

A Holistic Concept based on Modern Influential Techniques of Integrated Marketing Communication: A Country Image Model

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Article history

Received 23 June 2022 | Accepted 28 July 2022 | Published online 05 August 2022.

Abstract

The country image has an important role in present period of globalization. However, image modeling, as a holistic concept based on various marketing communications techniques, has been tangentially analyzed over time. This study aims to explore the influencing techniques used in marketing communication in a complex analysis from a traditional to a modern approach with respect to the country's image. The measuring of a multi-dimensional construct of modeling a home country's image was tested with the implication of image of city, corporation, product, and personal as well as digitalization process. This research outlined various marketing communication techniques at different levels. The impact of image of a city, corporation, product, and person image on the home county image was significant. This editorial adds a contribution to the scientific literature's body of knowledge. It can be concluded that marketing communication techniques that manage image of a place, corporation, product, and person imply a positive effect on the home country's image.

Keywords: Marketing, communication, techniques, personal image, corporate image, city image, county image.

JEL classification: M00, M30, M31, M39.

1. Introduction

Marketing communication is a comprehensive phenomenon and an ethical approach is required in order to contribute to the benefit of society. The research question of the paper is to present the evolution of marketing communication from a traditional to a modern approach due to globalization and digitalization with respect to the country's image. The research methodology was an empirical study and exploratory research. Its purpose was the classification of phenomena, mainly of influencing techniques used in marketing communication, in order to understand their essence, nature and effects. This paper aims to develop the role of marketing communication activity with respect to home country image as a result of influence of city, corporate, product, residents' personal image and digitalization process in the county. In this editorial, we were motivated to understand and describe marketing communication processes as a holistic concept.

The main contribution of this paper is to highlight the evolution of marketing communication techniques aimed towards customers and their significance for the image of the home country. The study adds a contribution to scientific literature while this is the first study that analyzes the home country's image as a holistic concept which is influenced by city, corporate, product and residents' personal image.

While this research is not without limitations, it brings an added value to the academic literature. It can be concluded that marketing communication techniques have shifted to modern trends. A complete summary of findings indicates that a home country's image is influenced by its place, corporate, product, and personal image.

2. Review of literature

Marketing is considered "a source of competitive advantage" in the international business field (Martinet al., 2020). It is characterized by an opposition and a connection between the company, as the main subject, and the market itself, as an object of context. Marketing offers companies tools to manage "the value of their offer" for their consumers and, at the same time, offer the value of their consumers to themselves (Ogden et al., 2011). The companies, as key players (Cieslik, 2020) through their marketing tools (Addis & Podesa, 2005) make it possible to maximize the potential of their offers and meet their consumers' needs.

2.1. Traditional techniques of marketing communication

Communication is defined as the information passing or the exchange of ideas (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012). While marketing communication must highlight the "benefit of the associated product environment" and the "interest of the company" (Popescu et al., 2013) it mediates the relationship "between marketing capabilities and competitive strategy" (Martinet al., 2020). Popescu (2003) grouped the techniques integrated in the marketing communication process as follows: (1) promotional communication techniques, such as: (a) advertising; (b) sales promotion (brand-supported techniques; promotional premiums and gifts; promotional games and products; testing operations free of charge); (c) public relations; (d) communication through events (fairs; sponsorship and patronage); (e) use of sales force; (f) direct marketing (catalog; mail; telephone; press; television); as well as (2) continuous communication techniques, such as: (a) brand (product brand, range, umbrella or warranties) and (b) packaging. Also, Bunghez (2020) listed the following elements of marketing communication: advertising, direct sales, public relations, sales promotions, and interactive marketing.

2.2. The impact of digitalization and the evolution of marketing communication techniques

Interactivity has become an important element for marketing communications due to the fast pace of social media and social networking evolution. Most advertising platforms and marketers are using data to personalize their marketing communication regarding the profiles created for Internet users (Strycharz et al., 2019). Mobile, smart-phone, wearable, and Internet of Things devices such as voice assistants, activity trackers, and smart sensors are integrated into marketing communication (Lee et al., 2019). The Internet of Things is the network created from people, things, and data (Joao et al., 2019), and it uses data mining techniques such as clusters (Garcia et al., 2016).

A dynamic way of using Internet services was boosted by the increasing diffusion of mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and services related to them, such as Quick Response barcodes (Porcu et al., 2012). Today, the marketplace is interconnected while technological advancements are permitting consumers to have access to the communication channels. Visual and multimedia content have become integral components of marketers' communication toolkits. Visual media includes television (TV shows, movies), blogs, radio, websites, advertisements on the Internet, books, newspapers, brochures, social media and networking sites (including visual content such as images, videos, cartoons, info graphics, and memes that display images as part of the message). Verbal media includes word-of-mouth communications, platforms (online magazines, corporate websites, or platforms for third party marketing), advertising, and other promotional materials. It may be extended beyond sensory media to previous personal experiences of the customers (John and De'Villiers, 2020).

