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Nation branding and marketing strategies for combatting tourism crises and stereotypes toward destinations

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ABSTRACT

Nearly every country is associated with both positive and negative generalizations and stereotypes. Despite the fact that stereotypes can be a serious barrier to the arrival of tourists and investors, comprehensive studies focused on repair strategies chosen by marketers have rarely been conducted to date. Using the “multi-step model for altering place image,” which belongs to the image repair theory, the aim of this study is to examine the strategies that countries around the world have used to deal with negative perceptions and stereotypes. This examination made use of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of seventy ads produced in forty-seven countries, including print ads, TV commercials and YouTube videos. The analysis shows the use of three kinds of strategies by marketers to combat national stereotypes: source (personal testimony, blaming the media), message (expanding a narrow image, use of celebrities) and audience (emphasis on similar values, cultural symbols and geography, changing the target audience).

1. Introduction

Positive and negative stereotypes and generalizations of any country and its people exist whether rightly or wrongly. As can be expected, these perceptions serve as a key mechanism to categorize and help us deal with the enormous volume of information, which flows from various sources (Adler-Nissen, 2014). But how should marketers, diplomats and countries' leaders react when these stereotypes constitute barriers to tourism, investments, commerce and international status (Nikolova & Hassan, 2013; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009)? This issue is even more frustrating and challenging when, for example, officials feel that the perceptions of their country as “dangerous”, “primitive”, “dull” or “grey” are wrong and have no connection to reality (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Dinnie, 2008).

Despite the fact that stereotypes can lead to serious marketing challenges, comprehensive studies that focus on strategies used by countries' leaders and marketers to overcome negative perceptions have rarely been conducted. Most of the studies conducted in this field have focused mainly on a qualitative content analysis of individual cases and have barely relied on the use of image restoration and crisis communication theories and models (Mair, Ritchie, & Walters, 2016). The result is a shortage of wide-ranging, comprehensive studies based on the theory of image restoration that also combine quantitative and qualitative content analyses.

Using the “multi-step model for altering place image” (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; p. 188), enables an examination of strategies countries

have chosen to counter stereotypes, stigmas and negative perceptions toward them. Until now this model, as many models in the field of image repair, was used only in qualitative research in order to analyze image repair strategies (Avraham, 2015). Here we are also including quantitative content analysis for the first time. Combining two research methods within the model is innovative in the field of image repair and will expand the discussion beyond the strategies used (as was done so far) and take into account the context in which these image repair efforts were used, as was done in one or very small number of case studies (Adler-Nissen, 2014; Walters & Mair, 2012). In other words, the use of quantitative research will allow us to gather information on the types of dominant stereotypes faced by many nations and the most popular repair strategies chosen to meet these challenges. The study will also provide information regarding the many countries' characteristics that affect the choice of strategy to combat their stereotype; for example, is there a connection between the strategy selection and countries' location or their type of regime.

The study will analyze seventy commercials both quantitatively and qualitatively. These ads try to deal with negative perceptions created for countries due to two kinds of image crises: a short-term crisis (such as a terror attack, war or natural disaster) or a long-term crisis (such as involvement in prolonged violent conflict, high crime rate, or social-economic challenges).

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2. Theoretical background and research questions

2.1. Marketing tourism, nation branding and combating national stereotypes

Many academics and professionals see a strong connection between a destination's positive image and its attractiveness for tourists (see list: [Kotsi, Balakrishnan, Michael, & Ramsøy, 2016](#)). According to [Crompton \(1979\)](#), “destination image” is “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination” (p. 18). “Place marketing” and “place promotion” are the leading fields of knowledge used by marketers and researchers to create a positive image for places. These fields have acquired many definitions (see list: [Avraham & Ketter, 2008](#)) and numerous publications suggest the most effective practices in order to use the knowledge accumulated ([Baker, 2007](#); [Dinnie, 2008](#)). According to [Uysal, Harrill, and Woo \(2011\)](#), the main goal of destination marketing research is twofold: to increase demand for the destination and to facilitate effective destination management.

Recent years have seen an increased use of the new concepts by researchers and practitioners of “destination branding” and “nation brand/branding”; these terms refer to a broad set of activities undertaken by governments and other stakeholders aimed at marketing and enhancing a place's visibility ([Papadopoulos, 2004](#)). [Baker \(2007\)](#) defines “destination branding” as designing the experiences and meaning connected with a place so that they are positive, attractive and unique. [Dinnie \(2008\)](#) defines “nation brand” as the multi-dimensional mix of components that make its message relative to the intended audience. The literature contains many other definitions and analyses of many case studies of countries and tourist destinations that have sought to re-brand themselves ([Dinnie, 2008](#); [Rinaldi & Beeton, 2015](#)) but little rigorous theory has been defined and elaborated ([Kotsi et al., 2016](#)).

Nevertheless, many of the tactics, tools, initiatives and marketing strategies that can be used to market destinations will not necessarily work for destinations suffering from either a prolonged or short-term negative image. When a place is perceived as being “not safe” and the local tourism industry starts to collapse, for example after several terror attacks or involvement in a prolonged violent conflict, it would not be wise for marketers to use campaigns that call upon tourists to “come and explore” it or to market a cultural festival since it is highly likely that the “lack of safety” perception will keep most visitors away ([Avraham & Ketter, 2015, 2016](#)). In other words, the use of any strategy in marketing efforts has a limited effect when the place is associated with risk, negative perceptions, generalizations and stereotypes ([Beirman, 2003](#)). In many cases, these negative perceptions dominate the place's image and harm its attempts to attract tourists. Such an image is also known as “label”, “stereotype” or “stigma”, which are simplified attitudes or beliefs about a place that are not examined thoroughly and are difficult to change ([Adler-Nissen, 2014](#)).

