

THE HUMAN AND CULTURE FACTOR IN NATION BRANDING: A STUDY ON FOREIGN ACADEMICIANS WORKING IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Human and cultural values for nation branding appear closely related with all other infrastructure variables of nation building which have to be dealt with properly, before and during communication as an integrated process.

The study explores the branding capabilities of nations in general and Turkey's potential for branding in particular, in relation to the effects of human and culture factors. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 foreign academicians who were working in six universities in Turkey and who were chosen for their specific regionality of their origin, namely Near East and North Africa. The findings were evaluated with the help of a quantitative analysis software and suggested that according to the participants, nation branding is indeed a feasible concept and that Turkey has the fundamentals to build herself as a brand nation if she could build upon the opportunities and pursue the required developmental concepts properly. Another important finding suggests that country images can grow very different in relation to specific regional public targets and eras, in different regions and nations worldwide. Thus, nation images and reputations and the public diplomacy strategies built upon these have to be evaluated also in their relation to target publics.

Keywords: Culture, cultural dimensions, brand, nation branding, public diplomacy.

ULUS MARKALAŞMASINDA İNSAN VE KÜLTÜR FAKTÖRÜ: TÜRKİYE'DE GÖREV YAPAN YABANCI AKADEMİSYENLER ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Özet

Ulus markalaşmasının giderek önem kazanması ile ortaya çıkan yeni anlayış, ulusların insani ve kültürel değerlerine sahip çıkarak korumasının ve bu değerleri diğer uluslara aktarmasının gerekliliğidir. Bu bağlamda, ülkelerin diğer ülkelerden ayrılarak marka konumuna gelebilmesi için kendi potansiyelini keşfederek eksikliklerini tespit etmesi, markalaşma yolunda yarar sağlamaktadır. Aynı zamanda ülkelerin, insani ve kültürel değerleri, eğitim kalitesi, medya kullanımı gibi değişkenleriyle de ön planda olması gerekmektedir.

Bu çerçevede üç bölümden meydana gelen çalışmanın, birinci bölümünde kültür kavramı ve kültürel boyutlar, ikinci bölümünde ulus markalaşması ve kamu diplomasisi literatür taraması ele alınmaktadır. Üçüncü bölümünde ise, ulus markalaşmasına etki eden insan ve kültür faktörü bağlamında ülkelerin markalaşabilirliği ve Türkiye'nin marka olma potansiyelini ölçen derinlemesine görüşme yöntemi ile elde edilen veriler değerlendirilmektedir. Araştırma derinlemesine görüşme yöntemiyle Türkiye'nin 6 üniversitesinden (Karadeniz Teknik, Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen, Atatürk, Trabzon, Avrasya ve Gümüşhane Üniversitesi'ndeki) 20 yabancı uyruklu akademisyene uygulanmıştır. Yapılan analizler sonucunda elde edilen bulgular, ülkelerin markalaşmasının olanaklı olduğunu ve Türkiye'nin de bu süreçleri doğru değerlendirmesi sonucunda marka bir ülke olabileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kamu Diplomasisi, Kültür, Kültürel Boyutlar, Ulus Markalaşması.

Introduction

While the development of new media has further added to the dynamics of globalization and also to the challenges of image and reputation communication for nations, it has not changed much for the developing countries. Although media dominance is still an important part of image communications, nations have to look onto their own responsibilities to begin with.

As a concept, it is accepted that nation branding was coined in 1996 by Simon Anholt as an approach based on the fundamentals of public diplomacy that strives to build a strategical planned, integrated and coherent field of action. The approach is still in the developmental stage (Szondi, 2008: 11) and is still being confused

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***This paper originated from the findings of the Master's Thesis by the same title submitted in 2018 to the Institute for Social Sciences of Gümüşhane University/Turkey, by the corresponding author Sibel YILDIZ under the guidance of the second author.



generally with related concepts of marketing, branding, international relations and public relations which all should form together the integrated approach of nation branding (Ali ve Rehman, 2015: 36).

Nation branding is a more complex approach than pursuing branding with marketing strategies. Countries are not mere products or services that are appreciated by the satisfaction they give their consumers, nation branding is interested in the reputation and the image in the minds of the target audience (Emre, 2012: 31). Economic power, military and diplomatic power, tourism etc., are naturally effective on the image and reputation of a nation, still, there is more to it. All perceived merits, powers and moral values are included in the mix, which are represented altogether by the human and culture of the nation. But the usability of these factors interact with the special relationship with the target audience, whether the particular audience has the ears to hear and the inclination to believe. Thus, public diplomacy is the mode of communication for nation branding. Diplomacy is only deemed as much as functional as with the achievement ratio of communication goals of persuasion and direction of others' (Kalm, 2010).

This study evaluated the effects of human and culture factors in the process of nation branding. First, the conceptual framework of the humanities, culture and their constituents are explored, then, the various dimensions of culture with their implications were studied. The literature of nation branding has been reviewed for functionality, importance, processes in relation with the concepts of public diplomacy, and the interaction of country image and reputation with nation branding. The evaluation of the interviews was focused on the views of the participants on nation branding and the potential branding targets of nations in general, and Turkey's perceived level in nation branding, and then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively for the effects of cultural/humanity factors on the nation branding process. In addition, a survey for nation branding issues was conducted.

NATION BRANDING

Countries can be subject o consumption like products. It can be important for many countries, regions, cities, towns and villages to be preferred as a living place, for investment, for vacation which makes them products and brands that can meet many needs. Like consumer products, each of these brands have their individual images in the minds of the audience (Yalçınkaya, 2006: 25). Administrations around the world believe that by utilizing branding tools, techniques and expertise to make national images more coherent and consistent can have many benefits ranging from attracting foreign investments and other assets up to promoting and maintaining citizen loyalty. The new challenges of the world of the so-called global village is adding to the importance of nation branding (Aronczyk, 2013: 1). There must be enough brand consciousness at citizen level to permeate internet boundaries.

