

AN EXTENDED NATION BRAND MODEL FOR IRAN BASED ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Amin Ardalan¹
Hossein Vazifehdust^{2*}
Hashem Nikoomaram³

¹Department of Business Management, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9426-4207>
Email: amin.ardalan@gmail.com

²Corresponding Author: Department of Business Management, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6503-5808>
Email: vazifehdust@yahoo.com

³Department of Business Management, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7308-4055>
Email: Nikoomaram@srbiau.ac.ir

*Corresponding Author: Hossein Vazifehdust, Department of Business Management, Tehran Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: vazifehdust@yahoo.com

Abstract: Nowadays, the importance of understanding and benefiting from the nation brand is an undeniable issue given the intense competition between countries in various fields. Thus, it is essential to use the attitudes and views of specialists and managers to identify various factors affecting nation brand complexity. The present study aims to answer the research questions about the nation brand using qualitative thematic analysis methods. Therefore, the in-depth interview method has been used with experts about factors affecting nation branding in Iran. The data has been investigated by NVIVO-8 software which shows that the seven organizing themes are included Economy, Government and Governance, Tourism, Geography and Environment, Society, Science and Technology and finally Culture and Civilization. These themes have been identified through 43 basic themes of the experts about nation brand, which have been determined through the investigation. In the final step of this research, a thematic network of factors and their relation with each other have been presented which influence on nation brand of Iran. **Keywords:** Nation branding, Iran, Competitive advantages, Thematic analysis, Qualitative Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to achieve new rare opportunities due to the unprecedented competitive conditions of the present century, and the increasing change in the level of competition in the international community. Thus, it also is needed more extensive efforts than before for maintaining past competitive advantages, as well as reducing resources. These competitions have played a significant role not only between individuals and companies, but also among countries. Therefore, it could make any future nation grow or fall into a decline. It could provide the possibility of achieving and upgrading to a higher international competitive position, exploiting the image-enhancing factors of the world's people towards the country, overcoming the negative mental stereotypes, which has been arisen due to various factors. (Anholt, 2003) believes that the consideration countries as corporate brands instead of brand products are the best way to realize the concept of a nation brand. For example, as a company has a specific language, color, logo, culture, and specialty thus a country could have a flag,

language, culture and citizens. The goods and services may survive in the market by creating brand value and displaying it with one or more distinct advantages. This will be chosen among buyers and consumers preferences in which it might be true in the same conditions for countries. Countries use different branding techniques consciously to gain more market share (Kotler & David, 2002). The lack of branding in a country leads to a difficult situation for economic and political attention in the world (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Hence, it seems necessary to be aware of the factors that can affect the nation branding in a country to enhance the competitive position of a country and success in the international competition. Through nation brand, this is possible for countries who want to benefit from competitive advantages over competitors in the long-term situation and improve their economy in the world. Many researchers believe that a nation is like a brand. Thus, they have tried to introduce and develop branding by studying the potential economic, political and strategic values (Gudjonsson, 2005), (Dinnie, 2008); (Anholt, 2003); (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002); (Yan, 2003). According to (José Rojas, 2013), the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the nation brand is an important point that has made the concept of the nation brand vaguer and more reflective for corporate brands. However, there is an ambiguity because sufficient theories have not been introduced by professors and experts. Meanwhile, this is because of different perspectives on the policies and international laws of countries based on complexity and historical elements. This complexity complicates the concept further because of the widespread global communication for some country with large communication.

Moreover, the nation brand has common relationship with a variety of sciences including tourism, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, urban management, international communication, economics and marketing, thus, this adds to the complexity of the nation brand. Today, researchers are more interested in the nation brand but the most of research has been devoted to describing this concept at the level of basic understanding. Therefore, it seems necessary to model nation brand. In addition, it is needed to implement a strategic plan to conduct a wide-ranging research on a variety of dimensions of nation brand, which has led to the development of its concept. In other words, it is vital to focus on the characteristics of the nation brand that are specific to each country. This creates a good competitive advantage leading to the world class success.

All countries have to build their valuable nation brand (Aaker, 1996). They have to show their brand and improve its distinctness continuously, which leads to creating a positive perception and positive image of that brand. Therefore, it can be said that nation brand needs a global approach and comprehensive accountability, which applies all effective dimensions of their concept to the country and global levels. The aim of this study is to explain the concept of nation brand and branding relying on the competitive identity of Iran and identify the determinants and implications of its nation brand. In Iran, the necessity to pay attention to nation brand is doubled because of the recent sanctions and the decision to eliminate these sanctions, and return the country's economic conditions to a favorable situation, and finally developing the trade, economic, political and tourism relations with other countries. According to a survey, research in the field of nation brand of Iran and identifying the variables affecting it is scarce. This creates a gap in terms of the in-depth studies to understand the concept of nation brand of Iran. For this purpose and to fill the study gap, a comprehensive study must be conducted to identify key factors relevant to the context of nation branding and provide a model to examine the relationship between these factors. According to what was discussed above the question, which has been motivating enough to be investigated by the researchers is that "How is the nation brand model for Iran, which can create and improve competitive advantage?" In addition, the present research answers the following questions:

Question 1: What are the factors affecting brand of Iran as a nation brand?

