

SNF-Report No. 45/02

**Company versus Country Branding:
"Same, Same but Different"**

by

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SNF-project No. 6345: "Country-Origin Strategies in International Marketing of Bioproducts"

SNF-project No. 6490: "Building Efficient Destination Images - A Study of International Image
Programs for Norway".

The projects are financed by The Research Council of Norway

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (SNF)

BERGEN, OCTOBER 2002

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ISBN 82-491-0235-5

ISSN 0803-4036

Preface

This report is the first in a series analyzing data from a multinational newspaper content analysis. The data provide input for the two projects "Country Image Strategies in International Marketing of Bioproducts" and "Building Efficient Destination Images - A Study of International Image Programs for Norway", which are both funded by the Research Council of Norway. The projects are managed by the Foundation for Research in Economics and Business Administration in collaboration with researchers at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration.

The content analysis covers newspaper articles on four source countries - Canada, Chile, Denmark, and Norway - written over a two-year period. The newspapers analyzed were sampled from the leading national newspaper and business newspaper in three target markets - France, Sweden, and Japan. Altogether more than 1500 articles were analyzed. In this report we concentrate on how one source country - Norway - is portrayed in the newspapers in the three target markets. 412 articles covering the two-year sampling period from August/September 1998 to August/September 2000 were analyzed.

A multinational team, supervised by project manager Associate Professor Ingeborg Astrid Kleppe, conducted this extensive multinational data collection project. Professor Kjell Grønhaug, and Associate Professor Magne Supphellen had advisory roles in the project during the planning and design of the data collection procedures.

The team of research assistants were: doctoral students Inger Beate Pettersen and Moheb Deif (visiting from University of Bologna), Master of Marketing student Irene Nygårdsvik, Master of International Business students Robert

Grygier and Marta Evanics Grygier, and International Business Consultant Akemi Nakamoto. Pettersen and Deif had an organizing role in the data collection and data documentation.

Associate Professor Lena Larsson Mossberg at School of Economics and Commercial Law at Göteborg University initiated an Image-Network for researchers linked to a research program on the Tourism industry at the Research Council of Norway. The authors of this report started their collaboration through this network.

The work on this report started during Kleppe's sabbatical leave at School of Marketing, University of New South Wales in Sydney. We thank the school for their welcome and their support.

Institute for Research in Economics and Business Administration (SNF)

Bergen, October 2002

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate whether countries can be branded like companies. Company brands are managed according to clear ownership and top-down control of brand management. In contrast, countries are governed according to the public interest, which requires transparency and participation. A major achievement of rethinking country branding is accomplished through a multinational newspaper content analysis, which enabled us to classify country associations according to variation in relational characteristics between source and target countries. The identified relationship forms - sibling, remote relative, and stranger - have important implications for managerial challenges in country branding with regard to organizational strategies for brand ownership, strategies for customization or standardization of core values across target markets, and communication strategies for country branding.

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1 INTRODUCTION

It seems to be widely believed, both among marketing practitioners and marketing researchers, that countries can be branded like companies (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001; Papadopolous & Heslop 1993). Government agencies in several countries, national tourist boards in particular, have embraced principles of brand management developed for product branding (Henderson 2000; Skjæveland & Tøsdal 1999) to new domains such as tourist destinations (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia 2002), cities (Hankinson 2001), states (Curtis 2001), and countries (Henderson 2000).¹ Recent statistics from the World Tourism Organization (1999) show that both affluent (e.g. Spain) and less affluent countries (e.g. Puerto Rico) are big spenders on national branding programs.²

In this paper we discuss to what degree concepts in the branding literature can be extended to the branding of countries, a topic which so far has been more or less absent in the literature (Dann 2000; Langer 2002). In doing so we extend the literature on brand management, international marketing, and country image research in three significant ways. First, our study involves a comprehensive discussion of conceptual and managerial challenges in applying ideas of branding developed in business settings to countries. Company ownership, top-

¹ Norway as a Brand - www.ntr.no ; New Asia-Singapore - www.newasia-singapore.com; The New Zealand Way - www.nzway.co.nz; Taiwans Innovalue - www.innovalue.cetra.org.tw; Space for Minds – www.swetourism.se; Cool Britannia ; Bravo Spain – www.tourspain-no.org; Amazing Thailand – www.thailand-gate; The Island of memories (Ireland) – www.islandinfo.com

² Spain is number one, with a budget for the National Tourism Administration of USD 147 millions, Mexico second with USD 103 millions, with Thailand, Brazil, Australia, Singapore, Puerto Rico, China, Korea, and France as the other top-ten spenders.

down control, and consistency of brand promotion are seen as three mandatory conditions for success in product brand management (Keller 1993; Kotler 2001). Countries or nations as brands, on the other hand, are not owned by anyone in particular as they belong to the public domain (Anholt 1998). A discussion and comparison of private versus public domain brands is therefore necessary before this field of research develops further in extending principles of product branding to country branding.

Secondly, countries are important units of analysis in the independent media, news, and popular culture (Gartner 1993). This makes the media important image agents that operate independently of commercial agents, who aim to induce a commercial image of a source country in a target market. To explore this challenge we have conducted an in-depth content analysis of how a small country is portrayed in the popular media (newspapers) over a period of two years in three different country markets. This is a new approach in the country image literature, which enabled us to gain new insight into the phenomenon of country associations. Of particular relevance is our classification of country associations according to relational characteristics between the source and target country.

Thirdly, our analysis is inspired by recent conceptual development in the brand management literature, where insights from concepts such as brand relationship qualities (Fournier 1998) and global brand management (Alden et al. 1999; Hewett & Bearden 2001) are integrated in our analysis of country image. Existing relations between a source and target country influence the existing degree of awareness and knowledge of a source country brand in a target market.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the first section we discuss conceptual and managerial issues related to country branding. Next, in the media analysis, a conceptual framework for understanding country-to-country relations and country image qualities is developed. Managerial implications for country branding are then discussed and research propositions for further research are suggested.

2 COMPANY VERSUS COUNTRY BRANDS

According to Anholt (1998, p. 39), there are two kinds of brands: private domain brands and public domain brands. Companies, which in most cases are managed by boards, own private domain brands (e.g. IBM, Volvo, Shell, or NIKE). Public domain brands do not belong to a single sovereign body with final authority (Beckett 2000) since they are part of the popular or traditional culture, which at least in the strict commercial sense, are nobody's property. Public domain brands may include countries, cities, and regions, races, demographic groups, and even individual people.

Since there obviously are significant differences between private and public domain brands, we have to clarify to what degree they can be analyzed and managed under the same theoretical and managerial umbrella. First we will establish whether company and country brands are conceptually equivalent. We also find it equally important to highlight specific characteristics of a country or nation as a branding unit that makes it different from branding units in business contexts. Next we examine managerial issues in country branding which focus on common assumptions in branding theory, such as clear ownership of the brand, management control over brand core values, and management control over the communication of the brand image (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Kotler 1993). It can be very problematic to apply these assumptions to public domain brands. In concluding this discussion, we therefore identify three managerial challenges that make country branding far more challenging than company branding.

2.1 Conceptual issues

Conceptual definitions of brands

A brand is defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler et al. 2001, p.469) and "a brand image is the perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller 1993, p. 4). In the same way as companies, stores and individuals have specific images among their respective audiences, countries can also have a "brand" or "images" (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001) among a target audience. A country's image is defined as "the total of all descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs about a particular country" (Martin & Eroglou 1993, p. 93), and can be seen as an umbrella construct which at the outset is not linked to any specific context. However, a country's image can be linked to specific products. Product-country images capture matches between country image associations and specific product categories (Roth & Romeo 1992). German cars, Danish furniture, French wine, and Cuban cigars are favorable product-class country image matches. A consistent and favorable product-country match would occur when the perceived strengths of the country are important product benefits or features. Country-of-origin, made in, brand image, designed in, etc. can be perceived as concepts referring to sub-units of product-country images, as they represent different stages or tasks in the value chain (Kleppe & Mossberg 2001). A country image can be seen as a generic *pool* of associations, which can be used in the marketing of specific products and services from a country (ibid).