The image of a country, her history, arts and music, celebrities, the popular culture, the media and other features may play a crucial role in forming and sustaining certain perceptions. But societal plagues like AIDS, pandemics, political upheavals, civil rights violations, environmental infringements, racial conflict, economic instability, poverty, and violent crimes all form negative images in the minds of people as persistent stereotypes (Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 42, 43).

Nation branding needs the social-cultural, economic and otherwise achievements of the country to build upon (Jansen, 2008: 12). According to Dinnee (2008), a nation brand is the unique and multifaceted mix of the factors that give distinction and relevance on cultural basis in the eye of her target public. The nation brand is also defined as the aggregation of historical, culture, language, geographical, her product brands images etc.. Besides from other circumstances, it consists a long-lived competitive advantage. Brand theory can help understand, assess and monitor the lives of these images but brand marketing is not a sufficient method for changing these images. Real change comes from good administration, smart investments, innovation and societal backing (Anholt, 2011: 61). Bettering a bad image in the eyes of a target public may not be impossible, but it is a way of much conviction and perseverance of a whole society.

The increasing importance of nation branding calls for a better understanding of the concept: What is a brand nation? Can a particular country make it into a brand? Why should a nation be a brand? Each question is important by itself, yet, they have to be dealt with as a whole (Gudjonsson, 2005: 283).

There are many noted indexes put up by foundations and agencies that assess countries along different criteria approaches, for different aims and uses, like the *World Values Survey*, the *Nation Brand Index*, *Country Brand Index* and more...

While developing nations that are aiming brand status are firstly targeting rural employment and economic growth, the country should not focus just onto its own solitary image. Rather, she has to aim for an integrated and sustainable brand structure that also will enliven the country's relational environment (Mihailovich, 2006: 230). In situations where lonesome efforts are too costly and less efficient even for powerful nations, Mihailovich (2006: 236) proposes a structure of international alliances for nation branding. The British Commonwealth, or the EU can add positively to member nations' images, a fact that nation branding consultants are rather inclined to overlook.

Whether bad or good, brand images of countries are rather incomplete, fragmentary reflections of the country. Anholt cheers up developing countries by suggesting that there is enough time to prove herself by developing the realities of the country and future prospects hand in hand if there is proper leadership for branding strategies in the public and private sectors (Anholt, 2005: 5).





Figure 1. Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon; Source: nation-brands.gfk.com

Anholt's Nation Brand Hexagon

In his hexagram, Anholt (2016: 13) explored the potential of a nation brand as the mix of six predictors of governance, people, culture and heritage, investment and immigration, exports, and tourism. For governance as an example, participants are asked to rank a particular government for their perceived competency and justice, and how much they would trust that it would ensure international peace and security by responsible decisions. Perceptions of alleviating poverty and taking responsibility for the global environment have been ranked also. Participants were asked to choose an attribute that would describe best the administration of every country (Anholt, 2016: 13).

The exports factor examines the inclination to actively seek or actively avoid certain products of each country and the technological and scientific expectations for each country are evaluated. Tourism factor measures peoples' desire for visiting a certain country or place. The investment and immigration factor measures the willingness of persons to work and live in a certain country (Anholt, 2016: 13).

The culture part of the hexagon explores the perceptions towards the cultural heritage of the country, intentions towards the consumption of the more actual commercial cultural products and activities and also the perceived excellence in sports (Anholt, 2016: 13). The appearance of the human capital is investigated and participants are asked to choose the attributes they think that would best characterize the people of the country. Friendliness, tolerance, benevolence, hospitality etc. are measured (Anholt, 2016: 13). A communication channel which conveys a nation's complexities and contradictions equally to the global community are her people. When not only diplomats, celebrities and politicians but also every ordinary citizen have become a passionate ambassador for his/her country or place, a positive change will really be able to develop (Anholt, 2009: 215).

The Public Diplomacy approach and its importance in the Nation Branding process

The soft power concept that consists the base for the public diplomacy, builds on the capacity to shape the thoughts of others by relying on the basis of everyday democratic politics, an inclination to persuade others without the use of force (Nye, 2008: 95). While it endorses "A government's or international institution's communication with another country's people and citizens through persons or organizations", the government dominated practice is understood rather is focused particularly in educational and cultural programs (Oktay, 2012: 129). Although this vagueness causes the terms public diplomacy and nation branding being used in place of each other (Szondi, 2008: 17-18), nevertheless, public diplomacy appears as a preferred tool for nation branding which claims to streamline and integrate all means at disposal.

Table 1: Szondi's Comparison of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding

	Public Diplomacy	Nation Branding
Aims	Political promotion	Economic promotion

Roles	The government has influence on the messages sent.	Government influence on the messages sent is little or absent.
Actors	Government, government agencies, ambassadors, Ministry/Secretary of Culture, Secretary of State/Foreign Minister, cultural institutions, NGO's, diasporas.	National Tourism Boards, Travel Agencies, Investment Incentive and Export Agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Multinational Organizations.
Strategies	Establishing and maintaining contact Building trust Non-specific approaches or specific strategies and activities to local people in different target countries. Seeking to relate people and cultures with a focus on positive and negative factors.	Image management. Emphasis on visual and symbolic elements. A central approach supported by brand essence and tailored for a general and homogenous audience. Focusing on only positive and "marketable" elements of a single country's culture and people.
Term	Continuous	Campaign focused-temporary
Budget	Government	Public and private partnership

Source: Szondi, 2008, 17-18

To overcome cultural challenges that countries may encounter globally, Wang (2006: 41) proposes a flexible approach by sharing public diplomacy efforts by various social institutions and to pursue relationships in multiple levels where it is most effective.

Turkey's public diplomacy efforts is based on combining strategical and political achievements with economic and cultural relations. The aim is to establish a feasible and sustainable trade country with a close cooperation and coordination of business circles and government agencies (Aras, 2009: 13). Özkan (2012) points to Turkey's public diplomacy potential that requires urgently a mobilization to conform to Turkey's active diplomacy efforts.