Question 2: How can the factors be linked together which affect the nation brand of Iran?

Theoretical Foundations and Background of Research

(Chernatony & McDonald, 1992) define brand as a product, service, person or place which is identified by customer or user who understand its unique and its fixed added value in a way that he/she sees the product or service of brand in a close accordance with his/her need. (Al-Sulait & Baker, 1998) states that brand is a multi-dimensional concept which refers to a set of functional, emotional, communicative, and strategic components that have been integrated into each other in a way that creates a unique collection of communication meanings in the public mind. In American Marketing Association perspective, Brand is defined as a name, term, pattern, symbol, sign, and a plan, which distinguishes the identity of the goods and serves a seller or a group of vendors from their competitors (Keller et al, 2008). In other words, customers' confidence and trust in the name of the brand is considered as a guarantee of brand quality and reputation which reduces their time, stress, anxiety and energy (Anholt, 2003).

Despite numerous studies on the impact of a country's image on purchasing products in recent decades (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002); (Al-Sulait & Baker, 1998); (Andreas, 2003) nation branding is known as a new and emerging concept. In spite of the recent tendencies and concerns of researchers in terms of the issue of branding, research in this area is still in the preliminary stage and has a complex structure, which is somewhat confusing and ambiguous. In the (Dinnie, 2007) perspective, brand is a unique and multidimensional integrated set of components, which indicates that a country is consistent with the taste and culture of all target audiences. In other words, the nation brand emphasizes the complexity of the concept, the complexity of multiple dimensions, and the overall difference with the product brand but simultaneously it links the nation brand with the attitude of individuals towards a country. Moreover, the nation brand is called a collection of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders including components such as people, places, culture, language, history, food, fashion, prominent figures, global brands and so on. (Fan, 2010).

According to (Fetscherin, 2010), nation brand belongs to the people of that country. This concept is very complex and has several levels and components, which requires the participation of many stakeholders to introduce it. It has led to the general image of the country and political, economic, social, environmental, historical and cultural dimensions. Therefore, it can be said that it is necessary to participate the people of a country or nation to establish and develop a brand. Nation branding has brought new dimensions to attractions and landmarks which walks toward an intangible value and converts brand value to identity (Anholt, 2003). (Kohn, 2006) believes that branding is not just a tourism-specific activity, but also it is a collaborative activity with the cooperation of various institutions aimed at promoting tourism, investment, and commerce while at the same time, it could be regarded as the sign of public and cultural diplomacy. (Kohn, 2006) also mentions nation brand as a competitive identity because in his opinion, other dimensions are possible definable using these dimensions which can affect the competition between countries. Generally, the concept of nation brand refers to a grand view of the global market advantage in which a country can be distinguished from other competitors. Importance of the concept of a nation brand as a strategic concept (Kotler et al, 1997) as well as the benefits of more competitive advantages compared to rival countries develops this belief that known nation brand contributes to the sustainable development of the country (José Rojas, 2013). In other words, establishing and

introducing a nation brand is a collaborative effort by both the people and the state government to promote the brand, which will provide the most realistic, the most competitive and challenging strategic insights for countries. Moreover, this ensures that this insight is strengthened and supported by establishing constructive communication between the country and the rest of the world (Anholt, 2003). (Braun et al, 2014) believes that the effects of nation branding can be attributed to the following improvements: Firstly, the globalization, which has increased competition among countries. In fact, globalization is defined as the process of eliminating distances, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, and dealing with various partners. This situation possibly makes borderless access to different places, products and ideas. In practice, this means that there are more suppliers, comparable products, and numerous rivals in conducting transactions. Moreover, in the case of countries that means more countries offer similar products.

Secondly, the difference between countries and products provided by them is decreasing day by day. For example, this has led to a uniformity of infrastructure, legislation, and education levels in almost all societies. This can be attributed to the quality, function and price of comparable prices in different countries. This change is very tangible in the European country. In fact, this affirms that the image of countries is more important than their distinctive and realistic features.

Regardless of the explanation given about the importance of nation branding, it could be said that the nation branding is the final step of all marketing activities. For example, many activities are being pursued to increase exports and attract foreign direct investment. Obviously, having a strong and well-known nation brand would mean gaining a highly competitive status. However, activities designed to achieve a specific competitive status are not directly sought to change a country's image. This can be attributed to the problem and costly way of assessing the power and influence of a brand. However, it is not considered difficult to assess the exact thriving tourism industry, export and attraction of foreign direct investment. (Dinnie, 2015) introduces five goals of nation branding including increased export growth, increased tourist attraction, attracting foreign capital to the country, strengthening international political influence, and managing negative images. All these goals play an important role in benefiting from the competitive advantages of a nation brand of a country.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Researchers have benefited from qualitative research to answer their questions. In view of the objective's researchers, it is believed that qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are not achieved by statistical tools or other quantitative tools (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It helps to understand the individual desired meaning about social phenomena and explain mental processes that embody their behavior (Weinreich, 1996). Therefore, the findings may be obtained from the real world in a natural way while examining time of the research. In the present study, the method of thematic analysis is used to understand the concepts, which helps understand the discernible interpretation (Van Ham, 2001). Thematic analysis is applicable for identifying, analyzing and reporting internal themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006); (Braun et al, 2014); (Stange et al, 2006).

