United States, to showcase typical foods, dances, and music, and "teach" them how to be Peruvian (Merino Araya, 2018). The campaign sought to emphasize gastronomy as the spearhead of Peru's strategic positioning for competitiveness (Matta, 2014, p. 34). In the following years, other campaigns were launched. "Recordarás Perú" (You will Remember Peru) in 2012 sought to highlight gastronomy, art and culture, sports, and education, while "Perú, Imperio de Tesoros Escondidos" (Peru, Empire of Hidden Treasures) emphasized heritage riches (Méndez-Coto, 2016). "Representantes de lo nuestro" (Representatives of what is ours), launched the following year by PromPerú and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (Mincetur), focused on five Brand Peru ambassadors, and "More Peruvian than...", aimed at local audiences in 2015, told stories of "Peruvianized" foreign visitors to narrate a positive version of national culture and identity (CEUPE, n.d.). Finally, in 2016, PromPerú launched "Perú, dedicado al mundo" (Peru, devoted to the world), featuring videos of indigenous communities showcasing typical products and inviting consumption.

The initiatives of this brand have focused on both foreign and domestic audiences to persuade individuals (especially residents, foreigners, and new residents) as well as corporate entities (investors, exporters, importers, organizations) (Barrientos Felipa, 2014). The use of the brand is regulated by law and requires approval from PromPerú to be used in events, institutions, travel agencies, or products. Supporters of the brand argue that it has brought economic benefits and international recognition to the country. However, more critical voices have noted that PromPerú has emphasized the economic gains from tourism at the expense of social development and sustainability, as well as the cultural implications tourism has for First Nations (Tavarez, 2021). Similarly, various Peruvian artists and designers have created parodies of Marca Perú to draw attention to episodes of social segregation, exploitation, and violence, especially among the country's indigenous people (Lossio, 2018). Furthermore, after the government of Ollanta Humala, Peru has experienced periods of deep political crisis and social unrest marked by corruption and the resignation of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski from office in 2018, which have contradicted the positive messages of its nation brand.

DISCUSSION

Comparing Nation Branding Strategies

When examining and comparing the nation branding strategies implemented by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru until 2020, three interconnected trends emerge. Over their first two decades, nation brands in Latin America have been characterized by 1) strong association with incumbent governments; 2) prominent roles played by authorities, often at the expense of citizens; and 3) privileging limited versions of national identity perceived as attractive to international markets. These trends are discussed below.

Politicization and Contingency

According to its supporters, nation brands are a type of "post-political" identity that perceives the world as a marketplace (Kaneva, 2011). According to Simon Anholt, this perspective would ground human relations on competition, consumer choice, and consumer power, rather than religion, ideology, territory, or politics (Anholt, 2006). This viewpoint permeates the initiatives summarized above, focusing on, as discussed below, versions of national identity associated with the market, and statements that nation branding strategies are long-term state policies.

Despite these discourses, the stability of the examined cases generally depended on the interests of incumbent governments. **Figure 11** allows for identifying nation branding strategies across different presidential periods. Changes in the color of the bars indicate strategy modifications accompanied by changes in government.

Figure 11. Table of Nation-branding Campaigns and Changes in Government [Source: Own creation]

In the case of Argentina, their nation brand was created during the government of Néstor Kirchner in 2004 and showed a certain continuity until 2015, when Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administration ended. While the overall strategy–primarily focused on tourism–did not change significantly, there were four logo changes and various decrees to regulate its institutional function. It was in 2018, during the administration of Mauricio Macri, that not only a visual image change occurred but also a change in strategy.

In Peru, nation brand initiatives also remained relatively stable during the presidency of Ollanta Humala (2011-2016), despite some strategy adjustments. However, the severe political crisis that affected the country during the government of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016-2018) questioned the previously communicated narrative

of success. Similarly, in the case of Brazil, there was continuity between the administrations of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, both from the same political party. Attempts to consolidate Brazil as an international power during the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics were, however, frustrated by protests, political scandals, and the poor performance of the Brazilian economy. In 2019, the administration of Jair Bolsonaro changed the nation brand strategy, emphasizing tourism over technology and innovation.

