



# Media, Country Image Formation And Cognition: Relationships In Between Themselves Creating A Country Image

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Abstract

The competition to attract tourism and the benefits that might derive from it has been one of the most interesting, notable, and accessible countries contests globally due to the consideration as well as comparison of the various images and media's influence together with its reach, ease. This study will focus on the hypothesized relationships between media, cognition, and country image. After proposed model testing, not all the hypotheses were accepted and so not all the factors were confirmed to form a country image. Cognition is not a significant factor to create an image of a country, i.e., individual's cognition does not play a role to form an image. The model brings some insights to help create the awareness of country images, their formation.

**Keywords:** *country image, country image formation factors (model), media effects (theory), media influence, media impact, cognition (cognitive)*

## 1. Introduction

Country perceptions have been approached from a variety of contexts, perspectives, and disciplines. In social psychology science the country images were analyzed, explored as process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, emotions and behavior of an individual, collective identity; in sociology, political sciences – as subjects of international arena, subjects of contest, rivalry and (political) country's identity, behavior; in communication science – as discourse construct and webs in organizations' as well as mass media communication, the management of this communication, public relations (Buhmann, 2016). The

construct of country image has drawn attention in studies of international communication, diplomatic and public relations as well as in studies of media and their effects - the concepts of country image have also been analyzed (and employed) in the areas of international affairs, competition sociology and politics anthropology (Buhmann A., Ingenhoff D., 2015).

Nowadays, world countries contest, strive to win against each other on various levels and areas - in this global rivalry a favorable, desired, solid image plays an essential role for a country's success as well as its recognition and appreciation abroad (Buhmann, 2017). From this significance, weight there derives a need to create, form and communicate an attractive country image to be represented outside the borders. In globalized world the significance of countries images as well as current spread of the media increase and images have drawn more and more attention of governments, leaders to their countries value, favorability outside the borders and necessary communication of those images (Buhmann, 2017). In the modern world a desirable image with reputation has become more significant than country's raw materials, territory, etc. (Gilboa, 2008).

The competition to attract tourism and the benefits that might derive from it has been one of the most interesting, notable, and accessible countries contests globally due to the consideration as well as comparison of the various images and media's influence together with its reach, ease.

Tourism sector is closely related to respective campaigns to promote a country and establish its image, transfer the message that provides appealing country features, attributes, competitive advantage, tends to commit to the consistent and defined essence of that country's peculiarity, distinctiveness, uniqueness, to stand out in the market. Some parts, ideas, representations from the transferred, especially repeated, message might eventually become constant stereotypes toward that country, benefit, or prejudice, undermine afterwards, form the concrete image.

Globalization together with media spread times have influenced images importance because countries are being easily observed by media, publics, organizations, they are being publicly rated and compared to each other according to their development, various attractiveness, etc. (Werron, 2014). In the modern world it is easy to observe, to broadcast, to publish, there is an increasing reach of social media, thus country images creation from their influencing, formatting factors as well as the communication may be simply caused, affected, widespread, represented abroad with an unprecedented reach and ease. Therefore, the communication of a country image requires joint efforts as well as the management of this process, the strategy to create and spread, relay country image - it leads to a variety, range of probable economic, political, cultural, and other effects on the country afterwards.

The country image challenges may be specified as a lack of its reflection, representation in the modern media, including news, the committed as well as consistent image compared to close geographical neighbors. Therefore, it shall be aimed to become more visible, recognizable, and represented together with the solid, positive, attractive, unique, distinctive image that would avoid the questioning about this unknown, unfamiliar, and thus mysterious country in the world map which may be just undiscovered, not represented, not promoted enough through modern media channels. There might also exist a lack of attention, publications, travel reviews, stories about a country nowadays and various discussions of that presently formed image.

## 2. Literature review

Over the past decades, while the tourism sector and (social) media have been expanding and reaching new levels of its accessibility, visibility, and the easiness as well as ways to spread own information, insights and impressions, the individual perceptions and creation, developing one's own or accepting someone's/media's beliefs (including the possibility of more or less mixed belief bases), cultivating emotions towards concrete country result in the creation of this image.