Social media has made it possible for consumers to transfer from "passive consumers to active contributors" by creating brand-related content (Schivinski et al., 2019), while becoming qualitative actors and main critics (Guede et al., 2019). Social media is playing a significant role in marketing communications. It is becoming integral to a company's marketing strategy with other organizations, communities, and individuals. This phenomenon requires modern communication and responsibility lines between organizational departments. Customers' loyalty to social network sites and media networks, as company Facebook page, is significantly related to social influence or enhancement values, compatibility, enjoyment, satisfaction with the company's page and usage behavior "associated with the company's offerings"(Valos et al., 2016).

The development of the majority of software affiliates is based on persuasion or other marketing communication skills. Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram (John and De'Villiers, 2020), Trip Advisor, MySpace, Meet Up, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, and other sites such as third-party reviews or private blogs, are a major opportunity and challenge for businesses. In a cyber environment, it is important for consumers to trust online reviews or social media information. Persuasion may take an important place in the context of Big Data Analytics while companies have opted for disintermediation. Online conversations on platforms are reasons for marketers "to change the way in which they listen to the voice of the customer" (Ruyter et al., 2018). Researchers suggested that both mixed neutral and rich electronic word of mouth content positively affect "online purchase intention" while web marketing, by e-commerce, has become attractive (Caiazza and Bigliardi, 2020). Based on these conclusions, marketers are encouraged to develop new online marketing communication techniques (Roy et al., 2018).

Social media integrates information and communication tools such as blogging, mobile connectivity, and photo or video sharing. Viral stealth marketing communications are using the electronic media platform. This marketing technique involves spreading messages through people or celebrities who, in most cases, do not disclose that they are promoting a product. At present time, it is seeming to shaping the digital marketing communication landscape to artificial intelligence services, augmented and virtual reality or multi-channel networks (Kim et al., n.d.). Cloud computing, the Internet of Things, smart cities, big data, advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, three-dimensional printing, biotechnology, broadband internet, and wireless mobility are among the digital technologies that are transforming our lives. The main areas of artificial intelligence implemented in marketing communication are: text, voice, image technologies, and autonomous robots and vehicles, as well as analytical decision-making systems. Also, it is considered a future trend in the development of intelligent artificial technologies to become independent machines and robots (Peyravi et al., 2020). Strategies focused on data-driven innovation have developed sophisticated technologies for "data management, predicting user behavior, or analyzing their actions" (Saura et al., n.d).

2.3. Integration of modern influence techniques in marketing communication

Digitalization, as part of the evolution towards customer experience management, customer journey management, and co-creation, has contributed to the implementation of integrated marketing communication. Customer integration in the process is also a result of innovation, combined with a targeted "marketing strategy" (Janos, 2021) due to globalization. Due to technological innovations' boom, this dynamic discipline and interactive process has increased its relevance (Porcu et al., 2012). Integrated marketing communication is the strategic consistency of all messages among different elements in order to ensure a positive image that will appeal to consumers. The idea of consistency of message among different communication techniques is important in developing customer trust. There is a need for "effective integration"

of social media into an integrated marketing communication strategy (Valos et al., 2016). When integrating interactive and traditional media, integrated campaigns are considered to be more effective (Navarro et al., 2009).

2.4. Complex phenomenon of marketing communication techniques of influence

The digital era has led to an exceptional transformation of the globalization process. Through the universal nature of macromarketing (Nason & White, 1981), it researches the "aggregate marketing system" and its impact on quality of life (Wilkie & Moore, 2009). Public diplomacy is included in macro-marketing communication (Rasmussen and Merckelsen, 2012), and the knowledge-based economy is changing governmental, intellectual, business, and personal mentalities around the world (Zaharia et al., 2011).

Global market communication

On an international level, the largest marketing communication industry is the United States. China is the second largest and fastest growing industry in the world. Ethnography, as a tool employed to understand nascent and emerging consumer issues (Malhotra and Peterson, 2001), may contribute to improving marketing communication at an international level. Internet marketing communication contributes to the modernization of the traditional one and has been implemented differently by countries worldwide in order to ensure their visibility in the global market. As example, Croatian internet saturation presents a challenge for both consumers and market experts (Odeljan & Gregurec, 2020) as well as for online marketing communication (Odeljan & Gregurec, 2020a). Broadband access technologies are at the basis of marketing communication in Japan (Oliveira et al., 2020). South Korea has an image as a digitalized country as well as an Internet of Things technology integrated into marketing communication.

Regional marketing communication

Place marketing is a complex process. In order to achieve a sustainable development of the region, it is necessary to develop, apply, and maintain various marketing communication techniques. Heritage (Balmer, 2013) can be successfully implemented in location marketing communication. Another efficient technique that can make a difference is innovation. The region's heritage can be considered an important marketing communication technique. In the French-speaking sphere, heritage refers to peoples and societies, while in Anglophone nations are focused on buildings and landscapes. For instance, Romania showed differences in terms of innovation compared to other EU member states. In this context, only 5% of Romania's small and medium-sized companies are engaged in innovation, while 33% of the same companies in other EU member countries have introduced product and process innovations (Stancu et al., 2020). It is important to underline that in an uncertain economic environment, market players tend to act cautiously.

