

Nation Branding as a Modern Expression of Colonialism in Latin America: A Focus on Chile, Colombia, and Peru

PABLO MIÑO¹
Boston University, USA

Since the 2000s, several Latin American governments have launched nation branding campaigns to internationally promote the exports, foreign direct investment, and tourism offerings of their countries. This study examines how these projects have attempted to appeal to both internal and external audiences by capturing specific moments in the history of these countries' political, social, and economic development, in a context of heightened neoliberalism in the region between the 1990s and 2010s. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 21 professionals involved with nation branding campaigns on behalf of Chile, Colombia, and Peru, this study recognizes nation branding as a reflection of modern colonialism in Latin America, through the lens of the literature on the coloniality of power and the duality between modernity and coloniality. This finding contributes to the cultural approach to nation branding, recognizing that brands act as vessels for the cultural meaning of ideas that are bound to time.

Keywords: advertising, colonialism, commercial nationalism, Latin American studies, nation branding, national identity

During the first two decades of the 21st century, several Latin American governments have launched nation branding campaigns to promote their national reputation with the goal to foster exports, enhance foreign direct investment (FDI), and attract tourism to their countries (Chaves, 2011; Miño & Saffer, 2021; Ramos & Noya, 2006). In a globalized and capitalistic world, these campaigns have been used by certain nations to jump from their *peripheral* status and reach the attention of the *core* powers of the world. World-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974) argues about the existence of peripheral countries that heavily depend on their economic relations with core nations. Peripheral countries sustain their economies with the export of commodities and raw materials, while core countries have advanced industries that manufacture products using high-level technologies. In this world-system, Latin America is conceived as a region of the world in a constant state of economic development (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979), subject to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). Following that rationale, Colombia has advertised itself as a country full of "passion" (Sanín, 2016), Chile as a nation that is "good for you"

Pablo Miño: pabloamn@bu.edu
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(Jiménez-Martínez, 2013, p. 281), and Peru as an “empire of hidden treasures” (Silverman, 2015, p. 143) with very specific goals in mind: to attract tourism, foster exports, and promote FDI in their country through nation branding campaigns (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008).

Chile, Colombia, and Peru are not the only Latin American countries that have launched these campaigns. For example, efforts such as “Mexico, the Place You Thought You Knew” and “Embrace Your Passion, Invest in Argentina” (Fehimovic & Ogden, 2018, p. 20) aimed to promote tourism and investment, respectively. They also acted as sources of symbolic capital for these countries to attract more revenue to grow their economies. The Washington Consensus played a significant role in Latin America in the 1990s (Williamson, 2009), leading political leaders to embrace a neoliberal mindset and represent their countries’ branded identities in accordance to the demands of the international market economy. This is how nation branding became a form to represent “exotic capital (. . .) constituting a source of symbolic wealth that can be produced, distributed, consumed, and traded” (Fehimovic & Ogden, 2018, p. 20). Critical-cultural scholars argue that nation branding’s end goal is to please an international gaze that benefits the economic elites of developing countries. They criticize this practice for using stereotypes to brand the nation, exoticizing the reputation of the country by turning it into an “imagined commodity” (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2020) with economic purposes (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). For example, focusing on the cases of Ukraine and Kosovo, Kaneva (2017) argued that nation branding campaigns in these contexts are limited for three reasons: (1) they are subject to a foreign gaze, aiming to satisfy consumerist desires of Western audiences, (2) they depend on commercial transnational media, and (3) they brand national subjectivities that contradict the lived experiences of national populations. Kaneva (2017) brought to attention that nation branding has become popular in developing countries where there has been a pressing need to “show compliance with the principles of market economy and liberal democracy in order to receive foreign aid” (p. 119).

This study aims to contribute to that literature, from a Latin American perspective. Through in-depth interviews with 21 professionals involved with nation branding campaigns on behalf of Chile, Colombia, and Peru, this study connects the colonialism and economic development literature in Latin America (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000; Wallerstein, 1974) with a cultural approach to nation branding (Aronczyk, 2013; Fehimovic & Ogden, 2018; Kaneva, 2011). Findings of this study suggest that to the eyes of these professionals, nation branding projects in Chile, Colombia, and Peru were received (and in some cases, even embraced) between the mid-2000s to the late 2010s by their citizens because of specific achievements that contributed to each country’s political, economic, and social development. Building off of that finding, I argue that these nation branding efforts act as a representation of the duality between coloniality and modernity in the region between the 1990s and 2010s (Mignolo, 2011). This is informed by these professionals’ perceptions of what counted as “modernity” and “development” under the influence of the Washington Consensus, in a context of heightened neoliberalism in Latin America during that time (Bértola & Ocampo, 2013).

Literature Review

This literature review is organized into three main subsections: (1) colonialism and economic development in Latin America, (2) a cultural approach to nation branding focused on coloniality, and (3)

the presentation of the case studies of Chile, Colombia, and Peru to interpret nation branding as an expression of modern colonialism in Latin America.