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The Objectives and Importance of the Study

The first objective of the study was to determine the factors that contribute to the nation branding process, and then by the exploration of the conceptual framework to test whether Turkey has the substance to be perceived by a certain target public as a nation brand in comparison to other countries. Second, the human



and culture factors has been explored specifically for their effects on the nation branding process. Cultural affinity effects in relation to the particular target public to which the participants belonged and to which Turkey is historically attached in relation to cultural geography were a targeted limitation for the study, albeit debates on the complex nature and effects of these relations are beyond the scope of this study. Suggestions to add global comparison capabilities by complementing the homogeneity of the sample pool with participants from contrasting cultural geographies would also extend the scope of this study and should be suggested for future research. Another distinct quality of the sample pool would be that academicians are believed to be more analytical in their social, cultural observations in their daily lives and working environment.

Because the lack of related research in the literature, this qualitative research will certainly reveal important issues that will show directions to future studies. Also, the inquiry on the related terminology will help further differentiate the conceptual framework of nation branding.

The Method of the Study

This study explored the importance of the human/people factor in the nation branding process using in-depth interviews with foreign nationals who were working in Turkey as academicians. The participants originated from a variety of nations of the Near-East and North Africa geographical/cultural sphere which consisted an intended and valued limitation of the study that aimed a particular target public in image communications. A quantitative survey with the 5-scale Likert model has been added to clarify the qualitative results.

The semi-structured questions that provided the framework for the in-depth interviews have been compiled with the help of insight from the literature, included Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011). The survey that had been conducted at the beginning, was compiled according the guidelines of the “Cultural Perspective Questionnaire” of Maznevski and Distefano (1998: 151). Both set of questions have been evaluated by three academicians of the Gümüşhane University School of Communications, who separately suggested revisions for confusing and ambiguous items. The voice records of the semi-structured interviews have been transcribed into 157 pages of text and analyzed with the help of Nvivo 11 software. The survey forms have been analyzed in SPSS for frequency analysis.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

1. Nation Brand Perception

The answers to the question “What are your thoughts about the factors that could affect the branding process of a nation?” have been analyzed for the Table 2.

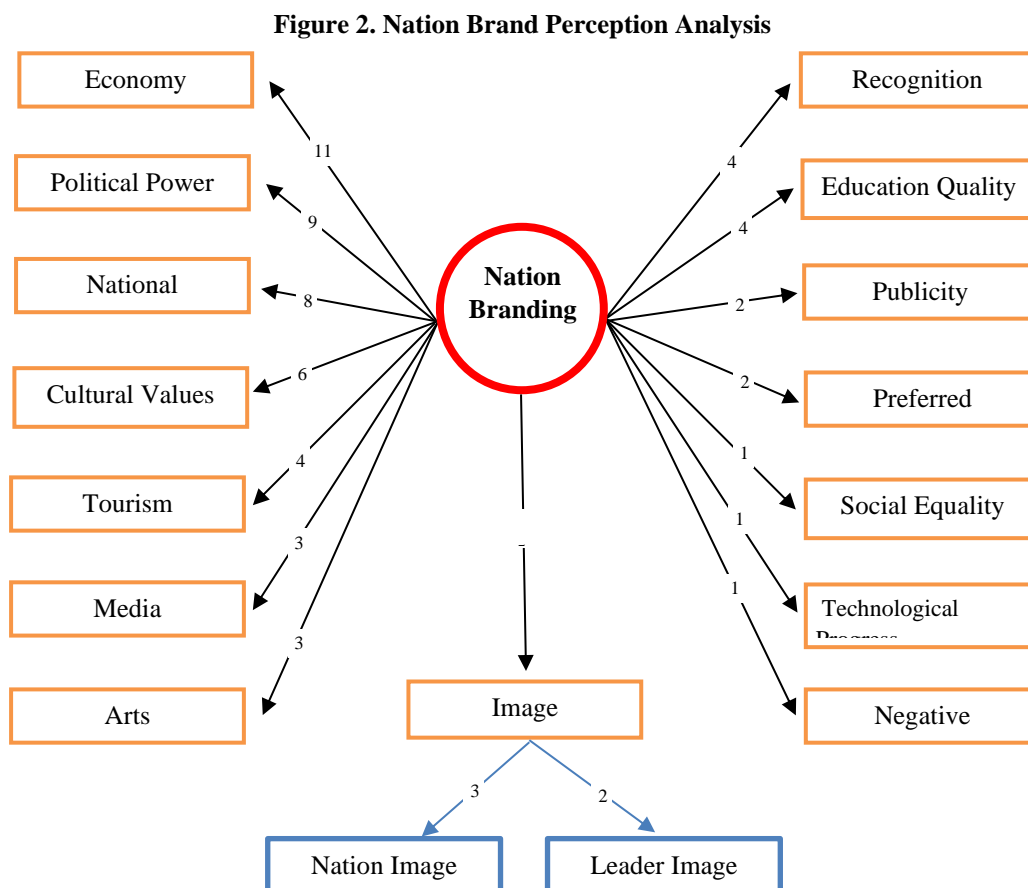
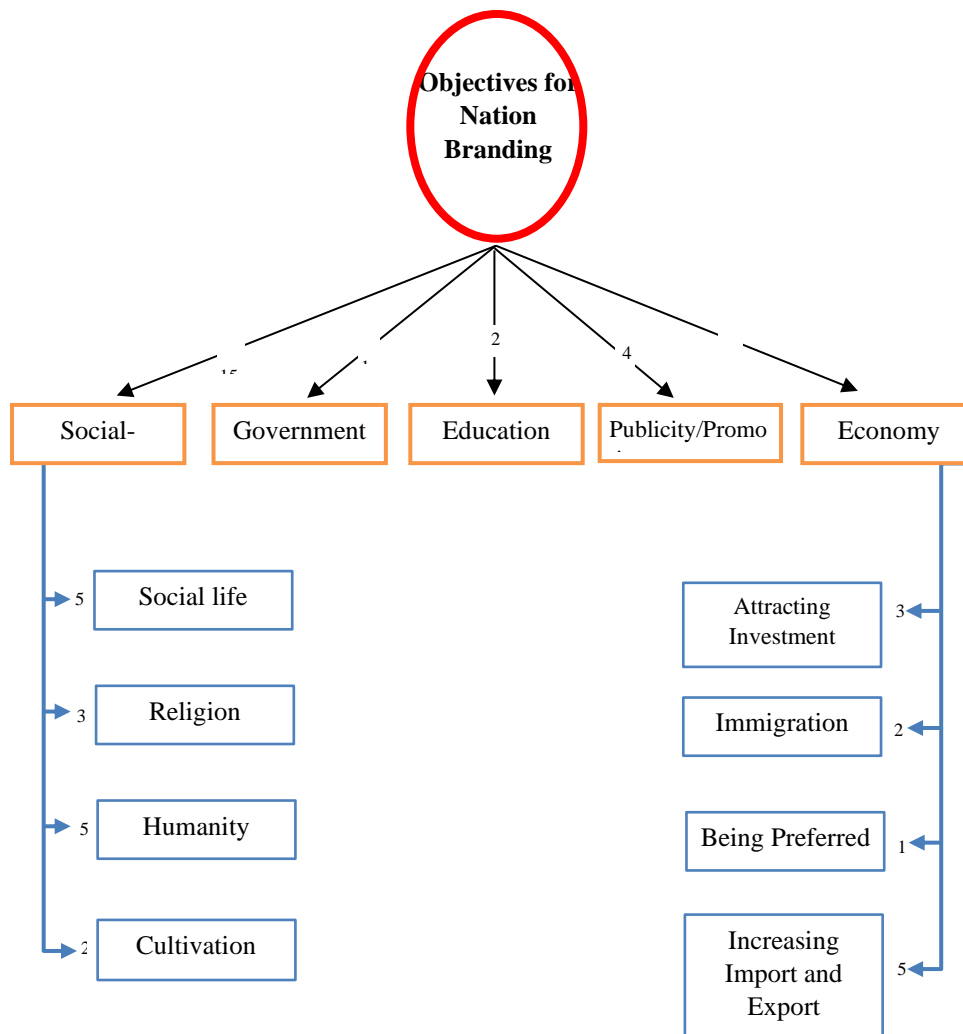