The country's marketing communication

In this globalization process, it is crucial for countries to create and maintain national marketing communication as a competitive advantage on international marketing (Nason & White, 1981). The country's image doesn't have a standard definition, although it is considered that each country has its own image (Cotirlea, 2015). Brijs, Bloemer and Kasper (2011) investigated the concept of country image as all consumer perceptions that attach to a country and its residents. Buhmann (2016) defined country image as "subjective attitudes towards a country among foreign publics". Information technologies have contributed to the multiplication of communication channels. In order to create a positive country image, countries worldwide are integrating different techniques of marketing communication. As example for the Canadian country's image, it is integrated a communication with an emphasis on favoring caring for others and flexibility. Denmark's country image has been improved by

diplomats with a focus on the economic factors of "reputation and security" (Rasmussen and Merckelsen, 2012). Marketing communication with an impact on the Estonian country's image is based on values such as business ethics and hard work, while Mexico's culture is known worldwide as committed to society and for its indulgence.

The city marketing communication

Currently, in the process of globalization, competition between cities is intense. City marketing is the coordinated implementation of marketing techniques supported by a customer-oriented philosophy to create, communicate, and deliver urban offers in order to create value for the city's customers and community at large. It involves considering the city's main functions, such as administratively, spatially, socially, economically, politically, etc. (Braun, 2008). Many cities worldwide are integrating into their marketing communication various smart technologies (Araral, 2020). For example, Amsterdam, in marketing communication, inserts a holistic approach of various smart projects (Somayya and Ramaswamy, 2016), while in Osaka, it is even easy to access the most suitable metro wagon through the Google Maps application (Oliveira et al., 2020).

The company's with its brands' marketing communication

It is essential for the company to create a network with its consumers, and modern marketing contributes to this process. Most companies adopt the concept of integrated marketing communication. They may design techniques in order to generate a link by stimulating the sensorial and emotional levels of customers in order to achieve a higher perception of its products or services (David et al., 2021). For companies, it's become very important for the detection and processing of emotional information while emotional stimuli are always nearby and customers have a high adaptive value. Company reputation, culture, and values may also be communicated by employer branding. A company is like a social network that is able to increase its value through each employee's own network. The employee's involvement in the company's marketing communication becomes decisive while it implies developing trust and has strategic importance for the company's future (Garaa and Porteb, 2020). A positive impact on the global market could be achieved by multinational corporations indicating the importance of corporate responsibility reports (Balan, 2010). Also, it is considered that a company's making reference to social norms in marketing communication is a way to influence sustainable consumption (Balan, 2021). Consumers prefer to buy from companies dedicated to noble social causes (Anghel, Grigore and Rosca, 2011), while young and high-income consumers are interested in the products of companies that are involved in environmental problems (Ahmad, Ali, Grigore and Stancu, 2012). An effective communication technique integrated into the marketing communication of companies is also considered social branding (Cornelissen et al., 2007).

Individual marketing communication

Personal marketing is a set of activities that people engage in to gain recognition in their target market. Personal marketing communication could use both words and non-verbal coding information (Popescu, 2001). Nonverbal communication can be expressed through facial expressions, vocal characteristics, protocol or body language, visual images, music, art, or colors. In this sense, at the level of personal marketing communication, it is advisable to integrate art, fashion, music, coloring, and other persuasive techniques. This assumes that it accurately communicates various subtleties and knowledge of intercultural differences. A successful personal image strategy requires a lot of personal effort, self-knowledge, and time. It is based on individual values, personal interests, and beliefs that contribute to maintaining a positive reputation. Personal reputation can create a positive impact on relationships, which is an important overall theme in marketing communication. Also, in relationships with different

people or companies, personal dignity is very important and it is mainly influenced by interactions with others (Plunkett and Kelly, 2021).

2.5. Hypotheses developed from the literature

Cities are perceived differently worldwide, including by their citizens as well. At the present time in the city, strategic marketing communication is essential while a powerful brand is also important for residents. The branding process is perceived as a strategic economic necessity (Cotirlea, 2015). While events are used as an image-enhancement tool, mostly for large cities, it is considered that they can have the effect of modeling a favorable image of the host country (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

Based on theoretical literature, we proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *City image has a positive effect on modeling the home country's image.*

The influence of corporate image on a country's image has rarely been researched. *Corporate image could have an influence on its country's image. It could be moderated by independent variables as "country familiarity, corporate familiarity, brand image fit, and corporate brand category-country brand image fit" as well as corporate level variables, mainly international visibility and market visibility (Lopez et al., 2011). Companies, in these mass communication times with heightened visibility, are interested in restoring their relationships with customers through complaint handling systems, formal apologies, and compensation strategies (Gils & Horton, 2019).* Politeness also can play an essential role in communication in general and in corporate social responsibility in particular, while overly-polite language about dubious actions could indicate deceitful intentions to informed observers (Farrow et al., 2021). Nguyen and Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2021) revealed that whereas the state need to build diplomatic ties in order to promote its country's image in foreign countries through its products in general or cultural products in particular. Foreign states profit from these products for their regionally oriented cultural policy.

We proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Corporate image has a positive effect on modeling the home country's image.*

Companies can differentiate their products by focusing on their physical, mainly taste, design, fit, or nonphysical, mainly price, brand name, country-of-origin characteristics. The national origin of a product is considered one of the defining factors of consumers' evaluation. In this context, a product's national origin can represent a product quality signal as well as affect perceived risk and likelihood of purchase. Consumers with strong national social identities (highly ethnocentric) are thought to prefer products from countries perceived to be similar to their own over those with lower levels of ethnocentricity (Lantz & Loeb, 1996). Roth, Diamantopoulos, and Montesinos (2008) analyzed the other side of the relationship by applying a brand equity construct in a country context in order to measure the value-added that the name of a country is endowing a brand or a product as perceived by the consumer. It was indicated that country brand equity was influenced by country image perceptions, while country brand equity positively impacts on product preferences and is not directly influenced by country image perceptions. The country's image is considered to indirectly affect buyers' brand attitudes through inferential beliefs and directly affect their brand attitudes (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). In order to make a difference, some brands have used art in their campaigns, promotions, or packaging (Estes et al., 2018), while others incorporate in their marketing communication corporate heritage or innovation. For example, the British aircraft engine company and the German car company emphasized in their marketing communication the enviable legacy of the

corporate heritage of Rolls Royce (Balmer, 2013), while Slovakian companies, recently, started using the tools of innovation (Janos, 2021) and modern technologies in their marketing communication. Use of brand-name products has an influence on the country's image (Lantz & Loeb, 1996).

We can summarize:

Hypothesis 3: *Product image has a positive effect on modeling the home country's image.*

Gaughan and Javalgi (2018) discuss how globalization affects business ethics. At the present time, ethical leadership with moral attentiveness is a must and has a positive influence on their company's (Gils, 2015) and country's image. Good leaders know the moment when to step back, reflect, and be coherent, balancing consultation and initiative and not being afraid of other leaders as well as mentoring new ones (Allal-Cherif et al., 2021). Bagozzia et al., (2018) research provided a perspective when the self is managed through personal assessment, which prompts the aspiration to proceed in admirable or irresponsible ways. A person can be identified with their country of origin, while residents can also improve the country's image by modeling their personal image (Rosca & Madan, 2020). Fashion, color, and art may play an important role in the process of creating and maintaining a personal image. Social influence has an important role (Ternovski and Yasserli, 2020), and fashion may make a difference in this field. Fashion, as a phenomenon, is considered to represent a marketing communication technique. While coloristic alchemy has a strong influence on people's minds, it communicates the subtleties of color perception. Also, music as an art form can promote ideas and/or emotions (Ogden et al., 2011), and may be integrated even with modern technology (Tran et al., 2018). Art-based initiatives are considered to have an influence on consumer behavior (Estes et al., 2018).

Hence, we conclude:

Hypothesis 4: *Personal image has a positive effect on modeling the home country's image.*

Globalization and the digitization of information are offering new possibilities, but also challenge (Peyravi et al., 2020). Marketing managers, academicians, and researchers are facing unprecedented marketplace and technological disruption (Key et al., 2020). The online environment is used by a large part of the population (Caiazza and Bigliardi, 2020). Marketers are guided to implement "integrated visual marketing communication" techniques of visual and online communication into their marketing toolbox in order to promote "audience" engagement and interaction (John and De'Villiers, 2020). It is considered that positive results can be achieved by implementing the effects of marketing communications power due to the combination of smart sensors like voice-based artificial intelligence assistants that include Amazon Echo and Google Home (Lee et al., 2019) and the dynamic environment of social media (Daj, 2016). These modern technologies contribute to people's well-being (Joao et al., 2019), interaction and cooperation between individuals in order to achieve common goals (Cioruta et al., 2018), the creation of valuable business platforms (Ganchev et al., 2014), as well as safety (Somayya and Ramaswamy, 2016) and have a positive impact on the country's image.

Related to this information from theoretical literature, we summarize the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: *Digitalization has a positive effect on modeling the home country's image.*

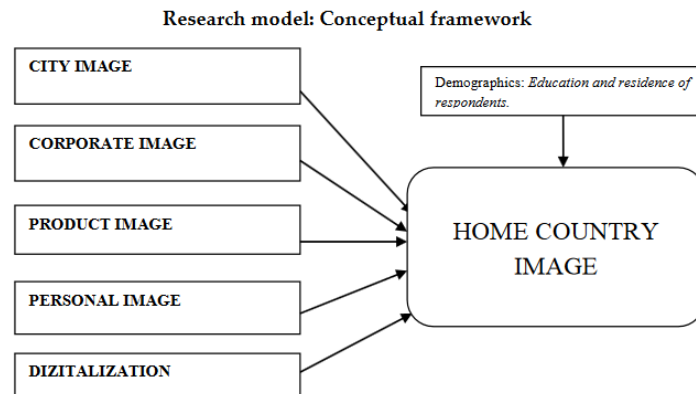


Figure 1. Research model: Conceptual framework

3. Material and methods

The study method was a survey and an exploratory research based on secondary data. Its purpose was to investigate respondents' attitudes, opinions, and values as well as measure their perception regarding marketing communication techniques. This research aimed to emphasize the role of influence techniques in global, regional, country, city, company, brand, and personal marketing communication and their effect on the home country's image.

