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A Brand Apart

Nation Branding in a More Competitive Africa

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Strengthening Africa's economic performance

THE BRENTHURST FOUNDATION

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Contents

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The views expressed in this Paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of any person interviewed for this study.

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Executive Summary

Over the past 10 years, at least 13 sub-Saharan African countries, among which include South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, have attempted to manage their nation brands. Their aim in doing so, as in other parts of the world, is to differentiate themselves and increase their competitiveness. This involves campaigns to promote tourism, investment and national pride. To varying degrees of success, these countries have unveiled new symbols and catch-phrases meant to embody a host of positive experiences associated with their nation and its people.

This Paper analyses the nation brand concept in the African context, highlighting its origins and detractors, and the lessons that might be drawn from non-African countries which have embraced the idea. Based on in-depth case studies from South Africa and Botswana, the two most developed nation brand strategies in Africa, this Paper discusses processes and factors relevant to the success or failure of nation branding initiatives. The case of Malawi is also highlighted, as an example of what might be achieved through targeted nation brand management.

The field of nation branding is still in its infancy. What exactly it is, how to implement it, and whether or not it works are hotly contested. Among proponents of the nation brand, variations in the definition of the word 'brand' lead to multiple articulations of the notion of a *nation* brand; this ultimately sees the emergence of competing strategies in nation brand management. For critics, the 'nation brand' is denounced as an unauthentic attempt to promote a simplified concept of a nation – an entity they claim is too dynamic and complex for a brand to honestly embody. Currently there is no reliable measurement of how successful governments have been in influencing their countries' brands, and myriad internal and external factors that affect national image are often difficult to track, quantify and directly attribute to proactive nation branding strategies.

The growing number of African countries that are attempting to influence perceptions of their brands suggests that, notwithstanding the lack of consensus on nation branding, African nations see it as a potential boon to their development. This Paper will examine the opportunity that nation brand management presents for African countries when it is used effectively in tandem with cross-sectoral strategic national planning. Mindful that any nation branding programme would occur within a highly constrained financial and skills environment, where basic issues of health, education and public safety are paramount, tough questions nevertheless need to be asked about the commitment of leadership, priorities and sequencing, and whether it could ever be 'money well spent' in these circumstances.

This Paper argues that the process of nation brand management may well be just as important as the outcome, if it is based on intensive research, consultation, and collaboration among a variety of domestic and international stakeholders. Such a process is in itself an exercise in democratic development and consolidation. Highlighted in this paper are several features of the domestic environment that will determine the relative success of any nation branding initiative:

- Commitment from leadership and stakeholders.
- Brand longevity and continuity across political cycles.
- Consistency between the branding activities and government objectives.
- Clear and bold actions from leadership that justify the brand message.

Evidence from around the world suggests that, despite lingering questions over its utility, the field of nation branding is likely to grow, which ultimately will lead to greater competition among nations. African countries that start now to strengthen their brands will be better positioned to differentiate themselves and escape the 'continent brand effect' which has negatively affected all African countries.

Introduction

At the annual World Economic Forum conference in Davos in January 2013, CNBC Africa hosted a special panel titled 'De-risking Africa'. The panel featured the heads of state of Africa's two largest economies, along with the CEOs of two leading companies with operations across the continent and the president of one of the world's most influential non-governmental agencies that focuses a large portion of its work on Africa. The moderator introduced the subject with the familiar roll call of statistics demonstrating Africa's impressive growth trajectory over the past decade and a half. Yet, inherent in the title of the discussion – 'De-risking Africa' – was the continuing concern about instability and potential threats to investments in Africa, despite these positive signals.

> Increasingly, public diplomacy is complemented with techniques commonly used in marketing – and none have attracted more attention than the idea of a 'national' or 'nation' brand

The first revealing statement came from South African President Jacob Zuma. Citing the major strides that the continent has made in instilling democratic governance, expanding infrastructure and taking steps towards economic integration, President Zuma 'took issue' with the theme of the conversation. To him it suggested an unfair 'perception of Africa that needs to be dealt with'. Does Africa truly need further de-risking, Zuma questioned, when its leaders are doing 'all the right things' to ensure progress? The second telling remark came from Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who spoke extensively on the subject of political risk and how Africa has, for the most part, mitigated it, with former military regimes making way for democratic governments. There was no mention of the acute threats to Nigeria's growth, from crude oil theft and the resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta region, to Islamic extremism and widespread corruption.

In contrast to Zuma's and Jonathan's upbeat assessments, the two non-African panellists emphasised the still-formidable hurdles to doing business on the continent. Sunil Mittal of Bharti Enterprises pointed, for instance, to the increasing threats in northern Nigeria and Mali, highlighting the limited effectiveness of governments in ensuring security in these regions, which is key to maintaining and increasing investment levels. Louise Arbour, president and CEO of the International Crisis Group, drove home the point that the failure of governments to strengthen institutions and address economic exclusion present serious risks, as does continuing insecurity in many parts of the continent.[1]

What these divergent responses to the subject of 'De-risking Africa' reveal is that external perceptions of Africa still tend to cohere around the challenges rather than the opportunities. To paraphrase Zuma, for all Africa's steady achievements, the continent still has an image problem. The final telling moment of the Davos panel was when Rwanda's President Paul Kagame made a comment from the audience that 'Africa's story is written from somewhere else and not by Africans themselves'. He went on to implore Africans to 'own our problems, own our solutions and write our own story'. The assertion that perceptions of Africa are biased towards negativity because they are shaped by non-Africans has a powerful resonance among leaders and civil society today, even if Africa's feeble long-term indicators tell their own story.[2] Few, though, could dispute that, historically, the experiences of Africa and interpretations of events on the continent have been expressed overwhelming by non-African voices.

Kagame's appeal for Africans to write their own stories is exactly what some governments in Africa have attempted to do over the course of the past decade. By recasting images of their countries, they seek to foster national pride, improve investment and trade, and attract tourists and professionals. Increasingly, public diplomacy is complemented with techniques commonly used in marketing – and none have attracted more attention than the idea of a 'national' or 'nation' *brand*.

To varying degrees of success, numerous African countries – including South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, to name only a few – have unveiled new symbols and catchphrases meant to embody a host of positive experiences associated with their nation and its people. These new 'brands' are supported and managed through policies and institutions, which actively employ various marketing and communications strategies to maximise their impact. The field of nation branding is still in its infancy, however. Hard evidence that it helps improve a country's domestic and international image more than, say, the straightforward implementation of 'good governance' measures – inclusive policy formation, transparent public administration and rule of law, etc – is, in fact, scarce.

> The field of nation branding is still in its infancy, hard evidence that it helps improve a country's image is scarce

Notwithstanding Kagame's reproach to outsiders who have monopolised the narrative on Africa, the negative stereotypes attached to the continent as a whole are rooted in serious, real-world weaknesses – often on the part of African leaders and governments themselves. And these stereotypes tend to trickle down to and affect all countries, even the best performing ones. Only by relentlessly tacking these issues will we see such images of Africa significantly altered; no amount of nation branding can make failing or failed states any more attractive.

Where there have been successful reforms and notable progress, however, questions about the viability and effectiveness of nation brands come into sharper focus. This Paper will examine how well African countries can leverage principles of nation brand management, in tandem with their strategic policy objectives, to not only improve national image but achieve their development goals. Mindful that any nation branding programme would occur within a highly constrained financial and skills environment, where basic issues of health, education and public safety are paramount, tough questions need to be asked about priorities and sequencing, and whether it could ever be 'money well spent' in these circumstances. This Paper begins with an overview of the nation brand concept, highlighting its origins and detractors, as well as non-African countries that have embraced the idea. The second part of the Paper surveys nation brand management in several African countries, particularly where the practice is most advanced – South Africa – and in Botswana where efforts at nation brand management are more recent. The case of Malawi is highlighted as a nation that could potentially benefit from deliberate branding and improved communication strategies. In conclusion, the Paper offers some tentative policy suggestions for those governments considering the nation brand model as a tool to improve their country's image.

A contested concept

Nation branding is a new field in public diplomacy. What exactly it is, how to implement it, and whether or not it works are hotly contested. At the base of these disputes are differences in the concept of the 'brand' itself. Often is it seen simply as the packaging, design and logo of a product, though in more nuanced examples the word 'brand' is used to describe a corporate culture that sits at the heart of an organisation and drives core values and ideology.[3] In other cases, 'brand' is synonymous with 'reputation'.[4] As a result, depending on whom you ask, nation branding can mean: the marketing of a nation through logos and slogans; an attempt to define core national values; or the management of a country's reputation through targeted public relations and communications.

The majority of nation branding campaigns adopted today reflect a simple understanding of the term brand, and focus on labelling and advertising a country. For most marketing firms hired to 'brand' a nation, the output is a fancy logo with the country's name and/or the colours of its flag, a pleasantly generic slogan, and a 25-page glossy strategy report on how this logo and slogan will unite the nation and improve its world standing. This branding strategy can result in millions of dollars spent on advertising with little, if any, tangible benefit to the country.[5]

Other attempts at nation branding present a more nuanced overall approach in line with the notion of a brand as a corporate culture, but they rely heavily on abstract theories that are hard to implement in practice. Phrases like 'compelling strategic vision' and 'state personality' are used to define the nation brand while vague mentions of 'coordination and consistency', 'brand loyalty' and 'creating a defined and differentiated experience' are presented as imperatives to successful nation branding without defining a process that could see such goals achieved.[6]

> Sceptics who argue that a country is not a product, maintain that the concept of branding a country is inherently flawed

Perhaps in a more sinister twist, nation branding as reputation management has seen governments engage public relations and communications firms in attempts to whitewash bad policies and attenuate media criticism. Again, comparatively vast sums are spent on consulting contracts to enhance a nation's reputation. Rarely do they last more than a few years, however. In some cases, a country's reputation may even be harmed if the branding exercise is seen as nothing more than propaganda and a waste of scarce government resources.[7]

These variations in defining and implementing the nation brand have fuelled scepticism and wide criticism of the industry. In his defence of nation branding, Wally Olins observes that the main contention that critics have is with the use of the word 'brand'.[8] Critics argue that the terminology implies a simplified concept of what a country is and that the act of branding, as you would a product, is not possible with a nation. Meanwhile, Sam Vaknin defines nation branding through the lens of a relationship between 'producers' and 'consumers', and points to a country's products – tax environment, infrastructure, and natural endowments – as important tools in branding the nation.[9] Yet, sceptics who argue that a country is not a product, maintain that the concept of branding a country is inherently flawed since the diversity of what a nation represents (among its citizens and among the international community) limits the ability of any nation brand to be broadly applicable or significantly influence what people think about the country.[10]

What is missing from the general conceptualisation of the nation brand and branding is a discussion of who should ultimately be doing this work. The logical assumption is that governments, possessing the most resources and the broadest influence over multiple areas of a nation's image, should be the caretakers of the nation brand. Inevitably, however, 'outsiders', specifically marketing and consulting firms, become involved. Beyond the trend towards hiring PR firms to manage communications, governments from Botswana to Ghana have engaged consultants and marketing experts to provide strategic direction and visual designs for their nation brands. Critics point to an obvious conflict of interest as these external consultants are more likely to seek simplified embodiments of the nation's identity and augment those to the status of 'brand' while alienating other representations of national identity that may be in conflict with each other.[11]

> Anholt, the originator of the nation brand concept, has famously distanced himself from the notion of 'nation branding'

Illustrative of the contentious nature of the branding debate is the current view of Simon Anholt, widely credited as the originator of the nation brand concept. Since then he has famously distanced himself from the popular notion of 'nation branding', decrying it as a 'dangerously misleading phrase' that implies that countries can superficially use commercial marketing and communications practices to manipulate public audiences.[12] At the inaugural Brand Africa Forum held in 2010 in Johannesburg, Anholt said nation branding had become a myth, put forth by public relations executives to mislead governments into believing that 'a shortcut to a better brand image' exists.[13] In his view, a nation's brand must be defined and communicated through a careful process that engages multiple stakeholders over an extended period of time.