To improve potential visitors perception toward a particular country, modern media channels have been considered the most significant informational source for the (global) market as well as personal search and the selection (Alkawsaneh M. S., Alfandi A. M. T., 2015). Perceived image enables the involved individuals, potential visitors to recognize that country, evaluate and anticipate certain experience, assume the satisfaction of it – country's image does not exist just as a product itself, but it derives, is being transferred by mentioned kind of a message as well as the promotions, advertisements, and/or personal experience (Lin N.-H., Lin B. S., 2007). Authors Beerli and Martin claimed that if potential tourists lack previous visit, experience of the concrete country and knowledge of that destination is scarce, limited, the destination with its solid, positive, and recognizable image will be more likely chosen by the prospective visitors (Beerli A., Martin J., 2004).

Researchers Echtner and Ritchie have also indicated the significance of being recognizable destination together with a favorable and solid image from the tourist perspectives in order to survive and compete in the global market (Echtner C. M., Ritchie J., 2003). Due to the factor of globalization, fierce competition as well as undiscovered world destinations, new players that join tourism market, the available selection of countries, destinations has been expanded, thus it becomes more difficult, tricky to distinguish and choose a country among the global (tourism) market competitors (Alkawsaneh M. S., Alfandi A. M. T., 2015).

The concept of contrast effects from author Cardozo indicates significance of the false expectations and thus a presumable perceiver's disappointment after a concrete object is assessed - that explains as well as leads to negative reinforcement of a country image (Cardozo, 1965). However, if an individual's experience equals or exceeds the expectations, that image of a country will be positively recreated as well as favorably strengthened, consolidated (Najjar, 2010). Following the latter concept, it may be stated that country image is sensitive to false expectations, although in the case of equal or exceeded individual's expectations toward a concrete country, image might change, be recreated, consolidated.

This statement is notable and significant to deepen the understanding of country images competition, its weight in the global arena and modern world nowadays. It may be challenging to confront, alter an image that has already become negative, it shall be even more challenging to control media that present the countries, including the problems.

An individual might have a stronger or weaker, yet empty, geographical background for the concrete country, the knowledge and the image that has been developing by accessing any type of existing public broadcasting, media, including the public relations, as well as impression of a country as based on someone's individual reportages from that place and pieces of randomly encountered information.

According to authors Insch and Avraham, nowadays, media tends to cover the countries that have negative, unfavorable images and thus this coverage influences the creation of undesirable perceptions as well as the formation of destructive stereotypes (Insch A., Avraham E., 2014). This statement of authors leads to the media effects theory. The literature on these effects has been accumulating over last decade,

thus in the proposed conceptual research's framework this independent construct's location and its presumable significance are being weighted.

The theory of media effects explains how the (mass) media influence the attitudes and perceptions of audience, general public (Borah, 2016). According to author Potter, media information occurs continuously, it is persistent and spreading widely, thus the receivers are being exposed to this means of mass communication in a direct way (i.e., from media information) or in an indirect way (from other persons that are talking about media information) and it is required to admit that media persistently have an effect on the receivers – although the latter are able not to accept this media impact and thus the effect will not be formed (Potter, 2012). Mentioned author has been selected as the first, the most significant one to represent media effects theory because this researcher connects media affects to a few times discussed country image factors, i.e., attitudes, affect as well as behaviors, defines them in a light of media influence - furthermore, researcher also makes reference to the attitude theory' of reasoned action authors Ajzen and Fishbein, quotes them to describe the beliefs as cognitions concerning the possibility that concrete object is related to a stated, specified attribute (Potter, 2012). Researcher also defines the cognitive media effect which is explained as media effect on procedures of an individual's mind or the product of these one's mind procedures (Grey, 2020).

Author Mann has also explored media effects including the effects on countries images and stated that consequences might be harmful – media effects are intensified in the case of not recognized information that the receivers are not able to verify (Mann, 1999). According to researcher Taylor, unfairly prejudiced or unbalanced representation of other countries might raise negative perceptions and this coverage in media might cause distortion, misrepresentation (Taylor, 1997).

According to researcher Kunczik, media can be considered as a key player that is able to formulate as well as spread the images - furthermore, a number of the prejudices have been transmitted from generation to generation, thus events from the past still remain determinant (Kunczik, 1997).