The definition of destination image in the tourism literature is quite similar to the definition of country image. Crompton suggests a destination image as "... the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (1979, p. 18), and the "formation of an overall destination image can be derived from attitudes towards the destination's perceived tourism attributes" (Um & Crompton 1990, pp. 432-433). MacKay & Fesenmaier (1997, p. 538) further elaborate this, seeing a destination's image as a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression. In this regard, destination image can also be seen as an umbrella construct for different products and services. The image object is the destination and, according to the definitions, it possesses both generic and product specific dimensions.

Definitions of brand, country image, and destination image all apply the basic logic of the "tripartite model of attitudes" (Lutz 1981; Peterson & Jolibert 1999; Scott 1965; Thakor et al. 1997). In their meta-analysis of country-of-origin research, Verlegh & Steenkamp conclude that "a country image is not merely a cognitive cue for product quality, but that it also relates to emotions, identity, pride and autobiographical memories that transform country of origin into an 'expressive' or 'image' attribute" (1999, p.539). This is also suggested in Hong & Wyer's (1989) study, where they found that the country-of-origin cue primarily raised the (affective) involvement in product evaluations and that this subsequently led to more cognitive elaboration about the product.

From the above discussion, it follows that definitions of product brand image and country image are compatible and that both concepts are anchored in the same theory base of consumer psychology. Thakor et al. (1997) are very explicit in this regard, as they state that: "... although it is plausible that the dimensions of country image as conceived in the international marketing literature are

significantly different from the concept of product quality dimensions studied by researchers in other areas, discriminant validity between the two concepts has never been established" (ibid., p. 81).

The branding unit

In their recent book on national branding, Jaffe & Nebenzahl (2001, p. 124) ask if a country can be branded like a company. Can marketing concepts developed for companies and products be extended to more complex social units, such as countries (Langer 2002)? This question is not new. In political science, it has been studied in connection with so-called "new public management reforms", where principles of business management have been applied to the management of government agencies (Allison 1982; Beckett 2000). Beckett (ibid.) critically examines this issue under the title *The "Government should run like business" Mantra* and says that public and private management are alike in all unimportant respects. First, she claims that democratic principles of public interest make government different from business. For example shareholders in corporations are seen as investors with limited knowledge and influence of the management of the corporation, while democratic ideals of government are based on openness and transparency of decision processes (ibid., p. 196). Secondly, the economic logic of owners and profits also represents a fundamental difference between shareholders and citizens. Thirdly, monolithic control of a proprietor of a business, or the board of a corporation does not translate well to the social and community aspects essential to government (ibid.). The role of citizens in a democratic society is a fundamental and constant concern for governments.

The country image literature is also unclear in its labeling of the branding unit, as country, nation, or nation state are used interchangeably (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001; Papadopoulos & Heslop 1993). If we take a closer look at how state,

nation, and country are defined in social and political sciences, there are characteristics that should be of concern for country branding. "State" can be defined as "a geographically delimited segment of human society united by common obedience to a single sovereign" (Watkins 1976). A nation can be defined according to common ancestry, historical memories, ethnic culture and modern civic features (Bogdanor 1993). The concept of nation state, also used in international marketing (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001), is a fusion of two dissimilar structures and principles, the one political and territorial, the other historical and cultural (Bogdanor 1993). Concepts like "country" and "people" are seen as more adequate to describe modern democracies since they do not have the connotations of a state with a single recognized ruler or governing body with final authority (Beckett 2000; Watkins 1976).

Modern democracies are complex multilevel systems of political institutions that have to legitimize their actions according to pluralistic interests and needs (Watkins 1976). First, the principle of democratic pluralism contradicts central principles in branding theory, which presupposes top-down control and management of a set of core values (Aaker 1991). Secondly, the multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity that characterize modern countries (Bogdanor 1993; Fried 1976; Watkins 1976) could be a challenge, for example, in deciding the core values of a country branding program.

The above discussion shows that countries are complex, multidimensional and dynamic entities, which are governed according to the public interest. Sole ownership, top-down control, and lack of transparency do not apply well to government programs or actions. Needless to say, this represents a managerial challenge for country branding programs, and this will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Managerial issues in country branding

Hart & Murphy (1998) claim that the best practices in brand management were developed in the fifties, when most companies were national, typically had a hierarchical structure with a well-defined marketing department, and with more shareholder patience than in today's intensely competitive global economy. Even if the world has changed, the "ideal script" for brand management still seems to presuppose substantial control by the marketer through exclusive company brand *ownership*, exclusive *control of core values*, and control of all *communication* of the brand.

Brand ownership

Evidence suggests that management of public domain brands fares better if the industry and citizens involved agree on the brand agenda (Ashworth & Voogd 1994; Hankinson 2001; Henderson 2000). Lack of cooperation across industries is assumed to be an important reason why the national branding campaign of New Zealand has not succeeded (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001, p. 131). A branding campaign entitled "Cool Britannia", supported by British industry, also failed. One reason for this failure was that the cool image seemed to fit well with music, fashion, and art industries but it did not represent manufacturing or technology (ibid.). The same authors find that lack of industry involvement and lack of willingness to pay for national branding campaigns is prevalent among British business firms.

Citizen involvement can also be crucial for country branding. In Singapore, for instance, the opinions of people in Chinatown and Singaporeans as a whole were neglected when officials presented a program for a new, revitalized Chinatown

(Henderson 2000). The program has generated considerable controversy from the Singapore Heritage Society due to lack of authenticity. Similarly, in the redevelopment of Docklands in London there was a conflict between those who wanted the area to be an extension of the City and those who argued that it should be redeveloped to meet local needs (Brownill 1994). Close collaboration with local leaders and close contact with residents can help reduce alienation, according to D'Hautesserre (2001).

Image authenticity is recognized as being crucial for destination marketing (Dann 2000) and place marketing (Hall 1997; Kotler et al. 1993). Henderson (2000), for example, claims that "Societies cannot be engineered or places manufactured for tourist consumption without a loss of authenticity..."(ibid., p. 42). Marketers tend to cherry-pick from reality to the point where it becomes unreal (Dann 2000). In the New Asia-Singapore brand, Singaporeans were supposed to live the brand values developed by a marketing firm, and to become ambassadors for the brand (Henderson 2000). Ideally, citizens should be involved in a democratic way to ensure that the authorities represent them in an appropriate fashion (Dann 1999).

In practice, lack of industry and citizen involvement often result in brand slogans and brand core values that aim to comprehend all interests and do not offend any stakeholders. As a result, country brands often promote core values that do not say anything unique about the country. Dann (2000, p. 69) provides several examples. Bangladesh is said to be "A country of friendly millions", Hungary is a country with "The friendliest people in Europe", Ireland has "The friendliest people you'll meet anywhere", and "Lao people are frank, open and friendly". Such slogans can hardly differentiate a country brand in the international market place.

Locus of control of the brand core values

Complex and contradicting images are justified when talking about countries (Aftonbladet, March 28, 2002). Even the superpower USA has problems controlling its image abroad in spite of global distribution of pro-American messages pouring out of New York, Los Angeles and Atlanta. This may explain why Charlotte Beers, a former top executive in advertising, was hired to support the Secretary of State to improve the USA's tattered image abroad (ibid.). In the same article Naomi Klein says that it would be impossible to launch the USA as a brand since democracy and brand logic are not compatible. It does not sound right when a prominent US branding expert complains that the USA has an image problem, since people do not hold one consistent idea about what the country stands for, but have multiple and conflicting images of the country.

In his empirical study of the brand management of cities, Hankinson (2001) suggests a central organizational structure to maintain a consistent and clearly identified brand position and set of objectives for strategic brand management. However, this would be very controversial to implement for a country brand. Such an approach could develop into centrally controlled national propaganda, which does not belong in a world of free speech and free press.