The general lack of consensus among proponents of the nation brand and between them and their critics makes it difficult to identify clear-cut nation branding strategies, not to mention whether they are successful. Currently there is no reliable measurement of how successful governments have been in influencing their countries' brands. Myriad internal and external factors come into play, whether a nation's brand improves or deteriorates. Even where government actions may correlate strongly with the 'health' of a nation's brand, the various inputs are often spread across several departments – and they can be hard to track, and even less so to quantify and attribute directly to specific branding strategies.

What is a nation brand?

Every nation has a brand that is reflected in the images it evokes in the minds of the world's citizens. This brand is what distinguishes Britain from Botswana to someone on the street in New York. This brand is what impacts choices as variant as whether a family will vacation in Kenya or France, or whether a multinational corporation will base the headquarters of its operations in Singapore or South Africa.

> A nation's brand affects its ability to export its goods and services, as well as attract investors and tourists

For the purposes of this study, a brand is defined as the combined name, identity, and reputation of a product, service, or organisation.[14] Importantly, this definition implies that a brand is obviously much more than a logo or a design, and while reputation is a component of a brand it is not the only element that constitutes the brand. While the idea that nations have images and reputations is not novel, the notion of a nation brand has only recently emerged. The concept's originator, Anholt, argues that, as countries compete for a share of the global economy, a nation's brand affects its ability to export its goods and services, as well as attract investors, tourists, students and professional immigrants.

Although nations have not, until recently, proactively sought to enhance their international reputations, historical events and the actions of governments have always shaped the ways in which individual countries are perceived. In his essay outlining the historical context of nation brands, Olins states that, as nations respond to internal and external pressures, 'they create self-sustaining myths to build coherent identities'; in essence, he argues, 'the nation reinvents itself'.[15] Citing the example of France's revolutionary doctrine of 1789, Olins argues that the values of *Liberté, Fratenité, Egalité* created a republic that was much more determined to maintain a consistent and coherent national identity than any other nation at that time. Over a century and a half later, another attempt to re-brand occurred with the wave of independence movements throughout Africa and Asia when post-colonial nations changed their names, so as to reflect their 'authentic' identities – for example, Ceylon became Sri Lanka, Gold Coast became Ghana, and Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe.

Today, the nation brand is taking on new importance as seen through deliberate policies directed towards improving the domestic and international perceptions of countries, from the UK, Spain and Croatia to India, Australia and South Africa. Despite his contempt for the term 'nation branding', Anholt maintains that the concept of a 'nation brand' is crucial to a country's competitiveness and requires deliberate nurturing through a process of country brand management. This, he admits, is a thankless process that is both 'more complex and less glamorous' than marketing a country through communications and public relations, and that requires long-term commitments from governments and multiple partners.[16]

Effective country brand management is, broadly speaking, the act of taking control over the perceptions that exist about a nation while uniting a diverse range of stakeholders into what Anholt calls 'a harmonious yet distinctive whole'.[17] According to the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, a global ranking of 50 nation brands, a nation brand is the general perception of a country across six areas of competence: governance; tourism; investment; exports; people; and culture. This can be depicted visually using the nation brand hexagon, in which each side of the hexagon represents one of these areas of competence. What the hexagon symbolises is that the nation brand itself resides at the nexus of a country's strategies across areas through which its brand can be experienced and therefore must be communicated. This means that in order for a country to effectively manage its brand it must possess a detailed understanding of the various perceptions that exist about it around the brand hexagon. The country's leaders must, therefore, endeavour to determine the key factors that drive people's perceptions of each of these areas. Then, stakeholders across those areas

> In nation brand management, the promise of the brand must be demonstrated through policies and procedures

The Nation Brand Hexagon
© 2000 Simon Anholt

must devise a strategy to communicate one harmonious and positive message about the nation to the world.

Devising this communication strategy is easier said than done: you cannot have a lasting influence on how people perceive something by telling them 'how great it is' – there has to be evidence of the utility of a specific product to a consumer and the consumer's experience of that product must be positive. In nation brand management, the promise of the brand must be demonstrated through policies and procedures that can be experienced by the nation's 'customers', through all the potential areas of contact they may have with the nation. This requires a significant amount of coordination and cohesion:

- domestic and foreign policies must reflect strong governance principles;
- natural endowments and physical infrastructure must be developed and maintained to attract tourism;
- encouraging investment means strengthening financial and legal institutions;
- developing a strong manufacturing and services sector to support the country's exports;
- the receptiveness of the country's citizens and the manner in which they behave when abroad will reflect positively on the people as a whole; and
- finally, festivals, museums and national heritage sites must be promoted to demonstrate cultural richness.

It is obvious that not all these fall directly under the control of a single organisation or government office; therefore, collaboration among various stakeholders across sectors and industries, operating on the basis of a comprehensive national strategy that delineates clear goals and objectives for a country, is crucial for effective brand management. [18]

In any nation brand management, logos, slogans, and advertisements can serve as useful tools of communication to make people aware of what the country offers – its natural endowments, its peoples and its institutions – and ensure it is perceived as an attractive place to visit, do business, or even settle in permanently. Thebe Ikalafeng, Founder of Brand Leadership, a nation branding consultancy based in Johannesburg, likens this to a simple process flowchart where the end goals are national pride and increased tourism and investment, and the inputs are government policies and effective administration, while communication and marketing strategies are the link between these inputs and the end goals.[19] If nation branding relies solely on communication and marketing, with no tangible policy inputs, it is futile to think that the process will generate national pride or increases in trade or tourism.

Global variations in nation brand management

The India Future of Change (IFC) initiative presents a formidable example of a dynamic and comprehensive approach to engaging local and domestic stakeholders in nation brand management. IFC was launched by the Public Diplomacy Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs and is supported by partners such as the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, India's leading business school, the Industrial Design Centre, a premiere school of design at the Indian Institute of Technology, and the *Financial Times*. This cross-sectoral collaboration enables the initiative to draw on the skills of change-makers across government, India's foremost academic institutions and a leading international media organisation. The IFC initiative has generated a global discussion about India through campus dialogues at Indian and international universities and global competitions for students and young adults as well as cultural events, all of which highlight new and innovative ways for India to partner with the world. Most notably, the IFC initiative has maintained a consistent presence at the World Economic Forum in Davos bringing together business leaders, policy-makers, academics, young entrepreneurs and artists from around the world – all of whom speak to the potential for India to magnify its global contribution in partnership with the international community. A sub-initiative, IndiAfrica: A Shared Future, which was born out of IFC to encourage cultural and innovative exchange between India and Africa, has brought together 10,000 young people from the two regions and offers an annual $10,000 grant to budding entrepreneurs through its Young Visionaries Fellowship Programme.

> The IFC sought to engage the world in defining what India symbolises in today's society

Rather than using adverts or slogans to 'convey' India to the international community, which the IFC initiative could have easily done, the strategy instead sought to engage the world in defining – or 'co-creating' as it is referred to in the campaign – what India symbolises in today's modern society. Still in its infancy, assessing the impact of the IFC initiative beyond simply counting the number of events held and people reached through these dialogues is difficult. Anecdotal evidence would, however, suggest that the collaborative approach of IFC is leading to lead to an improved image of India abroad, which could result in greater tourism, trade and investment. Furthermore, the interactions with young leaders across the world – through conversations hosted with Indian business leaders and scholarships that support business startups – are sure to foster a strong entrepreneurial link between India and young non-Indians who take advantage of these programs.

In a number of emerging economies, tourism has served as the focus of successful nation brand management strategies, such as 'Malaysia, Truly Asia', 'Incredible India' and Costa Rica's 'No Artificial Ingredients'. Jose Filipe Torres, CEO of Bloom Consulting based in Madrid, advocates for what he calls the 'Three T Approach' to branding, which separates a country's brand management among three areas – trade, tourism and talent – each treated separately in terms of brand strategy and messaging.[20] Torres believes that one of the major setbacks to comprehensive nation branding is the need for extensive cross-sectoral consultation and cohesion, which are rare and difficult to ensure in democratic systems wherein ministries tend to operate in silos.[21] Providing support for Torres' view is the fact that, by virtue of the simplicity in its messaging, tourism branding is notably much easier to implement than comprehensive nation branding. Anholt, who despite his disapproval of the traditional advertising techniques used to brand countries, concedes that these tools are 'essential' for highlighting a country's endowments and promoting tourism.[22]

For India and Costa Rica the successes of their tourism brands have drastically enhanced their overall global images. 'Incredible India' helped India shift from a symbol of poverty and disease in the 1990's to an embodiment of cultural vibrancy and healthy living; today Indian cuisine is just as popular as its Italian counterpart, and Yoga has become a global symbol of wellness. Similarly, Costa Rica's tourism brand 'No Artificial Ingredients', capitalising on the concentration of bio-diversity in the small Central American country, has attracted over 2 million tourists annually to a nation of just 4.3 million inhabitants.

There is, however, a significant danger in relying heavily on tourism – a sector highly vulnerable to security or climatic 'shocks' – to enhance national image. Following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, the number of tourist arrivals fell by 45 per cent in the first three months of 2008, and in the first quarter of that year tourism revenues were $130.5 million, a 50 per cent decrease from a year earlier.[23] The decline in this sector not only meant a major loss for Kenya's foreign exchange earnings, but it had significant follow-on impact on employment, with the Ministry of Tourism at the time estimating that 120,000 jobs would be lost as a result of the decline in tourism.[24] A similar experience occurred in the South Asian nations affected by the 2004 earthquake and tsunami in that region.

For their part, while India and Costa Rica have actively pursued tourism promotion campaigns instead of broader nation branding campaigns, they both have very strong reputations as global centres of business – adding diversity to their overall national image. India's Bangalore technology cluster has spearheaded the country's emergence as an innovation and entrepreneurship hub. As of 2009 India was considered the second best outsourcing destination in the world (after the United States) with 7 out of 15 of the top global IT outsourcing companies located in India.[25] Meanwhile Costa Rica, which offers tax exemptions to investors, is home to a number of global high-tech companies including Intel, GlaxoSmithKline and Procter & Gamble. A 2011 study by fDi Intelligence, a division of the *Financial Times LTd.*, named the island nation the 'Caribbean and Central American Nation of the Future 2011/12', citing that it has been the top destination for foreign direct investment in Central America since 2003.[26] Furthermore, both Costa Rica and India have in the past three years undertaken broader nation brand management initiatives, capitalising on the successes of their tourism promotion. The India Future of Change program discussed earlier and the Costa Rican Export Promotion Agency (PROCOMER) are both managing their respective national brands.