Data Collection Technique

In this research, the method of semi-structured in-depth interview has been used for investigating the research questions by providing the conditions that interviewees can easily comment on the nation brand (Creswell, 2012). A guide of semi-structured interview has been used in a way that interviews have been begun by common general questions, then, have been

continued with the wisdom questions which was taken from respondents in another interview. The researcher recorded the interviewee's voice by communicating and gaining the trust of the interviewee and with observing ethical considerations. Meanwhile, if needed, researcher took some notes. On average, the time for each interview was 45 to 60 minutes. Also, the focus of the questions in the interview was on subjects including how to look at the subject of the researcher from the viewpoint of the interviewees, how variables interact with each other, the priorities of the dimensions studied, the expression of other variables outside the category of the variables in question, and finally, the expression of how people in different countries can look at Iran.

Sampling

Respondents have been selected using targeted sampling which is consistent with the criteria for research (Kuzel, 1992). Since there was no suitable database for determining this group of experts, thus researcher used "snowball sampling" method for collecting samples. In other words, researcher asked interviewees to inform cases on the topic of inquiry who are eligible for interview for subsequent interviews until the researcher has reached the saturation of information. Respondents included academic experts and executives from Iran who have enough experience in the field of management, marketing, branding, macro and wisdom of the economy, and the implementation of policies in the international market. Despite the characteristics that are considered for the interviewees, a basic condition was having a history of travel to other countries because people with a foreign travel experience have a more complete and comprehensive point of view on the subject.

Data Analysis

The implemented interviews have been analyzed using the method of analytic analysis by NVIVO-8 software. For this purpose, the six-step process proposed by (Braun et al, 2014) was used. Researchers have also pointed to strengthening analyzes with research literature, which show their sensitivity to the finer features of data (Braun et al, 2014). After importing the texts in the software and applicate work steps in the software, various themes and sentences were extracted as their meaningful sentences in rows. Therefore, around 665 open-codes have been identified without editing or merging. After that, it has been attempted to integrate or merge and edit open codes to the codes, which were able to make changes and optimize. After merging and renaming, to achieve this purpose, the number of open codes was reduced to 320. After initial encoding, these themes were encoded in thematic categories according to the apparent content, which in fact represent an independent theme. Then, first, the main themes were described briefly the purpose of the research in a nutshell. Next, the basic themes were examined along with any organizing themes matter.

Validity and Reliability

The four criteria proposed by (Berkowitz et al, 2007) have been evaluated for validation of the present research tools. To verify validity, Triangulation techniques such as approved sources, other researchers, and multiple methods during data collection and analysis and self-monitoring technique during the process of data collection and analysis, which could increase validity, have been used. To reach transferability, it has been used some methods including Maximum descriptive techniques from the study data set during the data collection step and also special procedures for encoding and analyzing symbols, signs and other data at the data analysis stage, which helps to ensure transmission capability (Boyatzis, 1998). By documenting the data, it was possible to use methods and decisions related to research and other investigators, which has increased validity. In order to verify credibility during data collection and analysis, researchers review the raw data, interpretations, suggestions and

findings. Also, researcher kept from all sources included raw data and all notes, documents and recorded files, for subsequent revisions, and reviewing the quality of the findings and interpretations and judging them (Dzenovska, 2005).

Therefore, according to the criteria mentioned above, it can be claimed that the present study has a high validity. In addition, reliability was measured using two methods of stability index and an intra-subject agreement between two coders. The retest method was used to evaluate the coding stability of the researcher. To calculate the retest reliability, stability index has been used through interviews and then, several interviews were selected and coded as examples. After that, the specified codes were compared in two intervals for each interview. In this research, three interviews were selected which are re-encoded within two weeks after the initial encoding. The retest reliability was 94%, which is higher than the critical value of 60% (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, the reliability of coding was verified and it can be claimed that the reliability of interview analysis is appropriate.

In addition, a Ph.D. candidate in business management was asked to participate as a research fellow in the research to calculate the reliability of the interviews, using the method of the intra-subject agreement, two coders (repeatability index). After providing instructions and encoding guide, he was given the necessary training for coding. Then the researcher encoded three interviews with his colleague and next the percentage of intra-subject agreement was calculated which is used as an indicator of analytical reliability. Percentage of reliability was 93% according to the intra-subject agreement, which is up from 80% (Endziņa & Luņeva, 2004). Therefore, the coding reliability was verified so it can be claimed that the reliability of interview analysis is also appropriate in terms of repeatability index.