The model tested the city image (Braun, 2008; Cotirlea, 2015), corporate image (Lopez et al., 2011; Gils & Horton, 2019; Farrow et al., 2021, Thelen and Formanchuk 2022), product image (Lantz and Loeb, 1996), Roth et al., 2008), personal image (Gils, 2015; Gaughan and Javalgi, 2018; Rosca and Madan, 2020; Wang and Hackett, 2020), and digitalization (Daj, 2016; Cioruta et al., 2018; Joao et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Caiazza and Bigliardi, 2020; John and De'Villiers, 2020) effect on the country's image. The research topic is important in the process of globalization. All multiple-item constructs were assessed on seven-point Likert scales (between 1 as totally disagree and 7 as totally agree) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	<i>n</i>		Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
	Valid	Missing				
Country Image						
The population / residents are effective communicators of the country's image	535	184	5.00	1.262	1	7
Domestic tourism and visitors are effective communicators of the country's image	535	184	5.20	1.246	1	7
The Diaspora are effective communicators of the country's image	534	185	4.59	1.387	1	7
Investors are effective communicators of the country's image	535	184	4.78	1.310	1	7
City Image						
The city of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product.	556	163	3.73	1.607	1	7
The country of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product.	556	163	4.01	1.589	1	7
Corporate Image						
The reputation of the manufacturing company is very important in the decision to buy a product.	557	162	4.98	1.379	1	7
Local companies (e.g., Dacia Pitești) are efficient communicators of the country's image.	530	189	4.89	1.362	1	7
Exports are efficient communicators of the country's image	529	190	5.02	1.374	1	7
Domestic products are efficient communicators of the country's image.	530	189	5.13	1.233	1	7
Product Image						

The packaging and labeling of products is very important in the decision to buy.	560	159	4.43	1.464	1	7
Color is very important in the decision to buy a product.	561	158	3.90	1.642	1	7
The presentation approach is very important in the decision to buy a product.	556	163	4.63	1.425	1	7
Promotion / marketing communication is very important in the decision to buy a product.	541	178	4.28	1.429	1	7
Personal Image						
Leaders have focused on their personal image over time in order to make a difference.	519	200	5.16	1.178	1	7
Famous leaders are effective communicators of the country's image.	530	189	4.75	1.355	1	7
Marketing communication must be ethical and based on morality.	525	194	5.75	1.234	1	7
A person's personal image is influenced by their clothing style.	522	197	5.28	1.245	1	7
Communication is essential for business.	529	190	5.90	1.233	1	7
Nonverbal communication is an influence technique used in business.	521	198	5.26	1.253	1	7
In the globalization process, it is important to study business ethics in different countries.	523	196	5.38	1.241	1	7
Digitalization						
E-commerce sites may be considered as reliable communication platforms.	556	163	4.54	1.350	1	7
Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter) are reliable communication channels.	553	166	4.30	1.432	1	7
Blogs are trustworthy communication platforms.	541	178	4.25	1.289	1	7

3.1. Independent and dependent variables

Country Image: represents all perceptions of residents and non-residents related to a country. The totality of people's perceptions, assumptions, and ideas about a country was described as its image (Kotler et.al., 1993). The country's image is also defined as an internal and external structure of beliefs and opinions about people, nations, and the country itself (Szeles, 1998). Beerli and Martin (2004) approached it through the domestic tourists that are visiting the country for the first time as well as those that make multiple visits. Yoo, Jo, and Jung (2014) measured behavioral intentions toward a country by modifying the investigation into country image perceptions: visit or return to the country, learn the country's language, have a friend from the country, purchase the country's cultural products, and purchase the country's commercial products. In this study, the country image impact was evaluated by questioning respondents to evaluate each of the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) the population / residents are effective communicators of the country's image, (2) domestic tourism and visitors are effective communicators of the country's image, (3) the diasporas are effective communicators of the country's image, and (4) investors are effective communicators of the country's image. The three-item measure was obtained by employing factor analysis. Factor analysis confirmed the underlying design. Cronbach's alpha was 0.646, which exceeds the generally agreed limit (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability and validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Measure	Factor Loading
Country Image	0.646	- The population / residents are effective communicators of the country's image	0.711
		- Domestic tourism and visitors are effective communicators of the country's image	0.742
		- The Diaspora are effective communicators of the country's image	0.685
		- Investors are effective communicators of the country's image	0.651
City Image	0.832	- The city of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product.	0.925
		- The country of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product.	0.925

Corporate Image	0.637	- The reputation of the manufacturing company is very important in the decision to buy a product.	0.583
		- Local companies (e.g., Dacia Pitești) are efficient communicators of the country's image.	0.733
		- Exports are efficient communicators of the country's image	0.774
		- Domestic products are efficient communicators of the country's image.	0.671
Product Image	0.746	- The packaging and labeling of products is very important in the decision to buy	0.778
		- Color is very important in the decision to buy a product.	0.783
		- The presentation approach is very important in the decision to buy a product.	0.784
		- Promotion / marketing communication is very important in the decision to buy a product.	0.668
Personal Image	0.733	- Leaders have focused on their personal image over time in order to make a difference.	0.561
		- Top leaders are effective communicators of the country's image.	0.386
		- Marketing communication must be ethical and based on morality.	0.748
		- A person's personal image is influenced by their clothing style	0.662
		- Communication is essential for business.	0.724
		- Nonverbal communication is an influence technique used in business.	0.565
Digitalization	0.709	- In the globalization process, it is important to study business ethics in different countries.	0.687
		- E-commerce sites may be considered as reliable communication platforms.	0.856
		- Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter) are reliable communication channels.	0.872
		- Blogs are trusty communication platforms.	0.643