> Tourism branding is much easier to implement than comprehensive nation branding

Africa: Is there a need for branding?

African countries considering a 'nation brand' approach might well ask why scarce resources should be spent when perceptions of countries have been made and unmade for centuries without governments seeking to control them directly. Miller Matola, CEO of Brand South Africa, suggests two questions are relevant here: does reputation matter? And can you influence reputation? If a government can answer 'yes' to both questions, then there is a basic case for brand management.[27]

In the African context there is no shortage of evidence that a bad reputation matters. In 2004 for instance, the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), while recognising the growing amount of FDI inflows to Nigeria, lamented that the nation's negative external image was a limiting factor on foreign investment and subsequently economic growth.[28] A good reputation, in contrast, is likely to benefit a country economically, especially if it is seen to be competitive. Globalisation has brought people closer together in terms of culture and world view – making cross-border relations easier; innovations in transportation as well as telecommunications have made physical barriers between groups of people negligible in interactions. Innovation has further cut the cost and time required to complete financial transactions, facilitating investments and capital movements across the globe. Consequently individual countries are now competing with every other country in the world (not just those in their immediate neighbourhood) in much of what that they do both domestically and internationally. When governments vie to attract foreigners to their shores or sell their goods overseas, the stakes are especially high. Having the reputation of being a trustworthy country, with reliable products and services, strong institutions, and honest citizens is often the factor that distinguishes one country from the next. Anholt refers to this as a country's 'competitive identity' and labels it as the 'new model for enhanced national competitiveness'.[29]

> A good reputation is likely to benefit a country economically, especially if it is seen to be competitive

A country's brand is also important in the arena of international relations and diplomacy. A relatively unknown country, or one that is not well liked or respected, commands much less attention internationally and has less ability to influence decisions that may directly affect it. This may sound more like playground pettiness than serious diplomacy, but having a poor brand can mean exclusion from certain influential international forums.[30] Peter van Ham makes the claim that 'image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state's *strategic equity*', and he proposes that politicians actually need training in brand management – a skill which most do not possess.[31]

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa collectively suffer from a largely negative reputation. Anholt refers to this as a 'continent brand effect' because, as he notes, outsiders who are generally ignorant of Africa tend to transfer their perceptions of the entire continent to its individual countries.[32] The tribalism, instability, poverty and disease characteristic of some countries thus becomes the caricature of all. For this reason an African nation brand must address two related issues to escape the 'continent brand effect' – association and differentiation.

For countries which have pursued a progressive reform agenda, yet are tainted by negative general stereotypes, effective and consistent communication mechanisms are required to draw the link between the government policies and the desired outcome of an improved country brand. In 'disassociating' from general stereotypes countries are essentially trying to 'differentiate' themselves – in order to grow their economies, by attracting investors, skilled professionals and so on. Within Africa's sub-regions, the process of differentiation is really an attempt to improve competitiveness. Where regional economies are dominated by a single country, smaller countries within the region could benefit from highlighting and promoting factors that make them distinct and attractive alternatives to their regional competitors. In southern Africa, Brand Botswana is an obvious challenge to Brand South Africa, presenting Botswana, with its history of democracy and strong governance, as an alternative destination for business and tourism in the region. Similarly in East Africa, the recently launched Rwandan branding campaign stands in direct competition with Brand Kenya, while in West Africa Brand Ghana promotes Ghana's infrastructure and security as benefits to doing business in Accra over Nigeria's chaotic mega-city, Lagos.

The nation brand in Africa

Branding in Africa is often discussed from a continental perspective, with an emphasis on refocusing the narrative of the continent away from one of war, poverty and disease and towards one of expanding business opportunities, ingenuity and a booming workforce. In 2009 Irish singer and activist, Bono, published a *New York Times* op-ed titled 'Rebranding Africa'; *The Economist* and *TIME* magazines within a year of each other both carried cover stories highlighting the political and economic rise of Africa; in May 2012 *Vogue Italia* dedicated its entire issue to Africa's new brand; and perhaps most telling, the renowned consultancy McKinsey published a famously bullish report about Africa's economic prospects entitled *Lions on the Move*. Despite this apparent shift in external perceptions of Africa, the image of the continent as an undifferentiated monolith has only been reinforced. To most outsiders, its individual nations remain mysterious and uninspiring entities. Within Africa as well, the continent is commonly promoted as a single bloc, underwritten by the ideology of pan-Africanism within the African Union. While mechanisms to promote African unity need not necessarily contradict with individual national identities, highlighting the unique attributes that differentiate the continent's countries from one another through nation branding could reveal areas of excellence and potential specialisation that may well propel the continent forward economically. Ultimately, the only way to change the image of Africa is to change the image of African countries – therefore, any discussion about branding Africa should focus primarily on branding at the national level.

In the past decade – starting with South Africa in 2002 – a number of African countries have actively sought to differentiate themselves through branding – or re-branding – their national images, targeting mainly investors and tourists but also with the aim of developing a strong sense of national pride. Nation brand management in Africa has emerged in various forms from strict tourism promotion, to hybrid tourism–investment branding, to attempts at reputation management through public relations, and finally towards developing an all-encompassing national identity with a long-term vision. For the most part though, these branding initiatives represent either recent developments or short-lived and short-sighted campaigns. This generally presents a challenge to anyone seeking information on African nation brands (and perhaps reveals an overall weakness in the African branding experience) as very little information is publicly available. In all, over the past 10 years, at least 13 sub-Saharan African countries have attempted to manage their brands in one of the ways mentioned. Successful examples of purely tourism brands include Mauritius and Tanzania, although the latter is beginning to explore the notion of a broad nation branding strategy. Mozambique and Angola stand out as having concurrent but distinct tourism promotion and export promotion campaigns. Rwanda, Uganda and Equatorial Guinea have all engaged PR firms in an attempt at reputation management. Finally, the trend towards a broad definition of a nation brand anchored to a country's overall identity can be seen in South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, Gabon and Nigeria, all of which have employed brand management strategies to this end, but to varying degrees of rigor and success.

> The overarching challenge of defining a brand that matches the realities on the ground and delivers on the intended outcomes has proved formidable

For African countries, the overarching challenge of defining a brand that matches the realities on the ground and delivers on the intended outcomes has proved formidable. In general, these brand management attempts are marked by shortcomings in the conceptualisation, development and implementation of the branding strategy. Nigeria for example, has seen two attempts to promote a national brand – in 2004 and 2009 – that quickly faded out of existence due to failures during the brand development phase to garner broad buy-in among citizens or even within the government. Tellingly, the London launch of Nigeria's initial nation branding attempt, was eclipsed by Nigerians themselves who staged protests at the event and overtly accused their government of 'image laundering' while it committed atrocities at home. Ultimately, this failure to include the citizenry in brand conceptualisation came at a high cost: an alleged $5 million was spent on the campaign and perhaps more was lost due to an even further erosion in the image of the nation.[33] Meanwhile, Mozambique's dualistic nation branding strategies have been working against each other, resulting in the country's tourism and trade promotion bodies competing for recognition. While both have undertaken potentially promising initiatives – promoting domestic tourism through provincial festivals and a Made in Mozambique campaign to bolster local industry – their lack of cohesion has limited the potential to scale-up their activities through possible partnerships, and particularly to cut costs.

> There has been a tendency for the nation brand itself to be anchored to the goals of political leadership while alienating the population at large

In other examples, there has been a tendency for the nation brand itself to be anchored to the goals of political leadership while alienating the population at large, as in Uganda. In 2005, amid severe criticisms following Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's campaign to amend the two-term presidential limit and accusations of human rights violations committed against political opponents, the PR firm Hill & Knowlton was engaged to enhance the image of his government. The result of the nearly $700,000 PR contract was a $1 million CNN advertising campaign that labelled Uganda a nation 'Gifted by Nature'.[34] The new campaign appeared to have little tangible impact, and certainly failed to shield the reputation from further damage when a police crackdown on protesters in 2009 left at least 40 people dead, and a controversial Anti-Homosexuality Bill attracted widespread international opprobrium. In a second attempt to resuscitate its international image, in 2012 the Ugandan government engaged another consultancy in a contract alleged to be worth over $1 million.[35] While an employee of the firm wrote that their mission was to train Uganda's civil servants 'to better equip them to actively manage the country's global reputation', there were no corresponding shifts in policy that might signal a positive change.[36] Instead, Uganda has since proposed an Anti-Pornography Bill that threatens to restrict the clothing that females can wear – and do more damage to the country's image.

Despite these somewhat uninspiring examples, the more entrenched nation brand management initiatives on the continent bear closer scrutiny. Brand South Africa and Brand Botswana stand out, not only as the two most comprehensive and established on-going nation branding strategies, but for their lessons for both big and small African countries. South Africa, the continent's economic powerhouse with a sizeable population and strong international presence, still feels the weight of a poor brand image in areas of social development. This presents a useful case study for perhaps Kenya and Nigeria, countries with similar strengths and challenges. Botswana, much smaller in terms of population, economy and continental presence, provides a number of lessons for small African countries which tend to get most consumed by the overall 'continent brand effect'.

Finally, Malawi, a small landlocked and aid-dependent country without any obvious competitive advantage, nor a current nation branding strategy (at least known to this author), illustrates some of the key considerations in developing a strategy, especially one centered around leadership.

Brand South Africa

The requirement and strategy

South Africa's transition from a pariah state under apartheid to a multi-racial democracy in the 1990s was one of the most dramatic shifts in national identity and image experienced by any state. And it occurred without any explicit nation brand management. Above all, this shift rested on the actions of Nelson Mandela and the difficult political compromises that were struck in the early 1990s to unite all South Africans. While these actions facilitated the much needed reconciliation of South Africa's racial groups and positioned the nation as a global symbol of democracy and inclusion, the systemic inequalities brought about by the apartheid regime were not easily rectified. These were most visible in the gross disparities in infrastructure, education and health care available to different racial groups. Unemployment and inequality remained persistently high throughout the late 1990s, and the nation suffered from some of the world's worst rates of HIV/AIDS prevalence and violent crime.[37] These facts created an international perception of South Africa that clashed sharply with the 'rainbow nation' that was supposedly forged in the wake of apartheid. It became obvious that South Africa could no longer rely on the legacy of Nelson Mandela to buttress its global image, and would have to tackle the sources of its growing negative brand head-on.