3.RESULTS

Interviews were investigated using Thematic Analysis Method to answer the research questions and the results are expressed in two parts:

Factors Affecting the Nation Brand of Iran

First, the themes extracted from the interviews were analyzed to answer the first question that tried to identify the factors affecting the nation brand of Iran. Seven main themes have been identified as factors affecting the nation brand of Iran including economy, government and governance, tourism, geography and environment, society, science and technology and finally culture and civilization. All themes and their categories are presented in (Table 1). The names, which are used for each theme, have had a high degree of compliance with the subject of literature.

Table 1: The Extracted Organizing themes and Basic themes Affecting Nation Brand of Iran

Organizing Theme	Basic themes	Frequency
Culture and Civilization	National culture	65
	Cultural Heritage	46
	Religion	39
	National identity	38
	Cultural exchange	28
	History and Civilization	24
	Culture making	18
Science and Technology	Subcultures	16
	Technology Development	54
	Human capital development	39

	Modernize training	28
	Commercialization of science	24
Government and Governance	Security and crisis management	57
	Governance	49
	Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy	37
	Justice and fight against corruption	28
	Construction and infrastructure tasks	24
	Healthcare	21
	Rules and Regulations	19
Geography and Environment	Climate	43
	Geographical location	39
	Sea and water resources	24
	Environmental disasters and crises	14
	Vegetation and Animals	15
Society	Social crises	65
	Demographic characteristics	55
	Characteristics of individual and social behavior	32
	Life style	27
	Social demands	17
	Social capital	13
Tourism	Tourism development	143
	Attractions and natural scenery	61
	Cities, villages and places	45
	Entertainments	18
Economy	Marketing and brand	129
	Opportunities and business infrastructure	78
	Risks and economic complexities	67
	Export and Import	61
	Investment	57
	Growth and development of economic competitiveness	52
	Macroeconomic policies	49
	Insurance and protectionist policies	35
	International economic cooperation	19

Economy

Essentially, the economic environment includes various economic stages, including growth and prosperity, recession and economic crisis (José Rojas, 2013). This would create an investment platform in the country leading to wealth and the quality of life improvement. This theme has been described by basic themes extracted from initial codes including marketing and brand, opportunities and business infrastructure, risks and economic complexities, export and import, investment, growth and development, economic competitiveness, macroeconomic policies, insurance and protectionist policies, and international economic cooperation.

Society

Society consists of a group of people who interact with each other to achieve goals and behaviors, and form a community (José Rojas, 2013). This theme has been described by basic themes extracted from open codes including social crises, demographic characteristics, and

characteristics of individual and social behavior, lifestyle, social demands and finally social capital.

Government and Governance

As (Dinnie, 2015) states, nation branding is a purely political activity that is why governments are considered as representing the people of a nation. Therefore, the government plays a special role in the nation branding strategy why so private sector organizations do not have the absolute legitimacy to guide and advance the nation brand strategy. (De Vicente, 2004) believes that nations are judged in accordance with their foreign and domestic policy behaviors of their government. Therefore, internal and external policies should enhance the coherence and integrity of the nation brand. This theme has been described by basic themes extracted from open codes including security and crisis management, governance, foreign policy and public diplomacy, justice and fight against corruption, construction and infrastructure tasks, healthcare, and finally rules and regulations (Papadopoulos, 2004).

Culture and Civilization

(Lawson, 2006) believes that culture is a symbolic system, which leads to the creation, experience and evaluation of a social process. In addition, often, this is defined as a set of customs and practices that are valuable and meaningful. From the perspective of (José Rojas, 2013), culture is defined as a collection that involves intangible differentiation among countries including all areas of behavior, because it relates to the way people live, and their interaction with others in a community. In addition, (Dinnie, 2015) believes that culture is the true nature of a nation brand for each country. This theme has been described by basic themes extracted from open codes including national culture, cultural heritage, religion, national identity, cultural exchange, history and civilization, culture making, and finally Subcultures (Palys & Atchison, 2012).

Science and Technology

The topic of technology and technology development is one of the issues that are irrevocably influential in the nation branding of each country. One of the ways to create wealth is to take advantage of science and technology because both the technology innovation and the added value of high-tech products have led to an increase in the income of a country, both at the domestic and international levels. For this reason, Iran is also seeking to increase its power as a developing country. (José Rojas, 2013) also believes that inventions and innovations that are actually creating new products, tools and processes lead to the development of a country. This theme is defined by basic themes that are extracted from open codes including technology development, human resource development, and modernization of education and commercialization of science.

