

Exploring the cultural heritage dimension of the country image: A textual analysis of web narratives across twenty-four countries^{1 2}

Received
15th February 2025

Revised
30th April 2025

Accepted
4th February 2026

Giada Mainolfi - Alessandro De Nisco - Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli

Abstract

Frame of the research. *This study examines how nations with rich cultural resources structure their institutional communication to enhance the understanding of cultural heritage's role within the promotion of country image.*

Purpose of the paper. *The study investigates the role of cultural heritage within the general framework of country image and proposes an explorative categorization of the constitutive dimensions of the “cultural heritage image”.*

Methodology. *The empirical research is based on a lexical analysis of the institutional web communication of twenty-four countries ranked in the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index 2023 (Ipsos, 2023).*

Results. *The textual analysis enabled the analytical identification of the constituent aspects of the cultural heritage image, revealing a network of nodes centered on three macro-dimensions (Tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage and national identity), and 13 major conceptual categories (i.e., historic sites, cultural institutions, natural environment, craftsmanship, visual arts, performing arts, literature, language, gastronomy, traditions, sports, people, diversity, equity and inclusion).*

Research limitations. *The main limit of the study is related to the size and variety of the selected documents.*

Managerial implications. *The study can support both policy makers and companies in the definition of international marketing strategies aiming to emphasize the role of cultural heritage in the perception of international audiences.*

Originality of the paper. *The study contributes to the international marketing literature by filling scientific gaps related to the categorization of the constituent components of cultural heritage image connected to the macro dimension of country image.*

Key words: *country image; cultural heritage; cultural heritage image; textual analysis; cross-country study*

¹ © 2026 The Author(s). Published by Fondazione CUEIM. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (CC BY 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>).

² Study carried out as part of the project ““Is old really gold?” International consumers’ perceptions and attitudes towards Italian cultural heritage and long-lasting brands”, PRIN 2022, ERC SH1 Sector, Project Code: 20227RMKFP, CUP MASTER I53D23002590006, CUP D53D23006220008 (UNINT), funded by the European Union - NextGenerationEU.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a country's image and reputation have become increasingly significant in marketing literature, which aims to create models for analyzing and measuring various components of image, as well as in nation branding strategies designed to enhance the prominence and identity of national systems in global markets. An established reputation generates resources by the fact that it is difficult to be imitated by other contexts. Non-duplicability derives from the possession of unique resources that have been formed and consolidated over time. In these terms, the reputational component becomes a barrier to mobility, in so far as it allows the country to consolidate its position at the international level, facilitating the activation of relationships, partnerships and strategic alliances with the different publics that populate the broad reference context. Reputation has, therefore, a cognitive value and efficacy, and its goodness derives from the comparison between the country's behavior and performance, and its social and value identity. In this view, we can observe an active role of the cultural environment in the foreign policy and attractiveness of a nation. In fact, within the framework of globalization and cultural convergence, the authenticity of cultural heritage serves as a significant asset for establishing a unique identity and fostering a feeling of community, thereby influencing tourism and various economic sectors of the nation (Poor and Snowball, 2010). For example, in economics, there has been much discussion about how cultural heritage affects a country's prosperity (Rizzo and Throsby, 2006). This contribution is acknowledged as originating from both intangible components, such as habits, abilities, and practices like music, dance, theater, and cuisine, which are maintained and passed down through the generations, as well as from tangible cultural assets, such as monuments, heritage sites, buildings, and artwork (Unesco, 2003). Furthermore, tourism and management research has made the marketing and management of arts and heritage destinations a specific subdiscipline (Millar, 1989; Colbert and St-James, 2014). With respect to the international marketing literature, studies in this field have extensively explored the impact of country image on foreign consumers' perceptions and behaviors. Country image is broadly defined as "the sum total of all the descriptive, inferential, and informational beliefs that a person has about a particular country" (Martin and Eroglu, 1993: 193). This concept encompasses a collection of generalized perceptions about a nation's political maturity, economic progress, industrial development, as well as its traditions, culture, and population. However, although several definitions of country image consider cultural heritage as a constituent dimension of the construct, for example, Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999: 525) define country image as a set of "mental representations of a country's people, products, culture and national symbols", cultural heritage has received relatively little attention in the international marketing literature, despite expanding recognition in adjacent domains (Mainolfi *et al.*, 2024). The literature review reveals only recently two proposals to systematize the cultural component (Hakala *et al.*, 2011; Rojas-Mendez, 2013), which, however, appear to be elaborated with a predominantly inductive

approach, unable to exhaust the theoretical domain of the construct. Based on these scientific gaps, the goal of this study is to develop a preliminary framework for comprehending the image of national cultural heritage, led by the international marketing perspective. The study aims at identifying the primary conceptual categories that may represent a tool to measure the cultural heritage image. The results of a lexical analysis of online communication around cultural heritage are then presented in the study. The primary goal of the study was to compare the content structure commonly employed in cultural heritage promotion to identify key themes that may shape the image of the cultural heritage of a nation.