Control of the communication of the brand

The definition of customer-based brand equity does not distinguish between the sources of brand beliefs – that is, whether beliefs are created by the marketer or by some other source of influence, such as reference groups or publicity. All that matters is the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations, which, combined with brand awareness, can produce differentiated consumer

responses to the marketing of a brand (Keller 1983). Countries are constantly subjected to media attention, which may convey multiple and more or less consistent messages. Evidence suggests that the news media in particular influence our pictures of the world, have a crucial gate-keeping role in the dissemination of information, and have the ability to set the public agenda on important issues (Bryant & Zillman 1986; Funkhauser 1973; McCombs & Gilbert 1986; Tuchman 1991). Moreover, the influence of news media on public opinion has proven to be most efficient with regard to unobtrusive issues – i.e. issues remote from personal experience. In foreign affairs, where most people have no firsthand experience, the news media have a near monopoly as an information source and hence the impact on public opinion is considerable (McComb & Gilbert 1986). Hence associations with a source country in most target markets will be a result of what the news media communicate about the country, provided that the target country is relatively developed and has a free press. Inferences about other countries and cross-national comparisons are seen as necessary to make sense of ourselves and others, and we assume that the news and popular culture will tell us something about people's perceptions of and attitudes toward other people and countries (Berger 1992). Gartner (1993) also suggests that news and popular culture as agents for promoting country images have higher credibility due to their independent status compared to commercial advertising agents. It would therefore be difficult or impossible for an advertising agent for a country brand to act independently of the images that are conveyed in public domain channels of information.

2.3 Managerial challenges for country brands

The above discussion shows and documents that basic assumptions of company branding cannot be directly applied to public domain brands in general, and country brands in particular, since a country is such a different unit from a

business company. The first managerial challenge is related to lack of ownership of public domain brands. The presence of multiple stakeholders makes it difficult to create an organizational structure for a country brand that can represent the multiple and diverse interests of different stakeholders. At the same time, a country brand authenticity and legitimacy would be dependent on stakeholder integration. The first managerial challenge is therefore stated as follows:

Managerial challenge 1:

Authentic and unique core values are mandatory for efficient country branding and require participation of and recognition by multiple stakeholders in the source country.

A country cannot be managed like a business firm. The independent media is a major social actor in maintaining principles of democracy and transparency of public affairs. A commercial agent for a country brand cannot ignore these principles. Top-down control and management of core values for a country brand are simply not possible in a democratic setting. Legitimate and democratic noise from multiple agents and sources will always compete with commercial agents. The next managerial challenge is therefore related to this fact.

Managerial challenge 2:

A country brand agency does not have the necessary managerial means or democratic legitimacy to determine and control the information about a source country that is communicated to the public in a target market.

The next managerial challenge relates to this fact and states that not only does a country brand agency lack the necessary organizational legitimacy to control source country information in a target market, but it also lacks the power or market position to establish and create a country brand independent of powerful image agents in the news media. The independent news media in any target market are the most important agent for information on other countries. Therefore the third managerial challenge is related to this.

Managerial challenge 3:

Images of foreign countries are primarily established by the independent news media in the target country.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Newspapers as data source for country image

Since influence from the independent news media makes a major difference between company and country brands, it would be of interest for country branding programs to learn how the news media deal with countries. There are three concerns that are relevant in this regard. First, since images of countries develop over time, *longitudinal data* is needed. Secondly, since the news media in each target market operate more or less independently, a *cross-country design* is necessary in order to capture variation in country images across target markets. Thirdly, we need *access* to a media source that provides longitudinal and cross-country data.

As a media source, newspapers satisfy all the above criteria. In many countries newspaper articles from many years back are available on the Internet. Databases can generate lists of articles based on a requested keyword or topic, which makes such databases very convenient for sampling articles containing information on a specific country. In addition to the practical concerns, newspapers are seen as a powerful agent in moving public opinion (McComb et al. 1982) and analysis of newspaper articles can give insight into existing attitudes in the population. At least this is what Berelson (1971) says in his seminal book *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, where he claims that: "Content media analysis assumes that communication content 'expresses' or 'reflects' some sort of *Zeitgeist*, which can be used as an index to attitudes, interests, values, mores of the population" (ibid., p. 90). A deep media analysis of country images can therefore shed new light on the understanding of country images (Jensen 1993).

To validate the findings of our media content analysis, we conducted a small-scale free elicitation study among consumers in the selected target countries. In each target market forty consumers were recruited when visiting a supermarket or travel agency. The purpose of this elicitation study was to check whether the findings in the newspaper content analysis were also reflected in perceptions of the source country among the public in the target country.

3.2 Design of study

Country sample

Because of the exploratory character of this study we chose a small sample of countries that had relatively stable economies and political situations. We expected news coverage in the international press on such countries to be relatively independent of volatile situations on the international scene. The sample consists of one source country and three different target countries. The source country, Norway, belongs to a group of smaller countries that have embarked on an international advertising campaign to build a national brand image in other countries. The target countries – Sweden, France, and Japan - vary in geographical, sociopolitical, and cultural closeness to the source country at the same time as they are important export markets for the source country. This country sample enabled us to make cross-country comparisons of variation in country image characteristics in three types of target markets: a very close neighboring country, a more remote country in the same continent, and a very distant country.

Sample of newspaper articles

For each target country, the national newspaper with the highest market coverage and the leading business newspaper were selected: Le Monde and Les

Echos were selected for France, Asahi and NIKKEI were selected for Japan, and Dagens Nyheter and Dagens Industri were selected for Sweden. Since images are typically developed over time (Aaker 1995; McComb & Gilbert 1986) we searched the databases for all newspaper articles about the source country over a two-year period (August/September 1998 to August /September 2000).³ The search key word was the name of the source country, which produced a list of titles where Norway was mentioned in the headline or in the text.

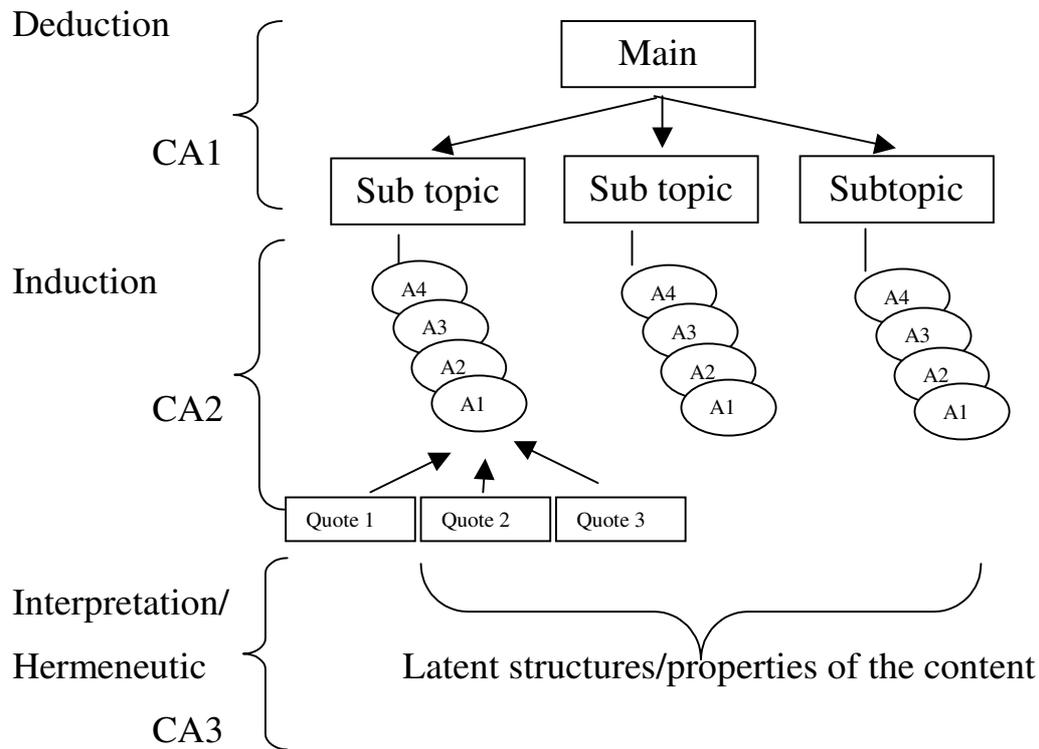
In order to secure texts that represented both the breadth and depth of topics covered in the newspapers, we combined statistically random sampling and subjective selection criteria (Berelson 1971). From the first lists of titles, ranging from 77 to 1800 titles across the newspapers, we applied a random sampling procedure by systematically picking articles from the lists (see table A1 in the Appendix). The first sample of articles was then subjected to specific criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Articles were excluded from the sampling frame if: a) the country was mentioned among several other countries, but the content of the article did not in particular concern the country (not specific enough), its people or its products; b) the country was mentioned, but the content of the article did not really concern the country, the people or its products; and c) the new articles did not give any additional information about the country, its people or products.⁴ The criterion for including an article was the degree to which it provided relevant and substantive information for further in-depth analysis. After applying these sampling procedures, we ended up with final sample of 412 newspaper articles from the three target countries (see table A2 in Appendix).