Figure 2 shows that the participants attached varied importance to their attributes of nation branding that showed incidental variance also from global emphasis, and ranked from high to low as *political power* (9 suggestions), *national production* (8), *cultural values* (6), *image* (5), *tourism* (4), *recognition* (4), *education quality* (4), *media* (3), *arts* (3), *publicity* (2), *being preferred* (2), *economy* (1), *social equality* (1), *technological progress* (1), *negative perception* (1). It is notable that the image factor was divided sensibly into two subcomponents as the *nation image* (3) and *leader image* (2).

The participants emphasized a largely conventional nation brand route over enhancing the national economy besides countries' power/influence over other countries. Beyond this, the study suggested that other factors could allow nations branding by marginally differentiating themselves. Moreover, the important base for all branding strategies is repeated also here: *Before all else, the nation branding activities have to start, to take root inside the country, the nation herself. Looking for strategies to achieve brand status in the eyes of other nations should come after that.*

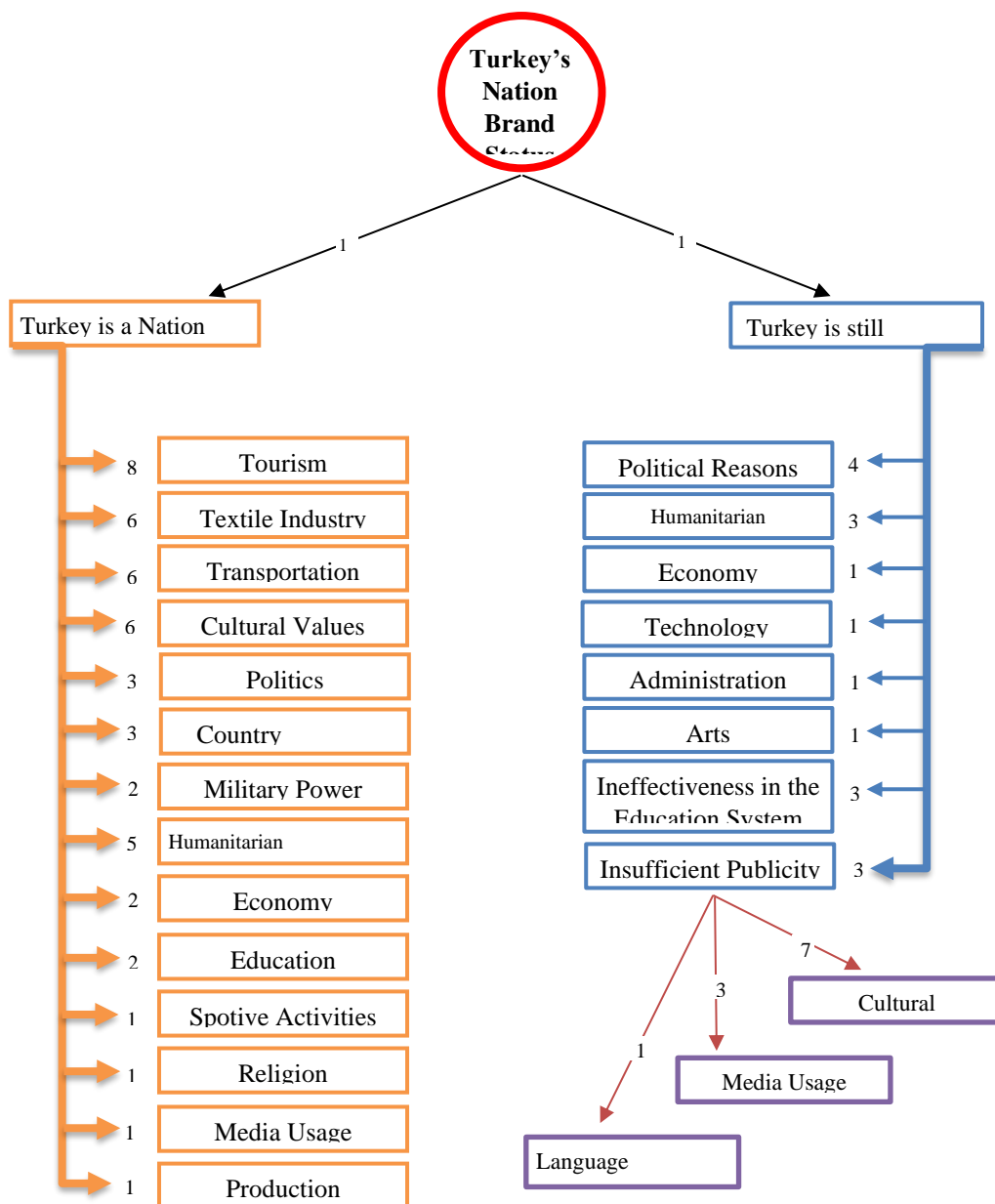
Figure 3. Analysis of the Fundamental Objectives for Nation Branding