2.2. Crisis communication and image repair theory

The “theory of image repair” is one of the central theories in crisis communication through which organizations, companies and brands can analyze efforts to restore their image. According to [Liu and Fraustino \(2014\)](#), this theory concentrates on how an organization can repair a damaged reputation and includes several models (see list: [Coombs & Holladay, 2010](#)). Despite the variety of strategies mentioned in the image repair models—such as denying, reducing offensiveness, bolstering and redressing—the use of most of them might be problematic when seeking to restore a nation's image ([Avraham & Ketter, 2016](#)). As a result, [Adler-Nissen \(2014\)](#) has developed a theoretical approach, which lists three ways of coping with a state's stigma and image crisis: stigma recognition, rejection and counter-stigmatization. [Walters and Mair \(2012\)](#) identify nine common strategies: Business as usual, community readiness, solidarity messages, celebrity endorsements, restore confidence and change misperceptions, spinning the unsafe image into

assets, curiosity enhancement, short-term discounts, guest/visitor testimonials.

Avraham and Ketter's multi-step model for altering place image ([Avraham & Ketter, 2008, 2016](#)), utilizes twenty-four strategies to restore place image. These are then divided into three the broad categories of Source, Audience and Message (SAM strategies). Source strategies concentrate mainly on marketers' efforts to influence or replace the source that is perceived as being responsible for the nation's negative image (“Come see for yourself”, using celebrities as an alternative source, buying news space, establishing rapport with the news people, exploiting background similarity, blocking media access and applying physical/economic threat). Message strategies focus on tackling the negative messages (Ignoring the crisis, acknowledging a negative image, reducing the scale of the crisis, tackling the crisis, hosting spotlight events, hosting opinion leaders, using films, TV and books, engaging celebrities, delivering a counter-message, spinning liabilities into assets, ridiculing the stereotype, branding contrary to the stereotype, geographic isolation and changing the place's name). Audience strategies are concerned with a specific audience (similarity to the target audience, patriotism and nationalism, and changing the target audience).

2.3. Research questions

The introduction and theoretical background outline two main gaps addressed by this research. First, how can we use image repair models to analyze nations' efforts to combat stereotypes? Second, how can we use quantitative content analysis in research conducted in the field of image repair theory? Ads produced by nations to fight stigmas and generalizations are excellent means to gain insights into the hitherto unexamined use of image repair theory and quantitative content analysis. Three main research questions are examined in this study:

- 1) What kinds of stereotypes are the focus of the campaigns that were created by nations and states?
- 2) What are the most popular strategies used by countries seeking to change stereotypes or negative perceptions and how are these strategies used in the campaigns?
- 3) Do the strategies used to change countries' negative perceptions differ either according to the continent where the countries are located or according to the type of political regime?

Answering these research questions involves a multi-step model that employs both quantitative and qualitative dimensions in a manner that is rare in image repair studies. Using quantitative research enables us to understand the types of stereotypes marketers of countries are combating, which strategies are most popular in fighting prejudices, and whether the characteristics of the country (e.g. location or regime type) influence a marketer's choices for the image repair strategies they used. In addition, thick qualitative descriptions illustrate how marketers use select strategies to expand their country's image beyond the stereotype. Whether they acknowledge the stereotypes and/or ridicule them, both try to repair the country's image. The results of this enhanced multi-step model help us to understand the connection between the various factors analyzed and comprehend how each strategy was used by the marketers.

3. Methodology

3.1. The sample

We analyzed seventy video and print ads published by various countries, using YouTube and Google Images (N = 70) to locate them. Sixty-three commercials were taken from YouTube's video sharing site and seven ads from Google Images. To find the commercials included in the sample, we inserted the words “X (name of a country) tourism

advertisement/campaign/ad/commercial”, “X (name of a country) attracting investment/industries/firms/businesses/ initiatives/citizens/immigrants”, according to the existing names of 192 countries taken from the United Nations site and the 50 states of the US—for example, “Albania tourism ad” or “Thailand tourism ad”. It is noteworthy that like the US, the 13 other countries are also federalist states (for example Mexico, Canada, and Germany). However, stereotypes and prejudices were encountered at the local (state) level only in the US. For this reason, advertisements from this level are also included in this study.

The search on YouTube and Google search engines using the defined search words returned hundreds of advertisements. Avraham and Ketter (2015) found that marketers of “ordinary” places that do not suffer from an image crisis primarily use one of two strategies: 1. “Expanding an image” (providing information about local people, activities, experiences and landscapes); 2. “Hosting events” in the place. Because these two strategies are also included among the 24 image repair strategies in the “multi-step model for altering place image” and in order to focus only on ads aimed at image restoration, for this study only ads that utilized a minimum of three of the twenty-four image repair strategies were included.

Ads included in the sample were those produced for countries or states by official bodies (national tourism offices, ministries of foreign affairs, tourism ministries, technology/commerce ministries) or recognized organizations or associations (such as hotels chains and NGOs). Sixty ads (86%) were produced by government ministries and ten ads by a chain of hotels or NGO (14%). Most of the countries produced one or two ads while four countries (South Africa, Tunisia, Albania and Israel) produced three to five ads. The average video length was 212 s (3 min and 32 s) and the average number of viewers for all the videos was 304,595.

3.2. Quantitative content analyses

Quantitative content analysis is a well-known research method; this study is the first use, to our knowledge, of this research method in an image repair model. Quantitative content analysis provides objective, systematic and quantifiable descriptions of media contents (such as news and advertisements) through the accumulation of measurable quantitative data (Krippendorff, 1980) measured by a coding page. The coding page in this study contained fifteen variables: country, continent, kind of advertising (video, print, or a combination), field/type of stereotype, target audience (external, specific or local), stereotype, strategies, narrator, ad producer, kind of regime (according to the Freedom in the World Index (2015): democratic-liberal, non-liberal democratic, authoritarian), length of ad (in seconds) and number of viewers on YouTube. Validity and reliability were achieved through the use of two judges, and the agreement rate between them with regard to the various variables included in the coding page was 90%. In order to achieve such a high level of agreement, the judges were given training and several pre-tests were conducted. Reliability was tested using an ordinal Krippendorff’s Alpha reliability test (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) and the minimal coefficient was 0.851 on the variable “repair strategies used”.