Geography and Environment

According to (Dinnie, 2015) nature, landscapes and perspectives exist on their own and providing their synthetic nature is not possible. In fact, many countries do not have these resources. They just have one or more of these resources. Iran is a country with sea and water resources, mountains, forests, plains, deserts, rivers, lakes, and four seasons. Its forests and vegetation are very different. Therefore, it can be said that Iran, despite being an almost inland region due to its geographical range, has diverse natural resources. In other words, Iran is considered differently in which is a very important factor in introducing Iran as a nation brand. This theme is defined by basic themes, which are extracted from open codes including

seas and water resources, disasters and environmental crises, geographical location, climate and vegetation and animal life.

Tourism

One of the most important tourist destinations for any country except visit is income generation and job creation. When a tourist travels to a country, it must pay for food, accommodation, recreation, visits, souvenirs, and transportation, which will help to create jobs and prosperity for a country that strengthens the nation brand. (Fetscherin, 2010) believes that the arrival of a tourist to a country reflects the strength of a nation brand. Therefore, it could be said that tourism is one of the most important ways of strengthening the nation brand. This theme is defined by basic themes that are extracted from open codes including tourism development, attractions and natural landscapes, entertainment, cities and villages.

Relationship of Factors Affecting the Nation Brand of Iran

The interviewees responded to the second question of the study, which concerns the relationship between factors affecting the nation brand of Iran, as shown in (Table 2). These relationships are expressed in terms of the effect of each theme on another topic as well as on the effect on the nation brand. In general, as shown by the answer to the first question, seven themes affecting the nation brand have been identified, but the nation brand also has an independent effect on some of the themes. This indicates the complexity of the relations between the themes studied in Iran nation brand. In addition, each theme has different effects on other themes.

Table 2. Relationships between independent themes

(from) Axial code	Type of relation		(to) Axial code
	bilaterally and symmetrical	unilateral	
Government and Governance	*		Economy
Government and Governance	*		Society
Government and Governance	*		Science and Technology
Government and Governance	*		Culture and Civilization
Government and Governance		*	Tourism
Government and Governance		*	Geography and Environment
Government and Governance		*	Nation Brand
Economy	*		Science and Technology
Economy	*		Culture and Civilization
Economy	*		Geography and Environment
Economy		*	Nation Brand
Economy		*	Society
Society	*		Geography and Environment
Society	*		Culture and Civilization
Society	*		Tourism
Society		*	Nation Brand
Science and Technology	*		Culture and Civilization
Science and Technology		*	Society
Science and Technology		*	Tourism
Science and Technology		*	Nation Brand
Culture and Civilization	*		Tourism
Culture and Civilization		*	Nation Brand
Tourism	*		Economy
Tourism		*	Nation Brand
Geography and Environment	*		Culture and Civilization
Geography and Environment	*		Tourism
Geography and Environment		*	Nation Brand
Geography and Environment	*		Science and Technology

4. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to determine the factors that could influence Iran's nation branding and could lead to a competitive advantage. By analyzing the data, seven organizing themes for conducting future research are proposed to describe the current Iranian characteristics that can be converted into a competitive identity for the nation brand of Iran. Therefore, we can see a thematic network of Iran nation brand in (Figure 1). The results show that since Iran has always been recognized as a tourist destination for various purposes such as recreation, treatment and religion, it is obvious that factors that can contribute to the prosperity of tourism in Iran are of great importance. Many researchers such as (Berkowitz et al, 2007) have studied how the 2008 Olympics have changed the image of China. Other countries such as Latvia, New Zealand (Morgan et al, 2002), The United State, Armenia (Pant, 2005), Asian countries (Watkins et al, 2006) and England (Wetzel, 2006) have used tourism as a powerful tool to create their own nation brands. Similarly, tourism has also benefited from the benefits of nation branding. The results of this study are consistent with the results of previous studies. All the efforts made by countries to promote nation branding must be supported in some way by the state, otherwise, all efforts, in addition to failure, will cause destruction, defamation and many negative effects on the brand of that country. Because the management of political affairs with the aim of establishing justice, peace, health, policies for political stability, resolution of internal and international disputes, transparency for people and parties and establishing national security for citizens. Health management with a view for providing health and physical treatment, psychological and social conditions of a country and the common diseases among residents of a state is under the control of the state. Finally, the security aspect that affects the public order and the comfort of the people, which leads to a sense of intimacy and kindness among citizens, is another duty of the state. That is why each country's security is among the inherent duties of any government, which is in line with the research results (José Rojas, 2013).