Colonialism and Economic Development in Latin America

Various schools of thought have provided different interpretations on economic development in Latin America. From a sociological standpoint, the world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974) proposes that there are peripheral countries that heavily depend on their economic relations with the core nations. All Latin American countries are considered to be peripheral, with the exception of Mexico and Brazil, labeled as semiperipheral (Chase-Dunn, Kawano, & Brewer, 2000). In *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, Cardoso and Faletto (1979) explained the historical, political, and structural reasons that led most of the economies in this region to be stuck in an economic “developing” phase in the early 1960s. With their economic dependency theory, Cardoso and Faletto (1979) proposed that Latin American societies are a consequence of American and European capitalism. They explained: “Many ‘underdeveloped’ economies—as is the case of Latin America—were incorporated into the capitalist system as colonies and later as national states” (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979, p. 23). Because of their underdeveloped status, historically, some of these economies have not been able to equally compete with other countries. Building on that idea, Quijano (2000) argued that modern forms of globalization are expansions of colonialism that go beyond economics and constitute the “coloniality of power” (p. 215). This model is composed of four interrelated domains: control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity. The “coloniality of power” criticizes the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital, social relations, and White privilege in Latin American societies, as a direct consequence of colonialism in the region.

From a humanities and cultural studies perspective, Mignolo (2011) built on the work of Quijano (2000) to argue that the coloniality of power is a representation of the duality between modernity and coloniality: without colonialism, the perception and knowledge of what constitutes “modernity” would not exist. What counts as “modern” or “development” is informed by preconceived notions coming from the Global North. Applied to the neoliberal world of the 20th and 21st centuries, the liberalization of the Latin American economies and their integration to international trade through the promotion of exports, services, and FDI became symbols of modernity. That view of “modernity,” speaking in economic terms, became more evident in Latin America after the end of the Cold War. Williamson (2009) reported that the term “Washington Consensus” was coined by him in 1989, which was used to describe “the extent to which the old ideas of development economics that had governed Latin American economic policy since the 1950s were being swept aside by the set of ideas that had long been accepted as appropriate within the OECD” (p. 7). This discourse permeated within the region, as some governments were trying to leave their economic crises and follow the “triumphant” American capitalist model from the 1980s and early 1990s (Stiglitz, 2002). Neoliberalism called nations to open their economies to the world. The sale of commodities to core nations allowed Latin American countries to grow their economies and solidify a political and economic elite that benefited from their nations’ integration to the world’s economy.

In a quest to sell those commodities, these elites engaged in a new field of practice that originated in the Global North, particularly the United Kingdom: nation branding. As Holt (2006) stated, branding can be conceptualized as the “language” of neoliberalism and capitalism. Applied to nation

branding, this study recognizes the elaboration of these campaigns as a symbol of these countries' attempt to lure global economic elites and become more connected to the world's neoliberal economy of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Fehimovic & Ogden, 2018).

A Cultural Approach to Nation Branding, Focused on Coloniality

As a field for both practice and research, nation branding is argued to be a product of globalization and the neoliberal model of the late 20th century. In the mid-1990s, the British consultant and policy advisor Simon Anholt, named by several scholars as the "father," or one of the "founding fathers" of nation branding (Kaneva, 2011, p. 117; Szondi, 2008, p. 2), proposed that governments throughout the world could apply the same techniques used by brand managers of private companies to create and manage a nation's brand. The goal of this brand would be to aid a government in its quest on the promotion of a country's exports, FDI, and tourism offerings abroad (Anholt, 2002).

Kaneva (2011) examined 186 articles about nation branding published in peer-reviewed journals between 1997 and 2009. She reported that the field had been studied from three main approaches: the technical-economic approach, the political approach, and the cultural approach. The technical-economic approach focused on nation branding as a marketing-oriented practice, providing recommendations for countries on how to best brand a country—following Anholt's (2002, 2007) proposal. The political approach was closely related to the public diplomacy literature, examining nation branding as a government's resource to improve its country's soft power abroad. Finally, the cultural approach was not concerned with providing recommendations on how to best execute a nation brand. This approach, critical by nature and the one that guides this study, examined issues such as the representation of a country's culture and identity through a brand, focusing on who has a deciding role on representations of nations that are inherently diverse, and at times with identities that are in conflict with each other.

Aronczyk (2008, 2013) provided evidence to illustrate the contradictory representations of different countries through these brands. She criticized how nation branding professionals, mostly based in the Global North, applied branding techniques, such as brand management and brand identity, to the branding of nations such as Chile, Lithuania, and Poland. Her critique was focused on how nation brands reduce discourses about the nation to cohesive and coherent national identities that are uniform by nature and neglect the internal and diverse realities of a country. These brands represent versions of the nation that follow the recommendations of these professionals, who have the knowledge on what constitutes the "main idea" to be sold through these brands. As it was previously outlined, Quijano (2000) presented knowledge and subjectivity as one of the edges in the coloniality of power. Nation branding, then, becomes a representation of how countries are supposed to subjectively know and present themselves (the knowledge and subjectivity edges of the model), aiming to profit from that representation to the world's economy (the economy edge of the model). In this study, I argue that Chile, Colombia, and Peru serve as useful case studies to theorize about nation branding in the Latin American context, as a region in a constant state of "economic development" (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979), subject to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). This rationale resembles the previous literature on nation branding focused in eastern European countries, which have also shied away from their socialist past to embrace a neoliberal approach to their economic development.