3.3. Qualitative content analyses

The qualitative approach is especially useful for studies attempting to explain social interaction in general, making use of inductive reasoning and generalizing from the social reality to a more comprehensive theory (Tuchman, 1991). This research method is used as a primary method of analysis in image repair studies (Peijuan, Ting, & Pang, 2009). Qualitative research engages in naturalistic inquiry; it studies real-world settings inductively to generate rich narrative descriptions and construct research insights (Patton, 2005). The images and motifs appearing in news items, promotional materials and the gamut of visuals, including symbols, logos and labels, give rise to patterns that the

researcher exposes. In this study we analyze the theoretical model’s 24 strategies as in Avraham and Ketter’s (2008) research. According to their study a strategy could appear in a video or an ad’s slogan, text, actor’s words, narrator’s words, subtitles, or visuals/pictures. For example, an ad with eight different visuals that present activities, experiences, people and landscapes from a certain country will be considered as “Expanding an image”.

4. Findings

This section analyzes the range of stereotypes that countries have tried to mitigate, as well as examples of the major strategies adopted by marketers to deal with challenges.

4.1. Stereotypes of countries and image repair strategies used

The quantitative analysis shows that forty-seven countries produced a video or ad to face the challenge posed by a stereotype or negative image for a total of seventy ads. The main reason for attempting to change a negative image was attracting tourists, followed by bringing investments and industries. In addition, most countries that chose to tackle a stereotype came from mainland Europe (14, 30%), South America and the Caribbean (9, 19%), and North America (7, 15%). States that produced ads or videos were facing a variety of stereotypes. According to Table 1, most of the countries suffered from problematic images. These images were either “narrow image”, “dull and unknown” (36 cases, 47%), “not safe” (17 cases, 22%), or “primitive/backward” (11 cases, 14%).

Table 1 shows that the most common type of stereotype countries encountered was lack of familiarity coupled with a narrow image. This is not surprising. In the early 1990s, as the Iron Curtain fell, the arrival of the technological revolution and the globalization process resulted in new countries being added to the tourist map (Adler-Nissen, 2014). Countries such as Croatia, Poland and Albania felt that in order to attract tourism, they had to shatter stereotypes and negative generalizations. This finding can explain why the message strategy of “expanding the image”, as presented in Table 2, was the most popular strategy.

After we identified the negative stereotypes, we tried to determine the most popular strategies used to combat national stereotypes. Table 2 shows the range of strategies divided into three types: source, message and audience.

Table 2 shows the total use of 288 strategies in various ads. Here are some examples for the use of the three kinds of strategies.

4.2. Source strategies

Officials use source strategies when they focus on sources that deliver messages to the target audience. The marketers used these strategies 39 times, which accounted for 13% of the strategies used. Three source strategies were identified.

Table 1
Kind of stereotypes countries were combatting.

Type of stereotypes	N	%
Narrow/grey image, boring, unfamiliar	36	47
Lack of safety, violence, danger	17	22
Primitive, lack of development, backwards	11	14
Positive stereotypes	3	4
Tough, unkind, unfriendly	3	4
Other	7	9
Summary	77 ^a	100

^a Some countries/states dealt with more than one kind of stereotype.

Table 2
Three groups of strategies used to combat stereotypes.

Type of strategy	Techniques	N	%	
Source strategies	Witnessing personal testimony	18	6	
	Witnessing first-hand – “Come see for yourself”	16	5	
	Blaming the media	5	2	
	Sub-total source strategies	39	13	
Message strategies	Expanding the image beyond the stereotypes	57	20	
	Acknowledging the stereotypes	35	12	
	Delivering a counter-message to the stereotype	31	11	
	Spinning liabilities into assets	23	8	
		Underdevelopment		
		Less familiarity		
		Ridiculing the stereotypes	16	6
		Using celebrities	16	6
		Promising a great future	12	4
		Softening the hard image	12	4
		Others	20	6
		Sub-total message strategies	222	77
Audience strategies	Emphasizing similar values, cultural symbols and geography	22	8	
		Country's physical characteristics		
		Audience's values, language and cultural symbols		
	Changing the target audience	5	2	
		Addressing external audiences		
	Addressing local audiences			
	Sub-total audience strategies	27	10	
	Total	288	100	

4.2.1. Personal testimony

While using this strategy, the commercial presents a testimony of a person describing his or her experiences in the destination while also recommending a visit. Eighteen countries used this strategy, which accounted for 6% of the strategies used. The main goal of this strategy is to deal with the concerns of potential tourists regarding visiting a particular destination. By using this strategy, marketers hope to show that there is tourist demand for the destination, and that there is no need for visitors to fear a visit. Personal testimony, therefore, conveys an opposing message to that of other sources (mainly the international media), which depict the destination as boring, ordinary or not safe. For example, in ads to promote tourism to South Africa (“Meet South Africa” and “Leave ordinary behind”), one can find a man who describes his personal experiences from the visit in which he concludes:

“...When you meet South Africa you re-consider what you think...”(#39)

“...When you meet South Africa you found that none of it, not one little bit, is ordinary” (#40)

In these commercials, the “witness’s” transformation happens in the wake of the trip, which makes the recommendation all the more believable to potential audiences. The hidden message of these campaigns is that only a trip to the destination will reveal the truth about it, as experienced by the “witness”.

Similarly, in the video produced by the Mexican tourism board in Chicago we find an attempt to change Mexico's perception as “not safe”. The video shows the head of the tourism board describing his positive experiences from a visit to Mexico:

“...I myself have been travelling to Mexico in past December, I did it with my wife and my kids, and we drove these beautiful areas and everything was perfectly fine and amazing; so I invite you to keep going down to Mexico and to discover why Mexico is a place you thought you knew”... (#23)

The narrator mentions the fact that his family felt completely safe during the trip and this allows him to emphasize that the country is safe for Americans tourists. Using the witness testimony, the video's goal was to fight the perception of Mexico as “not safe.”