City image: refers to the image of all cities from a home country. Marketing techniques is considered to have a positive effect on the city's images (Braun, 2008). Richards and Wilson (2004) surveyed visitors to the event Rotterdam 2001 European Cultural Capital, about the following city image attributes: modern architecture; water; multicultural; working city; international; dynamic; culture and art; lots to discover; events; shopping; nightlife; cosy; and unsafe. In our research, we measured city image by questioning respondents to evaluate the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) the city of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product, and (2) the country of origin of the company is very important in the purchase decision of a product. Factor analysis confirmed the underlying design. All variables were loaded above the 0.70 threshold. Cronbach's alpha was 0.832, which exceeds the generally agreed limit (see Table 2).

Corporate image: refers to the image of all companies from a home country. Thelen and Formanchuk (2022) noted that an ethical organizational culture plays a decisive role in modeling transparent marketing communication of a company as well as perceived relationship investment that cultivates employee advocacy behaviors. Lopez, Gotsi, and Andriopoulos (2011) developed a conceptual framework grounded on the following items: country of origin, image transfer, corporate and place branding. We measured company image impact by questioning respondents to evaluate the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) the reputation of the manufacturing company is very important in the decision to buy a product, (2) local companies (e.g., Dacia Pitești) are efficient communicators of the country's image, (3) exports are efficient communicators of the country's image, and (4) domestic products are efficient communicators of the country's image. Table 2 presents the factor analysis results. Cronbach's alpha was 0.637, which exceeds the generally agreed limit (see Table 2).

Product image: refers to all products' image from a home country. Roth, Diamantopoulos, and Montesinos (2008) developed a model with an estimated intervening variable that linked (home) country image and product preferences with country brand equity. Lantz and Loeb (1996) tested: samples of a rather ordinary product, and countries where quality is relevant but also those where it should not be an issue. In our study, we considered product branding by questioning respondents to evaluate the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) the packaging and labeling of products is very important in the decision to buy, (2) color is very important in the decision to buy a product, (3) the presentation approach is very important in the decision to buy a product, and (4) promotion / marketing communication is very important in the decision to buy a product. Factor analysis confirmed the underlying design. Cronbach's alpha was 0.746 (see Table 2).

Personal image: refers to the personal image of the country's residents. Personal image need to be adapted to context, while ethical leadership styles goes beyond charisma and competencies in order to involve motivations and emotions (Allal-Cherif et al., 2021). Wang and Hackett (2020) analyzed a moral identity framework of virtuous leadership that involves six cardinal virtues, such as courage, prudence, temperance, justice, humanity, and truthfulness. This idea was expanded upon with the prospect of the virtue ethics school of moral philosophy. Gils, Quaquebeke, Knippenberg, Dijke, and Cremer (2015) investigated ethical leadership - "my leader conducts his/her personal life in an ethical manner" and "my leader defines success not just by results but also the way that they are obtained"; moral attentiveness "I regularly think about the ethical implications of my decisions" and "I frequently encounter ethical situations"; and organizational deviance "how often did your colleague in the last year take property from work without permission?" and "how often did your colleague in the last year intentionally work slower than he/she could have worked?". We measured personal image impact by questioning respondents to evaluate the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) leaders have focused on their personal image over time in order to make a difference, (2) top leaders are effective communicators of the country's image, (3) marketing communication must be ethical and based on morality, (4) a person's personal image is influenced by their clothing style, (5) communication is essential for business, (6) nonverbal communication is an influence technique used in business, and (7) in the globalization process, it is important to study business ethics in different countries. Table 2 presents the factor analysis results. Cronbach's alpha was 0.733, which exceeds the generally agreed limit (see Table 2).

Digitalization: refers to digitalization process implemented in the home country. Digitalization allows the extension of institutions in marketing communication to create value jointly for customers and companies through customer interactions and experiences in digital environments. Modern technologies may be integrated into "intense customer interaction, networking different actors, customizations, and personalization" (Peyravi et al., 2020). Zuniga-Collazos and Castillo-Palacio (2016) investigated through variables: marketing innovation of the country's tourist enterprises; customer satisfaction by application of innovative marketing strategies; and image of the company's products and services by application of innovative marketing strategies. In our research, we calculated digitalization by questioning respondents to evaluate the following items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) E-commerce sites may be considered as reliable communication platforms, (2) Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter) are reliable communication channels, and (3) blogs are trusty communication platforms. Factor analysis confirmed the underlying design. Cronbach's alpha was 0.709, which exceeds the generally agreed limit (see Table 2).

Control variables: Javalgi et al. (2005) analyzed demographic variables, evaluating the respondents' gender, education, age, and income. Ahmed and d'Astous (2008) measured control variables, evaluating the respondents' age, education, marital status, income, and children. We analyzed the control variables by demographic variables: the respondent's education and residence.

3.2. Statistical analysis and interpretation

The empirical study of the researched hypotheses was based on an assessment of a survey with 719 respondents. The final sample was composed of 52.7% females and 47.4% males; 76.6% living in urban areas (Thelen & Formanchuk, 2022). The majority of the included respondents were Romanian residents (Hajdini & Windsperger, 2020). The response rate was 77% of the overall respondents (Mumdziev & Windsperger, 2011).