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural
heritage dimension of the
country image: A textual
analysis of web narratives
across twenty-four
countries

2. The role of cultural heritage dimension in country image literature

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in a well-established body of literature, closely linked to the country-of-origin phenomenon. Extensive research in this field suggests that country image acts as an extrinsic cue that consumers rely on to evaluate foreign-produced goods (Eroglu and Machleit, 1989; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018). Within this broad domain, numerous studies have aimed to identify the key factors that contribute to the formation of country image (Han, 1989; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994). Initially, this concept was primarily defined through cognitive elements, reflecting rational beliefs about various national attributes. However, more recent scholarship has confirmed the multidimensional nature of country image, incorporating an affective dimension - capturing the emotional associations with a country - and a conative dimension, which represents the willingness to engage with it (D'Astous and Ahmed, 1999; Laroche *et al.*, 2005). Within this cognitive-affective framework, several general definitions of country image have integrated aspects of a nation's cultural heritage. For example, Bannister and Sanders (1978, p. 152) defined country image as "the generalized image created by such variables as representative products, economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, traditions, industrialization, and degree of technological virtuosity." Similarly, Allred *et al.* (1999, p. 36) also pointed out that "the perception of a country is based on its economic condition, political structure, culture, conflicts with other countries, working conditions, and position toward environmental issues."

Although some scholars seem to recognize a broader role for culture as a distinctive component of a nation's competitive identity, as "the cultural aspect of the national image is irreplaceable and irreproducible because it is uniquely tied to the country itself; it is reassuring because it links the country's past with its present, (...); and it is uplifting because it shows the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the country's people and institutions" (Anholt, 2007, p. 133), studies have limited the interpretation of the cultural heritage image to a simple evaluation of some population traits (Verlegh, 2001; Van Ittersum *et al.*, 2003) or to a specific attribute of tourism destination image related to the endowment of cultural attractions and sites (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002). Only relatively few studies have sought to operationalize the cultural heritage aspect within the broader country

image construct (Hakala *et al.*, 2011; Rojas-Méndez, 2013; Buhmann, 2016; Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015). A literature review (see tab. 1) on country image reveals only recently two proposals for systematizing the cultural component, but these are elaborated with a predominantly inductive approach and do not appear able to exhaust the theoretical domain of such an extremely complex construct. The first attempt is contained in a study by Hakala *et al.* (2011) in which it is acknowledged that “studies on national cultural heritage are scarce” (Hakala *et al.*, 2011, p. 448) and a measurement system is proposed based on two dimensions: homogeneity, understood as the degree of dominance of a single language and religion, and endurance, measured through the number of Unesco awards obtained by a given country. The second is reported in a more recent study by Rojas-Méndez (2013), in which the author, using the free elicited response technique with respect to perceptions referred to 26 different nations, associates the culture and heritage dimension with a wide range of attributes (monuments, traditions, historical figures, gastronomy, religion, education, sports and colors), limiting himself, however, to a simple listing devoid of attempts at systematization and operationalization. An additional contribution is provided by Jung *et al.* (2014), who include a “cultural assets” dimension within their country image framework. Nevertheless, the study does not present a fully developed measurement scale, as the items related to cultural assets are adapted from previous literature and mainly serve to assess the influence of cultural perceptions on brand evaluation, rather than to comprehensively operationalize the cultural dimension of country image. In 2016 Buhmann proposed a comprehensive model for measuring country image, identifying four key dimensions: functional, normative, aesthetic and emotional. The aesthetic dimension involves beliefs regarding a country cultural and natural attractiveness and including opinions about the beauty of the natural environment, the appeal of national culture and the richness of its traditions. However, some limitations prevent its generalizability and usability. The author does not clarify how the items submitted to the measurement scale validation process were obtained. Moreover, the model was tested using students’ samples from specific countries, such as Switzerland, thus compromising the model’s cross-national validity.

Coming out of the more purely academic sphere, a further proposal for measuring the role of cultural heritage in the perceived image of a nation is that contained in the Anholt-Ipsos Nations Brand Index (Ipsos, 2023), which places the heritage and culture dimension among the pillars underlying the recognition and strength of a nation’s brand. However, the limited variety of dimensions used, linked mainly to the endowment of tangible cultural resources - natural beauty, monumental attractions, history and art - does not seem able to represent the complex nature of a nation’s cultural identity and sense of place, understood as “the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values” (Icomos, 2002, p. 21).