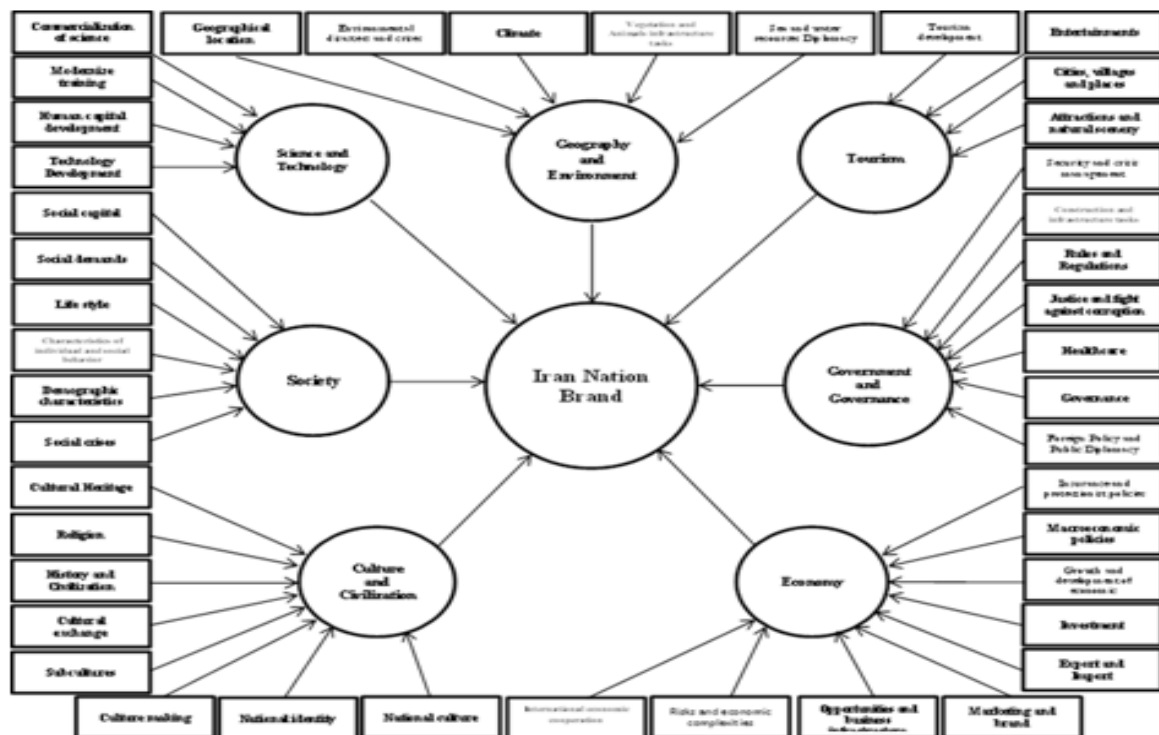


Figure 1. Thematic network of Iran nation brand

In a study in Costa Rica and Moldavia by (Olins, 2002), it is argued that the export of indigenous products is contributing to the creation and strengthening of nation brands. The results of this study are consistent with the results of the present study. (Dinnie, 2015) believes that the success of a country in terms of export depends on the ability of the nation brand and for this reason, (Fetscherin, 2010) states that the nation brand will make countries known for exporting their distinct products and services to international markets. Therefore, the present research also expresses the same notion, which shows the strength of the results. Branding of a country with the goal of direct foreign investment has become widespread because of the increasing globalization effect, and this spreads to the interests of a country (Özkan, 2015). Therefore, the results of this study are in line with previous research and indicate the necessity of increasing foreign investment. As Kotler et al. (1993) stated various communities do not have the ability to respond and react in face of high-speed changes in the market. He also believes that the success of site marketing occurs when citizens, tourists, companies and staffs are introduced as stakeholders and attract their community satisfaction, as well as the expectations of new tourists, businesspersons and investors. On the other hand, (Dinnie, 2015) believes that people can adapt their social and cultural identity through available resources for self-knowledge of society and themselves. Therefore, for countries that are seeking effective nation branding, these limited supplies, based on the geographical and social environment of their competitive provide a range of services and products. Therefore, the results of this research are in line with other studies. In order to develop a brand, countries must first consider their citizens' attitudes towards the brand (José Rojas, 2013). As such, they often attribute characteristics such as demographics, personality traits, language and lifestyle to them. Therefore, it can be said that the results of this research also show these components in relation to the community, which is similar to the results of the studies of (José Rojas, 2013). In particular, culture is one of the most important indicators in the nation brand. Culture is the final point of reference and the solution of difficult and conflicting problems that affects all aspects of life (Florek, 2005). For this reason, (Đorđević, 2008) states that culture represents the country's lasting distinction and unique to the same country. By linking the past of the country, it creates a great deal of bondage and trust. In addition, since culture is defined as a non-business activity, it can show the spiritual and intellectual quality of people and institutions in a country. The results of this study are in line with previous studies.

From another perspective, (Florek & Conejo, 2007), by referring to the nation as a political entity and a cultural institution, discussed the relationship between cultural identity and spatial branding. By examining the factors affecting national identity, they have concluded that the most important factors are cultural elements or inherited traditions in countries. Therefore, according to the statement derived from this research and its alignment with the results of previous studies, it could be said that the results of this research are highly reliant. (Dinnie, 2015), by relying on cultural components, emphasized that a nation brand that does not have cultural components and dimensions is merely an inventive or semi-artistic product with a purely commercial purpose that is not supported by shareholders. They also believe that cultural symbols as factors shaping perceptions about a country as well as the main component of a nation brand are one of the cultural aspects that have a direct relationship with the shaping and launching of branding campaigns. Therefore, it must be said that the image of a country is shaped largely by culture, not merely based on the perception of consumers of the products and services of a country. For this reason, it can be stated that the results of the present study are consistent with the results reported by (Dinnie, 2015).

