

## **The Position of National Brand in the Modern Public Diplomacy of Islamic Republic of Iran**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

A brand is a set of subjective perceptions of a factor that is formed over time. Meanwhile, a national brand is an overall image of a country which encompasses political, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions. National brand is a multidimensional, hybrid, and consistent concept which occupies a prominent position as one of the important tools of soft power and a modern characteristic of new public diplomacy. The present study seeks to provide answers to the following question: has the Islamic Republic of Iran been successful in the area of modern public diplomacy by creating its national brand? The main purpose of the study is to examine the performance of I.R.I. in this context in addition to conducting a theoretical investigation of the position of national branding in the modern public diplomacy.

#### **2. Review of Literature**

To date, there has been no studies conducted in the examination of the position of national brand in modern public diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the only research carried out in this regard have focused on indices of the modern public diplomacy including the concept of national brand. Szondi (2008) described the relation between modern public diplomacy and national brand. Cull (2009) has regarded national brand as one of the important differences between traditional and modern public diplomacies.

Public diplomacy is a tool for governments to take the resources (soft power) in order to communicate with and attract people from other countries. During the past few years (since the September 11 incident), public diplomacy has undergone

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massive developments in terms of execution patterns to the extent that the former pattern is now called the “conventional” one, gradually being replaced by the modern pattern.

One of the differences between conventional and modern diplomacies is the attention paid to the concept of national brand within the international context and the proper use of the brand to increase soft power and improve the country’s public diplomacy (Hadian & Saeidi, 2013). The idea of a national brand means creating a specific name or symbol by which the country can be distinguished from other nations. Alton (1996) believes that countries transmit their messages through a number of communication channels which include export brand, tourism, domestic and foreign policies, people, investments, and cultural heritage (Ryniejska–Kieldanowicz, 2009). Paul Temporal considers the intentions and motivations behind countries’ national branding to include attracting tourists, encouraging foreign investors, increasing exports, stabilizing the currency, gaining international credit, improving nations’ international positions, increasing political influence at international level, inspiring more effective international participation, and enhancing the national symbol (Keith, 2008).

### 3. Method

The present study was conducted using the descriptive-analytical method. Data were processed using document studies. In addition to illustrating the status quo, researchers employ this method to provide descriptions and explanations for the causes behind a certain subject as well as its dimensions. Researchers require strong argumentative basis so as to explain and justify the causes; such a basis can be provided through exploring the related literature and theoretical discussions of the study along with editing the overall propositions involved.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Given the stated criteria, the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the context of national branding can be described as follows:

#### 1. In the area of cultural heritage, history, and nature:

One of the most important actions taken by I.R.I. in the context of national branding was the usage of potential capacities present in areas including cultural, historical and natural heritage; subsequently, their introduction at international level, and particularly their registration in UNESCO, are considered as Iran’s priorities. Currently, there are 24 instances of historical, cultural, and natural heritage are registered to UNESCO. Along with cultural heritage, there are 13 instances of *spiritual heritage* registered to UNESCO as well, in terms of immaterial or intangible features. Of the total 460 types of handicrafts, 370 exist in Iran out of which 273 have received the UNESCO’s symbol of authenticity which is of great significance in highlighting the Iranian arts.

#### 2. In the area of tourism, social, and scientific indices

The tourism sector is substantially important and can be effective in improving the national image of I.R.I. at the international level. The positive image of Iranians from the outlook of foreigners who travel to Iran and the inclusion of this country in the 2019 index on the least dangerous places to travel according to travel risk map<sup>1</sup> are certain advantages of Iran with regards to its international appearance. In the ranking of countries according to the health index, Iran was positioned at 69<sup>th</sup> place out of 169 nations.<sup>2</sup> In the area of academics and interests to pursue education in Iran, 40 Iranian universities were pointed out in the 2020 edition of NY Times' 2019 index of the world's top institutions (The Islamic Republic News Agency, 2019).

Listed below are a number of other indices that significantly affect the creation of a national brand and are at inadequate positions in Iran:

1. Iran's inadequate positions in international economic rankings include:

- Ranked 85<sup>th</sup> in the 2017 global entrepreneurship index and ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> of 2018 Iran entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup>
- Following a 7-place downgrade, Iran was ranked 138<sup>th</sup> in the 2018 international transparency organization report on the corruption perception index.<sup>4</sup>
- Ranked 128<sup>th</sup> in the sixteenth World Bank's ease of doing business ranking in 2019; this is a place downgrade compared to the 2018 ranking.<sup>5</sup>
- Ranked 155<sup>th</sup> out of 180 nations in the report by the Heritage Foundation on economic freedom index (ISNA News Agency, 30 January, 2019).

2. Domestic indices:

- Ranked 58<sup>th</sup> out of 60 countries in the 2018 quality of life index by the Economist information unit (Eghtesad News, 28 May, 2018).
- Conflicts between domestic and foreign policies and lack of endeavors to provide a better understanding of complex subjects through engaging in informed conversations.

## 5. Conclusion

The national brand of a country such as Iran should be formed in a way as to cover almost the entire significant aspects and features of the country; features including ancient history and civilization, political geography, natural geography, and rich culture. Subsequently, the Iranian national brand can achieve a desirable function when it becomes consistent with the inherent reality of the nation while encompassing the affective elements that transforms the country into an appealing destination for the target audience. On the other hand, the superior position of Iran with regards to historical, cultural, and natural heritage necessitate the efforts made

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1. [www.travelriskmap.com/#/planner/map](http://www.travelriskmap.com/#/planner/map)  
2. <https://www.bloomberg.com>  
3. <https://www.mcls.gov.ir/fa/news/107404>  
4. [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)  
5. <https://www.doingbusiness.org/>

in line with their registration in UNESCO; until such time that the Iranian cultural and civilizational heritage are presented to the international views, any attempts to improve the image of Iran along with creating and empowering a national brand at the international level would face difficulties. Aside from the country's potential capacities in cultural, historical, and natural areas, Iran is suffering from substantial shortcomings in terms of effective economic indices, creating and empowering a national brand such as indices of entrepreneurship, ease of doing business, economic freedom, quality of life, and perception of corruption. In the majority of these indices published by valid international institutions such as the World Bank, Iran occupies a low rank which is not a suitable image for the country at the international level. Improving the position of Iran in economic contexts would definitely play a significant role in offering a positive image and improving the national brand at the international level. Moreover, the adoption of balanced domestic and foreign policies should not be overlooked from the perspective of domestic affairs that influence national brand. Without an effective national structure, the national brand cannot achieve success. The people's self-perception of their own country is in line with that of foreigners with respect to the nation's structure and image.

**Keywords:** Soft Power, Conventional Public Diplomacy, Modern Public Diplomacy, National Brand.

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