4.2.2. “Come and see for yourself”

Another strategy used by officials of destinations that received “bad press” is to invite members of the target audience to “Come see for

yourself.” Here the ad emphasizes that the destination is safe or interesting while hinting to target audience members that they should not rely on negative media reports. By means of this strategy, destinations can deny their media mediated image as dangerous, boring or grey, and assert that the reality is totally different. The marketers believe that if they can convince the target audience to visit, the target audience will see that the media-spread stereotypes are false and that the place is vibrant, thriving and safe. Sixteen countries used this strategy, which accounted for 5% of all the strategies used. For example, in a commercial for Oklahoma, one can see various scenes, people, views, and cultural events with the slogan:

“Come see for yourself.” (#47).

Similarly, in the 1980s, Jamaica also ran a campaign targeted at the British market. The commercial started with the slogan: “Once you go, you know” (#48) and the narrator described the advantages of the island, its main attractions and cities, and other useful information. Another example is California, which adopted the same strategy in a campaign to promote tourism in which the ad said:

“...You want to know the truth about California? Get out here, we will show you how we roll...” (#53)

Once again, we can see that only during a visit can a visitor see the truth about a place.

4.2.3. Blaming the media

On many occasions, decision-makers and marketers blame the media for creating the negative image and stereotypes toward their country. There are occasional hints that the media's own interests create a negative destination image; therefore, a potential tourist should not let the negative image be an obstacle for a visit. Five countries used this strategy, which accounted for 2% of the strategies used. In one example, seeking to combat its media image as an unsafe destination during the beginning of the 2000s, Israel used a slogan inviting visitors to see Israel with their own eyes:

“See the real Israel... The real Israel is different than the Israel in the news.” (#18)

Here the ad hints that the media reports distort the reality in the destination and the truth can only be exposed through a visit. Another example is Africa, where many believe that one of the main reasons for the continent's negative image is Western media. In a video aimed at combating negative African stereotypes, African medical students say:

“To the western...I am an African man, but Do You Know Who we are? If you've only seen us in Hollywood movies, this is what you may think of us: machine guns, rocket launchers... we are obsessed with violence... we hate smiling, smiling is stupid... when we speak, we sound evil. And one thing's for sure, a day without war is a day not worth living....” (#11)

Colombia has also chosen to restore its image by blaming Hollywood for its perception as a dangerous place. The opening slide in its video reads “FBI Warning” and the narrator says:

“Colombia, a country in South America that makes newspaper headlines...It is not necessary to run the risk of travelling all the way there to know it, since Hollywood is taking care to show its reality to the world (on the screen one can see parts of Hollywood movies which describe the country as hub of drugs, violent incidents, gangs fighting the American army)... If you decided to find the truth about Colombia, you should not listen to some warning...” (#2)

Here we can see that a certain source (Hollywood) is blamed for the stereotypes and negative images of the country and clips from Hollywood prove the claim. In any event, blaming the media for the stereotypes is done in two ways: indirectly and subtly as in the case of Israel, or directly as in the case of Colombia and Africa.

4.3. Message strategies

Message strategies try to directly combat the content of stereotypes and negative perceptions toward countries. The marketers used these strategies 222 times, which accounted for 77% of the strategies used. Thirteen message strategies were found.

4.3.1. Expanding the narrow image

Table 2 shows that the image expansion strategy was the most popular message strategy. It accounted for 20% of strategies used and was evidenced in 57 of the 70 ads (in 82% of all ads). It is important to note that this strategy is also popular among marketers of countries that do not suffer from any image crisis. This is because marketers are constantly trying to show how versatile their particular countries are in terms of landscapes, sites, people and events. It is not surprising, however, that this is the most popular strategy among countries that suffer from an image crisis or a narrow image such as “unsafe/dangerous”, “too far,” “too hot,” or “boring”. Once these stereotypes are created, people tend to forget the positive aspects of a country, so it is natural that the marketers will try to expand the image and show that their destination is beyond the stereotype and is, in fact, interesting, varied and surprising.

When using this strategy, we found two techniques: direct and indirect. The first is an extension of targeting an image directly. This technique is seen in the campaign published by the Japan airlines (JAL), whose slogan was: “There's more to Japan than business”. The text reads:

“From neon-lit cities to the tranquility and peace of Mount Fuji. From culture thousands of years in the making to a world of tomorrow. There's much more to Japan than just business.” (#36)

The background to this text is a photo of Mount Fuji in autumn, covered with snow and framed by a distinct tree. The message is clear and direct. Many people think that Japan is only a business destination but the ad expands the narrow image beyond that. Similarly, Switzerland's marketers used this direct technique while running the campaign: “Switzerland – more than just mountains” (#4). The campaign tells the story of two Swiss farmers who arrive with their tractor to a big city and are exposed to city life. They do shopping, go to a modern art museum and casino, enjoy a beach, eat in a gourmet restaurant and get tattoos on their arms. The last sentence says: “Everything you need for a perfect city break.”

In the second technique, there is an attempt to expand the destination image indirectly while presenting the destination with its many faces, landscapes, cultural events, various sites, and smiling and warm people. For example, in an ad for Colombia (# 2), which was mentioned previously, one can see pictures of tourist sites, events, animals and friendly people. In a Saudi commercial, “Saudi Arabia: yesterday and today building the future,” the narrator says: “This is the new Saudi Arabia. Nation-building for the future” (#21) and presents the country's achievements in technology, science, economic self-sufficiency, and agriculture. The latter includes pictures of supermarkets, deserts turned green and many others sceneries and sites.