The present study showed that geography and nature have a positive impact on the nation brand, which indicates the importance and high status of geography and nature in the process of branding. This means that natural habitats, climates, geological features, neighbors,

disasters, plants and animals, rivers, lakes and seas and wetlands are all effective in defining a country as a nation brand. Nation brand molecule, posed by (José Rojas, 2013), pointed out geography and nature as a very complex and vital factor that increases complexity of nation brand. Therefore, decision-makers in the field of environment, agriculture, natural resources and NGOs all have irrefutable responsibilities in this regard and should pay special attention to their performance with the goal of nation branding. The reason for this view of Mendez can be found in the various components of geography and nature dimension.

5. SUMMARY

In his study, natural disasters including flood, heat wave, storm, earthquake, volcano eruption, drought and tsunami, climate including sunny, hot, warm, cold, wet, dry and tropical, neighborhoods including neighbor, far, north, south, isolated and in the center of the world; vegetation and animal cover includes bushes or shrubs, plants, flowers, forests, trees, and all kinds of marine and land animals; and natural resources include rivers, lakes and seas, mountains, deserts, valleys and islands. In addition, (Kotler & David, 2002), argue that the geography and characteristics of a location give an updated image of that location. (Kaplan, 2010) also considers geography important along with other variables, and (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010) identifies the realm, natural resources, and natural blessings along with important political and cultural variables. Therefore, this suggests that the results obtained in this research can be relied upon. The aspect of science and technology point to the development of technology, the commercialization of science, human capital development, and the modernization of education. Hence, technological advances and the improvement of the quality of communications technology should be considered by the government of each country as a critical factor in the development of science and technology. This causes the people of the world to represent a country from other countries differently. Another point to consider is the development of a country in terms of technology level and upgrading the existing technologies and outdated old technology. It means whether a country is known in the eyes of the people of the world as a modern, advanced and creative country or not. Therefore, the attention of government policymakers and business owners to updating their technologies and to use advanced equipment and to simplify business processes, such as their Internet-based marketing, education and human resource is a very important topic. In the molecular brand, (José Rojas, 2013) examines the science and technology aspect and its impact on nation branding. The results obtained in this study are in line with previous studies.

6. SUGGESTION

Drawing up of the nation branding program is possible due to the results of this research in Iran because the essential aspects needed for planning in the nation branding are presented in this study. Therefore, it is recommended that the nation branding program of Iran be based on the competitive identity. Developing strategies related to nation branding based on the dimensions presented in this study can have a positive impact on the development of countries macroeconomic, political, and social goals. According to the results, it is recommended that the custodians of each dimension formulate coherently a strategic plan for the development of the concepts, the position and significance of these dimensions that have a positive impact on the nation brand and with the operational plan to implement the goals of nation branding.

Strengthening the concept of a nation brand is an inherent duty of all stakeholders in a country. Therefore, it is suggested that these concepts be taught at the levels of academic courses especially in the field of humanities and sciences. This concept should not be considered only as a field of study and research, but also, as a factor in creating, improving

and developing the mental image of the people of the world towards Iran. Considering that the present research has used qualitative method, it is recommended that future researchers use other research methods such as dynamic system analysis and mathematical models. Considering the fact that in the present study, in order to collect information due to the limited time and lack of access to foreign experts, domestic managers and experts have been interviewed, it is suggested that in the future research, the issue of the nation brand of Iran be considered from the perspective of foreign experts. In this study, the role of the technology and science was studied, and given that today, virtual space has become irrefutable, it is suggested that future researchers analyze the consequences of the role of cyberspace on nation branding. In this study, the role of the government was studied on nation brand, so it is suggested that other researchers investigate the role of e-government in the field of security. In this study, the role of government in nation brand was studied. It is suggested that the other researchers examine the role of e-government in facilitating the process of doing things.