In Chile, changes in government also brought changes in strategy. While the first period of Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014) emphasized the country's stability and focused on promoting exports and investments, the second period of Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) highlighted the blend of tradition and modernity and developed initiatives aimed at domestic audiences. Colombia modified its strategy with each government, but the basic approach remained consistent: attracting foreign tourists and enhancing the self-image of Colombians.

Despite its different governments and strategies, Mexico maintained the same logo launched in 2005. While this may give an impression of consistency, a more cautious analysis shows that presidential changes were associated with new messages. Thus, each term promoted different objectives in line with the interests of the authorities. At times, there were modifications within the same administration. This was the case during the administrations of Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto, where changes were made in response to negative comments that emerged due to security and violence issues.

The cases above show that, beyond discourses of stability and "post-political" identities (Kaneva, 2011), nation branding strategies are highly contingent and often respond more to the interests and perspectives of the current governments than to a long-term vision. This connection of nation brands with specific administrations could explain why each new administration decided to launch a different promotion strategy: maintaining the same brand would not be interpreted as an exercise of continuity for the benefit of the country, but rather a way to validate ideas and guidelines of administrations of different political stripes.

Stakeholders Involved

The examined cases highlight the fundamental role that states have played in relation to nation branding in Latin America. Contrary to arguments that nation brands are a market product (Anholt, 2006), they were primarily developed through governmental institutions in the region, including central governments, ministries or secretariats of tourism, export promotion offices, and in specific cases such as Chile, Mexico, or Colombia, institutions specially created for this purpose.

Governmental efforts, however, were often advised by local or international consultants and advertising agencies, who provided assessments of the supposed national essence, proposed guidelines and strategies, and designed logos and slogans. Global News and Bell Pottinger worked in Argentina, Interbrand in Chile, FutureBrand in Chile and Peru, Emblem in Mexico, and David Lightle, WWP, and Omnicom Solutions in Colombia. Three of the analyzed countries (Brazil, Chile, and Mexico) also received advice from Simon Amholt, who has emerged in recent years as a critic of nation branding strategies (Subramanian, 2017).

Nevertheless, citizens are absent from these initiatives. Despite international advisors calling for the involvement of society as a whole in the development of nation brands (Anholt, 2007), in practice, the role of a nation's inhabitants is limited to occasional interviews by experts, and more often to being "taught" what the "correct" national identity determined by authorities and their advisors should be. In Colombia, for instance, efforts aimed to change perceptions of low self-esteem, while in Chile, the intention was to foster a sense of national identity. These kinds of efforts, justified under the guise of transforming a country's inhabitants into "brand ambassadors" (Anholt, 2007), reveal a disciplinary nature. Their purpose is to align citizens with objectives set primarily for commercial reasons rather than facilitating spaces where national identity is negotiated or challenged, or where alternative versions of that identity are proposed.

Therefore, nation brands emerge as attempts to centralize and control the narrative of a nation-state. However, despite the promises of nation branding gurus, such control is impossible. In addition to the economic and political crises mentioned above, there are also social issues, as seen in Mexico and Colombia, citizen parodies and responses to brand campaigns as in Peru (Lossio, 2018), and episodes of protest that challenge the positive messages proposed by authorities, as in Brazil and Chile (Jiménez-Martínez, 2020).

Types of Identities Constructed

Advocates of nation branding strategies argue that these initiatives often bridge the gap between misperception and the alleged "reality" of a nation (Anholt, 2007). This was particularly explicit in cases like Chile and Colombia. However, such arguments overlook the changing and conflictive nature of nation-states. In the words of Billig (1995), "The voice of a nation is a fiction; it often ignores the struggles between different factions and the deaths of unsuccessful nations that make this fiction possible" (p. 71). Therefore, nation brands are part of

that fiction, closer to the "invented traditions" discussed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) than a mirror reflecting reality.