Cronbach's alpha statistics were analyzed to evaluate the measurement of multi-item scales' reliability of the model concept (see Table 2). In our study, the country image indicated a reliability coefficient of 0.646, while the city image indicated a coefficient of 0.832, the company image indicated a coefficient of 0.637, the product brand indicated a coefficient of 0.746, the personal brand indicated a coefficient of 0.733, and digitalization indicated a satisfactory coefficient of 0.709. Each reliability coefficient corresponded to the normative acceptability of alpha statistics.

After evaluation of the alpha statistics, the items were statistically tested through factor analysis. All the data confirmed the suitability. Correspondingly, the factor loading for the items set that measured the city image was 0.925. The loadings for the country image ranged between 0.651 and 0.742, which provided a valid construct measurement with heavy loading. The same applied to the four items that presented the company image, which was a formation construct that loaded heavily on the same factor, ranging from 0.583 to 0.774. The factor loading for the items set that measured the product brand indicated a heavy loading that ranged between 0.668 and 0.784. The loadings for the personal brand ranged between 0.386 and 0.748, which also provided a valid construct measurement with heavy loading. The same applied to the three items that contributed to the digitalization, a construct that loaded heavily on the same factor, ranging from 0.643 to 0.872 (see Table 2).

The correlation table below shows the connections between the variables. No correlation coefficient higher than a value of 0.9 was found. However, the highest correlation coefficient was the one between the company image and the country image, which was 0.515. Table 3 summarizes all the results of the correlations between the variables:

Table 3: Correlations of independent variables

	Correlations					
	Country Image	City Image	Corporate Image	Product Image	Personal Image	Digitalization
Country Image	1	.191**	.515**	.330**	.508**	.121**
City Image		1	.263**	.349**	.027	-.037
Corporate Image			1	.347**	.452**	.151**
Product Image				1	.199**	.072
Personal Image					1	.244**
Digitalization						1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table below (see table 6) summarizes all independent variable regression analyses created with the factor analysis's help with respect to the country's image as a dependent variable. Due to the factor analysis and scale reliability results, it was analyzed as a single construct. But first, in the linear regression analysis, it is necessary to analyze the model summary. Table 4 indicates a statistically significant multiple correlation of coefficient R with a representation of 62.1%. Additionally, $R^2 = 38.6\%$ represented the percentage by which the dependent variable variation was influenced by the independent variable values and only with this percentage did the model fit. A R^2 value of 1 indicates total influence, while a value of 0 indicates a non-existent influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Table 4: Model summary

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.613 ^a	.376	.370	.71323	
2	.621 ^b	.386	.377	.70897	

a. Predictors: (Constant), City Image, Corporate Image, Product Image, Personal Image, Digitalization

b. Predictors: (Constant), City Image, Corporate Image, Product Image, Personal Image, Digitalization, respondent residents, respondent education

Second, in the regression analysis, it was required to evaluate the ANOVA (see Table 5). In our research, the significance value was $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$). Since the significance coefficient was lower than 0.05, the model was significant. Due to this regression model, the independent variables as a cohort were linked to the dependent variable.

Table 5: ANOVA

		ANOVA ^a				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	153.244	5	30.649	60.249	.000 ^b
	Residual	254.350	500	.509		
	Total	407.594	505			
2	Regression	157.281	7	22.469	44.702	.000 ^c
	Residual	250.313	498	.503		
	Total	407.594	505			

a. Dependent Variable: Country Image

b. Predictors: (Constant), City Image, Corporate Image, Product Image, Personal Image, Digitalization

c. Predictors: (Constant), City Image, Corporate Image, Product Image, Personal Image, Digitalization, respondent residents, respondent education

In the third assessment of the model, we evaluated how every single construct was linked to the dependent variable. By investigating the standardized coefficient beta, it is indicated which independent variable significantly affects a dependent variable (see Table 6).

Subsequently, we analyzed how every construct was connected to the dependent variable. Hence, image of a city, corporate, product, person, and respondent education variables were significant in this regression model. The significance of the city image was 0.049 ($p < 0.05$), with a beta value of 0.077, the corporate image was 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), with a beta value of 0.308, the product image was 0.007 ($p < 0.05$), with a beta value of 0.107, the personal image was 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), with a beta value of 0.347, and respondent education was 0.012 ($p < 0.05$), with a beta value of -0.090. The positive beta value sign represented a positive relationship between the image of a city, company, product, person, and their effect on the home country's image. Also, the negative sign implied a negative relationship between the respondent's education and its effect on the home country's image. Consequently, the higher the value of the image of a city, company, product, or a person, the greater the impact on the image value of their home country. These positive relationships were similar to those initially expected by Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Finally, following variables such digitalization and the respondent's residence were not statistically significant, with p -values of 0.533 and 0.155, respectively. However, these variables are important to the model's representativeness.