4.3.2. Acknowledging the stereotypes

This strategy was also one of the more popular strategies, used 35 times, amounting to 12% of the cases. While using this strategy, marketers describe the components of the existing stereotypes toward the country, thus establishing credibility with the target audience. Once that is done, marketers then try to break down the negative image using a variety of strategies and techniques. Marketers, in effect, are saying “we know what you think about our country, but we want to show you that the reality is totally different.” For example:

“If you think of Saudi Arabia as just a vast expanse of sand, where people live in tents and ride camels, look again...” (#21)

“Canada, big, wild and very very cold...it snows 24 hours a day, every day of the year, its frozen landscape is dotted with igloos, home of the vast majority of Canadians, igloos and polar bears.” (#7)

“When you hear the word Israel what goes through your mind? This, (visual of a desert), or this, (visual of a camel), or defiantly this, (visual of a soldier riding a camel).” (#19)

These are the predictable images of the countries that marketers then begin to break down. It seems like the marketers intentionally exaggerate the content of these countries' perceptions in order to present the country in totally different, often contradictory, ways. In the ads, there are efforts to expand the country's image regarding its scenery, innovations, cuisine, multi-culturalism and many other aspects.

While the previous examples describe an attempt to fight negative stereotypes, California and Holland have used this strategy to fight positive ones. These campaigns, while presenting the stereotypes, do not then break them down into positive images of the stereotypes. In the California campaign to remove misconceptions about California, the commercial starts with the acknowledged stereotypes:

“People have a lot of misconceptions about California but none of them are really true... they think we are all surfers, or celebrities, that we are all into yoga, and everyone owns a winery or skateboard...” (#53)

The ad does not try to change these misconceptions, but rather encourages the audience to come and visit in order to discover the expanded “truth”. Holland's marketers also used a similar strategy to combat its stereotypes:

“What do you know about Holland? Flowers, windmills, picturesque canals, cheese, wooden shoes, master paintings from the Golden Age...” (#5)

The idea was to expand the image of country beyond these perceptions and stereotypes by first exposing them. These positive stereotypes are then built upon. To summarize, we can see that this strategy was used to acknowledge negative stereotypes as in the cases of Saudi Arabia, Israel and Canada and to expand positive perceptions as in the case of Holland and California.

4.3.3. Delivering a counter-message to the stereotype

Delivering a counter-message to the stereotype was also a popular strategy, used 31 times in the ads (11%). The goal of this strategy is to convey straight messages that are the opposite of the stereotypes and the negative characteristics associated with the country. For example, Egypt, during and after the Arab Spring events, was not perceived as a safe destination, an image that caused damage to the tourism industry. As a result, a campaign initiated by the Azur hotels and resorts contained a very simple and straightforward message: “Egypt is safe” (#16). The video made by the Mexican tourism board in Chicago, mentioned previously, also targeted the safety issue of the country:

“...Mexico is perfectly safe to travel for tourism...much more safe than many cities in the world...” (#23)

After exposing the possible concerns of potential American tourists, the head of the Mexican tourism board addressed the safety issue directly.

Another example of a country using this strategy is Italy. In a commercial made for the Milan Expo in 2015 one can find a “list” of negative stereotypes about the country:

“Pizza makers? Italy is a world leader in the creation of major infrastructure – 1000 constructions in 90 countries. Latin lover? Italy has the world’s 5th largest trade surplus in manufactured goods. Party addicts?... Gesticulators?... Eternal children? Italy is the home to leading aerospace technologies...Football maniacs? Italy is the country greatest number of UNESCO heritage sites.” (#8)

Here again the marketers expose the stereotypes toward the country and its people and immediately deliver a counter-message to the stereotype.

4.3.4. Spinning liabilities into assets

This strategy spins negative characteristics or liabilities into assets and was used 23 times (8%). When we use the term “negative characteristics”, we mean characteristics that might be a barrier to attracting mass tourism such as extreme climate (cold or hot), small size, remote geographical location, underdevelopment and less familiarity (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Here we would like to discuss two kinds of liabilities and how they were turned into assets in the ads.

4.3.4.1. Underdevelopment. Places that are seen as not being sufficiently “developed” or “modern” are often viewed critically (Shields, 1992) regarding their ability to attract tourists. There are, however, numerous examples of marketers who have managed to turn a problematic image into a plus when trying to attract a specific audience. Using this technique, a location can focus on a natural environment that is “unspoiled” as opposed to “underdeveloped”. For example, Sierra Leone marketers used clean, undeveloped beaches in advertisements as an advantage that can be beneficial to investors, entrepreneurs and tourism developers:

“...Sierra Leone has over sixty miles of pristine, sandy beaches untouched and as yet undeveloped...” (#66)

In another case, during the years 2010–2011, Montana state tourism promoters used the slogan: “There is Nothing Here” (#27). A series of printed advertisements appearing in international tourism magazines showed mountains, snow, trees, lakes and wildlife, without depicting any human actions or activity. The perception of a place where nothing happens might keep away many tourists, but it seems that Montana marketers used it to attract people looking for places that are far from civilization while offering peaceful, untouched, pure nature.

4.3.4.2. Less familiarity. This technique deals with countries that are less known or familiar, and turns this lack of familiarity into an asset. Belize’s marketers employed this technique while marketing the country using the slogan “Belize – Mother nature’s best keep secret”

(#33). Curacao used a similar slogan: “Curacao – The hidden treasure of the Caribbean” (#34). The island’s ads showed pristine landscapes and long, barely trod-upon beaches. The caption read:

“There’s no better place to get away than a place nobody’s ever heard of...” (#34)

Eritrea used a similar slogan: “Welcome to Eritrea, Africa’s hidden gem” (#64). Other examples are:

Guyana: “South America’s best kept little secret.” (#52)

Antigua-Barbuda: “A secret paradise awaits you...discover the best Caribbean hidden treasure.” (#59)

Albania: “The last secret of Europe.” (#57)

Peru: “Land of hidden treasures.” (#60)

Here we can see again how lack of familiarity can be turned into an advantage for tourists who aspire to be the “first” to visit a destination and reveal its “secrets.”