³ The *NIKKEI* online search engine only provides articles for the past twelve months from the search date. The search period for *NIKKEI* is therefore Oct. 1999 – Oct. 2000)

⁴ Specifically for Norway we also excluded articles where Norway (Norwegian cities) is mentioned because of its strategic position during the Second World War (mostly historical articles about French soldiers).

The work process

Three country teams with extensive knowledge of the target country's culture and political climate conducted the content analysis in the three target markets. In the literature on content analysis, words, topics/themes, characters, and items appear as major units of analysis (Berelson 1971). The first task was therefore to find a system for categorizing the articles according to topics and sub-topics with cross-national validity (see table A2 in the Appendix). In the second stage of the content analysis, the articles were subjected to intensive reading to elicit characteristics and specific attributes used to describe the source country. The main topics - Politics, Society, Economy, and Culture - build on existing measurement scales of country image (Martin & Eroglu 1993) and country-of-origin (Prameswaran & Pisharodi 1994). The topic "Nature" is central in the measurement of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie 1993) and "People" is central in the literature on national stereotypes focused on perceptions of peoples (Scott 1965, Bar-Tal 1997).



Legend: CA1=content analysis one, CA2= content analysis two, A=Attribute, CA3=content analysis three

Figure 1 Three-stage model of the content analysis

The data was documented as depicted in figure 1, with main topics, sub-topics, specific attributes or characteristics, and textual quotes supporting and documenting each attribute. This standard of organization of the data across the target countries enabled us to perform cross-country comparisons by article content. In the third stage of the content analysis, we integrated insights from the structure that appeared from content analyses 1 and 2 with interpretive analysis of the quotes. This deep analysis provided us with insight into ideological sentiments, moods, values, attitudes, and relational qualities that came across as manifest or latent information in the portrayal of the source country. Larsen (1991) argues that media texts are carriers of ideological meaning, which is usually not captured in quantitative content analysis. He claims that there is "a growing awareness of the complexity of mass communication – a realization

that media texts are not carriers of single meanings, let alone a single, dominant ideology; that their content is carried, in part, by the mode of address, and that audiences are active in interpreting media, genres, and texts" (ibid., p. 132).

4 FINDINGS

In this section we will report the results of the content analysis. First we will give a short cross-country comparison of how the source country is covered in the newspapers in the three target markets. The main emphasis is, however, on the in-depth study of the attributes and quotes that enable us to identify underlying dimensions and qualities of country images in the target markets.

4.1 Cross-country comparison of media coverage of source country

The media coverage of the source country varies significantly across the three target countries. In neighboring Sweden, the newspapers cover current affairs and the domestic agenda in the source country on a daily basis. The Swedish national newspaper provides substantive information on the source country on all the main topics. The business newspaper focuses mainly on economic affairs. However, this coverage is both extensive and deep, and probably reflects the many economic ties that exist between the two countries. In more remote France, the newspapers seemed to screen source country news according to their own interests. Typical news from Norway in the French newspapers had to do with international affairs, very significant events, and analyses of economic issues with relevance for France. In far away Japan, Norway was rarely mentioned in the newspapers, and when it was mentioned, it was often not in substantive terms. We found hardly any substantive articles about Norway in the Japanese business newspaper for the period studied.

Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF NORWAY IN SWEDEN, FRANCE, AND JAPAN

Topics:	Sweden		France		Japan	
	National Newspaper	Business newspaper	National Newspaper	Business newspaper	National Newspaper	Business newspaper
Politics	Current affairs/ Domestic agenda of source country	Occasional coverage of major events	Role of source country in foreign affairs	Minor coverage	Role of source country in foreign affairs	Minor coverage
Society	Current affairs/ Domestic agenda of source country	Occasional coverage of major events	Coverage of significant events in source country	Minor coverage	Occasional coverage of events that confirm source country stereotypes	No/minor coverage
Economy	Current affairs/ Domestic agenda of source country	Current affairs/ Domestic agenda/ Swedish interest in source country	Focus on dominant industry (oil) in source country	Monitoring of current economic events in source country with relevance for France	Minor coverage	Minor coverage
Culture	Current events/Domestic agenda in source country	Minor coverage	Sports events and attention to selected artists	Occasional analysis of business culture in source and neighboring countries	Occasional coverage of athletes from source country	No/Minor coverage
People	Minor coverage	Analyses of business style	Appearance and social relations	Minor coverage	No/minor coverage	No/minor coverage
Nature	Scenery/climate in source country	Minor coverage	Sporadic coverage of scenery and climate	Minor coverage	No/Minor coverage	No/Minor coverage

This analysis reveals that the character of newspaper coverage is dependent on geographical, cultural, and social proximity between source and target countries. The Swedish coverage is factual, analytic, and at times very emotional. The French coverage is mostly analytical and reveals an interest in Norwegian idiosyncrasies. The Japanese newspaper coverage of Norway is very minor and mostly in terms of stereotypes. However, as we shall see later in the analysis, some involvement can be raised in relation to specific cases, even between such distant countries. In sum this analysis shows that the public in different target countries is exposed to very different types of news about a source country, which will necessarily have consequences for the source country image in the target market.

The above analysis suggests that the media content in the different target markets varies according to the existing relations between the source and target countries. We therefore use a relationship metaphor to organize and label the qualitative properties that emerge from the deep analysis of the newspaper content. Relationship concepts are commonly used both in marketing (Fournier 1998; Zeithaml & Bitner 2000) and business studies (see Grönroos 2000; Liljander & Strandvik 1995; Sheth & Parvatiar 1995) to enhance understanding and to provide a conceptual framework for analyses of economic exchange. In relationships, the actions and attitudes of the other party are interpreted according to mutual expectations, mutual dependency, commitment, and promises that are inherent in relationships. The relationship metaphor is therefore highly relevant and useful in our analysis of the media texts, as they represent an interpretive background for what the media communicates to the public in the target country.

The analysis of the Swedish newspapers reflects a "sibling" relationship with Norway. Sibling relationships have strong emotional bonds, high interdependency, mutual influences due to shared heritage, strong competition and cooperation, and are long-term and non-voluntary in nature (Howe et al. 2001, Fournier 1998). The French newspapers' analytical coverage suggests a more distant relationship to Norway, which we labeled "remote relative". A remote relative relationship is one that is characterized by mutual knowledge of one another's existence: there is low degree of interdependency between the parties, and loose bonds due to shared heritage, but mutual commitment is low. The content in the Japanese press suggests a relationship between "strangers". Strangers can have accidental and situational contacts devoid of the affect and commitment, which are present in closer relationships. In the following table we have depicted how these three types of relationships are reflected in different country image characteristics.

Table 2

RELATIONS BETWEEN SOURCE AND TARGET COUNTRY, COUNTRY IMAGE CHARACTERISTICS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTRY BRANDING

Type of relation between source and target country	Characteristics of the media coverage of source country	Country image characteristics of source country	Brand core values	Implications for country branding: Managerial challenges
<p>Sibling: Long-term, non-voluntary relation imposed by shared history and roots, with high affective attachment, and high expectations of reciprocity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous coverage of <i>domestic</i> and <i>current</i> affairs in the source country - Critical press - Emotionally laden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High awareness - In-depth knowledge - High degree of affect - High involvement - Complex - Deep - Strong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic focus - Authentic - Affective - Relational - Unique (relation-specific) - Positive emotional appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership: Multiple and diverse stakeholders - Core values: Authentic and diverse - Communication: Multiple image agents
<p>Remote relative: Relation characterized by mutual knowledge of each other's existence and shared history, but with low affect and mutual commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on the presence of the source country on the international arena - Analytical articles on source country attributes of interest to the public in the target country - Sporadic coverage of domestic affairs in the source country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medium awareness - Knowledge of selected topics - Low degree of affect - Low involvement - Cognitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authentic - Focus on target country interests - Cognitive appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership: Multiple and diverse stakeholders - Core values: Linked to particular idiosyncrasies in the target country - Communication: Multiple image agents
<p>Stranger: Accidental or situational contacts devoid of commitment and reciprocity demands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sporadic focus on the source country's role on the international scene - No or limited insight into domestic affairs in source country - Sporadic coverage of issues (flings) of mutual interest to source and target country - Descriptive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low awareness - Low knowledge - Stereotypical associations - No involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive stereotypes - Focus on special shared interests between source and target country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership: Lack of interest among stakeholders - Core values: Low awareness and stereotypical knowledge - Communication: The independent media has little interest in the source country