2. Perception of Turkey as a Nation Brand

While many participants were perceiving Turkey as already a nation brand by some dimensions, most others saw her as a nation that was in the middle of the branding process in many other aspects.

Figure 4. Turkey’s Nation Brand Analysis according to the participants



The participants who endorsed Turkey’s nation brand status, confined their claims largely to developed areas like tourism, textile industry, transportation, and cultural heritage. Many of them also ascribed brand status to Turkey’s domestic and international politics, general conditions in the country, humanitarian development level, economy, the importance attached to education, the sports activities in the country, approach to religion, media use, and national production in general.

Those participants who believed that Turkey was still in the middle of nation branding, pointed to domestic upheavals, incompetency in Turkish people’s progress levels, instabilities in the economy, insufficient technological development, incompetency of the administration, insufficient emphasis on artistic activities,

shortcomings of the education system, and ineffective promotion of the country. Ineffective promotion was divided into ineffective cultural promotion, ineffective media use for promotion and publicity, and ineffectiveness in the promotion of the Turkish language.

3. Analysis of perceived similarities and differences between Turkey and the home countries of the participants

As this study was confined to participants from the Near East and North Africa, comparisons of cultural, social and otherwise similarities and also dissimilarities with Turkey and their home countries were of particular interest.

Figure 5. Perceived similarities between Turkey and the home countries of the participants

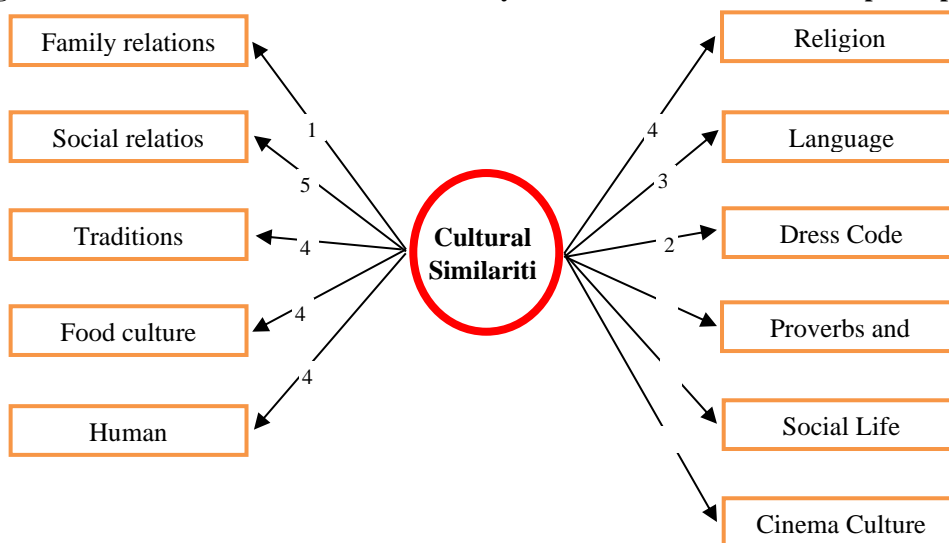


Figure 6. Analysis of perceived differences of Turkey and the home countries of the participants