REFERENCES

1. Anholt S. (2003), *Brand New Justice: The Upside of Global Branding*. London, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 13(4): 101-112.
2. Kotler P. & David G. (2002), "Country as a Brand, Product, and Beyond: A Place Marketing and Brand Management Perspective", *Journal of Brand Management*, 9 (4/5): 249-261.
3. Gudjonsson H. (2005), "Nation Branding," *Place Branding*, 1 (3): 283-98.
4. Dinnie K. (2008), *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*. London, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 11(5): 114-125.
5. Papadopoulos N. & Heslop L. (2002) 'Country Equity and Country Branding: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4/5): 294-314.
6. Yan, J. (2003). Branding and the international community. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 10(6), 447-456.
7. Aaker D. (1996), *Building Strong Brands*, The Free Press, New York, NY., 3(4): 15-29.
8. Chernatony L. & McDonald M. (1992), *Creating Powerful Brands*, Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford, 17(6): 88-96.
9. Al-Sulait K. & Baker M. (1998) 'Country of Origin Effects: A Literature Review', *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 16(3): 150-99.
10. Keller K. & Apéria T. & Georgson M. (2008). *Strategic brand management: A European perspective*. Pearson Education, 11(3): 118-132.
11. Andreas M. (2003), Validity and reliability tests in case study research: a literature review with "hands-on applications for each research phase, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Griffith University, Nathan, Australia, 6(2): 75-86.
12. Dinnie K. (2007). Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions, 13(2): 189-200.
13. Fan Y. (2010), "Branding the nation: towards a better understanding", *Place Branding & Public Diplomacy*, 6(2): 97-103.
14. Fetscherin M. (2010), "The determinants and measurement of a country brand: the country brand strength index", *International Marketing Review*, 27(4): 466-479.
15. Kohn A. (2006). Beyond discipline: From compliance to community. *ASCD*, 12(2): 70-81.
16. Kotler P. & Jatusripitak S. & Maesincee S. (1997). *The marketing of nations: A strategic approach to building national wealth*. Simon & Schuster, 16(1): 225-139.

17. Attride-Stirling J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 1(3), 385-405.
18. José Rojas M. (2013), "The nation brand molecule", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 22(7): 462-472.
19. Braun V. & Clarke V. & Terry G. (2014). Thematic analysis. *Qual Res Clin Health Psychol*, 24(5): 95-114.
20. Dinnie K. (2015). *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice*. Routledge, 9(3): 208-215.
21. Strauss A. & Corbin J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications, Inc.
22. Weinreich N. (1996). A more perfect union: Integrating quantitative and qualitative methods in social marketing research. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 3(1), 53-58.
23. Van Ham, P. (2001). The rise of the brand state: The postmodern politics of image and reputation. *Foreign affairs*, 2-6.
24. Fereday J. & Muir-Cochrane E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 5(1):80-92.
25. Stange K. & Crabtree B. & Miller W. (2006). Publishing multimethod research. *The Annals of Family Medicine*, 4(4): 292-294.
26. Creswell J. (2012). *Educational research. Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 6(2): 32-40.
27. Kuzel A. (1992). Sampling in qualitative inquiry, 17(9): 118-125.
28. Berkowitz P. & Gjermano G. & Gomez L. & Schafer G. (2007). Brand China: using the 2008 Olympic Games to enhance China's image. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3(2), 164-178.
29. Boyatzis R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 32(1): 411-423.
30. Dzenovska D. (2005). Remaking the nation of Latvia: Anthropological perspectives on nation branding. *Place branding and public diplomacy*, 1(2): 173-186.
31. Kvale S. (1996), *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative research Interviewing*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, 8(4): 56-60.
32. Endziņa I. & Luņeva L. (2004). Development of a national branding strategy: The case of Latvia. *Place Branding*, 1(1): 94-105.
33. De Vicente J. (2004). *State branding in the 21st century*. Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis. The Fletcher School, Medford, United States, 3(4): 53-66.
34. Lawson S. (2006). Culture and context in world politics. *Springer*, 22(3): 36-49.
35. Đorđević B. (2008). Corporate strategic branding: how country and corporate brands come together. *Economic Annals*, 53(177): 59-88.
36. Florek M. (2005). The country brand as a new challenge for Poland. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 1(2): 205-214.
37. Florek M. & Conejo F. (2007). Export flagships in branding small developing countries: The cases of Costa Rica and Moldova. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3(1): 53-72.
38. Kaplan R. (2010). The geography of Chinese power: how far can Beijing reach on land and at sea? *Foreign Affairs*, 6(2): 22-41.
39. Stokburger-Sauer, N. (2010). Brand community: Drivers and outcomes. *Psychology & Marketing*, 27(4), 347-368.
40. Morgan N. & Pritchard A. & Pride R. (2002). *Destination branding: creating the unique destination proposition*. Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, 19(7): 177-189.

41. Pant D. (2005). A place brand strategy for the Republic of Armenia: 'Quality of context' and 'sustainability' as competitive advantage. *Place branding*, 1(3): 273-282.
42. Watkins S. & Hassanien A. & Crispin D. (2006). Exploring the image of the Black Country as a tourist destination. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 2(4), 321.
43. Wetzel F. (2006), "Brand England", *Place Branding*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 144-154.
44. Olins W. (2002). Branding the nation—The historical context. *The journal of brand management*, 9(4): 241-248.
45. Özkan A. (2015). The Role of Strategic Communication Management in Nation Brand Building. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 5(4): 174.
46. Papadopoulos, N. (2004). Place branding: Evolution, meaning and implications. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 1(1), 36-49.
47. Palys, T., & Atchison, C. (2012). Qualitative research in the digital era: Obstacles and opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(4), 352-367.