Table 2 summarizes the main findings of the content analysis and is organized according to type of relation between source and target country. In this section we will discuss and analyze the first three columns. In the next section of the paper we will discuss the managerial implications of the findings. The deep analysis of the quotes was conducted on the basis of all the sampled newspaper articles and, with the exception of the Japanese newspapers, was conducted in the original language. In the following text we present an English translation of a few examples of the original quotes for illustrative purposes. As we are aware that the validity of an interpretation depends on confidence in the scholar's sensitivity, her legitimacy and authority (Jancowski & Wester 1991), we do not claim intersubjectivity for the interpretative analysis in a strict scientific sense. However, the relationship categories emerged very consistently and clearly in the analysis of the newspaper articles.

4.2 Country image characteristics in sibling countries

Relationship characteristics of siblings

A sibling relationship can be defined as a long-term, non-voluntary relationship imposed by shared history and roots. Siblings are to varying degrees mutually dependent for their welfare, which explains high mutual expectations. Such relations are characterized by both cooperative and competitive behavior, which is both socially and biologically grounded (Asplund 1991; Dunn 1988; Howe et al. 2001; West et al. 2002). Due to the strong ties between siblings, such relationships can be very emotionally laden.

Media content in a sibling country

Sibling relationship characteristics come across as a clear finding in the content analysis of the Swedish newspaper articles. Particularly in the business newspaper, emotions are expressed very explicitly when Norwegian-Swedish business mergers fail. Just look at the following quotes on the failed negotiations for two mergers in the banking and telecom sectors.

Dagens Industri, 24.01.00:

Ebba Grön sang 'About the state and capital' in the early 1980s: 'Side by side, together they help each other. The state and capital, they are in the same boat'. That song could have its origin in Norway. There, the state and capital are the same thing to a larger degree than in any western democracy....

'Norwegian politicians are racists in the way they treat foreigners on the Norwegian stock market', says Jan Eiler in Gambak Fonds... In Norway the public, the politicians, and the industry protect the Norwegian Model.

Dagens Industri, 02.11.98:

Svenska Handelsbanken (SHB) surprised financial markets late last week with its NOK 5.1 billion cash bid for Norway's Focus Bank, which is currently engaged in talks to merge with two other Norwegian banks. Johan Jakobsen, leader of Norway's Center Party, criticized the Swedish offer, terming it an effort to 'sabotage' the domestic solution.

In connection with the failed attempts to merge the Swedish and Norwegian Telecom companies, the then Swedish minister of industry, was caught off-guard on TV describing Norwegians as "Stalinists". This incident and the quotes above express strong emotions, anger and disappointment. Interestingly, these incidents did not create hostility between the two countries. One could get the impression that the press in both countries found the emotional outbursts "part of life" – as one does in close relationships (Asplund 1991). In another type of country-to-country relation it would most likely have caused substantial problems if the press or politicians accused the other country of being racists or

Stalinists. In a country-to-country relation with sibling qualities, strong emotions and outbursts seem to have some degree of legitimacy.

Siblings also know the contradictions and the complexities of each other's characters. The image of a sibling country can be characterized by respect and disrespect, love and hate. For example, the Swedish newspapers describe the Norwegian government as both stingy and a big spender.

Dagens Nyheter, 27.07.00:

The Norwegian government could not raise two million dollars to calibrate alcoholmeters used by the traffic police. This true story about Norway could come in handy next time the Norwegians make fun of the strict Swedish organization and planning regime. It also teaches us that the (Norwegian) government's budget is sacred, even in a country that is awash with oil money.

Dagens Nyheter, 21.07.00:

While Swedish businesses had to rationalize through the recession and Swedish food became less expensive due to the EU membership and tax reduction, the Norwegians pumped oil to cushion their lives.

These quotes are critical of the Norwegian government for not managing to raise money for an economically minor but socially important cause. At the same time, the Swedish press notices that the Norwegian government spends a lot of money as a cushion to protect itself from the economic challenges that other countries face on the international scene. Some newspaper articles also expressed envy of Norwegian oil wealth.

Country image characteristics of siblings

The country image expressed in the newspapers in a sibling country typically reflects high awareness and in-depth knowledge of the source country. One can assume that the continuous daily flow of information on a wide range of topics keeps the audience constantly alert and aware of the source country. Brand

awareness and knowledge are two fundamental and necessary conditions for efficient brand management and mass communication of a brand.

The country image characteristics that came across in the newspaper content analysis were confirmed in the free elicitation study we conducted on a small sample of Swedish consumers (n = 40). The elicitations indicate that Swedish consumers also have a high awareness and a lot of in-depth knowledge of Norway. In the elicitations, they name Norwegian politicians, athletes, pop bands, cities, famous places, brands, and businesses. They also know the most important industries, such as oil and fish, and tourism. Interestingly, the elicitations also confirm the complexity of sibling relations. The following statement from the elicitation study is representative: "... many nice people, but they are too self-contained, too bragging, very clever employers and business people". It was typical to list contradictory attributes of Norway and Norwegians. On the one hand, almost all of the respondents describe Norwegians as nice people. On the other hand, they make clear statements about things they see as weaknesses in Norwegian culture and character.

In sum, we propose that in a target country that has a sibling relation to the source country both the media and the public hold a deep, complex and strong image of the source country. The true character of the source country is well known, and it is very unlikely that impersonal or very general country image slogans will catch on in such a target market, unless they hit a very strong and authentic link between the two countries. Interestingly, both Swedish newspapers and consumers seemed to be able to deal with the complexity of the close relationship to neighboring Norway and still maintain a friendly attitude.

4.3 Country image characteristics in a remote relative country

Relationship characteristics of remote relatives

A remote relative relationship is different from a sibling relationship on many important dimensions. There is no necessary mutual dependency between the parties, and although you may be aware of the other's existence you may not know the other party very well. The important characteristic of a remote relative is that there is a shared heritage, which in some matters can make a remote relative more interesting and relevant than a complete stranger.⁵

Media content in a "remote relative" target country

The national newspaper, *Le Monde*, describes Norway as a country with high integrity on global issues such as peace and environmental concerns. Norway is also perceived as having high standards in its social organization and legal system. The articles on politics, society, and economy are analytical in character and reflect an emotionless relationship to the source country. However, there is one topic that seems to evoke French involvement in Norway. The French journalists are curious about the Norwegian conception of the relationship between man and nature. This topic seems to be triggered through the French fascination with the Norwegian screenwriter Jon Fosse.

Le Monde 18.09.99:

In his traditional milieu, he experienced from the age of seven the loneliness and the intensely dangerous excitement of being different, the brittleness of the distance separating him from his own. However, it is not difficult to find this also in his characters when he recalls the villagers' very strong emotionalism,

⁵ In the French-Norwegian case, the Second World War is treated as a shared experience/heritage between the two countries.

their horrifying tension, born as a result of contact with a landscape which gives them an intense sense of beauty which they are incapable of expressing...."Writing is intuitive. Writing should not submit to an intellectual commandment; it is not within the domain of knowledge. I write well only when I listen to what is already written" (quote from interview with Fosse). His method consists of an isolated chalet near Bergen, with a chair, a table, a personal computer and a window that opens onto the fjord, because he needs to use the violent energy that emanates from the landscape.

This quote demonstrates the journalist's search for a deeper understanding of Fosse's relationship to Norwegian nature and culture. A combination of the very dramatic and beautiful Norwegian coastal scenery and social isolation seems to fascinate the journalist and he argues that out of this comes the energy and ability to write. This man-nature relationship is described as exotic and unique to the Norwegian character also in other contexts.

Le Monde, 06.04.00 :

The islanders are transformed, spending the nights outside among friends, beer in hand, despite the rather fresh temperatures: around 10 degrees during the summer solstice.