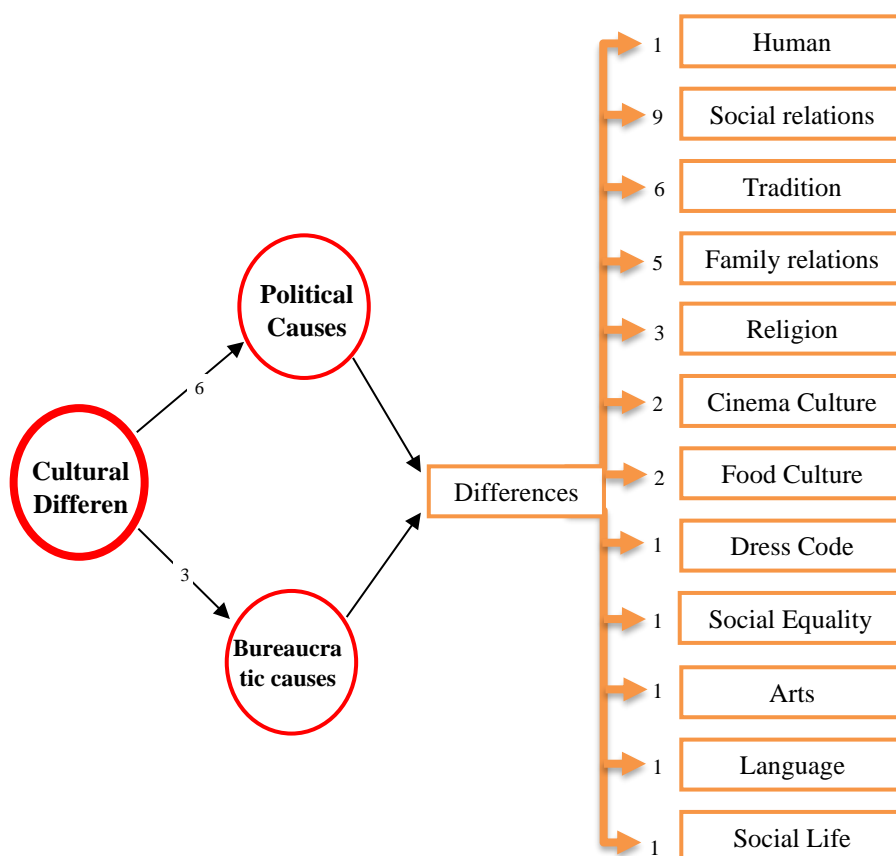
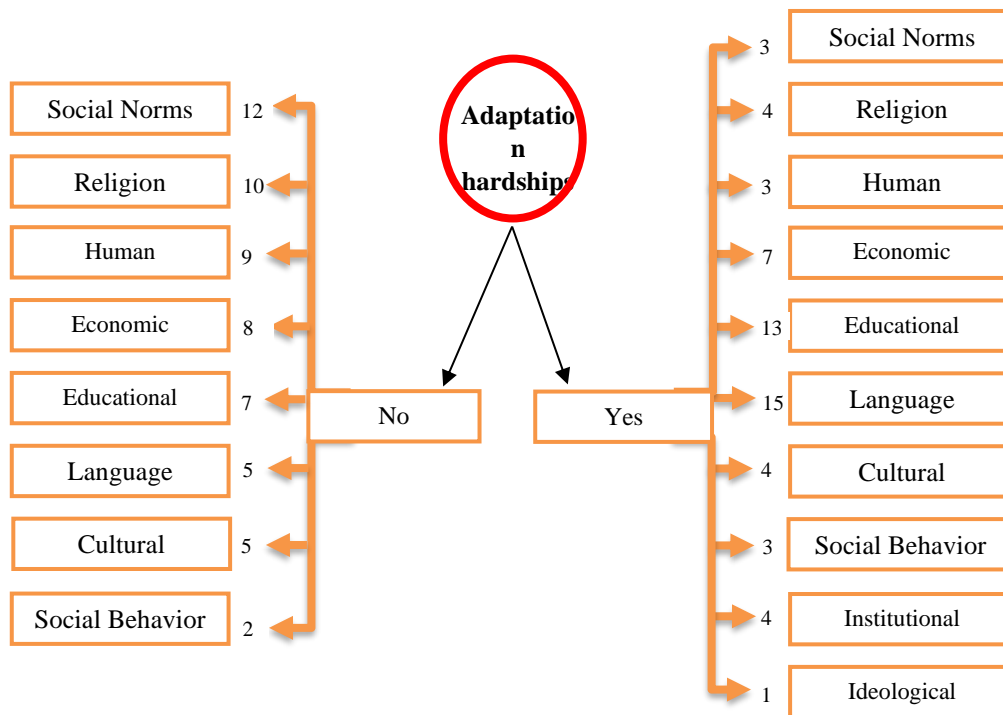


Figure 7. Analysis of experienced hardships during adaptation to Turkey



3. Hardships that the participants experienced during adaptation to Turkey

While the participants largely reported that did not experience hardships in adapting to social norms, religious attitudes, human characteristics, economic conditions, and educational conditions, some participants reported that indeed they experienced hardships to adapt to religious attitudes, institutional conditions, cultural values, human characteristics, social behavior, social norms, and ideological polarization. On the other hand, more participants reported that they experienced hardships in the first couple of years in language education, education conditions, and economic conditions.

Table 2: Approved/disapproved characteristics of the Turkish people

APPROVAL	REFERENCE	DISAPPROVAL	REFERENCE
Respectful	8	Nationalist	3
Benevolent	5	Short tempered	3
Patriotic	5	Reactionary	2
Humane	4	Insensible	2
Tolerant	3	Egoist	2
Reliable	3	Obsessive	2
Clean	3	Family dependant	1
Hardworking	3	Professional Incompetency	1
Honest	2	Talkative	1

Innovational	2	Prejudiced	1
Hospitable	2	Disrespectful	1
Sympathetic/Friendly	2	Insecure	1
Just	2	Personal armament	1
Patient	1	Obstinacy	1
Fighting spirit	1	Gossip	1
Open minded	1		
Elegant	1		
Responsible	1		
Intelligent	1		
Democratic	1		
Self-controlled	1		

Figure 8. Analysis of perceived freedoms: Comparison between Turkey and participants' country of origin