The Case Studies: Chile, Colombia, and Peru

Since the 1990s, Chile, Colombia, and Peru have opened their economies to the world, signing trade agreements with countries in North America, Europe, and Asia (Bértola & Ocampo, 2013). These agreements have also strengthened their diplomatic and political relations with the great powers of the world. However, the current standing of these three countries is very different from their internal realities in the last stages of the 20th century. Just to name a few examples, between 1973 and 1990, Chile was ruled by a military dictatorship (Stern, 2006); Colombia went through a “war on drugs” (Livingstone, 2003); and Peru had to struggle with the terrorist attacks of the “Shining Path” (Stern, 1998), an internal guerrilla movement. These events caught the attention of headlines in the international news media, leaving these three countries with a reputation to manage in front of the global arena during the last stages of the 20th century.

Throughout the 2000s, these countries engaged in nation branding campaigns to leave behind their troubled past and foster their economic offerings to the world. For example, the campaign “Chile Is Good for You” promoted Chilean seafood, fresh fruit, and wine to North American, European, and Asian audiences (Jiménez-Martínez, 2013). Peru strongly relied on its cultural heritage and cuisine to promote its gastronomy worldwide, through campaigns such as “Cocina Peruana Para el Mundo” (Zhang, 2015). When first launched in the mid-2000s, the campaign “Colombia is Passion” had two end goals: to promote the Colombia brand internally to Colombians, triggering feelings of pride among them to become “brand ambassadors” for their nation brand, and to promote Colombia externally (Sanín, 2016). In all these cases, the governments of these countries implemented brand-management techniques, such as the establishment of a brand identity (in this case, rooted in national identity) to promote a brand image internationally. However, and considering that national identities are never fixed but are always multifaceted, heterogenous, and contested (Bonikowski, 2017), most of the times these countries adopted a technical-economic approach to nation branding, representing one-sided versions of their identity that aimed to please an international gaze (Kaneva, 2017) with economic interests in mind. This makes Chile, Colombia, and Peru a useful set of case studies to analyze nation branding as a modern expression of colonialism in Latin America. Using this rationale, I propose the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the conceptions of “modernity” and “development” that professionals behind the nation branding efforts of Chile, Colombia, and Peru used to situate these campaigns as connectors between the geopolitical and economic Latin American context to the world-systems economy?*
- RQ2: What are the conceptions of Chilean, Colombian, and Peruvian diverse cultures and identities that nation branding professionals used to situate their campaigns to internally and globally “manage” and improve a country’s brand?*
- RQ3: In the context of the colonality of power, how do nation branding campaigns account for the contested notions of what entails a country’s culture and identity that is represented through each brand?*

Methodology

To answer these research questions, I conducted 21 in-depth interviews with professionals involved in the nation branding efforts of Chile, Colombia, and Peru. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Some of these professionals worked specifically for the nation branding office of their country while others were tangentially involved with these brands as external consultants. All interviews were conducted in Spanish between March 2019 and August 2020 via phone or video conferencing (i.e., Zoom). Interviews averaged 43 minutes and 51 seconds. Informants' educational backgrounds were in journalism (n = 6), business administration (n = 5), advertising (n = 4), economics (n = 3), sociology (n = 2), and comparative literature (n = 1), and some of them had graduate degrees in marketing, sociology, international relations, and cinema studies. To protect their identities, all participants were offered anonymity and given an ID number. Some of their background information is shared in Table 1, although not enough to make them easily identifiable.

Table 1. Interviewees' Characteristics.

ID no.	Country of expertise	Institution	Areas of expertise
1	Chile	ProChile	Public relations; trade relations between Chile and the United States
2	Chile	ProChile	Advertising; branding; business administration
3	Chile	ProChile	Advertising; public relations; nation branding campaigns in Asia
4	Chile	Marca Chile	Public relations; public diplomacy; government relations
5	Chile	Marca Chile	Market research; perception studies of image of Chile abroad
6	Chile	Marca Chile	Market research; perception studies of image of Chile abroad
7	Chile	InvestChile	Branding; marketing; promotion of FDI in Chile
8	Chile	Sernatur	Marketing; business; promotion of Chilean tourism abroad
9	Colombia	External consultant	Advertising; marketing; branding (private and public clients)
10	Colombia	ProColombia	Advertising; marketing; nation branding campaigns for Colombia
11	Colombia	ProColombia	Advertising; marketing; nation branding campaigns for Colombia
12	Colombia	ProColombia	Marketing; business; promotion of Colombian tourism abroad
13	Colombia	ProColombia	Marketing; business; promotion of Colombian FDI abroad
14	Colombia	ProColombia	Marketing; business; promotion of Colombian exports abroad
15	Peru	PromPerú	Advertising; public relations; nation branding campaigns for Peru
16	Peru	PromPerú	Advertising; public relations; nation branding campaigns for Peru
17	Peru	PromPerú	Advertising; marketing; nation branding campaigns for Peru
18	Peru	PromPerú	Marketing; business; promotion of Peruvian tourism abroad
19	Peru	ProInversión	Economics; promotion of Peruvian FDI abroad
20	General	External consultant	Marketing; evaluation of nation brands in Latin America
21	General	External consultant	Branding (private and public clients); creative and strategic design