> South Africa could no longer rely on the legacy of Nelson Mandela to buttress its global image

The international Marketing Council (IMC) was established by President Thabo Mbeki in 2002 to be the custodian of South Africa's image both globally and locally. Yvonne Johnston, who served as CEO of IMC from 2002 until 2008, describes at the time 'a gap between the perception of the country and the reality of the country in the global marketplace' and argues that the IMC was necessary to 'accelerate' the World's understanding of South Africa towards what the nation really stood for.[38] Registered as a Trust and governed by a Trust Deed signed in 2002, the IMC was created with a mandate to 'transform the image of South Africa domestically and internationally by creating, coordinating and integrating a compelling South African brand proposition'.[39] The Deed also created the Board of Trustees as the governing body appointed by the President and accountable to the Minister in the Presidency. Funded through a government communications program, the IMC's annual budget the year it was created was R50 million, at its peak in 2010/2011 it was R170 million, due largely to preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, by 2011/2012 the budget stood at R140 million.[40]

In order to develop an authentic brand proposition, in 2003 the IMC held several focus groups and workshops, reaching out to over 25,000 domestic and international stakeholders across the public sector, civil society, private sector and media. In these engagements stakeholders described how they perceived South Africa's identity and the key attributes from these descriptions were captured in a Brand Key and summarized in the slogan 'South Africa, Alive with Possibility'. In 2007 the IMC initiated a review of this slogan, again consulting with local and global stakeholders. The process revealed that South Africans felt that the slogan 'Alive with Possibility' alluded to a potential that was not yet actualised, and did not reflect South Africa's achievements particularly its selection to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup. A new brand slogan was thus agreed upon – 'South Africa, Inspiring New Ways' – and this was launched after the 2010 World Cup. A crucial success factor in this process was the IMC's commitment to seeking public validation from stakeholders and its openness to revising ideas that were not yet embraced. Before launching 'South Africa, Inspiring New Ways' the IMC experimented with the tag-line 'South Africa, More than you imagined'. However, this proposition was largely rejected by South Africans, owing in part to its previous use by Singapore for tourism. The IMC subsequently reverted to the slogan 'South Africa, Alive with Possibility' which was far better received.

Stakeholder engagement did not stop at the consultations to define the brand proposition. Once completed, achieving aligned messaging among stakeholders was necessary. Johnston admits that this was challenging as entities like the Department of Trade & Industry and South African Tourism already had well-established brands which they were reluctant to abandon.[41] In order to avoid territorialism, the IMC had to adopt the position of a facilitator to South Africa's nation brand management and not over-assert its lead. During the consultations on South Africa's brand 'essence', the brand keys of various sub-brands – tourism, trade, and the FIFA World Cup organising committee – as well as the IMC, were important influencers in shaping the overarching Brand South Africa brand key and developing a message all organisations could embrace. Subsequently, the Department of Trade & Industry adopted the slogan 'Unlimited Business Opportunities' while South African Tourism used the tag-line 'It's Possible', both of these reflecting the Brand South Africa message of 'Alive with Possibility'.

> In its early years Brand South Africa had, despite a significant investment of government effort and resources, minimal impact

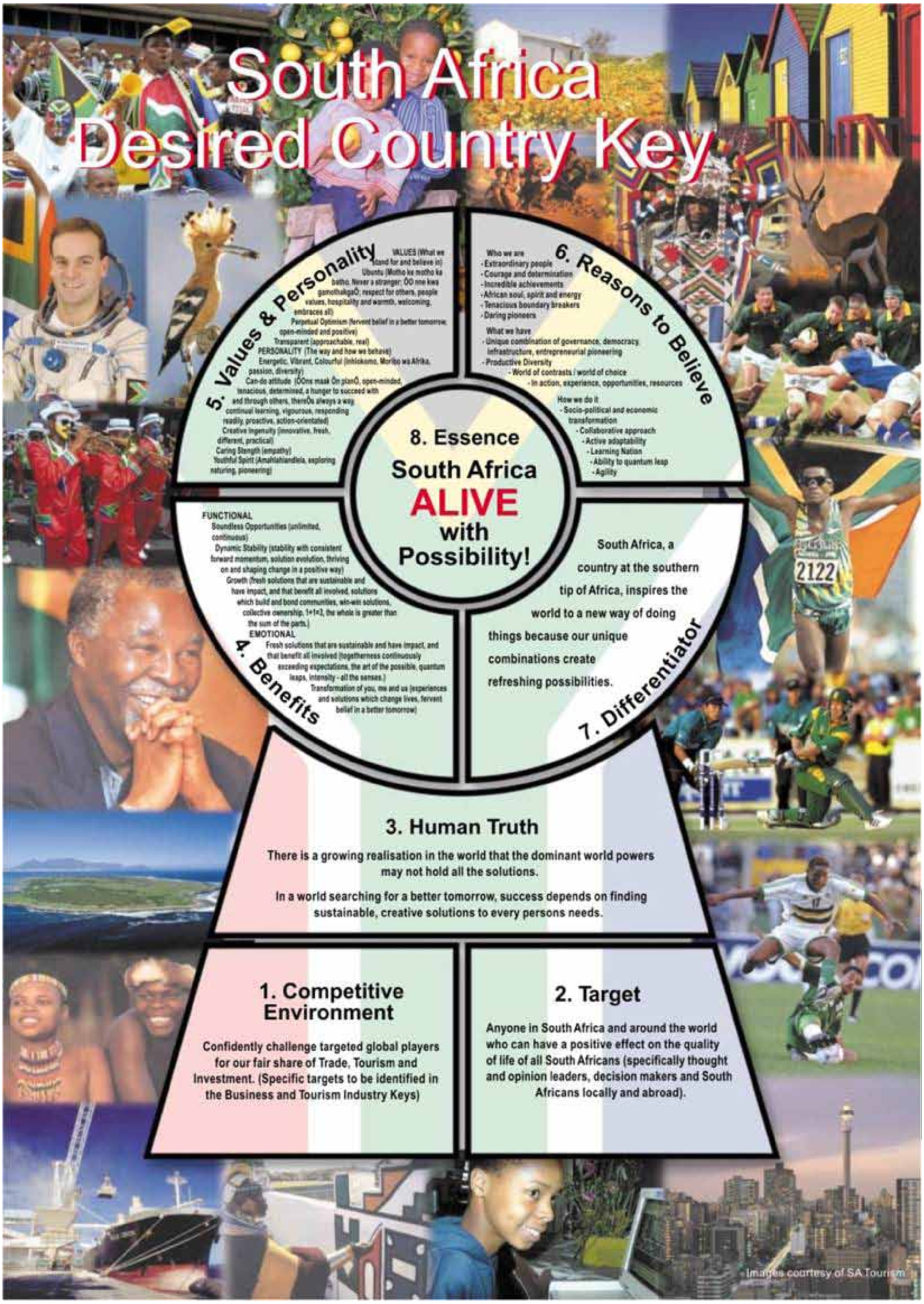
In its early years, the IMC pursued a marketing and communications strategy through television, radio and print advertisements aimed at both local and international audiences. Domestic advertising, such as the 'Today I woke up …' and 'It starts with you' television series and radio campaigns, triggered sentimental values associated with South Africa's history and the achievements of national icons and ordinary citizens in order to encourage national pride. Internationally, television and print adverts were heavily geared towards portraying South Africa as the 'gateway to Africa', a centre for business and innovation. Images in these campaigns highlighted South Africa's growing manufacturing and power industries and referred to very specific growth figures within these industries. All advertising leveraged the FIFA World Cup either as a tool to enhance national pride or as an occasion to underscore South Africa's growing investment opportunities.

To a lesser extent, the IMC's first six years of operation involved some collaborative and proactive engagements aimed at enhancing the national image. Among these were a domestic campaign, 'Movement for Good', which integrated the activities of various organisations working to enhance national pride, and collaborations with the Department of Trade & Industry in five investment missions that facilitated interaction between South African business leaders and nearly 400 potential investors in China, India, the US, the UK and Brazil.

Assessing impact

An internal evaluation commissioned in 2006 revealed that in its early years Brand South Africa had, despite a significant investment of government effort and resources, minimal impact. A National Perception Audit demonstrated that there was barely any change in the positive associations held among South Africans of Brand South Africa from 2004–2006. Meanwhile, an International Brand Health study found that, among comparable nations – Brazil, Chile, China, the Czech Republic, India and Poland – the South African brand performed best in China, India, Brazil, and the UK while it ranked second and third in China and India respectively, and fourth in Brazil and the UK. However, in the US, Germany, Netherlands and France, Brand South Africa did not rank as a top brand when considered among its competitors.[42] These findings led Johnston to conclude that, in its early years, Brand South Africa suffered from 'limited familiarity and weak associations'.[43] This view is substantiated by the fact that the highest negative attribute that investors associated with South Africa was an 'unstable political environment' despite the fact that South Africa had not experienced any political instability since the end of apartheid over a decade ago.

In 2008 the IMC underwent a Strategic Review commissioned by the Minister in the Presidency. Some key findings from this review revealed major shortcomings of the institution, notably in the areas of strategy and stakeholder engagement. In terms of strategic approach, the review found that the IMC focused on specific activities and lacked strategic direction. Additionally, the review found that the IMC spent a disproportionate amount of resources on advertising and mobilising internal


South Africa
Desired Country Key
5. Values & Personality
VALUES (What we stand for and believe in)
Ubuntu (Motho ke motho ka batho. Never a stranger; ÒO nne kwa gamothakgaÓ; respect for others, people values, hospitality and warmth, welcoming, embraces all)
Perpetual Optimism (fervent belief in a better tomorrow, open-minded and positive)
Transparent (approachable, real)
PERSONALITY (The way and how we behave)
Energetic, Vibrant, Colourful (Inhlokomo, Moriko wa Afrika, passion, diversity)
Can-do attitude (ÒOns maak Ôn planÓ, open-minded, tenacious, determined, a hunger to succeed with and through others, thereÕs always a way, continual learning, vigourous, responding readily, proactive, action-orientated)
Creative Ingenuity (innovative, fresh, different, practical)
Caring Stength (empathy)
Youthful Spirit (Amahlahlandlela, exploring naturing, pioneering)
6. Reasons to Believe
Who we are
-Extraordinary people
-Courage and determination
-Incredible achievements
-African soul, spirit and energy
-Tenacious boundary breakers
-Daring pioneers
What we have
-Unique combination of governance, democracy, infrastructure, entrepreneurial pioneering
-Productive Diversity
-World of contrasts / world of choice
-In action, experience, opportunities, resources
How we do it
-Socio-political and economic transformation
-Collaborative approach
-Active adaptability
-Learning Nation
-Ability to quantum leap
-Agility
8. Essence
South Africa
ALIVE
with
Possibility!
FUNCTIONAL
Boundless Opportunities (unlimited, continuous)
Dynamic Stability (stability with consistent forward momentum, solution evolution, thriving on and shaping change in a positive way)
Growth (fresh solutions that are sustainable and have impact, and that benefit all involved, solutions which build and bond communities, win-win solutions, collective ownership, 1+1=3, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.)
EMOTIONAL
Fresh solutions that are sustainable and have impact, and that benefit all involved (togetherness continuously exceeding expectations, the art of the possible, quantum leaps, intensity - all the senses.)
Transformation of you, me and us (experiences and solutions which change lives, fervent belief in a better tomorrow)
4. Benefits
South Africa, a country at the southern tip of Africa, inspires the world to a new way of doing things because our unique combinations create refreshing possibilities.
7. Differentiator
3. Human Truth
There is a growing realisation in the world that the dominant world powers may not hold all the solutions.
In a world searching for a better tomorrow, success depends on finding sustainable, creative solutions to every persons needs.
1. Competitive Environment
Confidently challenge targeted global players for our fair share of Trade, Tourism and Investment. (Specific targets to be identified in the Business and Tourism Industry Keys)
2. Target
Anyone in South Africa and around the world who can have a positive effect on the quality of life of all South Africans (specifically thought and opinion leaders, decision makers and South Africans locally and abroad).
Images courtesy of SA Tourism

awareness while greater resources should have been spent on developing the skills and capacity of the IMC and partner organisations. As for stakeholder engagement, the review found that the relationship between the IMC and its stakeholders had not been clearly delineated, thus resulting in considerable overlap. Furthermore, the IMC had not effectively leveraged the authority of the Presidency in order to gain legitimacy among its stakeholders. The review recommended that the IMC tighten its mandate to reflect that of a 'brand franchisor', thereby defining and providing the brand vision and building relationships among stakeholders who will themselves be responsible for delivering the brand promise. The review also called for the establishment of clear measures of success based on the programs executed by the IMC's stakeholders.