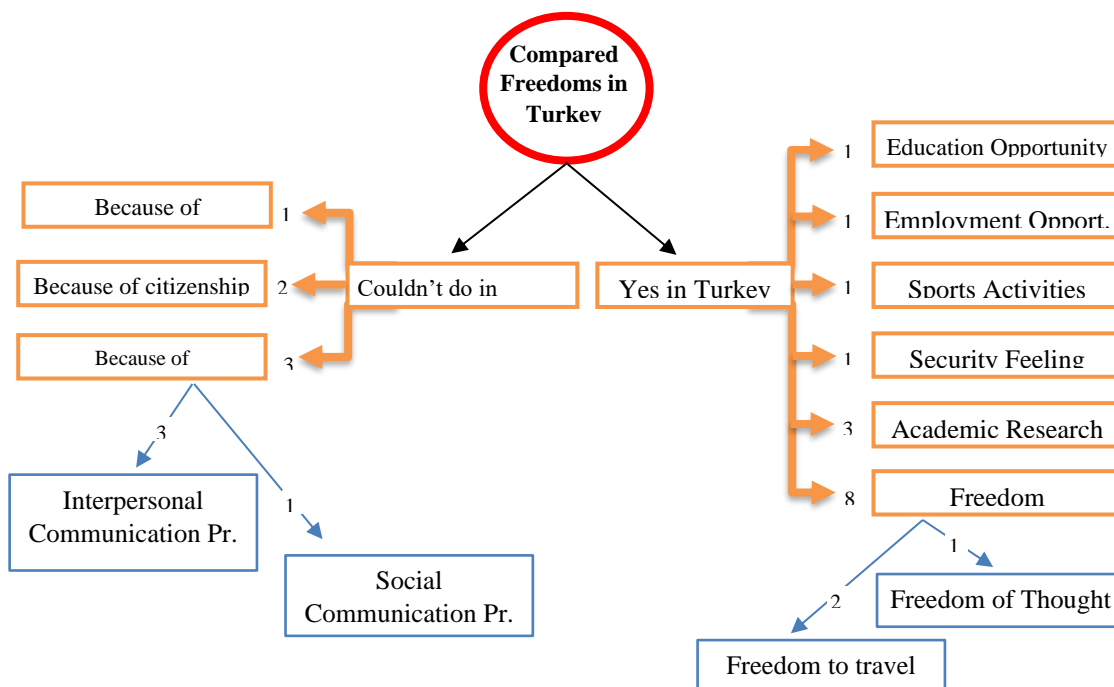
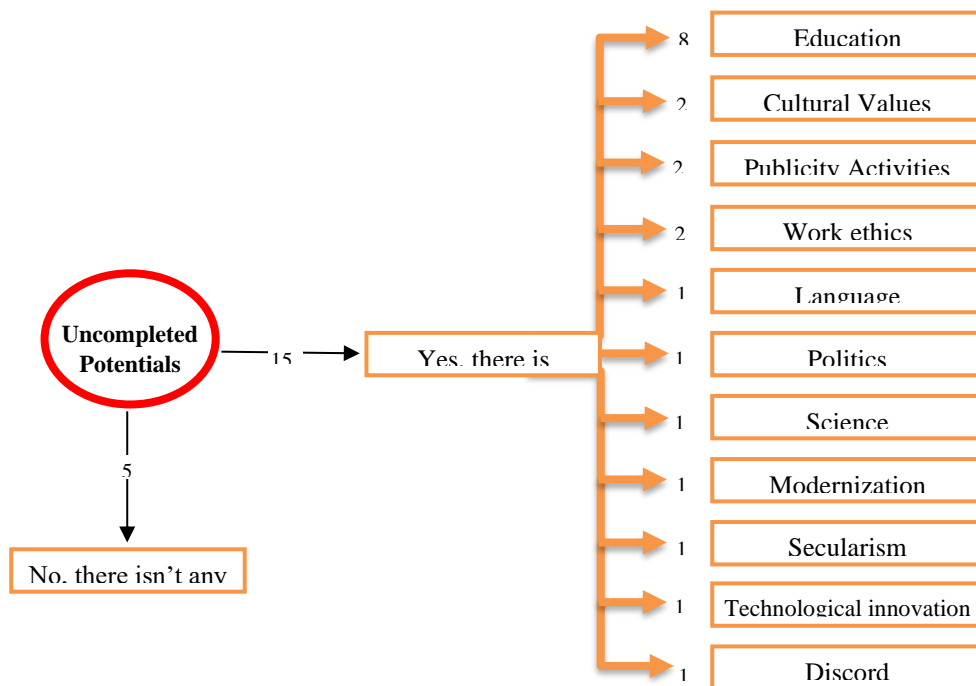


Figure 9. Analysis of uncompleted potentials in the Turkish People/Society



One in four participants stated that they did not see any uncompleted potential in the Turkish people and society, but that the Turkish society had had her positive and negative facts as every nation had. Still, their opinion was that Turkey was progressing with the correct strategy in the process of nation branding that in the future could place the nation in a better position.

Figure 10. Behaviour which the participants hesitated doing in Turkey

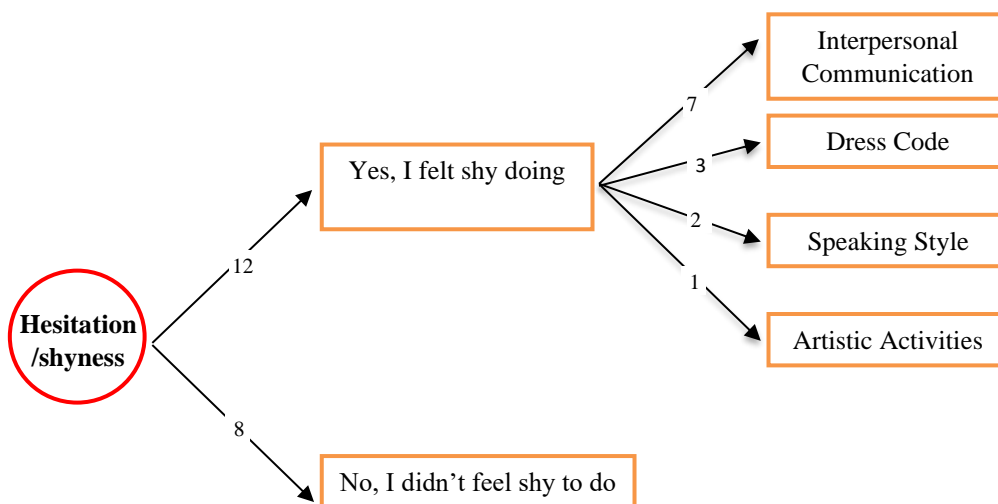
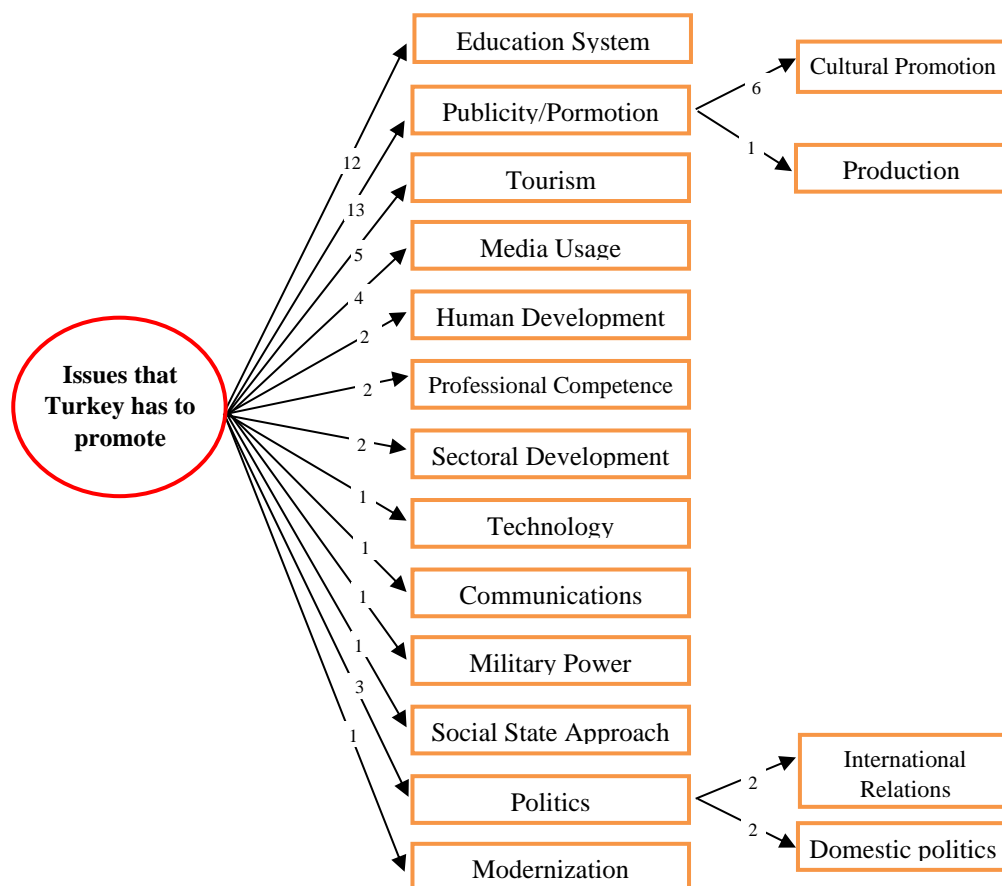