Diverse information sources to create a concrete country image have also been indicated by author Jenes – according to this researcher, country image is being formed on a base of individuals experience, opinions toward concrete (nation or) country as well as information that has been received from different channels (Jenes, 2008). Further information channels concretization is given by author Zaharopoulos which stated that country image might be affected by its positive or negative coverage in media as well as the volume, type of this coverage (Zaharopoulos, 1986). Similar statement has also been given by researcher Hanan which claims that national image is related to a representation of concrete country's positive or negative attributes in media, in historical, political, economic, etc., contexts (Hanan, 2006).

Author Al-Rodhan specified media influence on country image formation – according to this researcher, country image is more than government, agencies product and they are not the ones that shape it because nowadays internet (news websites, blogs) affects the creation of a country image as well (Al-Rodhan, 2009). In literature authors presumed that countries representations in media influence, affect those countries images formation, although destination image researches have been omitting to analyze the latter representations (Mercille, 2005).

In literature the definitions of media vary. In dictionaries, for example, Lexico (powered by Oxford), it is described as the main means of mass communication, i.e., publishing, broadcasting, internet, that are regarded collectively (Anon., 2021). Similar definition is provided in Dictionary.com (parent dictionary of Lexico) – media are the means of communication, i.e., radio, television, newspapers and magazines, internet, etc., these means reach or influence the audience (Anon., 2021). The latter definition is considered

significant because it separates, dissociates the reach of audience from media influence, effects on the receivers.

Media is also described as communicative channels to spread news and other information, educate, it comprises physical as well as internet newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internet (that progressively takes over) – media may reach a large amount of receivers and thus it is named mass media (Anon., 2020). Media remain the most important player to connect to the world that exists beyond usual environment and media presentation (misrepresentation) is able to change the world in a political, military and economical ways – media's nature evolves in this information century, although it is needed to draw attention to a role of media in chaos nowadays (Taylor, 1997).

Researcher claims that media have become simple instead of complex, imaginary, illusionary instead of real, true, and quantity instead of its quality – politics as well as another public information, media messages, representations are prepared to entertain the audience more than to inform, provide useful information (Taylor, 1997).

The mentioned statements may lead to the media effect on a country image formation. In this study it is assumed that media affects individual's cognition and thus forms, creates a country image.

Cognitive element together with the scholars' statements towards its relation to a country image shall be given separately.

In 1991 author Ajzen detailed the definition of country image and have described it as a variable that is related to the attitudes and consists of cognitive individual's beliefs group (i.e., normative, functional dimensions) as well as an affective element (emotive dimension) (Ajzen, 1991).

Affective element has also been explored by an author Verlegh which describes country image as a mental web that comprises affective as well as cognitive associations that are related to a country (Verlegh, 2001). The latter definition might be followed by the one from author Kunczik which described (national) image as cognitive one's representation of a country (Kunczik, 2003).

Cognition has also been indicated by researchers Ingenhoff et al. – authors described country image as perception which derives from a few personal assessments, i.e., cognitive - rational, affective - emotional procedures (Ingenhoff D., White C., Buhmann A., Kioussis S., 2019).

The concept from researchers Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos defined (general, initial, "parent") country image as every of person's beliefs, perceptions as well as individually possessed information that is connected to the affective and cognitive country qualities - thus country image is considered a variable that is related to two elements, i.e., affection and cognition (Zeugner-Roth K. P., Diamantopoulos A., 2009). Based on this researchers' theory, country image is being derived from individual's beliefs, perceptions and personally possessed information (three factors to create a country image) and the construct is connected to affective as well as cognitive features (Zeugner-Roth K. P., Diamantopoulos A., 2009).

Researchers Usunier and Lee expanded the notion and described country image as a variable of several dimensions that is affected by three elements: affective, cognitive elements as well as stereotypes (Usunier J.-C., Lee J. A., 2005).

This study will focus on the relationships between media, cognition, and country image.