Following the 2008 review, the IMC took steps to enhance its operations. First, specifying its brand mandate to reflect the clear goal of improving South Africa's competitiveness, then establishing measurable objectives in line with this mandate – for South Africa to rank among the top 20 in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brand Index and within the top 30 of the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index by 2020. To achieve this, the IMC devised a strategic plan focused on the development and management of strategy, alignment and integration with stakeholders, reputation management and performance management.

The years immediately following the Review and leading up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup were marked by an extraordinary level of internal mobilisation and international engagement to demonstrate South Africa's readiness for the event. Domestic activities in preparation for the World Cup such as 'Fly Your Flag' and 'Football Fridays', which engaged an estimated 34 million South Africans and 50 top companies, succeeded in raising enthusiasm and national pride levels as high as 90 per cent of the population according to IMC's domestic tracker.[44] The IMC hosted international media awareness tours, such as 'Kicking it in South Africa', that allowed journalists from India, Brazil, China, the UK, and the US to name a few, to tour South Africa's major developments in preparation for the FIFA World Cup. IMC also ensured that South Africa maintained a regular and robust presence at the World Economic Forums held in Davos, where in 2010 South Africa was among the top six countries reported on during the conference and President Jacob Zuma among the top ten cited participants.

While these activities were rigorous and largely successful, they did not position Brand South Africa for continued success post-2010. This lack of a strategic vision of how South Africa could leverage a successful World Cup for long-term economic and reputational gain can, in part, be attributed to internal challenges that began in late 2008 and lasted until April 2010, a period during which the IMC operated without a full time CEO and experienced a 30 per cent vacancy rate due to a moratorium on hiring.[45]

> While these activities were rigorous and successful, they did not position Brand South Africa for success post-2010

Ultimately, the success of the IMC will be determined by the strength of South Africa's brand, and how that brand translates into increases in tourism and investment into South Africa. Brand Finance, the only organisation that ranks and places a number value on nation brands around the world, ranks Brand South Africa as the 31st strongest brand among 100 nation brands for the year 2012, and estimates the value of Brand South Africa at $222 billion.[46] This is an increase from the 2011 ranking of 34th and valuation at $150 billion. In its 2012/2013 report, Brand Finance spotlights the strength of South African Tourism and its ability to maintain high numbers of inbound tourists, partially boosted by the FIFA World Cup, but also as a result of improved airport infrastructure and robust advertising. In 2010, the year of the World Cup, Statistics South Africa reported a total of approximately 8.1 million international tourist arrivals, a 15 per cent increase over the previous year.[47] By 2012 total tourists arrivals had risen to approximately 9.2 million, a 10 per cent growth rate over the previous year and more than double the 4 per cent average global growth rate estimated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.[48]

However, tangible evidence that Brand South Africa has enhanced the appeal of South Africa as a business destination is scarce. A 2011 IMC-led research study, Project Thrive, measured the perceptions of South Africa as a business destination among international investors. The study found that only 30 per cent of international investors are in South Africa, furthermore an alarming 40 per cent are not familiar at all with South Africa and 50 per cent have never done business in the country. However, another survey conducted by the IMC among current investors in South Africa revealed that 66 per cent of non-South African multinational corporations (MNCs) planned to continue investing in South Africa for the next five years, and 31 per cent of them ranked South Africa as the second best place to invest among the BRICS nations (after China). These results demonstrated that 10 years after the founding of the IMC, new investors were still sceptical about investing in South Africa although the majority of those currently in the market found it profitable enough to stay on for five more years.

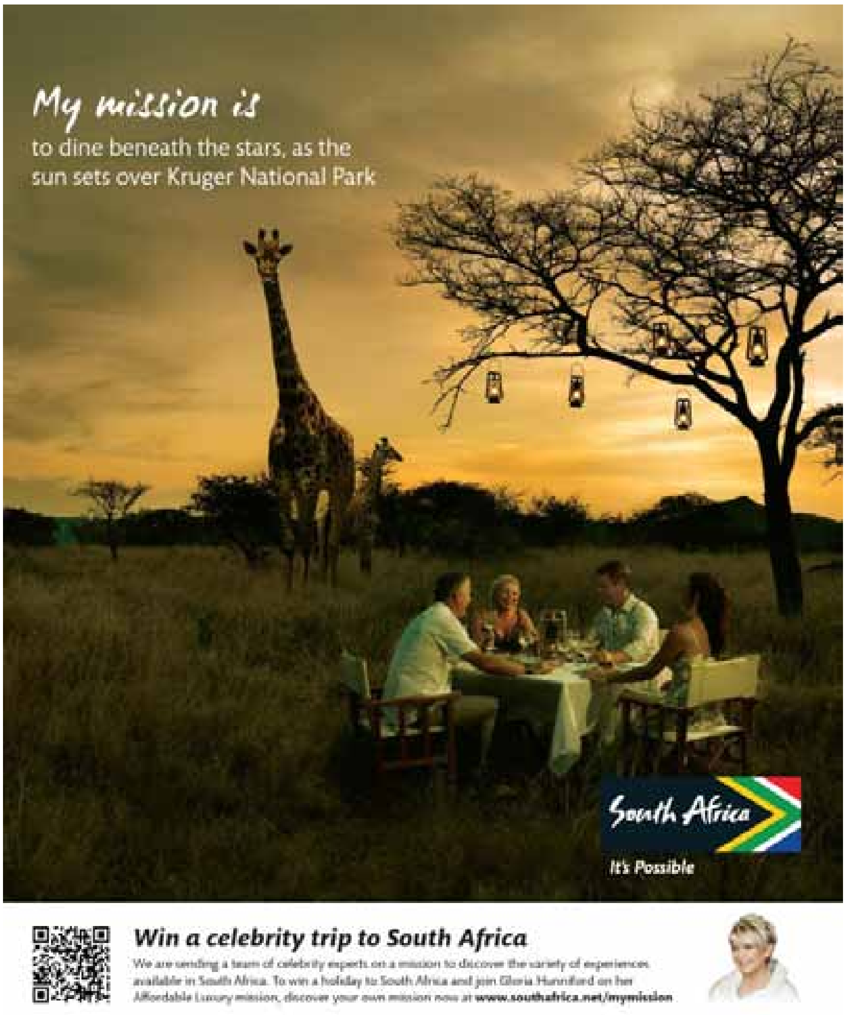
> Tangible evidence that Brand South Africa has enhanced the appeal of South Africa as a business destination is scarce

A look at FDI inflows to South Africa since 2000 reveals significant volatility with alternating peaks and large drops – the highest being in 2001 when there was an estimated $7.3 billion in inflows, and the lowest in 2006 when South Africa saw a net disinvestment of about $200 million.[49] Over the same period of time inflows to countries such as Nigeria and Ghana have not shown as much volatility as those to South Africa; rather, they have steadily increased. By 2011 FDI inflows to South Africa, according to statistics from the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), represented nearly 14 per cent of total inflows to Africa, while Nigeria received the largest share of Africa's FDI at about 21 per cent and Ghana received about 7.5 per cent. These numbers demonstrate that while South Africa remains a healthy and attractive investment destination in Africa, it is operating within an increasingly competitive environment and must address the risk concerns that are keeping new investors at bay.

> The IMC's 2011 study found the top three investor concerns about South Africa to be: high crime levels; corruption; and rigid and unskilled labour markets

The IMC's 2011 Project Thrive study found the top three investor concerns about South Africa to be: high crime levels; corruption; and rigid and unskilled labour markets. These challenges to Brand South Africa are not new; they have been persistent over the past decade, and in some cases they are growing. Although homicide rates have fallen from around 50 murders per 100,000 in 2000 to about 31 in 2011/2012, the rate of rape in South Africa is still persistently high at over 90 rapes per 100,000. Several high profile cases, including allegations of rape made against President Zuma in 2005 and a sexual assault scandal at the Oprah Winfrey School for the girls in 2007, to name just a few, have only drawn negative international attention to the nation. These culminated in 2012 in Interpol labelling South Africa the rape capital of the world and boldly stating that a woman in South Africa is more likely to be raped than educated.

The environment for doing business is also marked by an increasing perception of corruption. A number of corruption scandals involving members of the ruling political party as well as the police force have contributed to this growing awareness – in 2009 the Global Integrity Commons cited a report that 42 per cent of President Zuma's cabinet members are in positions that pose potential conflicts of interest.[50] In its 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International ranked South Africa


My mission is
to dine beneath the stars, as the sun sets over Kruger National Park
South Africa
It's Possible
Win a celebrity trip to South Africa
We are sending a team of celebrity experts on a mission to discover the variety of experiences available in South Africa. To win a holiday to South Africa and join Gloria Hunniford on her Affordable Luxury mission, discover your own mission now at www.southafrica.net/mymission


Leading change in Africa
CSAV
Africa is at the forefront of global socio-political change. With unrealised growth potential, abundant resources and entrepreneurial spirit, the world is looking to Africa for a brighter global future. South Africa is leading this change – from world-leader in financial and legal regulation to advancing the frontiers of innovation with the Square Kilometre Array to supporting the realisation of a multilateral free-trade agreement to connect Southern and Eastern Africa.
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69th out of 176 countries, and 9th among the least corrupt countries in Africa – a drop from 2000 when it ranked 2nd in Africa.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), which ranks overall competitiveness in 144 countries, finds that South Africa is moderately competitive on a global scale, consistently ranking in the top half of the index (although since 2005 this ranking has fallen from 40th to 52nd in 2013). However, when examining the sub-categories of the GCI, South Africa's performance mirrors investor concerns – in the most recent index the nation ranks 132nd in health and primary education, 113th in labour efficiency, and 84th in higher education and training. In all of these areas South Africa under-performs when compared to similar efficiency-driven economies.[51] A look back at South Africa's performance in the 2006 GCI report reveals that these challenges are not recent; that year South Africa ranked 103rd out of 126 nations for health and primary education and 123rd in labour market flexibility.

If the IMC is determined to enhance the image of South Africa to see improvements beyond the number of tourist arrivals, the country's competitiveness failings need to be addressed while its strengths – advanced financial sector, world-class infrastructure and skills base – are relentlessly promoted. This will require the Council to assume the role not just of a facilitator for image promotion, but perhaps even

> To enhance the image of South Africa, the country's competitiveness failings need to be addressed and its strengths relentlessly promoted

more strategically as an advisor to the Department of Trade & Industry on policies that negatively affect competitiveness. Beyond its interactions with government, the IMC will need to partner with leading businesses and civil society organisations to raise public awareness of the state of South Africa's competitiveness and the role individual South Africans play as members of a labour force that is in essence competing with the world.