Tab. 1: Main operationalizations of the country image construct

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural heritage dimension of the country image: A textual analysis of web narratives across twenty-four countries

Dimensions	Operationalisations	Contributions
Cognitive country image	<i>People facets</i> (e.g., friendly and likable; artist and creative; well-educated; hard working)	Parameswaran <i>et al.</i> (1987); Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994); Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2000)
	<i>Economy</i> (e.g., raised standard of living; quality of products; economic environment; level of industrialisation)	Marting and Eroglu (1993); Parameswaran and Pisharodi (1994); Pappu <i>et al.</i> (2007)
	<i>Technology</i> (e.g., technical skills, technological research)	Martin and Eroglu (1993)
	<i>Politics</i> (e.g., political stability, participation in international affairs)	Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010); Knight <i>et al.</i> (2003)
	<i>Climate</i> (e.g., human, nature and climate factor)	Van Ittersum <i>et al.</i> (2003)
	<i>Social context</i> (e.g., individual rights and freedom, alignment with own country)	Heslop <i>et al.</i> (2010); Passow <i>et al.</i> (2005)
	<i>Cultural assets</i> (e.g., this country possesses its own cultures that are differentiated from those of other countries, this country has affluent cultural assets, this country has cultural symbols which represent this country)	Jung <i>et al.</i> (2014)
	<i>Culture heritage</i> (e.g., homogeneity and endurance; national culture, gastronomy, sports, history, attractions, traditions, colours, religion)	Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015); Rojas-Mendez (2013); Hakala <i>et al.</i> (2011)
	<i>Aesthetic dimension</i> (e.g., cultural goods, culinary, history and tradition, landscape and scenery)	Buhmann (2016); Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015)
Affective country image	<i>Positive and negative country affect</i> (e.g., positive feelings, pleasant feelings, enthusiastic feelings, distrustful, irritated, hostile)	Aydin <i>et al.</i> (2021); Harmerling <i>et al.</i> , (2015); Verlegh (2001); Brijs (2006)
	<i>Intergroup affect and stereotype (BIAS)</i> (e.g., contempt and admiration)	Maher and Carter (2011)
	<i>Emotional dimension</i> (e.g., country fascination, sympathy, attractiveness)	Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015)

Source: Adapted from Mainolfi *et al.* (2024).

3. Revealing the cultural heritage dimension of country image: a web-based textual analysis of the communication of twenty-four countries

In order to contribute to a correct interpretation of the role of cultural heritage within the theoretical domain of country image (cultural heritage image), and at the same time to highlight the thematic structure of institutional communication adopted by nations characterized by a high endowment of cultural resources, in this study a textual analysis was conducted on the institutional web-based cultural heritage communication as chosen by twenty-four prominent nations. The inductive approach was chosen because of the widespread use of contemporary communication systems, which reveal the quirks and signaling components of a country's cultural heritage, albeit with wildly disparate modalities and results (Napolitano *et al.*, 2015; Marino and Mainolfi, 2013). From a methodological point of view, the study was developed through three main phases: data collection, analysis and interpretation of results.

3.1 Sample and data collection

Twenty-four nations that were ranked in the Anholt-Ipsos Nations Brand Index 2023 (Ipsos, 2023), one of the most widely used metrics for evaluating the power of a national brand, were the subject of the textual analysis. The selection of countries was made by first including the top ten countries according to the Nation Brand Index (Ipsos, 2023) and then adding countries, one after the other, so that each continent was represented by at least three countries. Consequently, the sample is composed as follows: Europe (France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom), Africa (Egypt, Morocco, South Africa), Asia (China, Japan, South Korea), Middle East (Israel, Qatar, UAE), North America (Canada, Mexico, USA), Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu³), South America (Argentina, Brazil, Peru).

In the first stage, the units of analysis were identified by consulting documents published on the official websites of the national bodies responsible for managing and promoting the cultural heritage of twenty-four prominent countries. These documentary units became the “data” for the research. Although they may contain incomplete information due to the formal nature of their representation, they nonetheless serve as an invaluable source of knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. As mentioned, this study prioritized data collection from websites, which primarily facilitate asynchronous, static communication, designed to be publicly accessible with limited opportunities for interaction. Websites were chosen over other communication channels due to their ability to present multimedia narratives, timelines, and historicized representations of a nation’s heritage (Cerquetti and Romagnoli, 2023). The primary focus of this phase was analyzing the websites of the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, and Cultural Heritage. Given the diversity of governance structures across countries, the analysis was also extended to the websites of Ministries of Foreign Affairs, which, in many cases, host sections dedicated to promoting the cultural sector. Additionally, in cases where a specific ministry was absent, the presence of government departments responsible for cultural protection and promotion was verified. Following this approach, the analysis also included communication documents related to institutional experiences of country branding.