### 3. Problem statement and research objectives

According to author Buhmann, there is no broadly, universally acknowledged conceptual comprehension of country image within separate, concrete research areas - based on the particular objectives of that research, country images are specified as the attitudes, stereotypes, information from mass media, thus there exists the need of a common framework as well as integration of knowledge (Buhmann, 2016). There are central gaps in the researches regarding theoretical country image's foundation (Buhmann A., Ingenhoff D., 2015).

Intentional and meaningful, purposeful countries images may foster, promote, stimulate a transfer of favorable, desired associations and thus strengthen the country images, their re(creation), increase the value as well as bring positive effects. On the other hand, negative, unfavorable, disadvantageous country image shall lead to the undesirable effects on a concrete country and thus limit its success, (political) influence, attraction of a benefits variety from global competitive arena. Without the determination of country image formatting factors, it is difficult to forecast the outcomes of their existence, spread. Until country image creation process, its composition, antecedents are defined, there is no direction for the intentions, the means, no clarity what is missed - shall be recreated, reassociated.

As it was mentioned, media information occurs continuously, it is persistent and spreading widely, thus the receivers are being exposed to this means of mass communication in a direct way (i.e., from media information) or in an indirect way (from other persons that are talking about media information) and it is required to admit that media persistently have an effect on the receivers – although the latter are able not to accept this media impact and thus the effect will not be formed (Potter, 2012). Researcher defined the cognitive media effect which is explained as media effect on procedures of an individual's mind or the product of these one's mind procedures (Grey, 2020).

Additionally, media can be considered as a key player that is able to formulate and spread the images - furthermore, a number of the prejudices have been transmitted from generation to generation, thus events from the past still remain determinant (Kunczik, 1997).

It was stated that diverse information sources to create a concrete country image had also been indicated by author Jenes – according to this researcher, country image is being formed on a base of individuals experience, opinions toward concrete (nation or) country as well as information that has been received from different channels (Jenes, 2008). Further information channels concretization is given by author Zaharopoulos which stated that country image might be affected by its positive or negative coverage in media as well as the volume, type of this coverage (Zaharopoulos, 1986).

As indicated, authors presumed that countries representations in media influence, affect the formation of these country images (Mercille, 2005).

Thus, the study endeavors and focuses on clarification, evaluation, measurement of the media', cognition' role, part, its weight, influence in country image creation (including through cognition), the confirmation (or rejection) of variables impact in that image's formation process.

Discussed literature review, overview of the problem statement enable to draft research objectives. The objectives of this study are given below:

1. To evaluate media influence on cognition.
2. To find the impact of cognition role to create a country image.
3. To determine media (direct) impact on a country image.

#### 4. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The proposed study's conceptual framework with the components is drawn below.

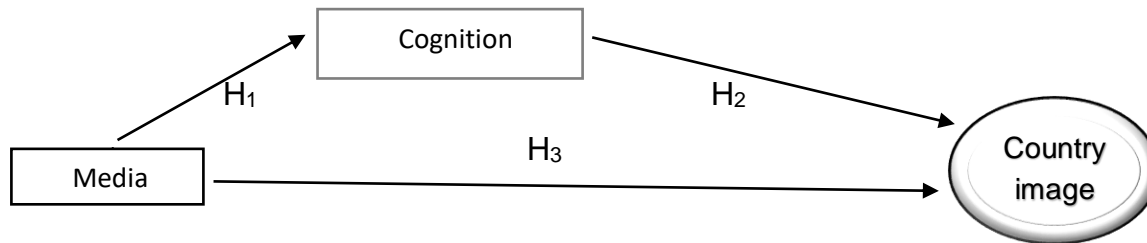


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of this research

This presented framework is generated, derives from, and integrates the previously chosen as well as elaborated theories to construct the given model.

The examined concepts attempt to cover image's formation antecedents, elements – it is assumed that the variables are a part of this procedure, have an effect. The presented model provides several relationships to be assessed in this study as well as the construct that is more than a variable with the direct effect – it also plays a mediating role.

In accordance with the drawn conceptual framework, Media variable is presumed to influence Cognition and Country image. Construct Cognition plays a mediating role in the given model - as depicted, this variable is presumed to have a moderating effect in the path. The relevant independent variables in the presented framework are Cognition and Media. The dependent variable in the proposed study's model is Country image.