Brand Botswana

Exploiting an African success story

Having one of the highest average GDP growth rates in the world since its independence in 1966 and a history of uninterrupted democratic governance, Botswana is widely considered to be an African success story. Sound economic policies have transformed the nation from a Least Developed Country with a per capita income of about $70 in 1966 to a middle income nation today with a per capita income of about $9,500. Botswana has also performed well in terms of governance: Transparency International has consistently ranked it as the least corrupt nation in the Africa since 2000, and Botswana is annually recognised among Africa's top three performers by the Mo-Ibrahim Index of African Governance which also awarded former President Festus Mogae its Prize for Achievement in African Leadership. The strength of its economy and its governance has resulted in Botswana receiving the highest sovereign credit ratings in Africa with a consistently stable outlook from both the Moody's and S&P ratings agencies.

The strength of Botswana's economy has largely been driven by the productivity of its diamond sector which over the past decade has represented an average of 73 per cent of Botswana's total exports, and contributed an average of 29 per cent to the nation's GDP.[52] While the success of the diamond sector has provided crucial income which the government has used to sustain improvements in health care services, education, and infrastructural development, the reliance on diamonds to support the economy has resulted in a serious decline in the productivity of other economic activities. For example, in 2003 agriculture only contributed an estimated 2.4 per cent to GDP, reflecting a 50 per cent decline from where it stood at independence.[53] Furthermore, an overall decline in the price of diamonds reveals that

Botswana will need to take strong efforts to diversify its economy to avoid future disaster.

In 2006, President Festus Mogae created the Botswana Brand Management Organisation (BBMO) to develop a strategic national brand that will contribute to economic diversification through increased tourism and investments in a broad base of sectors. In 2009, the decision was taken to house BBMO within the Botswana Export and Development Investment Authority (BEDIA), due to its expertise in trade and industry. A 2012 merge saw BEDIA renamed as the Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC), where Brand Botswana sits today as a department with two Managing Directors who report to the CEO of BITC. At the time of its creation, BBMO's mandate was to create a national brand for Botswana that would domestically stimulate a stronger sense of community, culture and heritage in order to encourage greater national pride; and internationally highlight the favourable attributes of Botswana as an attractive place to visit, invest, and retire.

The branding process was guided by a Brand Leadership Team (BLT), chaired by the Minister of Trade & Industry and comprising members from Botswana's government, public institutions as well as private sector members. The BLT was responsible for setting the strategic direction for Brand Botswana – in line with Botswana's Vision 2016 – as well as establishing the implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation framework. A Brand Development Team (BDT) was also established, and it comprised over 50 members from government, the private sector, academia, civil society, and traditional leaders. The BDT, which reported to the BLT, was responsible for developing the actual visual representation of the brand. From the onset, several consultations and interviews among the members of the BLT and BDT were held in order to determine their perceptions on how a brand for Botswana should be developed – a 'Masterclass' workshop was held to raise understanding among members of the BLT and BDT on the expectations of the nation branding initiative. These exchanges ensured that there was clarity in the mandate given to Brand Botswana, and enabled the members of these boards to set a unified agenda for achieving this goal.

In its early stages Brand Botswana conducted three rounds of extensive consultations. The first was a 'Situational Analysis' which was in essence a domestic and international survey of the current perceptions of Botswana. According to Ludo Mokotedi, Director of Brand Botswana's international activities, the global surveys revealed that most outsiders had a negative view of Botswana in line with their prejudices towards the entire continent – despite the strength of its democracy and its history of sound economic management.[54] Based on the findings of the Situational Analysis, the BLT and BDT members

Most outsiders have a negative view of Botswana in line with their prejudices towards the entire continent – despite the strength of its democracy and its history of sound economic management

initiated a second round of consultations aimed at defining the vision and strategy for Brand Botswana. During this process, workshops, focus groups and direct interviews were organised with stakeholders in Botswana and in specific international target markets to ensure that a sustainable and practicable brand strategy was adopted. Finally, to determine the brand logo and slogan, the BDT reached out to Botswana's traditional leaders as well as a broad base of citizens through a public awareness campaign involving debates on the national talkback radio and newspaper questionnaires where Batswana could describe their sources of pride and their vision for the nation. While these rounds of consultations, interviews and debates may seem painstaking, the act of democratic dialogue is a crucial feature in Batswana culture known as *therisanyo*, and it would have been inconceivable for the process to have been undertaken in any other way. Mokotedi maintains that, although this was a long process, it was 'critical to ensure that Batswana developed a true sense of ownership' of the brand since they would have to deliver on its promise.[55]

In 2010 Brand Botswana officially launched its logo, 'Our Pride, Your Destination'. Since then the initiative has embarked on a domestic and international awareness-raising campaign. Domestic awareness was spearheaded by a national road trip through which the Brand Botswana team reached over 100 villages where the logo and nation branding principles were introduced. A Pride Campaign was also launched to encourage local organisations to use the brand logo to promote their events and show solidarity with the movement as a way to encourage national pride. In these activities, Gaorekwe Gaorekwe, Director of Brand Botswana's domestic operations, indicates two major challenges:

> Brand Botswana's most effective initiative has been its reliance on partnerships to carry the brand message

- Getting citizens to internalise the idea that the value they bring to the brand is more important than the value they receive from it.
- Raising enough financial resources to run a campaign that extends to the most remote corners of the country.[56]

To tackle the first challenge, the Brand Ambassadorship program was created. Through nominations, this program identifies individual Batswana who embody the values of Brand Botswana and engages them as spokespersons for the brand. The Brand Ambassadorship program also selects internationally-based Batswana as global representatives of the brand; these include high profile politicians as well as entertainers and artists such as Donald Molosi, a Broadway actor whose storytelling has brought global attention to Batswana culture.

Perhaps Brand Botswana's most effective initiative, and one that has enabled it to share the financial burden of nation branding, has been its reliance on partnerships to carry the brand message. Gaorekwe insists that 'nation branding is not just about one office […] you have to coordinate with other players across sectors', while Mokotedi says that Brand Botswana's partnerships have enabled them to 'basically leverage the skills, knowledge and network of these companies [their partners]'.[57] The most significant of these is Brand Botswana's co-branding partnership with Debswana, which launched an advertising campaign with the tagline 'Our Diamonds, Our Pride', demonstrating a clear relationship to the national branding slogan. The high profile partnership presents an enormous platform from which Brand Botswana can gain large-scale recognition – Debswana is the largest private sector company in Botswana, the bedrock of its economy, and the world's largest diamond producer in terms of value. Another recent partnership has been with Air Botswana. Working with the Ministries of Aviation and Trade & industry to facilitate the collaboration, Brand Botswana was able to display the national logo on Air Botswana's aircrafts and influence the welcome message, flight attendant uniforms and the food served on flights. In another partnership, collaboration with the Ministry of Sports resulted in the Botswana Expo at the 2012 London Olympics, an initiative that aimed to boost international business partnerships through cultural exchange.

> The strength of Presidential backing that Brand Botswana enjoyed at its establishment cannot be ignored

A factor in enabling the success of these high level partnerships, Mokotedi highlights, were the workshops that Brand Botswana held with leading businesses during its consultative phases.[58] These involved, firstly, a deconstruction of why nation branding was useful generally, and then a practical explanation of the utility of an effective nation brand to the private sector. By doing this, Brand Botswana sought to cement good relations with the business community, which could then translate into partnerships. From there, based on a shared understanding of their respective organisational objectives, Brand Botswana and its partners could develop activities and performance indicators specific to those activities. Also, the strength of Presidential backing that

Brand Botswana enjoyed at its establishment cannot be ignored – Gaorekwe points to this a crucial enabling factor to Brand Botswana's success.[59] From its founding President Mogae gave BBMO his full support and issued a statement that branding should be a component of the strategic planning in all ministries. This enabled BBMO to have direct influence over the planning and implementation of brand strategy across government, setting specific expectations in all ministries.

Impact

Although it is too soon to evaluate the impact of Brand Botswana – it has only been three years since the initiative was formally launched – several social and economic challenges will have to be addressed if Botswana is to see improvement in its Brand's ability to attract business and tourism. Notably, Botswana faces its fair share of social challenges that restrict its overall human development levels. Unemployment, poverty, and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates remain high, and it is considered among the most unequal countries in the world.[60] In 2002/2003, Botswana's Statistics bureau reported that approximately 30 per cent of Batswana lived below the national poverty line, with the figure climbing to nearly 45 per cent in rural areas. Although by 2009/2010, the poverty figure had dropped to about 20 per cent, the unemployment rate was estimated at 18 per cent of the population, both of which stand in contrast to the country's high growth rates and its status as an upper middle income nation. Similarly, Botswana continues to have one of the worst adult HIV/AIDS infection rates, with UNAIDS in 2001 ranking it first in the world with a prevalence rate of 27 per cent among its population aged 15–49. The government of Botswana has actively pursued policies to combat these challenges – the drop in poverty rate is seen as a general success and Botswana has the best treatment of mother-to-child HIV infection in Africa with 98 per cent of the babies born under its preventative program HIV negative.[61]

> Despite efforts to diversify, Botswana remains reliant on the strength of its diamond sector – a trend that in the long-term is unstable

On the economic side, despite efforts to diversify, Botswana remains reliant on the strength of its diamond sector – a trend that in the long-term is unstable and in recent years has revealed the vulnerability of the nation's economy. In 2009, during the global economic recession, a significant drop in demand for diamonds saw Botswana's economy contract 5 per cent. In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa as a whole was able to weather the recession much better than Botswana did; on average the region experienced a slowed economic growth rate of about 3 per cent but not a full-on contraction.[62]

> Brand Botswana will need to step up its international engagements to highlight Botswana's growing non-mining sectors

The hit to Botswana's diamond sector is also reflected in the levels of foreign direct investment that have flown into its economy in recent years. At its peak in 2008, Botswana received approximately $900 million in total FDI inflows, putting it above its regional competitor and a similar upper middle income country, Namibia. After the 2009 recession, FDI inflows fell drastically and by 2011 inflows to Botswana were just under $600 million – well below Namibia's $970 million.[63] In order to attract more diversified investments, Botswana will need to tackle factors that hinder its competitiveness. A look at its performance in the 2012/2013 Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) reveals that it is the fourth most competitive African country; however, given the size of its market and strength of its institutions Botswana should be more competitive. To improve its GCI ranking, Botswana will have to make significant progress in areas where it lags behind other comparable economies – primarily in its scores for health and primary education and technological readiness.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there are signs that Botswana is taking concrete steps to diversify its economy, and the nation's brand already demonstrates its potential to attract tourism. After a two-year decline in international tourist arrivals in 2006, the next two years saw increases in the number of tourists of over 20 per cent. In 2010 there were just over 2 million tourist arrivals in Botswana, an amount almost equal to the size of the entire population.[64] With more coordination between Brand Botswana and Botswana Tourism, and targeted marketing of Botswana's tourism offerings, the sector could increase its contribution to Botswana's GDP significantly. Meanwhile, since 2009 a stronger focus on strengthening non-mining sectors – particularly the manufacturing and services sectors which showed modest growth even during the global recession – resulted in an increase in private sector non-mining activities, making these activities a 44 per cent contributor to GDP in 2011.[65] Botswana has also recently implemented a new Economic Diversification Drive (EDD) which aims to improve the environment for Small Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMEE), this effort will undoubtedly need to tackle issues that limit the cost competitiveness of doing business in Botswana, notably the high cost of starting a business.