Figure 11. Turkey's perceived features which were recommended for emphasis in the nation branding process



For nation branding, the participants largely recommended to promote the areas of; the education system, promotion/publicity activities, using tourism activities for branding, using the media more efficient for nation brand promotion, and politics. On the other hand, participants' emphasis on some areas which were previously pointed out by some as uncompleted potential, imply that some factors might indeed be understood and recommended as the areas with room for improvement. The participants also recommended more efficient use of professionals for promotion.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Communicational integration in the age of globalization and digital media is accompanied by new challenges for more competition for difference and continuation in image communications. Nation branding requires a value of uniqueness for a nation. As with all brands, nation branding necessitate that concrete, measurable facts to be translated largely or partially into perceptible images. Or put vice-versa, nation



brands as widespread and resistant perceptions/images, depend partially or largely on concrete, measurable facts.

While various branding targets have been suggested for Turkey's branding efforts, a commitment on a single unique promise or a couple of interrelated promises would surely ease image communication processes.

However, arguably the most important issue on the way of a nation to branding is to arrive at an understanding that seeing and accepting negativity and committing to deal with them should have priority before communicating positivity.

This study explored the general framework of nation branding and then attempted to build upon this base to establish nation branding directions for Turkey. The study also put an emphasis in exploring the importance of the dimension of people/culture in nation branding.

As expected, the main findings corroborated the idea that without economic and international political power, hence no visibility internationally, there is no way for a country's image to make it into a brand. The sample pool differed not from a mainstream and popular understanding of Brand Nation by suggesting; *“strengthening the economy and using nation branding for more strengthening and maintaining this status, for preserving social-cultural values and diffusing them to others' cultures, preserving the government's power and helping to strengthen it even more. The participants expected that the so established nation brand would attract more foreign investment and tourists and that import and export would increase. More people would want to live in such a country. From a social-cultural viewpoint, better wealth and social life quality levels would ultimately entail the perception of “quality people”.*” Naturally, all of these factors are interrelated in “chicken-or-egg” relationships and more participants were aware of this by suggesting that any nation branding endeavor had to begin inside a country itself.

12 participants perceived brand nation status for Turkey for being a brand nation in tourism, a brand nation in textile production, she also achieved a fully developed level in transportation system infra- and ultrastructure, and she also was ascribed the cultural values base for a brand nation. Also Turkey's engagements in domestic and international politics, general conditions in the country, military power, the human development level, the economy in general, the focus on education, sports activities at the national level, the approach to religion, media use, and national production in general, all these factors have been perceived as potential branding factors. On the other hand, other 8 participants perceived for Turkey brand nation status limited to specific fields only, while conceding future branding potential in the remaining fields too. It is remarkable that none of the participants saw Turkey as a *no-brand nation* and *never-to-brand* country.

The participants presented a consensus by suggesting a coordinated and integrated approach to form a single shining brand from the many developed advantageous dimensions like industry, diplomacy, education, tourism etc. Many participants emphasized the employment of “educated” individuals at points of international representation which implied a somewhat uneasiness in communication with “ordinary” Turkish. This is a problematic approach in many ways because re-education of employees and employers in a wide-spread sector like tourism would practically suggest the re-education of a whole nation which



indeed had been actually implied in various occasions. All findings are pointing to the fundamental importance of the culture infrastructure in nation branding. For public diplomacy to be effective on nation branding and communication, the nation has to be interested in long and comprehensive values education and cultivation. If the shortcomings of the education system could be dealt with effectively, it certainly will prove competent in putting Turkey's branding into excellent shape. However, there is no quick and easy way to such deep and extensive social transformations which are even exceeding the capabilities of the education system. From the media to the family, from political actors and institutions to NGO's, all shareholders have to contribute to the development of a constructive culture. So achieved advancements are more worth than those of economic and military power and they are more lasting and easily to communicate globally.

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