4.3.5. Ridiculing the stereotypes

In this strategy, the destination’s marketers take the negative stereotypes to extremes, and then dispel the stereotypes by showing how absurd and ridiculous they actually are (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). In the study, this strategy was used 16 times in the ads (6%). Using this strategy, the marketers present the negative stereotype, show how ridiculous it is, and thereby attempt to nullify it. This strategy, for example, was employed by the state of Mississippi, USA, to battle images of an uneducated, cultureless and underdeveloped population. Trying to ridicule these stereotypes away, Mississippi created an advertisement showing pictures of famous authors and Pulitzer Prize winners who were Mississippi natives. The portraits were followed by the slogan: “Yes, we can read. A few of us even write” (#13). Another advertisement in this campaign showed portraits of well-known celebrities born in Mississippi, with the text:

“Monster Trucks? **No.** Hog Callin’? **No.** Tractor Pulls? **No.** World-Class Entertainers? **Yes!**” (#13)

Similarly, in Lebanon, the marketers tried to ridicule the negative stereotypes **toward** the country, which had lead people to avoid visiting. In the ad “Don’t go to Lebanon” the marketers hint that a visit to this country might lead to an overexposure to the sun, too much nightlife and too much food. The final line was: “They say stay away from Lebanon but what is greater than Lebanon?” (#12).

It was interesting to discover that this strategy has also been used to combat positive stereotypes. For many tourists, Switzerland is perceived to be a perfect destination: too clean, too esthetic, too organized, too beautiful to be true, almost unreal. In order to counter these perceptions the tourism ministry produced a tongue-in-cheek ad: “Swiss: How the Swiss Prepare for Tourists” (#15) where we see employees of the tourism industry sculpt snowballs on the hotel fence, insure that the hotel room window will make appropriately rustic squeaks, iron the flag, “fill” a St. Bernard rescue dog, and make sure to play yodel music when the tourists arrive at their hotel. Like other examples, the ad clearly tried to ridicule the stereotypes of the country as too perfect and to promote the message that the country’s beauty and orderliness is all natural, without any intervention.

4.3.6. Using celebrities

The strategy of using celebrities was used sixteen times in the sample (6%). Here, destinations marketers try to bask in the reflected glory of well-known figures or celebrities who are familiar to the target audiences (Mair et al., 2016). The use of celebrities is done in two different ways. The first technique has celebrities lead the entire campaign. For example, actor John Belushi (“The Blues Brothers”) participated in an ad to promote tourism to Albania (#58), Paul Gunn

(“Crocodile Dundee”) participated in a campaign to promote tourism to Australia (#9) and the comedian Martin Short was featured in a Canadian promotional video. Similarly, in a commercial for California (#53) we see many entertainment celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Betty White, the Jonas Brothers, January Jones and William Shatner, along with athletes, such as Shaun White and Joe Montana, all together rejecting the idea that “Californians live in their own reality with their heads in the clouds”. So too the campaign “Cool Britain,” designed to combat the perception of a boring, tired and square Britain, employed celebrities Steven Frye, Julie Walters, and Rupert Grint. Finally, in the campaign “Bulgaria is the place to be” (# 63), several American actors are used, such as Adrien Brody and Sylvester Stallone.

In the second technique, the marketers emphasize that a certain celebrity who originates from the promoted country. The child narrator of the Colombia commercial (“Colombia is Passion” – # 38) notes that Shakira, Garcia Marquez and other well-known celebrities are originally from this country. In a Polish commercial, marketers, in an effort to strengthen the country citizens' self-image mentioned the well-known writer, Andrzej Wajda (#14). Similarly, Mississippi marketers developed a poster featuring its famous people in the fields of music, literature, TV and film such as Morgan Freeman, James Earl Jones and Oprah Winfrey (#13).

4.4. Audience-focused strategies

The common denominator of audience-focused strategies is to improve a country's image by reaching out to certain target audiences directly. Thus, marketers of countries suffering from stereotypes hint or suggest that audiences should ignore the stereotypes and, instead, feel positively toward the people of the country for various reasons: common values, history, religion, or world outlook. The marketers used two audience strategies a total of 27 times, which accounted for 10% of the strategies used.

4.4.1. Emphasis on similar values, cultural symbols and geography

The analysis shows that when marketers want to deal with national stereotypes using audience strategies, they have found a variety of ways to connect or to associate with specific audiences. As we can see in Table 2, this strategy was used 22 times (8%). In fact, this strategy can be divided into two techniques. One connects target audiences with the country's physical characteristics (geography, location) and the second connects to the country's values and cultural symbols.

4.4.1.1. Association of audiences with the country's physical characteristics. Here the marketers try to give the audiences a feeling of close proximity regarding the destination location. For example:

Belize: “...Located only two hours from the US...” (#33)

Sierra Leon: “Only 5 hours flying time from Europe...” (#66)

Jamaica: “... British airways flies to Kingstone three times a week, direct from London-Gatwick...” (#48)

Here the overuse of the word “only” is intentional and clearly emphasizes how close the destination is to the target audience's home country. The diminished geographical distance “is not as far as you think.”

4.4.1.2. Association with the audience's values, language and cultural symbols. This technique seeks to give target audiences a close feeling by emphasizing various cultural characteristics such as language, values and cultural symbols. Some examples focusing on language are:

Holland: “Did you notice that I am speaking English? We all do...” (#5)

Belize: “The only English-speaking country in Central America.” (#33)

Philippines: “We speak over 176 local languages but we love playing around with English.” (#67)

It is easy to see that emphasis on the English language was popular among the marketers. It was important to draw target audiences closer and to combat potential tourists' fears regarding how they will manage when they tour the destination.

Another example comes from Saudi Arabia. After this country's name was linked to the September 11th terrorist attacks in the US, an ad campaign was started to restore the Saudis' positive image. It emphasized Saudi Arabia's ties to America:

“We are separated by three oceans, one language, but we share the same desires, the same dreams, same joy, same pain and same hope that we can make our world a safer place together...” (#20)

Besides language, this commercial ad sought to connect with foreign audiences on the basis of similar values, dreams and emotions. During its Arab Spring, Tunisia likewise planned several events under the slogan “Free to Live It All” (#41). The campaign invited Western tourists to visit post-revolution Tunisia and support its struggle for freedom. It also reassured them about the security situation in the country.