In the interviews, informants were asked to reflect on the specific needs that led each country to initially develop a nation brand. They reported their observations about how the identities of each country defined the nation brand management efforts on behalf of each government. Finally, they evaluated the specific branding strategies they had been involved with to economically engage with core nations, questioning how, at times, those strategies responded to the specific political, social, economic, and cultural moments that each country was going through in time.

To analyze the data, I followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral strategy. This strategy consists of six stages, ranging from managing and organizing the data to representing and visualizing the final codes and themes. In this process, the researcher systematically moves in analytic circles in a meaning-making process that generate specific themes, which are linked to the previous literature and theory. After all the interviews were conducted, I systematically read all the transcripts in Spanish, line by line, jotting down comments in English and eliciting meaningful connections around specific themes that were tied to the previous literature on nation branding. Then, I used MAXQDA (a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software) to select specific quotes that conformed to codes that later informed each theme presented in the study. I relied on a professional English-Spanish interpreter to translate all the quotes presented in the study. I selected this approach to make sure not to impose personal bias into the translation. This approach is used by other qualitative researchers who conduct cross-cultural research (Santos, Black, & Sandelowski, 2014).

Findings

Three main themes were identified in the data: (1) nation branding informed by conceptions of "modernity" and "development" in Latin America; (2) nation branding driven by conceptions of national cultures and identities as strategic management assets, and (3) nation branding as a response to a country's moment in history. Each theme is fully explained in the rest of this section.

Nation Branding Informed by Conceptions of "Modernity" and "Development" in Latin America

As Quijano (2000) proposed, the coloniality of power extends not just to the economic power of colonialism, but also to the *understanding* of what entails economic power, development, and modernity (knowledge and subjectivity edge of the model). When reflecting on the initial need to even invest in nation branding, informants of this study described that their work was driven by their *understanding of the need of these countries' to foster economic development*. This dependency heavily relied on external monetary resources. This is consistent with the literature on the world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974) and the dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979), which situates most of Latin American societies at the periphery of the world's economy. Informant #11 poignantly described the importance of their work, saying:

Our endgoal [with their work] is economic. ProColombia, at the end of the day, what it wants is to sell Colombia so that more currencies enter . . . I think we are all on the same page in regards to that. Despite the fact that the nation brand can have a very romantic idea, very soulful because of its connection to our national pride, outwardly, our mission is to have more money enter our economy, that tourists come and spend their money here. That is what we have always said . . . we want tourists to come, to spend, to drop their dollars here.

Informant #1 expanded on this idea applied to the Chilean case: "We are a small economy that depends largely on international commerce. We have a very strong dependency." Referring specifically to how FDI aids the economic development of Chile, Informant #7 said that those resources are important to generate more job opportunities: "The thing to do in a small country like this one, with the productive development structure it has, is to attract foreign investment (. . .) whereby companies that come generate higher salaries." Along those lines, Informant #13, from Colombia, said that FDI would bring in the necessary monetary resources to transform Colombia into a "exports platform" in Latin America: "We like when, for example, companies that come in bet on regions which did not have much of the business or corporate network we needed or were hoping for, aiming to generate work in cities that really need it."

This economic dependency, at the national level, put each of these nations in direct competition with one another at the regional level as well. Interviewees reported how they were constantly observing the nation branding efforts of other Latin American countries as a way to assess their own work. Informant #7 even joked that Chile had set the example for FDI promotion in the region, and how that model was even used in the mid-2010s by countries such as Colombia: "you read how Colombia was being advertised as a place attracting investment, and you thought, 'this is Chile in the 1990s. Did they copy our leaflet?'" However, Chileans also recognized their admiration for the nation branding efforts of Colombia and Peru. Informant #1 said that Chile should have had a more "strategic" evaluation of the international promotion of their country brand, "just like neighbors such as Colombia and Peru are doing so." Interviewees recognized that, since they are all from Latin America, it was key finding an "insight" that would allow their countries to stand out in front of their intended international audiences. As Informant #1 said, this was necessary to generate awareness about the differences between countries: "In complex markets, such as the United States, the view toward Latin America (. . .) is that Latin American countries to the south of Mexico are all the same."