From a procedural perspective, within each analyzed website, texts used to describe or narrate the characteristics and distinctive qualities of cultural heritage were selected. To enable comparison of the syntax adopted by different countries, only texts written in English were selected and downloaded. The initial keywords that guided the selection of texts were: “cultural heritage,” “heritage,” “culture,” “traditions,” and “history.” However, given the exploratory nature of the study, the selection criteria were refined and validated throughout the research process, incorporating additional keywords such as “cultural identity,” “people,” and “community”.

³ For Oceania, since there were not three countries (the NBI has only 50 positions, so it does not rank all countries), the country with the highest number of tangible and intangible UNESCO sites was chosen, so in addition to Australia and New Zealand, Vanuatu was added.

Among the frequently occurring word types not previously highlighted, the terms “creative,” “artists,” and “films” are also noteworthy. This finding underscores the significance of artistic expressions and the creative industries in cultural heritage, reflecting the vital role of artists, film productions, and musical performances in shaping cultural identity and enriching the socio-cultural fabric of communities. Table 2 presents the ten most frequently occurring words in the institutional communication documents of various countries, revealing key trends and differences in how cultural heritage is leveraged and promoted. As can be seen from this partial analysis, several countries, including Canada, France, Germany, UK, South Korea and Italy, demonstrate a strong emphasis on “heritage” and “cultural”, reflecting a shared commitment to preserving and promoting both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Moreover, the words “arts” and “culture” are present in countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia, underscoring a universal commitment to promoting the arts as an integral part of national identity and international dialogue.

As expected, reference to tourism is a cross-country theme, and this is evident from the presence of the words such as “tourism” (France, Italy, Canada, USA, Japan, South Africa, New Zealand), “tourist” (Mexico), “visitors” (New Zealand) and “destination” (Brazil). This trend aligns with a broader global movement toward valuing cultural heritage as a fundamental component of national branding and tourism appeal. Countries like Sweden, Switzerland, Egypt, Israel highlight the presence of the word “museum”, showing a focus on places deputed to the enjoyment of cultural assets. Noteworthy is the term “people” present in 7 countries (UK, Canada, USA, Brazil, China, South Korea, South Africa) to denote the relevance of the population, seen not only as the creator but also the beneficiary of the actions and projects aimed at enhancing the nation’s cultural capital. Australia and Canada stand out for the use of terms like “aboriginal” and “indigenous” and show a commitment to educating and preserving indigenous stories and cultures. Moreover, in the case of Canada the copresence of words like “reconciliation” and “people” also highlight a specific effort to recognize and respect indigenous communities. Thanks to the multicultural structure of these countries, this result confirms the social value of culture and creative industries (intangible cultural heritage) in contributing to social cohesion. South American countries, like Mexico and Peru, demonstrate a special emphasis on culinary traditions.

3.3 Content analysis

In order to bring out the broader thematic structure underlying the different conceptual categories related to the cultural heritage theme, for each country, the selected texts were coded and an analysis of the words and phrases adjacent to the theme words (high-frequency words) was carried out. The analysis of the texts made it possible to analytically identify the constituent elements of the cultural heritage image, revealing a system of nodes centered on 13 conceptual categories from which it was possible to trace 54 sub-categories, linking coded phrases and paragraphs

and representing the main themes of the corpus. The conceptual sub-categories represent a decomposition of the text into homogeneous parts characterized by similarity of subject matter. In-depth analysis of these sub-nodes enabled the definition of the metatext, synthesizing the original text into meaningful segments that to varying degrees are found in different countries (Table 3). Through a process of abstraction, from the analysis of the subcategories, the main categories were defined. The categories include the characteristic elements of the bidimensional perspective normally associated with the cultural heritage concept. However, results show a move beyond the dyadic nature of the concept to embrace a three-dimensional one in which there is also an emphasis on aspects more closely related to the population and the national identity. Therefore, these dimensions include tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, and national identity, highlighting the deep interconnection between cultural elements and the collective identity of a nation.