The drawn research's conceptual framework represents hypothesized relationships. This proposed model depicts direct and indirect effects of variables together with presumable mediated impact. The given model of the study suggests to test both of constructs impact, the relationships.

Based on presented conceptual framework of this research, the following hypotheses are being derived:

- Hypothesis no. 1,  $H_1$  – Media has a significant effect on Cognition.
- Hypothesis no. 2,  $H_2$  – Cognition has a significant effect on Country image.
- Hypothesis no. 3,  $H_3$  – Media has a significant effect on Country image.
- Hypothesis no. 4, A – Effect of Media on Country image is mediated by Cognition.

These four listed hypotheses have been given in accordance with the depicted study's model and together with presumed effects of proposed variables.

#### 5. Methodology and data analysis

Research's sample is constituted of the population that has been identified and selected as adults from all the world's continents as much as it is possible to reach, contact them by modern nowadays means of communication (mainly internet), and invite to participate in the research about the country image, to provide with their perception of it. There is no gender, race, education, income, social class, geographic

proximity, travel frequency, computer/technologies literacy level, exposure to the media or other factors that might have been considered to divide, stratify population, simplify sample selection.

The respondents were chosen carefully, the priority has been given to those willing to answer the questionnaire responsively. The study’s respondents represent a range of world regions, different education, and job levels together with various travel frequency as well as potential. The questionnaire was conducted in English and spread among the 158 respondents that understand this language sufficiently. The study’s questionnaire included attitudinal scale - namely Likert consisting of 7 points (levels) which ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”) for the selected measures. There was no data missing.

The new proposed study’s model has been tested using SmartPLS software. The influence of independent variable (Media) on the dependent variable (Country Image) was determined, including the mediator (Cognition). The data had been imported into SmartPLS and the analysis began. The proposed model was pictured in the program. The calculations of PLS Algorithm and Bootstrapping method have returned the results as below.

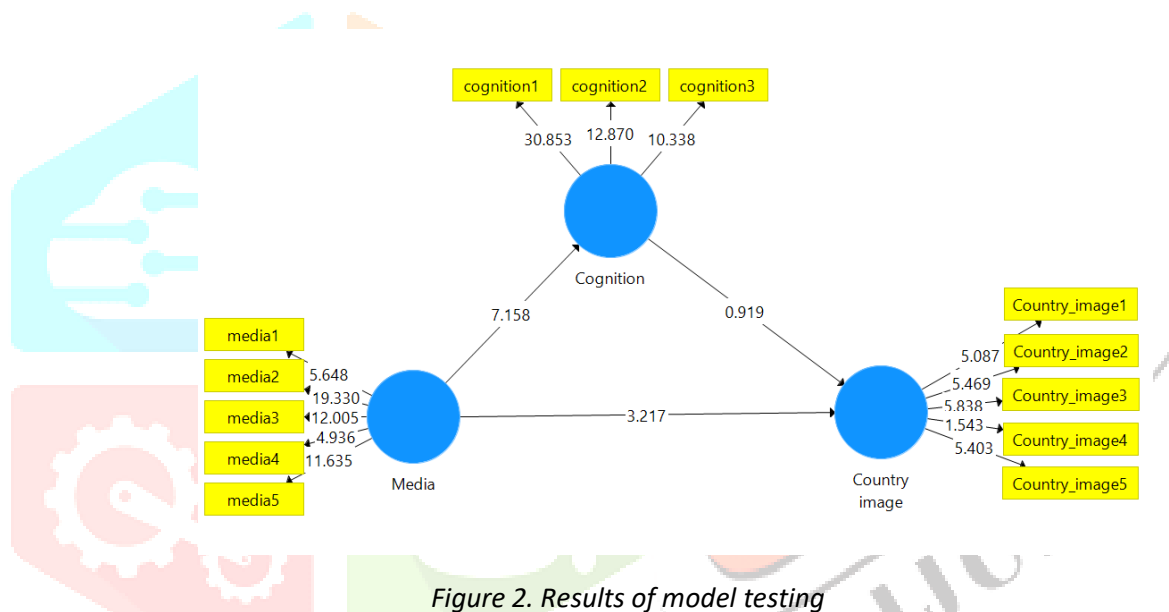


Figure 2. Results of model testing

First step to test the model was PLS Algorithm. After the procedure’s run Construct Reliability and Validity, Discriminant Validity results have been calculated.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Media	0.777	0.795	0.848	0.531
Country image	0.794	0.870	0.861	0.572
Cognition	0.767	0.778	0.866	0.684