In that competitive regional landscape, informants reflected that they all shared the same target countries in the promotion of their nation brand, particularly in North America (mostly the United States and sometimes Canada), Europe (mainly the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain), and Asia (primarily China, Japan, and South Korea). "The United States is Colombia's key trading partner, our main buyer, but also our main tourism provider and Colombia's key investor. Then, naturally, it makes sense to prioritize a market such as the United States," said Informant #10. Similarly, Informant #16 reinforced that idea and said: "For Peru's brand, the markets that are a priority are the same for tourism and for exports. (. . .) We always go all in to make it as efficient as possible."

The realization that Chile, Colombia, and Peru are dependent and peripheral Latin American economies, competing to attract the attention of the same target audiences, illuminated these informants' perceptions of what entailed economic development, and how to achieve it. To reach their intended global audiences, their strategy was to crystalize a fixed version of a country's culture and identity, to be used as a strategic asset in their nation branding work. I expand on this idea in the next subsection.

Nation Branding Driven By National Identity and Culture as a "Strategic" Assets

Even though most interviewees agreed that the nation brand had an external end goal, they also highlighted the they also highlighted the need to convince their internal audiences (citizens of each country) about the importance of finding a distinctive "national identity" to be used in the international promotion of their country abroad. As Informant #8 stated, a nation brand needs to "in one way or another, transmit or represent what you are." In that sense, national identity was seen as a competitive asset for these professionals. Informants agreed that the brand acts as a symbol of differentiation of their country's offer of goods and services abroad. The nation brand was described as an "important tool of commercial management" (Informants #7 and #21), as a "fingerprint and imprint in the world" (Informant #13), and a "strategy to capitalize our reputation in the international markets" (Informant #20). In that sense, they viewed nation brands as guided under the same principles of those that constitute a private brand ("This is a commercial brand, a commercial brand that is exposed and wears down like any other brand," Informant #10).

In an attempt to improve Chile's visibility abroad, Informants #6, #7, and #21 described that in the early 2010s, Chile's strategy was to build its competitive identity aided by other institutions that promoted the reputation of the country internationally, such as ProChile (exports), InvestChile (FDI), and Sernatur (tourism). "You have to identify what it is that unites us. What makes us *us*, from the Chilean identity, to that which makes us feel Chileans," said Informant #1, making a call to use the Chilean identity as an asset in the promotion of the country abroad. This call to determine one type of "identity" resembles the technical-economic approach to nation branding outlined by Kaneva (2011), which emphasizes Anholt's (2002, 2007) recommendation to agree on a fixed national identity when branding a country. Chilean informants agreed that most of their branding efforts had been aimed at international audiences, but had not been as successful in finding an insight that resonated with Chileans on what aspects of their country could be branded abroad. Indeed, it becomes a challenge to find such "insight" when there is debate on whether only one type of "identity" should dominate the branding narrative of a country.

Colombia's first nation branding campaign, "Colombia is Passion," ran between 2004 and 2010 and precisely appealed to Colombians' national identity. Overall, informants involved with the campaign evaluated it well. The "passion" phrasing was justified by market research that revealed how Colombians saw themselves as hard-working and resilient, which made the campaign resonate with the population (Informant #12). Informant #10 was involved with its creation in 2004 and evaluated the efforts as successful because the campaign was launched "at a time when the country started experiencing important changes in its internal configuration, in security above all else, which later brought about other positive changes like economic dynamism." Despite being well evaluated among Colombians, this

informant explained that the campaign was discarded in 2010, after a new government was installed. In 2010, Colombia's nation brand became ColombiaCo, and its first advertising campaign was titled "The Answer is Colombia." Despite these efforts to renew the nation brand, informants reported that ColombiaCo was not as accepted by Colombians when compared to "Colombia is Passion." Informant #20 claimed that the government had not fully communicated the new brand to Colombians:

When people don't understand the product, they don't understand the brand. And if I ask a Colombian what they feel about Colombia's nation brand, they don't know what that is (. . .) we need to preach in our internal market. Firstly, for them to understand the importance of the brand.

Peru's nation branding efforts in the early 2010s were intentionally first targeted to Peruvians. Informant #16 said:

We thought it was efficient and strategic to firstly ingrain this concept of the nation brand in Peruvians, by explaining to them why we were investing in an advertising and marketing campaign, what the objectives were, and what benefits it would bring.

This informant also said that presenting the brand internally was important to secure buy-in from the Peruvian business community. After that initial launch, PromPerú developed the advertising campaign "Peru, Nebraska" that specifically appealed to trigger national pride among Peruvians. The campaign depicted a group of Peruvians traveling to the little town of Peru in the state of Nebraska, United States. Once there, they taught U.S. Americans how to enjoy Peruvian food and music. The ad's final intention was to portray that Peruvians also had something to share with and teach Americans, to whom they had traditionally always looked up to. Informants #15 and #16 explained that the campaign uplifted the pride of Peruvians with their country. "The use of Peru's nation brand had a lot to do with becoming a symbol to be proud of (. . .) People sometimes interpret it as a control stamp, but in reality it is simply a stamp for Peruvianism," said Informant #15.