After analyzing the regression model results, they are considered statistically significant. It can be concluded that hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 were confirmed. The relationship fit as we expected. These hypotheses specified a positive link between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 6: Regression analysis

		Coefficients ^a				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.980	.274		3.576	.000
	City Image	.040	.024	.066	1.695	.091
	Corporate Image	.280	.041	.297	6.891	.000
	Product Image	.088	.032	.109	2.737	.006
	Personal Image	.396	.046	.354	8.607	.000

	Digitalization	-.099	.133	-.027	-.745	.456
2	(Constant)	1.400	.318		4.397	.000
	City Image	.047	.024	.077	1.971	.049
	Corporate Image	.290	.041	.308	7.146	.000
	Product Image	.087	.032	.107	2.702	.007
	Personal Image	.388	.046	.347	8.451	.000
	Digitalization	-.083	.133	-.023	-.624	.533
	Respondent Education	-.112	.045	-.090	-2.523	.012
	Respondent Residence	-.032	.023	-.050	-1.423	.155

a. Dependent Variable: Country Image

The performed analysis indicated that the research was statistically significant. The image of a city, company, product, and person denoted a positive relationship in customer preference as a positive impact on the home country's image. Basically the same as was estimated. These hypotheses were supported and confirmed by both the theoretical literature and empirical analysis results. The outcomes showed that the image of a city, company, product, and person imply a positive effect on their home country's image. This represents a significant advantage in the process of globalization. These concepts and techniques are required to be integrated into the long-term marketing strategies of a country's marketing communication. These results confirm our expectations about the image of a city, company, product, and person impact on customer behavior with an effect on the country's image.

4. Results and discussions

In the globalization process, macroeconomics is essential to be studied (Nason & White, 1981; Wilkie & Moore, 2009; Rasmussen and Merckelsen, 2012) from a communication perspective (Braun, 2008; Cotirlea, 2015; Odeljan & Gregurec, 2020a; Garaa and Porteb, 2020; David et al., 2021) with respect to the country's image.

The main objective of this research was to investigate the image of a city, company, product, person, and digitalization process influence on customers, mainly Romanian residents, with respect to the country's image. By reviewing the international literature, we established different influence techniques used in marketing communication ranked at global, regional, national, city, corporation, and individual levels and proposed some hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 tested the link between the city's image and their home country's image. This variable indicated statistical significance in the regression round with the positive link between the city's images is perceived and home country's image being perceived overall. This relationship is also supported by the authors: Braun (2008) and Cotirlea (2015).

Hypothesis 2 tested the link between the corporate image and their home country's image. The results in the regression round showed an impact between the two. As a result, the better a company image is perceived, the better the home country's image is perceived overall. This relationship is also supported by the authors: Lopez, Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2011), *Gils and Horton (2019)* Farrow et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2021).

Hypothesis 3 tested the link between the product's image and their home country's image. After analyzing the results above, we identified that the product's image was found to impact the dependent variable. This relationship is also supported by the authors: Martin and Eroglu (1993), Lantz and Loeb (1996) and Roth, Diamantopoulos and Montesinos (2008).

Hypothesis 4 tested the link between the personal image and their home country's image. This variable denoted statistical significance in the regression round. It indicated the positive link between the residents' image and home country's image being perceived overall. This relationship is also supported by the authors: Gils (2015), Gaughan and Javalgi (2018) and Rosca and Madan (2020)

Hypothesis 5 tested the link between the digitalization process of the country and their home country's image. Even, that Yoo, Jo, and Jung (2014) mentioned that mass media plays an essential role in shaping prior perceptions of a country and television programs can be an effective form of marketing communication media for conveying positive characteristics of a specific country by delivering information via narrative and visual channels, this variable indicated no statistical significance in the regression round. This hypothesis was no statistically confirmed.

This specified that respondents reflect on the influencing techniques of the image of a city, company, product, and person as suitable to be integrated as part of marketing communications of their home county's image. Mostly, marketers do not have ample information about the impact of marketing communication techniques on the image of city, company, product, and person, while they have an positive effective on their home country's image.

5. Conclusions

Marketing communication evolved towards customer experience and journey management, leading to co-creation due to the emergence of new technologies and globalization. The increasing role of marketing communication is reflected in society. At the scientific level, the evolution from traditional to modern influential techniques used in market communication has not been researched so broadly.

This study contributes to the academic literature. Firstly, it makes a contribution to the body of knowledge through extensive theoretical notions of influencing techniques integrated in marketing communication. Second, the study underlines the complexity of marketing communication and the importance of each element in this phenomenon. Third, this article is the first that assesses the image of a city, company, product, person, and digitalization process in their home country's image. It can be concluded that marketing communication has an essential role in the present period of globalization when countries need to model their image in order to be seen.

The main contribution of this editorial is that it analyzes the home country's image as a holistic concept that is influenced by the image of its cities, companies, products and residents in this process of globalization. While this research is not without limitations, it brings an added value to the body of knowledge of academic literature.

Marketers face both opportunities and challenges in present globalization era. It can be concluded that marketing communication techniques have shifted to modern trends. A complete summary of findings indicates that the images of city, companies, products, and residents are at the basis of modeling the home country's image. Finally, during the recent transformation, marketing communication experienced a significant change in its activities, requiring the modification of its technologies and influencing techniques. This is the first study to analyze the modeling of the country's image as a holistic concept through influencing techniques integrated at the marketing communication level.

Acknowledgments

This work. was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of European Funds, POC program, project number P _ 40 __ 382/ 19598- ASECOMP.

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