From this perspective, it is interesting to examine the types of identities these brands highlighted. In cases like Argentina, Colombia, and Peru, strategies primarily focused on tourism, emphasizing these countries as attractive destinations for travelers from the United States, Western Europe, and specific countries in Asia and Latin America. Meanwhile, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico emphasized promoting exports and foreign investment, with Brazil also focusing on technology and innovation.

As discussed earlier, nation branding strategies in each case were fluid and at times sought to extend beyond tourism. In some instances, the intention was to position these nation-states not only as tropical and exotic paradises but also as competitive markets internationally, attractive for foreign investment. Despite these changes, the type of identities proposed was limited. In each case, the related countries were reduced to mere units of production of goods, attractive sites for foreign capital, and/or landscapes where Western tourists could spend their holidays (for similar arguments, see Castelló & Mihelj, 2018). Political participation, human rights, or social justice had little relevance. Moreover, efforts to address violence and insecurity, as seen in Mexico and Colombia, were viewed as opportunities to reassure investors rather than responses to the urgent needs of the local population.

The nation brands under examination attempted to establish specific attributes for each nation-state: passion in the case of Colombia; heritage and gastronomy in Peru; innovation and technology in Brazil; progress and contrasts between tradition and modernity in Chile; culture and competitiveness in Mexico. These attributes did not emerge out of the blue, but rather sought to respond to pre-existing perceptions (or the lack of them). While Chile sought to gain visibility and create an image abroad, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico tried to modify negative images (economic in Argentina's case, security-related in Colombia and Mexico). Similar to other regions (Aronczyk, 2013), these efforts attempted to impose limits on the types of possible national identities, in order to strengthen narratives that could better align with characteristics perceived as attractive for the international market.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of nation branding strategies implemented by six Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru) until 2020 confirms the ongoing attractiveness of nation branding in the region. A significant piece is that almost all the countries that were analyzed launched their first strategies around the same years (2004-2005), confirming the competitive and capitalist nature of these efforts (Anholt, 2006).

However, it is worth mentioning that, despite discourses of stability and long-term planning, these strategies were used as instruments to respond to the interests, perspectives, and needs of specific governments. Continuity was possible only when the previous government belonged to the same political color, as occurred, for example, in Argentina and Brazil. Therefore, strategies developed have been largely contingent. They were modified to respond to internal or external criticism, or to address crisis situations perceived as threatening to a country's international image, as in Mexico.

Therefore, nation brands have been political instruments, part of the material and symbolic arsenal of the authorities in power. While international advertising agencies and consultants have played an essential role in their implementation, governments have been key actors, allocating budgets, creating legal and institutional frameworks, and making final decisions on strategies. The role of citizens in these processes has been limited to occasionally serving as sources of information to determine the supposed "essence" of the nation or more often being disciplined as "ambassadors" of the brands created by authorities and external advisors (see also Aronczyk, 2013).

The types of identities proposed or imposed by these nation brands have focused on emphasizing supposed national characteristics perceived as attractive to tourists, investors, and other governments in the United States and Europe, as well as specific countries in Asia and Latin America. In general terms, versions of national identity proposed by different campaigns sought to portray these countries as attractive sites for foreign capital, travel destinations, or units of production of goods. Other perspectives for understanding or evaluating a society, of a more humanistic or social nature, were generally irrelevant.

However, given the political and economic volatility that has characterized Latin America (Spinola, 2023), the type of strategies discussed above emerges as particularly fragile. Evidence of this fragility has been demonstrated when citizens of a nation have contradicted these nation brands through parodies, as in Peru, or protests, as in

Brazil and Chile. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how citizens actually engage with these initiatives, beyond official discourses. Additionally, questions about the effectiveness of these efforts persist, especially in a post-COVID-19 context. While proponents of nation brands often attribute them to great success, it is unclear to what extent these brands have truly been drivers of economic growth or political stability and whether they have genuinely benefited the entire population or merely served as a source of profit for a few.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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