Throughout interviews, an overwhelming number of informants pointed out Peru as "the case study" on what constitutes an effective nation branding campaign: "Peru has one of the best nation brands in Latin America" (Informant #20); "Peru has done a beautiful internal job, to make the internal public fall in love with their brand first" (Informant #11); "Peru is a great example, people were almost starting to get a tattoo of their logo" (Informant #7); "Obviously, the main reference was Peru because everybody was positively surprised to see its development, management, promotion and results" (Informant #6). Effectively, informants involved with the Peruvian campaigns also presented themselves as very proud of the work that they had done with their brand: "We are in constant contact with different actors at the international level, and they have all given us very, very positive feedback about the brand" (Informant #18). Informant #21, an external consultant of the Peru nation brand, explained that even though they had developed the brand aimed to external publics, they also advised Peru to present the project to Peruvians (mostly the business community). Reflecting on why the Peruvian case had been so successful and different to other nation brands in the region, this informant said:

Peru is that case where, despite the political differences, the country presents one of the highest growth rates in all of Latin America, together with the greatest decrease in poverty. That is exactly what it has, a great degree of entrepreneurship; and people bought [the idea of having a nation brand] and started to produce the brand very quickly.

Those insights about the Peruvian nation brand respond to specific moments in its national history, which are explained next.

Nation Branding as a Reflection of a Country's Moment in History

To different extents, Chile, Colombia, and Peru attempted to use their national identity to develop their nation branding campaigns, although some insights resonated better than others. For example, Informant #1 said that Chileans are characterized for being "resilient," which was defined as "an identity that makes us stronger because we withstand earthquakes but we manage to get up over and over again, and this is what we have managed to develop, a *know-how*." Colombians also used the word resilience to describe the identity of their country—or *berraquera*, as they called it, which is what led the insight to the brand and campaign "Colombia is Passion." Informant #10 said:

There is a word that defines us very well and that I like a lot as it is related to all the above, that word is resilience . . . we are people who have learned to survive in the midst of difficulties.

However, informants reported that the new campaigns of ColombiaCo discarded the use of the word "passion," even though market research had shown it had resonated well among Colombians. Informant #20 explained that Colombians do not know what their nation brand is because there is no strong association between the brand ColombiaCo and Colombian culture:

Peru continues to be a brand that people associate with their national identity and their culinary culture and tradition. They feel very proud of their Incas; one of the few countries that feels proud of their Indigenous people. If you ask a Colombian about our culture they say, "that has nothing to do with us." (. . .) I love my country very much but I can also acknowledge the arrogance Colombia has developed in the past years, as it is a country that has achieved growth.

With this quote, this informant emphasized that the moment in which ColombiaCo was launched also coincided with a different moment in history of the country, very different from the mid-2000s when the "Colombia is Passion" campaign was launched. This quote also points to the case of Peru, which has shown its Indigenous cultures through its advertising campaigns. Informant #2, from Chile, reflected on the poor work that Chile had done to make Chileans aware (and therefore, proud) of their nation brand, which differs from the Peruvian case:

Do we [Chileans] have to know the brand? Yes. They [Marca Chile, organization tasked with managing the Chilean nation brand] are indebted to their public since nobody knows Chile's nation brand. Quite the opposite from Peru's brand, which is an example of what a brand should be like, with all its mysticism; they really managed to position an identity . . . and that one can feel represented. I think they did great there, as people properly adopted their nation brand.

Interviewees reflected about Peru's moment in history since the mid-2000s, when it could showcase a booming economy, mainly boosted by trade agreements signed with the United States, China, and the European Union. In Chile, the 1990s were known as their moment in history as the country went through the same process, after a dictatorship of 17 years that ended in 1990, and opened up economically to the world, which was not aided with the implementation of a nation brand. Informant #7 offered more insights on how different moments in history can have an impact on the development and adoption by the citizens of a country of a nation brand, and how that differed for both the Chilean and Peruvian cases:

If Chile had continued with the efforts of the 1990s and had raised the issue of country ownership [referring to the embracement of nationalism through a nation brand], it would have been very likely to achieve a success like Peru's (. . .) It is important to understand how the people are feeling when being represented by a brand, understanding how you are marked by the recent historical process you experience in order to feel this comradeship and say, *you know what? Peruvians are awesome.*

Informant #7 explained that beyond how attractive a nation brand logo is, or how appealing an advertising campaign directed to the citizens of a country is, nation brands are also social constructs that are situated within specific periods of time. These are periods in which the population of a country could be going through a positive economic cycle that can make them more proud of what they have achieved as a nation. Informant #7 said:

There was a time when Peruvians felt as if they were doing alright, that things were starting to improve, that their economy was growing, and that is when you look at yourself and you value yourself (. . .) Chile did not do it when the time was right [in the 1990s] as the concept didn't exist [nation branding] . . . it wasn't a *thing*. Those were other times and today we are facing other types of challenges.