In addition to languages and values, we found associations and connections were also made on the basis of similar technologies and cultural symbols and heroes. For example, in the ad to combat stereotypes toward Africa, we see an appeal to Western audiences through technology when the presenter says:

“We are likable and friendly guys and we are even on Facebook.” (#11)

Israel's marketers emphasized the use of technology in its ad, “68 Facts You Probably Didn't Know About Israel”:

“...What was invented here? The technology that allows us to chat in WhatsApp, Messenger and everything else you youngsters spend your time on, the world's first antivirus program...a technology to prevent taxi accidents...a small pill that allows you to photograph your body from the inside...” (#19)

The narrator used common technologies to highlight the country's contribution to the target audience's day-to-day life.

4.4.2. Changing the target audience

A national stereotype is not an objective entity, but rather is a subjective one formed through the eyes of the target audiences. Thus, marketers know that they need to communicate different messages to different audiences, depending on the selected targets to overcome negative perceptions (Bekk, Spörrle, & Kruse, 2016). As a result, a feature of a place that might be negative for a certain audience could be considered positive by a different audience. For example, a quiet, pastoral place in which one “can hear the birds” can be perceived as not attractive for a young audience that is looking for action and parties, while it can be highly attractive to an older audience. In addition, there are potential audiences that know less about the stereotype or are less afraid of it or less concerned about it. In this strategy the marketers address two kinds of target audiences: external audiences perceived as “resilient” to the crisis or stereotype, and local audiences that are asked to help in combatting the stereotypes. Five countries used this strategy, which accounted for 2% of the strategies used.

4.4.2.1. Addressing external audiences. Here the marketers try to address external audiences who might be resilient to the stereotype or crisis. For example, in the video made to combat Colombia's stereotypes, the foreign models who appeared in the video were singles or young couples. It seems that the marketers were targeting this specific audience as those more “willing to take the risk” (#2) than

“regular” tourists. As part of the effort to develop “Diaspora tourism”, Lebanon targeted the twelve million Lebanese who live outside the country in order to convince them to come and visit the “old country”. Lebanon’s ministry of tourism ran a campaign called “Lebanon–Safest place on earth” after the 2006 war. At first, this slogan looks surprising because Lebanon was not exactly associated with safety at that time. The ad shows many locals hugging returning family members at the airport and the text reads:

“There is no safer place than in the arms of your loved ones.” (#22).

Similarly, resiliency is one factor addressed in the “Don’t go to Lebanon” campaign mentioned previously. Here, again, we can see how a country that has suffered from an image crisis can ridicule the stereotype, and address a more resilient audience (#22).

4.4.2.2. Addressing local audiences. When a destination is perceived as unsafe, tourists, as can be expected, are often afraid to visit the country. In order to prevent the collapse of the tourism industry, marketers tend to change the target audience and try to attract local tourists. They may, for example, create a campaign aimed at attracting local tourists in place of tourists from abroad who are afraid to visit after terror attacks. In Poland, the marketers believed that in order to combat national stereotypes there was a need to convince Polish people that these stereotypes were not true. In the campaign “Poland. Come and complain” we can see local Polish people who have been “interviewed” expressing many complaints and negative perceptions about their country. After these complaints were aired, the narrator described many Polish achievements in a variety of fields such as culture, literature and economy. For example:

Narrator: “What are the Poles best at?”

Actor: “They’re best at...nothing.”

Narrator: “But abroad, things are attractive to the naked eye...Polish GDP is steadily increasing in spite of the crisis in Europe and Poland is now the 4th most attractive market in the continent...” (#14)

The idea is to acknowledge the stereotypes Polish people have toward their country and then to inform these people about Polish achievements in the hope that they will combat the wrong “internal” stereotypes directly. It seems like the marketers believe that “change begins from within” and real change to national negative perceptions should start with the locals.

Another campaign to fight stereotypes addressed to locals was in India. The goal of the campaign was to convince the locals to behave better to foreign tourists and to combat the country’s negative image as an unsafe place for women (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). In the commercials, we can see locals pushing and yelling at tourists, harassing them sexually, and bothering visitors. Then the narrator says:

“...Every visitor to this country is our esteemed guest. Take good care of them and our country will earn respect...” (#26)

Here the message was to concentrate on changing the behavior of locals and not to blame the media or adopt other message strategies. The campaign sought to change the negative reality with the hope that this would lead to a change in the external negative image.

5. Discussion

An analysis of the strategies used to combat national stereotypes reveals interesting findings. Message strategies were used by countries from all of the continents; however, the amount of source and audience strategies used was varied. For example, African countries made the greatest use of source strategies (in 67% of the ads); apparently, African countries’ marketers believe that a substantial part of the stereotypes against them are created by the international media (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). At the same time African and Asian countries have made the

least use of audience strategies (20%), apparently due to their geographical and mental remoteness from Western countries. Additionally, it is important to mention that non-democratic states rarely used audience strategies since the non-democratic nature of a state does not provide a source of connection to Western audiences (Bekk, Spörrle, & Kruse, 2015; Peijuan et al., 2009).

Analyzing the use of specific strategies also leads to note-worthy insights. While most countries have dealt with narrow image, 22% of them dealt with the image of lack of safety. When this lack of safety was the issue, the most popular strategy used was “image expansion” (70%), followed by “acknowledging the stereotype” and “sending opposite messages to the stereotype” strategies (47%). Here, it was interesting to discover that there are areas that suffer tremendously from this kind of image issue, like the Middle East, where 69% of the ads were created by the region’s countries facing this challenge. At the same time, data shows that 65% of the commercials that face this challenge used source strategies; the dominance of source strategies for image repair was seen also in previous studies (Avraham, 2015; Beirman, 2003).