Le Monde, 05.05.00:

What she seeks in Bergen is the emptiness, the forgetfulness, which she endeavors to find as much in the Nordic landscape as in an excessive consumption of aquavit.

In the national newspaper, the unique man-nature relationship in Norway is described as something exotic, positive, and productive. In the business newspaper, however, this phenomenon is interpreted in more negative terms, as a sign of protectionist politics and economic isolation. The state capitalism of Norway in the oil industry, and the Swedish failure to establish mergers in the banking and financial sectors are mentioned as examples of a protectionist economy. Contrary to the Swedish press, the French newspapers have a predominantly analytic approach to this topic. They seem to note Norwegian behavior but do not seem to be emotionally involved on behalf of French interests.

Les Echos, 12.05.99:

For some months, voices in Norway have been clamoring for a thorough review of the whole sector as well as a reduction of state influence. The state owns 100 percent of Statoil, the national leader, and 51 percent of Norsk Hydro. The state also holds equity in Saga, via Statoil, which holds 20 percent. ... an omnipresence originally intended to protect the black gold from foreigner with appetite.

Les Echos, 06.12.99:

Being too fragmented to be competitive, the Scandinavian banking sector is considering changing. But the sector has to reckon with the reluctance of the Norwegian government concerning transnational consolidations, specifically those originating in Sweden.

A second particularity in the French newspapers is their admiration for the physique of Norwegians. This was probably evoked through the Norwegian participation in the 2000 World Cup in soccer, which was held in France. Characterizations such as: ‘spectacular silhouettes’, ‘exemplary physiques’,

‘perfect athletes’, and ‘blonde Vikings’, all reflect strong admiration of the appearance of Norwegian athletes.

Le Monde, 24.07.00:

... the biggest and the strongest of men... I have never seen more perfect bodies than theirs. Their size made me think of palm trees. They grow up on clean air, and are hardened by the cold.

Le Monde, 24.06.99:

The Nordic dance is very physical, very masculine, even among the female (dancers).

The quotes on physical appearance are very graphically elaborate, and similar descriptions are not found in the other target countries. The second quote about the female ballet dancer was written a year before the World Cup, which may indicate that the French preoccupation with the Nordic physique may be more than a sporadic interest.

This type of perception of the source country is unique to the French newspapers and may be rooted in the French sense of style and aesthetics. If a source country possesses such an image in a target country it might be used as an image asset in the design of a country image campaign.

The consumer elicitation data from France does not reflect the same deep, complex image of Norway that is reflected in the French newspapers. With few exceptions, the forty respondents cited only three to four attributes of Norway. The most frequently mentioned attributes were: fish, cold, oil, and beautiful nature. However, there were a few who commented on the man-nature relationship of the Norwegian people and wondered how they lived in such a cold country. In sum, the consumer elicitations indicate a superficial image of Norway as a source country.

Country image characteristics of remote relatives.

The image of Norway in the French newspapers is characterized by medium awareness and knowledge. The French newspaper analysis suggests that the French media is selective in what it writes about Norway. They do not cover the domestic agenda in Norway, but choose to focus on issues that are perceived as having interest for the French public. When they find an interesting topic, they tend to provide extensive and solid analyses.

The consumer elicitation may suggest that only certain groups in the audience, who have an interest in the topics covered, read the articles about Norway. Since the journalists are very selective in their coverage of Norway, their role as information gatekeepers is much more salient than in a sibling country.

4.4 Country image characteristics in a country that is a stranger

Relationship characteristics of strangers

A stranger is someone you do not know personally. To the degree that one is aware of a stranger, it may be in stereotypical terms (Koomen & Bähler 1996; Peabody 1985), which may be more or less representative of people and products from a particular country. Stereotypical perceptions of nations can be defined as stored beliefs about the characteristics of a group of people (Bar-Tal 1997) and are measured according to specific attributes or measurement scales (e.g. Jonas & Hewstone 1986; Phalet & Poppe 1997). Stereotypes are generic perceptions that tend to be stable over time.

Media content in a "stranger" target country

The Japanese newspapers write about Norway in three ways. First, Norway is mentioned for its role on the international scene, e.g. peace negotiations in the Middle East and Sri Lanka, disarmament in Kosovo, and its role in the anti-personnel mines issue. In these articles, Norway is portrayed as a peace-loving nation.

Asahi, 16.10.00:

Norway is known for having been the bridge between Israel and the PLO when both parties came to a historical mutual agreement in September 1993 after talks behind the scenes. Therefore, Norway became the chair of AHLC, which arranges economic support for the Palestinian Authority.

Asahi, 13.01.99:

Let us recall the words of former Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst, who accomplished the historical agreement on temporal Palestinian self-government. He said that, after the Cold War, there is no common solution to different conflicts. Even a superpower like the USA sometimes has difficulties in acting as a mediator, due to complex circumstances. It is important to support the building of a peaceful environment in the Middle East, not only by financial means, but also by demanding that the USA act so as to have a positive effect on the Middle East peace process.

Secondly, Norway is portrayed in relation to matters which are presented as exotic and/or contrasting to Japanese society. For example, the egalitarian social structure and equality between the sexes are promoted as Norwegian characteristics. These are also seen as features of high democratic ideals, which are highlighted as an inspiration also for Japan.

Asahi, 07.05.00:

The Norwegian gender equality ombudsmen is visiting Japan. Before other countries, Norway has been fighting for equal rights for men and women and now they have public relations officers to share their experience with other countries, this time in Kyoto.

Asahi, 01.02.00:

Moreover, he points out that Japanese democracy has become different from Western democracies, which are based on Christianity. He chose former Norwegian Prime Minister Brundtland as one of three Prime Ministers who had the strongest belief in democracy. All of them had thought about the world in the 21st century. Japanese politicians should not completely ignore idealism.

Thirdly, Norway is mentioned in matters where the two countries can have mutual interests and involvement. For example, the Japanese newspapers promote Norway as a "partner" on issues related to nuclear waste from Russia in the North - a shared faith between the two countries that was activated by the Kursk accident. The articles were framed as if this also could happen close to the Japanese-Russian border. The Kursk accident was seen as a critical case, which put to the test the adequacy of current knowledge and technology.

Asahi, 21.08.00:

For the rescue operation on the Kursk submarine, an LR5 operated by a private English company and civilian Norwegian divers who usually work on the North Sea offshore wells, was used. These 10 Norwegian divers are civilians, who were trained to dive more than 30m and work for a long time under water. They work searching for oil and building wells in the North Sea. The Norwegian Minister of Defence admits that the private sector has more experienced divers in such areas. The Norwegian boat, which came to the site, is also used for offshore operations, and it carries a sea-floor car with a high-quality underwater camera. The offshore business is one of the biggest industries in both the UK and Norway. In 1980, one of the Norwegian oil platforms was destroyed due to bad weather and 123 were killed. Moreover, in 1988, an English oil platform exploded and 166 died or went missing. Therefore, both countries had improved their professional deep diving equipment and strengthened their diving teams.

The mutual link or interests between the two countries in relation to the Kursk incident is reflected in the media texts, which show a high involvement on behalf of the target country. This finding is interesting, since countries that normally would be characterized as strangers to each other may in some cases

have very close, shared interests. Even if such cases may be rare, they can have significant impact on the impression of a relatively unknown source country in a target market.

Country image characteristics of strangers

In branding terms one would say that generally there is low awareness of, little knowledge of, and low involvement with strangers. The consumer elicitation study that we conducted in Japan suggests that Japanese consumers are also strangers to Norway. Most of the respondents only mention two attributes about Norway, one of them being "salmon". In the case of Norwegian salmon, the product seem to be better known than the country of origin. One would expect that knowledge about remote "stranger" countries would only be found in special niches in the target market. When there is an occasion that evokes some degree of involvement between strangers, this is usually short-term. In such cases, commercial image agents must be alert and use the occasion when the source country is on the news agenda.

5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTRY BRANDING

Conceptual and managerial issues applied to national branding have been discussed and explored empirically in a multi-country context. The contribution of this study lies in the insight into which key factors affect country brand management. One distinctive feature of the study's empirical component is the variation in forms of relationship between source and target countries. The identified relationship forms have important implications for managerial challenges in country branding with regard to organizational strategies for brand ownership, strategies for customization or standardization of core values across target markets, and communication strategies for country branding.

