Measuring Country Image

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Measuring Country Image

Theory, Method, and Effects

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Short summary

The role of country images and knowledge of their constitution and effects is of major interest not only for communication science scholars (especially those in the area of International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy), but also for various research disciplines like Business Studies (esp. International Marketing), Social Psychology, Political Science, as well as for Public Diplomacy practitioners. This book proposes a new model for the measurement of the constitution and effects of country images by combining well-established concepts from national identity theory and attitude theory with a model from reputation management. The model is operationalized and tested in two surveys. Results show how different cognitive and affective dimensions of the image affect each other and the facilitation of behavioral intentions.

Under the conditions of a globalized world and the spread of modern media societies a country's image is becoming more important compared to territory access and raw materials when it comes to the cultural, economic, and political competitiveness of nation-states in the international system (Nye 2004; Gilboa 2008). While research domains, such as marketing and social psychology, have devoted some attention to the constitution and effects of country images from their field perspective, in public relations and public diplomacy research there is no widely accepted model and measurement instrument available. Much like the seminal works of, e.g., Michael Kunczik (1997) or Joseph Nye (2004), many of the studies available in the domain of international public relations and public diplomacy research that touch on the construct of the country image have a rather conceptual or historical focus. Until now it has remained an open question, how the available concepts from other domains may be gainfully combined to derive, specify, and operationalize a comprehensive model of the country image suitable for analyses in international public relations and public diplomacy. Such a specific model and instrument is needed, however, to clarify the constitution of this central target construct in international public relations and public diplomacy and understand how its different dimensions interrelate and affect each other and how they ultimately lead to the facilitation of favorable stakeholder behavior.

The present study combines extant approaches from national identity theory, attitude theory, and reputation management to derive an integrative four-

dimensional model (4D Model) of the country image as a subjective stakeholder attitude towards a nation and its state, comprising specific beliefs and general feelings in a functional, a normative, an aesthetic and an emotional dimension.

Furthermore, the work advances the debate on methods in the field by introducing variance-based structural equation modeling as a suitable approach to analyzing effects between different latent/emergent country image dimensions and behavioral intentions when handling specific research conditions such as mixed-specified (formative and reflective) constructs, predictive research settings, or relatively large sets of variables and indicators.

Subsequently, both model and method are applied in two sets of empirical studies, which, due to the novelty of the model, serve the development and testing of a new measurement instrument. The latter is developed successively through semi-structured interviews, expert interviews, and item sorting tasks and is then tested and validated by means of three standardized surveys in Switzerland and Germany.

The results retrieved in this study support the proposed model and underscore the value of measuring the country image as a four-factorial construct in international public relations and public diplomacy, comprising both cognitive and affective dimensions. Furthermore, the results a) demonstrate how functional, normative and aesthetic country image dimensions vary in affecting the formation of the affective country image component and b) support the mediating role of the affective component in the country image's effect on stakeholder behavior.