Figure 3. Results of model reliability and validities testing

With reference to Figure 3, all the variables are valid (above 0.7 for Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability, above 0.5 for Average Variance Extracted (AVE)) and therefore this model’s reliability and validities are confirmed.



All the numbers have minimum values hence it is able to continue the analysis. The final step to confirm the hypotheses was Bootstrapping process after which every hypothesis would become accepted or rejected. The calculations of Bootstrapping method are being presented in Figure 2.

The figure of T Statistics, P Values etc. states the rejected and accepted hypotheses as well as summarizes the proposed model's content. P Values might be considered as conclusion of the independent variable' effect on the dependent variable (including mediation), confirmation or rejection of each given framework's hypothesis.

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Media -> Country image	0.544	0.556	0.169	3.217	0.001
Media -> Cognition	0.586	0.600	0.082	7.158	0.000
Cognition -> Country image	-0.169	-0.169	0.184	0.919	0.358

Figure 4. Results of path coefficients

## 6. Discussion of the results

With reference to Figure 4, independent variable Media was confirmed as the one influencing, affecting dependent variable Country image, although the mediator Cognition is not impacting Country image. Therefore, after proposed model testing, not all the hypotheses were accepted and so not all the factors were confirmed to form a country image.

Construct Cognition (the mediating variable) together with its impact on Country image was rejected as insufficient, notwithstanding that an image of a country could have been influenced by the knowledge, understanding gathered from the media. Thus, it shall be concluded that the hypothesis was not confirmed by the analysis and so due to the lack of affect, Cognition is not a significant factor to format an image of a country, individual's cognition does not play a role to create this image.

Media influences a country image - if an individual is open and receptive to the media' view of a concrete country, it will weigh the formation of this country image, even though media does not impact one's cognition. The statement is acceptable, although it requires more analysis to be done for testing the correlation of other factors, media as well as its strength, including, for example, the possible correlation of knowledge, feelings and/or impressions, beliefs. The study's hypothesis of media influence on a country image has been confirmed and thus there may arise many more hypotheses as well as various country image formation, media effects models to test.

Media also influences cognition, although, as it was stated, the latter does not (further) impact a country image (its formation), steady, establish.

## 7. Recommendation, future scope, and limitations

The given model sought a goal to deepen understanding of media effects, impact on a country image and thus might empower the will, intentions to (re)create, strengthen, direct, control and influence the latter. Understanding of how a country image is being formatted enables to work on the factors as well as open a new chapter, become much more visible, distinctive, peculiar, regain the position that might be lost and compete with other countries of the region and/or the world.

The proposed model is simple and thus it will be further investigated to improve, expand the understanding, perception. Yet this given model brings some insights to help create the awareness of country images and their formation, what to focus on, how to implement the result of a desirable country image, improve it based on the findings, for example, confirmed (formatting) factors. In the future this new model shall be tested and expanded for deeper insights.

Drawing the attention to practitioners, the study suggests a few insights to create as well as manage a country image – for example, globalized media is quite under-utilized tool for the images, although media's reach and its accessibility, ease shall be considered accordingly, appropriately, intentionally. Meaningful, purposeful country images may foster, promote, stimulate a change in people's mindset with an influence on the perception of favorable, desired associations (or response) and thus strengthen those country images as well as support their re(creation), increase the value, bring positive effects.

The study has the limitations, for example, as it was stated, the model is simple and it requires more analysis to be done for testing the correlation of other factors, media as well as the strength. There shall be more factors involved to possibly cover blind spots left in the undertaken study because the author believes that the given model must be expanded, namely independent and/or mediating variables may be added between Cognition and Country image constructs. An importing of more data, an expanded study shall enhance the country image field.

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