Moving beyond awareness and public education, Brand Botswana will need to play a more significant role in enabling Botswana to attract a diverse range of investment. As Botswana implements policies to improve the overall health of its population and strengthen the business environment for enterprise, Brand Botswana will need to step up its international engagements to highlight Botswana's growing non-mining sectors, particularly the transportation, communications and construction sectors. Partnerships such as the one with Debswana send a strong public signal of Brand Botswana's strength – this should spur more cooperation with private partners in other sectors in order to highlight their growth potential and encourage investment. For Brand Botswana, the challenge now is to scale up its activities and engagements in order to more boldly communicate Botswana's strengths.

Malawi

Seizing a branding opportunity

Under the leadership of President Bingu wa Mutharika, Malawi went from a nation praised for its agricultural reforms and booming economy to an increasingly authoritarian state, estranged from its principal donor, the United Kingdom. Malawi presents an example of how myopic leadership can erode a nation's brand, stifle economic activity and throw a nation into political and social crisis. The opportunity for Malawi to turn around this image rests largely – at least for the time being – in the brand of its much-feted new President, Joyce Banda.

> Malawi presents an example of how myopic leadership can erode a nation's brand

With a GDP of about $4.5 billion, a per capita income of $360 and 50 per cent of its population living below the national poverty line, Malawi is considered one of the least developed countries in the world.[66] With life expectancy at just 52 years, the UN Human Development Index ranks Malawi 170th out of 187 countries; a rank that places the nation at the bottom of the 'low human development' category.[67]

Following his re-election in 2009, Mutharika embarked on an autocratic mission to consolidate his power by stifling civil liberties and attempting to side-line democratic procedures. Politically, he alienated his Vice President Joyce Banda in order to groom his brother as the next president. His extravagant purchase of a $13 million private jet occurred against the backdrop of an economy struggling under the effect of a drop in the volume of the nation's primary exports – tobacco. The result was a shortage in foreign exchange which limited Malawi's ability to sustain its imports and led to crippling fuel shortages, which restricted the transportation of goods and the provision of public services. Given the increasingly unstable political and economic environment, in 2009 Malawi's FDI inflows fell by approximately 75 per cent.[68] A brutal police crackdown on protesters in 2011 that left 18 people dead brought public attention to the contempt Mutharika's government had for dissenting voices. Criticism from the international community and concerns surrounding the protection of democratic liberties resulted in the British government and then the Millennium Challenge Commission suspending their aid contributions to Malawi's budget. Since foreign aid constituted an estimated 40 per cent of the national budget, these developments had devastating effects on Malawi's economy. After the failure of an apparent attempted coup in the 48 hours after Mutharika's death in April 2012, Vice President Joyce Banda was sworn in as the new President of Malawi.

> Since assuming the Presidency, Banda has taken drastic and controversial steps that signal a clear commitment to rebuilding the country's image

Since assuming the Presidency, Banda has taken drastic and controversial steps that signal a clear commitment to rebuilding the country's image. She did not reshuffle all of the previous cabinet members and civil servants who had served under Mutharika, though she did authorise an inquiry into the apparent attempted coup, which led to the arrest of the former president's brother and several former and sitting ministers. Economically, she publicly announced several austerity measures, from the sale of the private jet to a significant pay cut for her and her Vice President. Most contentiously, she oversaw the near 50 per cent devaluation of the Malawian Kwacha and an IMF-recommended programme which has seen the costs of living and inflation rise significantly. The devaluation has been positively received internationally and spurred the reinstitution of crucial donor funds, though understandably has proved far less popular at home.

Banda's bold actions were all implemented within less than three months of her assumption of the Presidency, sending a strong sign that her leadership brand presents a distinct break from her predecessor's. In her short time in office, Joyce Banda has captured the world's attention. A respected educator, defender of women's rights and grassroots activist-turned-president, Banda was recently named one of *TIME* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. As such lists go, *TIME*'s has perhaps the greatest global recognition, and adds considerable lustre to a new President embarking on a seemingly radical new path for her long-benighted country.

> Of the many threats and challenges, weak and non-strategic communications rank highly

Of the many threats and challenges that could undo the President's best intentions, weak and non-strategic communications rank highly. Evidence elsewhere suggests that a highly proactive approach to her messaging, one that speaks to Malawians and not just donors, will help protect the brand from the inevitable attacks against it by political foes and also ordinary Malawians, facing the brunt of the austerity measures. That President Banda is intent on communicating her particular brand directly to the citizenry is evident in her extremely active Facebook page – launched in late April 2013, it garnered nearly 100,000 followers in only a few weeks. There are also plans to launch a new official website as well as radio and television programs. The potential for social media to be used as a tool not only to communicate with the youth, but also to feed formal media reporting should not be underestimated. Malawi could adopt an online brand ambassadorship program that coordinates and empowers activists with an established presence in social media to share Malawi's successes.

Malawi could also capitalise on the historical strength of its brand as a peaceful and welcoming tourism destination – a reputation which saw the nation dubbed 'The Warm Heart of Africa'. Although Malawi has experienced significant growth in its tourism volume over the past decade, a near 100 per cent increase from 2002 to 2007, a lot of potential growth was lost during Mutharika's unstable second term.[69] The brand is still highly vulnerable to political and social instability; the UK's *Guardian* questioned the sincerity of the nation's 'warm heart' in 2012.[70] This signals that a closer management of Malawi's tourism and national brands is required; certainly the potential for Malawi's reputation in tourism to strengthen its overall image should not be undervalued.

With Malawi going to the polls in 2014, the nation's brand has, perhaps understandably, played second fiddle to 'Brand Banda' – and that could see her through the elections, provided a consistent and honest dialogue with Malawians is maintained. Over the long-term, however, Malawi will need a combination of greater economic strength, stronger social indicators and a clearly aligned tourism brand in order to build a nation brand that can stand on its own – even if the President's own brand still plays an important role.

Recommendations

The limited knowledge of brand management strategies and even fewer examples of countries that have employed them for an extended period of time, make it difficult to assess the impact of nation brands accurately. For the time being, anecdotal judgements are perhaps our best guide. Furthermore, the fact that the intended outcomes of nation brand management – increased national pride, growth in tourism numbers, foreign direct investment, enhanced trade relations, and improved overall reputation – are often influenced by numerous factors, most of which do not fall within the direct scope of nation branding bodies, makes it doubly difficult to attribute success or failure in these areas to a country's brand management organisation. What is clear, however, is that successful brand management can drastically improve governance, due to the fact that the process of defining a nation's brand is, in essence, an exercise in democracy: it aims to provide a common vision for all citizens, and the ability to honestly deliver on the brand's promise relies on progressive and results-driven governance. As such, for African countries the actual process of conceptualising and implementing a sound nation brand management strategy could have significant benefits for the state and its people.

> For African countries the process of conceptualising and implementing a sound nation brand management strategy could have significant benefits for the state and its people

The above analysis suggests that for any nation brand exercise to be successful, governments need to:

- *Define* expectations and desired outcomes for what the nation brand should deliver and what the process of managing a nation brand will look like. The process should include all agencies and bodies that would be responsible for developing the brand strategy and managing its implementation. Brand Botswana's Masterclass workshop provides a simple example of how to ensure that everyone is on the same page from the outset.
- *Research and understand* the domestic and international perceptions of the country. Any nation brand management initiative must undertake a fact-finding mission that engages all branches of government, the domestic private sector and civil society, as well as international target groups. There is no shortcut to sitting down with business leaders, non-governmental associations (e.g., religious institutions or women's and youth associations, students in universities and high schools), as well as reaching out to local media houses, in order to understand the current perceptions and the visions these groups have for the nation.
- *Identify* a wide variety of stakeholders and potential partners that cover as many areas of the brand hexagon as possible, explain the essence of the nation brand to them and target areas of intersection between their objectives and the

brand objectives. Build a co-branding strategy that encourages shared activities and identifies activities that do not support the national brand message.

- *Implement* domestic and international branding strategies through interactive initiatives that involve stakeholder and target groups. During this phase, effective nation brand management will also require clear communication of government goals and the progress made towards achieving them. Logos and taglines can be used to facilitate association between the nation brand and co-branding partners. Advertising campaigns are not central to the process, though clearly play a role in promoting tourism.
- *Monitor and evaluate* progress regularly through feedback solicited from public surveys, radio and television shows, townhall-style meetings with the private sector and civil society and meetings with government ministries. This phase should mirror the research phase because the aim is similar. The results from these interactions should feed back into the overall nation brand strategy.

While this process is not fail-proof, several important factors contribute to its success. Among these are: committed leadership; longevity; diverse partnerships; messaging consistency; and clear actions from government.

Leadership

The case of Malawi, at its core, reveals that a change in leadership can enhance or detract from a nation's brand dramatically – but only in the short term. At the most basic level successful nation brand management relies, over time, on leadership that recognises a need for the country to have a strong reputation and is committed to taking the steps necessary to bring about that result. The President or head of government has to be the source for defining a country brand management initiative, and providing this vision with the political backing necessary to make it a reality. The example of Botswana's BBMO stands out, as President Festus Mogae went as far as to grant the organisation influence over decisions made within government ministries. This level of support from the head of the government affords BBMO the opportunity to direct strategic areas within the brand hexagon that fall under the authority of various government bodies, but that reflect on the performance of Brand Botswana. Strong support from the President also sends a signal of the nation brand's credibility to stakeholders. Although this credibility will have to be proven and sustained in the long-run, in the early stages strong backing from the executive ensures that the branding organisation will at least receive sufficient resources to enable it to achieve its mandate.

Longevity

Ensuring longevity and continuity is crucial to nation brand management, because a country's brand cannot be made in a year, not even five years. Brand South Africa, over a decade since its creation, is still in the process of growing into its full potential to be a leading African brand.

> Successful nation brand management relies on leadership that recognises the need for a strong reputation and is committed to taking the steps necessary to bring it about

The key to ensuring brand longevity is in limiting the opportunity for politicisation of the brand. First and foremost, the job of nation brand management must be entrusted to a non-politically aligned institution that is operationally autonomous – it cannot be the project of a Minster because this will leave the nation's brand hostage to electoral cycles. While this body may report to a Minister – as is the case with the South Africa's IMC and Botswana's BBMO – the appointment of its leadership and their term limits must not be politically aligned. The argument can be made, however, that the importance of presidential leadership to the success of the brand risks its longevity as the initiative could easily become the President's pet project and fade with a political changeover. However, Brand Botswana, which has survived beyond the presidency of Festus Mogae, so far has proven resilient to a change in government. This can be attributed to the fact that although the initiative was born out of a presidential decree, influence over the strategy and direction of the brand was spread across management teams, ministries, stakeholders and civil society.

> As a nation becomes more competitive, the way it communicates its brand must reflect the rise in its influence

The responsiveness of the nation brand to political and economic transformations will also safeguard its longevity. Managing the brand is not a static activity, it requires dynamism and constant checking with international and domestic stakeholders to ensure that the brand remains true to what the country represents. When Brand South Africa changed its brand slogan from 'Alive with Possibility' to 'Inspiring New Ways', it was in response to South Africa's growing global influence exemplified by its G20 membership and its selection to host the FIFA World Cup. The idea is that, as the nation becomes more competitive, the way it communicates its brand must reflect the rise in its influence. What this implies is that nation branding is a continuous process of critically analysing a country's strengths and weaknesses, and simultaneously seizing opportunities to highlight those strengths while addressing the weaknesses. For African countries, this means that brand management can be successfully carried out even in the midst of multiple negative brand images, but with the understanding that, as the nation makes progress, its brand must reflect its changing realities.