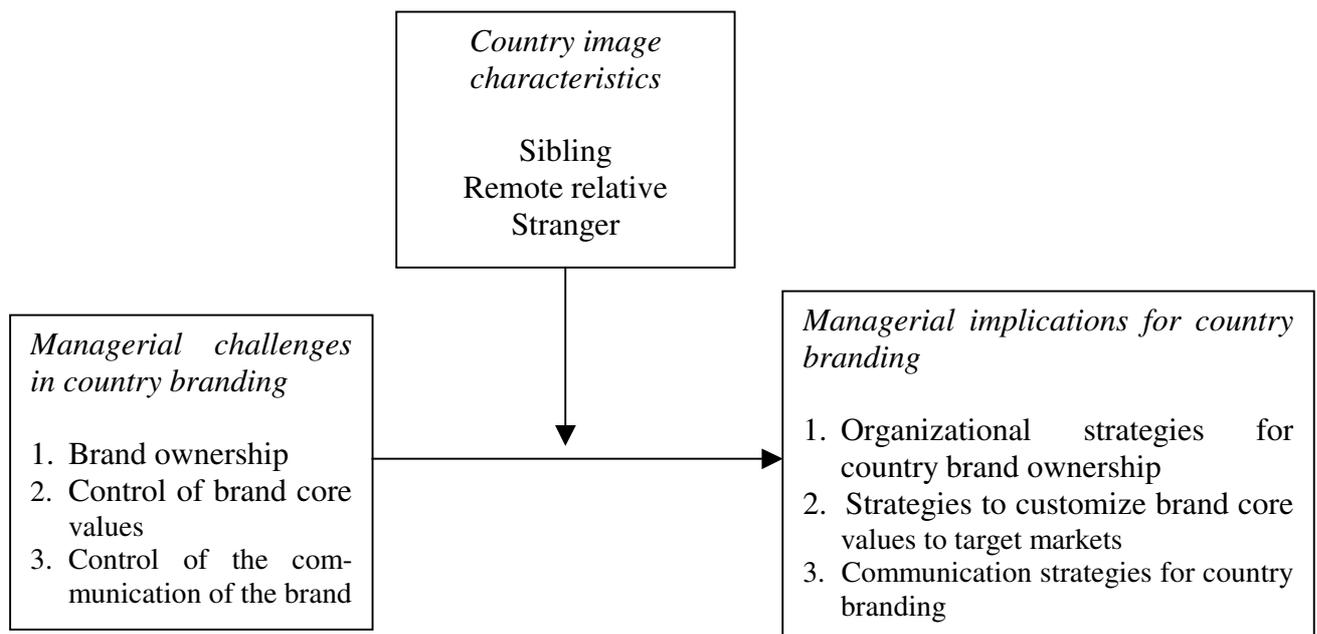


Figure 2 The relationship between managerial challenges, country image characteristics, and managerial implications for country branding

5.1 Organizational strategies for country brand ownership

The first managerial challenge states that country brand authenticity is mandatory for efficient country branding and that this requires participation and recognition of multiple stakeholders in the source country. In our discussion we also question the degree to which it is possible for a governmental agency to accomplish brand authenticity through top-down management strategies developed for a business context. For example, country images in sibling target markets are rooted in multiple sources of information and contacts between the source and the target countries. These might be contacts between government agencies, cultural contacts, business contacts or personal contacts. It would be very difficult to find an organizational structure that represents the multiple interests of all these types of actors. In cases where there are multiple and diverse contacts between source and target countries, a centrally managed umbrella brand for the country would most likely "disappear" in all the noise from individual marketers and independent image agents.

Proposition 1:

Multiple ownership and democratic principles are necessary to establish and manage an authentic country brand.

Proposition 2:

The larger the number and diversity of stakeholders a country brand has, the more difficult it will be to establish and manage a representative country brand alliance.

The more stakeholders you have in a source country, the more difficult it will be to establish a legitimate and representative umbrella brand. Even remote

relatives may have multiple and complex relations. Therefore, to manage a country brand for target countries with which the source country has multiple and complex relations would require a very complex brand management organization. It may be easier to find a legitimate umbrella organization to manage a country brand to target markets that are strangers. In case where there are few stakeholders in the source country, an umbrella agency could work as a unifying context for country branding.

Since many of the centrally owned and managed country branding programs have failed (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 2001), new organizational structures should be explored. The newly launched campaign – *Alp Action* – is an alliance between the private sector, the media, governmental and environmental organizations, and local communities to safeguard the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps (www.cyberalps.com). Similarly, the Swedish country brand *Space for minds* aims to build a "team Sweden" consisting of major political and economic actors in Sweden who can benefit from country branding. *Space for minds* will not be organized as a top-down branding program, but rather as a facilitator to coordinate actions involving multiple stakeholders in the source country (www.swetourism.se).

Even commercial brands have to legitimate their actions to multiple stakeholders in their countries of operation. This is particularly evident in Shell's "triple bottom line" annual report *People, Planet and Profits*, where they document how they aim to meet their economic, environmental and social responsibilities (www.shell.com/shellreport). Global companies and brands have to assume many responsibilities that were previously seen as the responsibility of nation-states. In some senses, such brands have become part of the public domain and have to take political, cultural, and moral responsibility. As such, country and

company branding have become more similar and therefore share similar political and managerial challenges.

5.2 Strategies for customization or standardization of core values across target markets

The second managerial challenge relates to brand core values and how these are identified and managed. We claim that a country's image in a target market cannot, and should not, be controlled by a single agency in the source country. A country image campaign has to relate to the existing image characteristics that at any time exist in a target market. This lack of control over a country brand image due to multiple image agents and principles of democracy is a major challenge in country branding. The magnitude of this managerial challenge is very much influenced by the type of relationship between source and target countries. The core values that are set for a country brand should therefore take into account already existing images in the target market. Target market idiosyncrasies in global branding are a recent and very relevant topic in this regard (Hewett & Bearden 2001). When marketers in consumer goods companies customize brand images across international markets, their marketing is related to variations in national environmental market conditions (Roth 1995). Managers tend to respond to variations in cultural uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and national socioeconomics by using an image customization strategy (ibid.).

In the case of sibling relations between source and target countries, the true character of the source country is known and therefore, the country brand core values have to be based on authenticity. The complex and rich relationship between sibling countries, which we found in the newspaper content analysis, is

interesting for country branding in two important respects. First, the source country image can contain very strong emotions, both positive and negative. Secondly, these mutual emotions or bonds are often unique to the relationship between the two countries. Strong and unique emotional bonds between close partners have clear advantages for marketing purposes (Fournier 1998; Liljander & Strandvik 1995; Sheth & Parvatiar 1995). The Danish tourism brand to attract customers from Norway and Sweden utilizes this in its advertising campaign: "It's wonderful to be Norwegian (Swedish) in Denmark." The brand logo is the Danish flag shaped like a heart (www.visitdenmark.com).

Proposition 3:

In a sibling target market, a source country brand will be stronger if it is based on core values that reflect the unique, strong, positive, and emotional links between the two countries.

In a target market that held less specific and less well-grounded images of a source country, the marketer has to establish a set of core values. The newspaper content analysis revealed that, in a country that has a remote relative relationship to a source country, there is medium awareness and knowledge. We also found that interest and involvement in source country issues seem to be screened according to the specific interests of the target market. The challenge would therefore be to find these issues and position the country core values accordingly.

Proposition 4:

In a target market, which can be characterized as a remote relative, the core values of a source country brand should build on the particular interests that the target market has with regard to the source country.

Since there is low awareness, little knowledge, and low involvement between strangers, it is difficult to establish strong core values in such a target market. At best, one can hope to reinforce positive stereotypes of the source country that may already exist; for example, Japanese admiration of Norway as a democratic and peace-loving country.

Proposition 5:

In a target market with a weak or non-existent image of the source country, core values that reinforce positive stereotypes have a better chance of creating brand awareness than brand core values that deviate from perceived stereotypes.