At this stage we should also note which strategies were used far less. For example, the use of celebrities in ads as an image restoration strategy was hardly used. This is surprising because a study conducted in Australia shows that this strategy is the most effective in dealing with image crises (Mair et al., 2016). One reason could be that only a few celebrities from developing countries are known in the West and another reason could be the high cost of recruiting Western celebrities for such a campaign. It is also not clear why audience strategies, used in only 10% of the ads, were not used much more often. Similarly, the low use of the strategy that seeks to change local behaviors in order to deal with negative stereotypes (Baker, 2007) should raise a question. Besides the ads produced in India (#26) and Australia (#29), we have not seen many attempts use this strategy to deal with a problematic reality.

6. Summary

This manuscript examines which strategies marketers have chosen to combat countries’ national stereotypes, negative perceptions and generalizations. The analysis showed three types of strategies to improve countries’ images: source, message and audience. To summarize, source strategies: witnessing personal testimony, witnessing first-hand–“come see for yourself” and blaming the media; message strategies: expanding the image, acknowledging the stereotypes, delivering a counter-message, spinning liabilities into assets, ridiculing the stereotypes, using celebrities, promising a great future and softening the hard image; audience strategies: emphasizing similarity and changing the target audience.

While previous studies have been based primarily on qualitative content analysis, this study marks one of the first attempts to combine the use of quantitative and qualitative analysis of ads dealing with national stereotypes. As we have seen, the use of quantitative research can assist us in gaining a broad, comprehensive picture of ways in which the countries deal with challenging images. Quantitative analysis has helped us to better understand the main stereotypes faced by countries, the most popular strategies used to defeat them, and the effects of state characteristics on the strategy chosen. In addition, the study not only used the “multi-step model for altering place image,” but deepened and developed its strategies to several innovative techniques.

The research findings contribute valuable information for both researchers and practitioners. Researchers learn that the use of image repair theory and models can greatly enrich the research foci of studies that deal with the ways nations combat stereotypes, negative image and crises. Practitioners, on the other hand, can learn about new strategies used around the world, possible new target audiences for their marketing that will be resilient to negative images, and a variety of creative messages that can be used during an image crisis.

The findings helped us draw some interesting conclusions that raise some questions and concerns. First, it was interesting to discover that

most of the countries that decided to deal with the challenge of changing stereotypes are democratic countries. At the same time, we saw that most of the countries wishing to tackle stereotypes were from Europe, Latin America and North America. These findings were very surprising, especially the fact that 23 out of 47 countries were in Europe. Countries of this continent enjoy positive images relative to other continents that truly need to alter their images, yet they are far less active in the field.

It is important to note the limitations of this study. The analysis undertaken was done only on commercials and ads that appeared on YouTube. This leads to a limited sample and could be problematic because not every campaign is uploaded to this site. It is also quite possible that campaigns appeared on this site in other languages besides English or used different keywords than the ones we defined and were therefore not included in the sample. In addition, when examining the results of qualitative analysis in general, it is important to keep in mind that it is the audience's perception of the work that is measured, and not

the creators' intent. As related to the current study, the judges assessed which strategy was used based on their understanding of the texts, images, etc. as described in the methodology section above. One cannot be certain that the advertisements were in fact designed to combat a specific stereotype. For these reasons, it is recommended to be cautious in reviewing the findings and to remember that this is a preliminary study that serves to present initial knowledge in a field of research that is relatively new.

Combatting national stereotypes is a topic of major interest for many researchers, policy makers and marketers who are interested in national branding, since any attempt to change a stereotype is indeed an effort to (re)brand a country (Dinne, 2008). Thus all ads (re)positioning a country after research on negative brand attributes are in reality “stereotype-combatting” ads. Future research should concentrate on which marketing initiatives, public relations strategies and advertising campaigns actually work to combat national stereotypes and negative image following various kinds of crises.

Appendix A. Links to ads and videos mentioned in the manuscript

Ad. No.	Country/State	Link
2	Colombia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgW8Y7F8DN8
4	Swaziland	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD0qCPAY2oU
5	Netherland	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqEh0iFWlgs
7	Canada	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8uYV40SyfQs
8	Italy	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1wVpnkZbOO
9	Australia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn_CPrCS8gs
11	Africa	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSEImEmEjb4
12	Lebanon	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOWhreNZzyA
13	Mississippi	https://www.pinterest.com/pin/16677461090825918/
14	Poland	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6Kzh6iGhfQ
15	Switzerland	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoA9FiJEtfg
16	Egypt	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h20cKbqTpcw
18	Israel	http://www.bluestarpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/wp_floating-in-israel.pdf
19	Israel	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3wmT2wH690
20	Saudi Arabia	http://www.marketingincrisis.com/index_files
21	Saudi Arabia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsDq6LFbfk8
22	Lebanon	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB92DP44pWg
23	Mexico	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=073XTgSDHio
26	India	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z9hWVZ_BiM
27	Minnesota	http://www.marketingincrisis.com/index_files
28	Israel	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjJ8SSFDbm8
29	Australia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6XgxRsxb7s
33	Belize	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn5hDbLcAQ4
34	Curacao	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_SwmwC1yvU
36	Japan	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsFBwwHy44c
38	Colombia	http://www.marketingincrisis.com/index_files
39	South Africa	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hn4hMEOpF8o
40	South Africa	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6f40ySFGAE
41	South Africa	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv1MU_Nh8ck
41	Tunisia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhtnMzCzrXk
41	Tunisia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVtF159yS60
47	Oklahoma	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm7kxOLQMh0
48	Jamaica	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4Xlj3dz1Qo
52	Guyana	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFI8gnGVSBU
53	California	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iey7_N_mEx4
58	Albania	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vd14e-KC-rk
59	Antigua Barbuda	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkGlzCjYRsk
60	Peru	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkJ2tyCzyiA
62	Ukraine	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZMMJo7jOTQ
63	Bulgaria	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i1IVCD8VzA
64	Eritrea	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjvgcvkD600
66	Sierra Leone	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDrtnhbS0IQ
67	Philippines	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-a6yOp0CyI

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