Informant #7 said that if nation branding had been a phenomena in the 1990s in Latin America, Chileans would probably better adopted their nation brand because that brand would have been sustained by the moment in history that the country was going through. Nation brands are embraced internally and recognized externally not by how visually appealing their logos or advertising campaigns are, but by the substance that sustains the brand: the economic, social, and political aspects that conform a country's society.

This sentiment was also shared by two Peruvian informants when asked to reflect on the success of their nation brand internally in their country. Informant #16 explained that the “Peru, Nebraska” campaign instilled pride among Peruvians because the ad depicted them as the “conquerors conquering the conquered”—with Americans being the “conquered.” Informant #15 also shared that in the mid-1990s, Peruvians did not feel the level of pride that they felt about their country in the late 2010s:

What Peru’s brand did was to cling onto a feeling that was already present. It had to do with the right historical moment, otherwise you cannot explain its success because in truth, these were years with a sustained economic growth. So, people *did* have very concrete reasons to say, “Hey, we are great, we are doing great, we are leaving poverty behind, we are leaving the bad times behind.” The economic growth of these years and this discourse about being “Peruvian” being worth it coincided in time and Peru’s brand took all of it. Peru’s nation brand gave it a logo and added text to this feeling, which was only just beginning to develop, this feeling of being proudly Peruvians.

Overall, findings revealed how nation brands attempted to use a fixed national identity as a strategic asset to instill feelings of pride among members of their country. These were feelings that were later used internationally to promote the brand. Informants also reflected on how nation brands are also a product of the period in the history of the country. These are moments when the population of a country is particularly proud of its economic achievements. Nation brands can put “a logo” to that feeling, which can make people in a country to better embrace that brand. In the next section, I dive deeper into this theme, making sense of how the overall findings relate to the research questions and the proposition of conceiving nation branding in Latin America as a modern expression of colonialism.

Discussion

As it was described in the literature review, Kaneva (2011) argued that the technical-economic approach to nation branding was focused on how governments could profit from their country’s reputation to grow their economies. Findings from this study reported that Chile, Colombia, and Peru followed that advice, attempting to use branding as the language of capitalism and neoliberalism (Holt, 2006) to economically engage with the developed world. This finding is consistent with the previous literature on nation branding in Latin America, which has conceived this practice as being the result of economic dependency of the region on their exports, tourism, and FDI offerings (Fehimovic & Ogden, 2018). However, one of the key limitations of the technical-economic approach is that it does not consider the social, political, and economic developments in a country’s history when a nation brand is launched—which is precisely the focus of the cultural approach to nation branding (Kaneva, 2011). This approach is useful to interpret the nation branding efforts of Chile, Colombia, and Peru as modern expressions of colonialism between the 1990s and the 2010s.

Interviewees agreed that Chile was seen as the model for economic development in the region in the 1990s. The “Washington Consensus” recipe (Williamson, 2009) resonated among Chilean political and economic elites, allowing neoliberalism to fully develop under that societal context. However, nation branding as a phenomenon was not fully developed in Latin America in the 1990s. Although Chilean nation

branding efforts still had a strong economic focus in the 2000s (Jiménez-Martínez, 2013), those efforts targeted mainly international audiences. At that time, Chileans did not recognize their nation brand as a signifier of neoliberalism and economic success under a particular moment in their country's history.

Contrarily, both Colombia and Peru experienced an economic boom in the mid-2000s, which coincided with the time when "Colombia is Passion" was first launched as a nation brand and also an advertising campaign (2004), and then Peru developed and launched its nation brand (early 2010s). Those were particular moments in the history of these nations that shaped their branding efforts. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, Peru experienced an economic boom that, coupled with the success and recognition of their gastronomy internationally, made the nation brand get widely accepted and embraced by Peruvians. This did not happen in Chile with their subsequent efforts in the early 2010s to promote their nation brand both internally and externally. Informants reported that Colombia had gone through a process in the mid-2000s to diminish the association that foreigners made between the country and drugs. This, coupled with an economic boom, and a campaign that portrayed Colombians as *berracos* (hardworking people) resonated well with the population. Similarly, Peru's economic boom also aided the Peruvian nation brand because the Peruvians realized that it was their moment in history to revalue and feel pride about their heritage, which had not happened in the early 1990s. The Colombian and Peruvian cases are examples of what Fehimovic and Ogden (2018) defined as forms of "exotic capital" in nation branding; a mere strategy to lure global consumption. Those efforts were subdued to the neoliberal discourse coming from the Global North, all part of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000).