5.3 Communication strategies

The third managerial challenge refers to the fact that countries are important units of attention in the news media and that news media have a near monopoly in conveying news about other countries in any target market. Gartner (1993) suggests that traditional marketing channels only control image agents with low credibility. News media and popular culture are ranked as having both high credibility and high market coverage (ibid.). A clear finding of the newspaper content analysis was that the media coverage of a source country varied significantly across target markets, both in quantity and quality.

In sibling countries there is high awareness, in-depth knowledge, high involvement with the source country. The public gets information on the source country from multiple image agents on a daily basis. This makes most media channels in the target country relevant for a country image campaign. However, since the news media are so rich in information about the source country all the time, a commercial country image would have to compete with multiple, and at

times contradictory, information about the source country. In cases of negative news, a private company can change its name and reposition its products; a country cannot escape its name.

The following example illustrates this challenge for a source country that can be described as a "remote relative" to the target country. The Austrian embassy published a brochure entitled "Fairness for Austrian Business" in Denmark after the national image crises in 2000 due to the participation of a right-wing party in a new government. The brochure attempted to document Austria's democratic tradition, migration policy and international integration, and asked Danish companies to keep their relations with Austria (Langer 2002). If a similar situation had arisen for sibling countries, like Norway and Sweden, such information would definitely have been useless and would probably have been perceived as a joke, since it would be expected that such an issue would have received a lot of attention in the independent media. A commercial agent can hardly compete with the independent news media on such an issue.

Proposition 6:

In sibling and remote relative target markets, a commercial image of a source country is highly dependent on the source country image conveyed by other image agents.

The newspaper analysis revealed that, in target countries that are strangers, the source country receives little attention in the news media. Hence the image of the source country in such markets would be weak on country brand awareness and knowledge. Building a country brand from scratch in "stranger" countries would be a task, which requires enormous resources. In such cases it might be better to build a positive source country image in existing business-to-business relations and through promotional activities, including attention-getting events.

Proposition 7:

In target markets where the public receives little or no information on the source country, a country image should be built on existing contacts between the two countries.

Countries, as well as global brands, make efforts to get onto the news agenda. One strategy used is to "play on" messages sent by independent image agents to create extra leverage for a marketing campaign, in order to achieve increased credibility and exposure through media coverage. One example of "play on" messages is on how publicity can influence perceptions and increase awareness of a country by hosting the Olympic Games. Positive effects have been found in connection with the Olympic Games in Canada (Ritchie & Smith 1991), South Korea (Kang & Perdue 1994), and Norway (Spilling 2000). In fact, the bid for the 1988 Olympic games was in large measure intended to improve South Korea's image as a developed, stable country, capable of hosting this mega-event (Jaffe & Nebenzahl 1993). This may indicate that particularly countries that are less known in international markets can benefit from the increased media attention of hosting a mega-event.

6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The aim of this study was to investigate whether countries can be branded like companies. Company brands are managed according to clear ownership and top-down control of brand management. In contrast, countries are governed according to the public interest, which requires transparency and participation. We extend the understanding of country branding by identifying managerial challenges related to brand authenticity and inclusion of multiple stakeholders to the country brand, lack of managerial means or democratic legitimacy to determine and control source country associations in a target market, and lack of control over independent image agents such as the independent news media in the target country.

A major achievement of rethinking country branding is accomplished through a multinational newspaper content analysis, which enabled us to classify country associations according to variation in relational characteristics between source and target countries. A kinship metaphor labeling three different relationship forms - sibling, remote relative, and stranger - offers an understanding of relationship qualities between the countries and how these are reflected in country image characteristics in the target country. The topic of the relationship between source and target countries has been neglected in earlier studies of country branding and should be stimulation for both further research and practice.

The conceptual framework for viewing country branding strategies as a function of managerial challenges and relationship form suggests a wide range of research possibilities. The preceding propositions provide starting points for research. All the propositions are general and each could be elaborated, explored

and tested empirically. Even if this study is based on a case analysis of how a small country is perceived in different target markets, the results have generic qualities. All countries, regardless of size and location, have relationships to other countries, and geographical, cultural, and social proximity between source and target countries impacts on the form of their relationship. Research dedicated to an exposition of alternative or extended relationship forms are welcome, particularly in terms of their characteristics, and in the dynamic processes through which they can be managed over time.

Given the complexity of country-to-country relationships, a variety of methods will be appropriate. The analysis demonstrates that the public in different target countries is exposed to very different types of news about a source country, which will necessarily have consequences for the source country image in the target market. Further application of content analysis in various media and in commercial channels for a range of countries is needed. Surveys would also be applicable for assessing consumer images of a source country, which include attribute-based images, holistic impressions, and functional, psychological, unique and common characteristics. This approach is common in destination image research (Echtner & Ritchie 1993) and can be useful for finding out whether consumers only hold stereotypes of the source country or have in-depth knowledge. To get deeper insights, in-depth interviews focused on various consumer perceptions and experiences of different source countries would be appropriate.

The theoretical framework, conceptual and managerial challenges, and propositions provide direction for research on a topic that is incredibly rich. A wide range of consumer methods and theories might be considered to gain a better understanding of country brand management.

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Sweden

Aftonbladet, 20.03.02, "Falsk marknadsföring" (False Marketing) author Naomi Klein,
Translated by Tor Wennerberg, pp. 4-5.

Dagens Industri, 24.01.00, Marie Sundberg, Staten äger halva Norge
Dagens Industri, 02.11.98, Monica Sandbäck; Norway in focus for SHB
Dagens Nyheter, 27.07.00, Lars Johansson, Politikärna glömde alkomäteren
Dagens Nyheter, 21.07.00, Daniel, Öhman, Gränshandelen: Handeln ger 7000 jobb i Sverige,
Oro i Norge. Förslag att sänka norska matmomsen til svensk nivå

France

Le Monde 18.09.99, France: Theatre – Jon Fosse, le riverain de la solitude
Le Monde, 06.04.00, Norvège: Les Nuit ensoleillées des îles Vesterålen
Le Monde, 05.05.00, France: Le monde des livres - littératures - à fleur de peau
Les Echos 12.05.99, Antoina Jacob; Norvège: Grands manoeuvres dans l'industrie pétrolière
Les Echos 06.12.99, Norvège: Les projets de concentration du secteur bancaire scandinavie
freinés par Oslo
Le Monde, 24.07.00, Jean-Pierre Langellier, Olaf Premier de Norvège, le Viking ardent
Le Monde, 23.06.99, France: culture – danses du Nord, à déguster frappés

Japan

Asahi, 16.10.00, Norwegian Foreign Minister, Chairman of AHLIC, Middle East Peace Talk
Asahi, 13.01.99, Is Palestine Far Away, Middle East and Japan
Asahi, 07.05.00, To Have More Female Members of Parliament
Asahi, 01.02.00, Medical Political Science – Patients All the Time
Asahi, 21.08.00, Sea of No Hope, Effort to Rescue Russian Nuclear Submarine

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Appendix

Table A1

SOURCE OF ACCESS TO ARTICLES, NUMBER OF HITS, AND
FINAL SAMPLE OF ARTICLES IN THE NEWSPAPERS SELECTED IN
THREE TARGET MARKETS

Country - Newspaper	Access to articles	Number of hits/ Articles opened	Sample of newspaper articles
France: - <i>Le Monde</i>	-Reuters Business Briefing	499/499 ⁶	105
- <i>Les Echos</i>	-Reuters Business Briefing	77/77	53
Japan: - <i>Asahi</i>	www.asahi.com	682/217	69
- <i>Nikkei</i>	www.nikkei.co.jp	516/50	33
Sweden: - <i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	Access via Press Text	855/137	91
- <i>Dagens Industri</i>	www.di.se	1801/181	61
			412

⁶ The French data served as a pilot exercise to develop organizing criteria for the content analysis. All the articles were therefore opened.

Appendix

Table A2

CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES FOR CLASSIFICATION OF ATTRIBUTES

Generic topic	Sub-topic
1. Politics	A. International Relations B. International role C. Political system D. Political stability E. Governmental profile
2. Society	A. Social system B. Religion C. Educational system D. Judicial system E. Population
3. Economy	A. Science B. Market system C. Market power D. International dependency E. Tourism F. Industry profile G. State of economy
4. Culture	A. Sports B. Arts & Literature
5. People	A. Physical appearance B. Social relations C. Relation to nature
6. Nature	A. Scenery B. Climate C. Localization D. Environment