Partnerships

The importance of diversity in nation brand management cannot be over-stressed. From the perspective of the strength of its brand, a country stands to lose a lot of brand equity if its image relies on just one area that it excels in. In this sense, successful nation brand management should contribute to a diversified positive image of a country that takes into account multiple industries and sectors. This level of diversity can only be achieved through partnerships across sectors and industries. The examples from South Africa and Botswana demonstrate that a very high level of interaction with government departments, private sector representatives and civil society is necessary. This interaction must occur in at least two ways: through consultations in the development of the brand management strategy; and through co-branding partnerships that deliver the brand to target groups. The aim is to engage as many actors that shape the six areas of the brand hexagon (if not all of them) as possible, getting them involved in defining a strategy for directing the nation's brand that reflects their vision and capabilities, and then holding them accountable to implementing that vision within their spheres of influence. These partners can range from universities, to small-scale community businesses, to large manufacturers, and to government ministries. Partnerships not only entrench the brand in diverse areas of social and economic activity, but also present an opportunity for the brand managing organisation to share the costs involved in raising the nation's profile.

> Successful nation brand management should contribute to a diversified positive image of a country that takes into account multiple industries and sectors

The development of local partnerships in support of the nation brand is vital. In both Botswana and South Africa, the high degree of collaboration ensured that local civil society and private businesses were active participants in the nation branding process from the start. Both Mokotedi and Gaorekwe from Brand Botswana stress that citizens must be encouraged to internalise and represent the brand, meaning that all nation branding efforts must deliver the brand internally for it to have legitimacy. By contrast, the example from Nigeria which saw citizens openly reject the government's branding initiatives reveals the acute dangers when branding efforts are focused externally and neglect citizens at home. From an investor perspective too, securing the support of local businesses of all sizes will demonstrate internationally the vibrancy and promise of a country's business environment.

Consistency

To the extent that a brand evolves in response to changes in the country's international position, it must however remain consistent with national objectives and government actions – otherwise, the brand becomes propaganda. For both Brand South Africa and Brand Botswana the National Development Plan (NDP) and Vision 2016, respectively, were used as sources of direction in shaping the brand vision and in creating the nation brand slogan. It is not clear whether IMC or BBMO were represented in subsequent committees to re-define the national objectives, but as bodies commissioned with stewarding the national brand they should be involved in such high-level dialogues.

> A brand must remain consistent with national objectives and government actions - otherwise it becomes propaganda

Similarly, the brand management body must possess some means of ensuring consistency between government actions/policies and the message of the nation brand. In the case of Brand Botswana, a process exists whereby actions that are detrimental or inconsistent with the brand can be formally flagged through a letter that passes from BBMO to the CEO of BITC to the Minister of Trade and Industry and finally to the offending government office. It is easy to imagine a situation whereby this formal notification gets overlooked or ignored as it passes from hand to hand. Any serious attempt at nation branding must formally involve the brand management body in regular 'stress-checking' of government policies for brand consistency. While collaborations on setting branding agendas and launching co-branding initiatives are a strong first step in, at the very least, developing close ties between the branding office and ministries within government, having an influence over inconsistent policies could require a branding representative on advisory and/or oversight committees within ministries.

Actions

Although actions clearly influence what people think of a country, their power to send clear messages is often underestimated. A country that suffers from a negative, uncompetitive, or outdated brand is most likely doing something wrong in the way it interacts with domestic and international audiences. Well-planned and deliberate actions will signal to audiences that the nation's brand can, and is, changing.

Seizing opportunities for taking big actions, which signal a significant positive change in national orientation, have the strongest impact on a nation's brand. South Africa's image over the span of just a few years in the 1990s went from racially segregated and oppressive to democratic and progressive. The actions that brought about this image makeover were colossal – the end of nearly half a century of apartheid, the election of a black president, and the reconciliation of millions of racially diverse South Africans under one democratic nation. In 2010, another big moment came for South Africa to take action when it was thrown under the spotlight of the FIFA World Cup. This was an opportunity for the nation to propel its image to new heights and demonstrate its world class infrastructure, its efficiency, its ingenuity and the hospitality of its people. South Africa's successful hosting of the World Cup attracted near universal plaudits, though in retrospect it seems clear that Brand South Africa did not seize the country's time in the global spotlight to take potentially catalytic actions in other areas of the brand. Instead, actions from within South Africa's government probably served to diminish its competitiveness in the eyes of international investors. Ultimately, the image boost was not sustained and brand equity that could have been gained from the World Cup was unrealised.

Not every nation needs to completely change its political, economic and social structure, or has the opportunity to host an international sporting event. However, multiple small actions can also strengthen a brand by signalling progress. In Botswana, government actions to raise overall human development levels can be seen through the nation's programs to combat HIV/AIDS and lower the poverty incidence.

Although much work is still needed, these send positive signals of the nation's brand promise. If the objective is to attract foreigners – tourists or investors – then on an even more basic level actions to improve a nation brand can start with updating government websites with relevant statistics and facts, so that potential visitors can easily access the information they need. Reducing visa processing times and/or costs, or doing away with the requirements all together (at least for citizens of countries richer than your own – as they are more likely to spend money in your country) could be a quick win. When visitors arrive, the first impressions they have should be positive. This means upgrading airports by taking simple actions to improve staff training, reduce queues, upgrade lounge areas and ensure that there is safe and orderly ground transportation.

In none of these actions is advertising necessary, and while it may be beneficial its impact is hard to demonstrate. While advertisements can be used to highlight the potential of specific industries, they are not the primary means through which the nation will achieve its desired brand – actions are. The amount of time and money spent on advertising in nation brand management is unjustified. The objective of a brand management initiative should never be to roll out advertisements, but to take actions that produce tangible results which can then be measured for impact.

While advertisements can be used to highlight the potential of specific industries, they are not the primary means through which the nation will achieve its desired brand – actions are

Conclusion

The growing number of African countries that are attempting to influence perceptions of their brands suggests that, notwithstanding the lack of consensus on nation branding, African nations see it as a potential boon to their development. There lies a potential promise and danger in this trend – the promise being that the growing awareness of the value in a strong image could spur a healthy competition among nations to surpass each other in the quality of their governance institutions, policies and overall development. The danger lies in the fact that, in their haste to turn around their images, and with limited expertise in brand management, African countries could waste scarce resources on ill-conceived 'branding' campaigns.

Currently, experiences from across the continent reflect both this promise and this danger in nation brand management. For African countries seeking to actively distinguish themselves from the 'continent brand', there are two fundamental principles that must be clear from the onset: that the process of nation branding – the multiple consultations and the high-level coordination of strategies involved in developing a national vision – enables an environment for democratic dialogue that could be an end in itself; also, that bad branding does more harm to a nation's image than no branding at all, and any attempts to manage the brand after a failed experience will inevitably have to compensate for the confidence lost the first time. With this in mind, serious thought must be given to the domestic and international context within which a nation's brand already exists, and how a country will subsequently frame its brand management strategies to avoid failure. This requires an honest analysis of the following:

- the country's leadership and its commitment to setting the example for the nation brand in the short- and long-term
- the country's existing relationships with domestic and international stakeholders, the strengths and weaknesses of those relationships and the degree of trust that exist between the nation's leaders and its stakeholders
- the associated costs and how large of a project the nation can financially support – to ensure that resources are well-spent, nation brand management strategies will have to mesh seamlessly with,

and not detract from the nation's overall development objectives.

Understanding where the country's strengths and weaknesses lie in each of these areas could provide insight into where to start, with an effort to enhance national image – addressing significant weaknesses in any of these areas should be the focus of branding activities.

At the same time, any nation seeking to enhance its competitiveness through brand management techniques must remain acutely aware of the dangerous pitfalls in nation branding. Nowhere is this more true than in Africa where cash-strapped countries grapple with myriad development challenges. These dangers include: failing to define specific and measurable objectives from the onset, a component of the brand strategy that is particularly important as clear measures of success in nation brand management do not exist as yet; anchoring the management of the nation brand to temporary leadership or external consulting firms that may be more committed to their profit margins than the actual national image; and spending significant sums of money on various forms of advertising and public relations without underpinning them with real actions and policies that can vindicate the national brand.

Overall there is potential for further development within nation branding, particularly as better metrics for defining and understanding nation brands emerge. This is already beginning to happen: as the number of nations pursuing branding strategies has grown over the past decade, so too have various approaches to measure the strength of a country's 'brand'. These include the Anholt-Gfk Roper Nation Brands Index, Future Brand's Country Brand Index, Brand Finance Nation Brand 100, and East-West Communications' Brand Perception Index. With the exception of the Brand Perception Index – which looks at global perceptions of each country in the world through the lens of media reporting – these indices all attempt to quantify in some way the quality of a nation's brand over a broad range of areas, usually as perceived by outsiders. Since none of the indices explicitly account for whether a deliberate attempt at branding has been made by a nation, their findings may not be useful in making direct links between nation brand management and enhanced national image. However, long-run trends in how countries perform in these indices could reveal whether branding strategies are having any impact.

Nations seeking to enhance their competitiveness through brand management techniques must remain aware of the pitfalls

As Africa becomes more competitive, individual countries will look to new ways to differentiate themselves from their neighbours. Based on the survey above, it seems likely that, increasingly, governments will turn to nation branding as a key instrument to promote their unique selling points. Countries which undertake the complex and painstaking process described here, involving all relevant stakeholders and extensive coordination and consultation, may derive significant benefits from nation branding. Those that take shortcuts, and believe slogans and logos can do the work themselves, are doomed to fail.

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Endnotes

1 The other non-government panellist, South African executive Graham MacKay, CEO of SABMiller, made a case not so much for de-risking, but for enhancing growth potential in Africa by removing the 'bottlenecks' – poor road networks and bridges, unreliable water and electricity supply and a lack of proper waste management, to name a few.

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4 Thomas Cromwell and Savas Kyriacou, 'Corporate strategies for a nation's success', http://www.diplomatictraffic.com/nation_branding.asp?ID=15 accessed 26 February 2013.

5 For example, in 2004, Nigeria engaged the communications firm Alder Consulting in a nation branding contract that lasted three years, and by some estimates cost over $5 million. Apart from a brand strategy report, a promotional CD and a controversial CNN advertisement that Alder consulting distanced itself from, there are few tangible outcomes from the relationship.

6 See essays by Peter van ham, Thomas Cromwell, Mathias Akotia, Donovan Neale-May, Wally Olins, and Simon Anholt, all of whom offer strong theoretical arguments for nation branding, however lacking of practical suggestions as to how it can be done correctly.

7 In Africa a number of countries including Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Equatorial Guinea have hired US or UK-based public relations companies that have largely pursued reputation management strategies in response to persistent international media reports of human rights abuses. In the case of Rwanda, the PR firm RacePoint was instrumental in turning media attention away from the 1994 Genocide.

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19 Personal interview with Thebe Ikalafeng, Johannesburg, 5 March 2013.

20 Personal interview with Jose Filipe Torres, via Skype, 8 March 2013.

21 This view is held by several nation brand experts who point to the difference between running a democratically inclusive government and managing a commercial enterprise as one of the reasons why nation branding efforts are more tasking and more likely to fail than product brands.

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