Drawing from Quijano's (2000) work, Mignolo (2011) recognized how the colonial matrix of power is "the very foundational structure of Western civilization" (p. 16). This matrix determines the relations between core and peripheral countries (Wallerstein, 1974) at different levels. Applied to the economic domain of the matrix, this study conceives nation branding as just one of the levels at which the logic of coloniality operates. But besides defining economic relations between countries, this matrix also defines how countries *see and subjectively know themselves*. Mignolo (2011) defined *knowledge* in the matrix as what was "deviant or non-modern according to Christian theology and, later on, secular philosophy and sciences" (p. 13). Western notions of what constitutes "reality" shape how colonialism understood what constituted "modernity." This is how Western knowledge became a commodity of exportation for the modernization of the non-Western world. Combining the "economy" and "knowledge and subjectivity" edges of the colonial matrix of power, this study conceptualizes nation branding as a venue for developing nations to know and learn the capitalism discourse of the Western world in the late stages of the 20th century. Nation branding, then, becomes their own expression of modernity, another piece of evidence to think about the duality between modernity and coloniality (Mignolo, 2011). As Quijano (2000) observed, Latin Americans have been:

Led, knowingly or not, willingly or not, to see and to accept that image as our own reality and ours only. Because of it, for a very long time we have been what we are not, what we never should have been and what we never will be. And because of it, we can never catch our real problems, much less solve them, except in only a partial and distorted way. (p. 222)

Nation branding campaigns become, then, versions of the reality of a country that mainly serve the interests of its economic and political elites, which is one of the main critiques of the cultural approach to nation branding.

Nation brands still reflect power imbalances between actors within and outside of the nation on the discourse of what is a nation's identity. For example, Jiménez-Martínez (2020) examined how the June Journeys of 2013 disrupted the authorities' efforts to construct a positive image for Brazil before two major international events were to take place in the country (the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics). In these contexts, Brazil's "mediated nationhood" became a contested battle between the government and protesters' voices, coupled with stories broadcasted to the world by national and international media. In that setting, the government's efforts—motivated by the economic resources that such events would bring to the country—conflicted with a moment in Brazil's history when citizens protested not only against an increase in the fare for public transportation, but also against political and economic elites' corruption. Similarly, and of particular relevance to this study, Lossio-Chavez (2018) analyzed the efforts of Peruvian artists and opinion leaders who, through a series of artistic exhibitions, mocked their country's branding efforts. For example, one of these exhibitions used the logo of the Peru nation brand and depicted it as a mining excavation. Mining is one of the principal economic industries of the country. However, most of the times, people working in mines are paid low wages and work in poor conditions. The critique by these artists pointed to the contradictions of nation branding, questioning who benefits the most from this practice. Lossio-Chavez called nation branding in Peru a "simulacrum" that understands Peruvianness under neoliberal cultural terms.

These insights are particularly relevant to the cases presented in this study. For example, in 2019, Chile experienced the largest social protests since the return to democracy, primarily driven by people's discontent with the neoliberal economic model implemented in the nation since the 1990s (Gonzalez & Morán, 2020). Similar protests took place in Colombia in 2021 (Turkewitz, 2021), while Peru elected that same year a president that promised to reform the neoliberal economic system implemented in the 1990s (Taj & Turkewitz, 2021). If nation branding was already an unclear feat for countries such as Chile and Colombia in the 2010s, for Peru, it could become even more troubling to justify such a branding project—inspired by the logics of neoliberalism—that instilled feelings of pride among Peruvians because of the economic growth of the 2000s and 2010s in the nation.

Conclusion

As findings of this study suggest, when branding a country, its "success"—if such a thing exists—is not informed by the aesthetics of a logo or an advertising campaign, but instead by how well such efforts capture a moment in history in which people in a country feel particularly proud of their nationality. This is an insight that the technical-economic literature on nation branding has consistently disregarded, and that makes the cultural approach to nation branding (Kaneva, 2011) even stronger. Applied to the cases of Chile, Colombia, and Peru, nation branding became a modern expression of colonialism not only because it made more evident their strong economic reliance on the developed powers of the world, but also because it drove these countries to *subjectively know themselves* under the logics of neoliberalism. As interviewees of this study recognized, Colombians and Peruvians felt particularly proud of their nations under a period of

heightened neoliberalism in Latin America, which called them to revalue distinctive aspects of their diverse national identities. This study analyzes what constitutes concepts such as "modernity" and "development" for nation branding in Latin America, keeping in sight the duality between modernity and coloniality (Mignolo, 2011).

All research studies have limitations, and this one is not an exception. First of all, only three cases from a region with more than 20 countries were chosen to place discussions around Latin America as a developing region in the world. Certainly, the experiences of other countries should also be explored in further research, especially since others have also conducted nation branding campaigns between 2005 and 2020, such as Argentina, Haiti, and Uruguay, to name a few. However, this study does present compelling discussions that could be further explored or even tested through other methodological approaches to offer more insights on how specific moments in the history of a country affect the creation of a nation brand. Within that analysis, it would be important to examine how those moments are informed by logics beyond colonialism among citizens of different regions of the world.

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