Tab. 2: The 10 most frequent words by country

<i>Europe</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
France	Heritage	Culture	Cultural	National	Ministry	Tourism	Public	Architecture	Monuments	Directorate
Germany	Foundation	Cultural	Heritage	World	Unesco	Intangible	Sites	Convention	Inscribed	International
Italy	Historical	Tourism	Heritage	Cultural	National	Law	Places	Activities	Artistic	Assets
Sweden	Castle	Language	Palace	Jewish	Museum	Arts	Culture	Government	Force	Century
Switzerland	Art	Film	Works	Museum	Dance	World	Include	Theatre	International	Design
UK	Heritage	Historic	Creative	National	People	Places	Local	Culture	Future	Support
<i>North America</i>										
Canada	Indigenous	Heritage	Tourism	Parks	Industry	Reconciliation	Work	Partners	People	Council
Mexico	City	State	Cultural	Cuisine	Culture	World	Natural	Tourist	Towns	One
USA	Arts	Cultural	Tourism	National	Travel	Communities	People	Strategy	Support	Organizations
<i>South America</i>										
Argentina	City	One	Country	Shows	South	World	Cultural	Culture	Football	History
Brazil	Country	People	World	Brand	Home	Nature	New	Cultural	Destinations	History
Peru	World	Grow	Latin	Sector	First	Economy	Gastronomy	Picchu	Country	Inca
<i>Asia</i>										
China	People	Day	Festival	Groups	National	Republic	Years	Area	Ethnic	One
Japan	Cultural	Properties	Arts	Culture	Travel	International	Information	Tourism	National	Local
South Korea	Heritage	Cultural	National	People	Designated	KHS*	Music	Country	Sea	Historic
<i>Africa</i>										
Egypt	World	Cairo	Seas	Museum	Desert	City	Temple	Proreorate	Waters	Nature
Morocco	Culture	Heritage	City	Modern	Nature	Districts	Marrakech	Lively	Medina	Traditions
South Africa	Heritage	National	Cultural	Act	Resources	Tourism	Nation	People	Brand	Culture
<i>Middle East</i>										
Israel	Museum	Jewish	Center	First	Land	State	Water	Archaeological	City	Historic
Qatar	Culture	Author	Ministry	Palestine	Design	Century	Gulf	Heritage	World	Cultural
UAE	Art	Arab	Culture	World	Intangible	Public	Centre	Countries	Traditions	Human
<i>Oceania</i>										
Australia	Aboriginal	Arts	Capital	New	Indigenous	Cultural	Islander	First	Government	Music
New Zealand	Heritage	Tourism	Wahi	Visitors	Māori	Tapu	Cultural	Historic	International	Culture
Vanuatu	Local	Events	Islands	Markets	Music	Mata	Drawings	Sand	Chief	Arts

Notes: * KHS (Korea Heritage Services).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.3.1 The tangible cultural heritage

With reference to the tangible aspects, we find that historic sites, natural environment and cultural institutions define the tangible presence of the cultural heritage. These categories show that different countries attach considerable importance to tangible components because of their recognisability and their ability to become powerful conveyors of the country's cultural identity. Tangible heritage offers stability, historical connection and authenticity, providing the public, both domestic and

foreign, with concrete elements through which to interpret the country's cultural narrative. Recurring references to cultural heritage also denote a view of material culture as a reliable, effective and understandable vehicle. At the same time, the classification of tangible heritage (historical-architectural heritage vs. natural heritage) highlights the polysemic structure of cultural heritage. Tangible assets do not represent a monolithic category but rather encompass multiple levels of meaning: some linked to historical architectural components, others to the characteristics of cultural institutions, and still others to symbolic identity formations rooted in the landscape imagery. Following this reasoning, results show that, alongside natural resources and historical sites, cultural institutions hold immense importance. The former are considered tangible expressions of the country's historic, artistic and natural heritage, while the latter are indispensable venues for transmitting the country's history to future generations. This distinction aligns with the dynamic view of cultural heritage, wherein the creation and vitality of cultural assets are increasingly important, alongside their safeguarding and transmission. Moreover, cultural institutions often serve a dual role: not only do they facilitate access to and enjoyment of cultural assets, but, when they possess significant history and longevity, they themselves become cultural-historical landmarks. And we refer specifically to museums, which in fact appear to be the most relevant textual category.

An eloquent example from Japan's communication highlights this: "As core institutions involved in the preservation and transmission of history and traditional culture, each museum collects objects according to its own individual collection policy to ensure that its collection is systematically and historically balanced".

In terms of tangible elements, some countries highlight the significance of landscapes and natural scenery, recognizing them not only as essential components of tourist destination image but also as vital factors enhancing the quality of life within the natural and historical environment.

3.3.2 The value of the intangible cultural heritage

With respect to the intangible macro-dimension, the conceptual framework surrounding the intangible aspects of cultural heritage is considerably more complex in line with the recent approach of the "living heritage" proposed by several scholars (Lenzerini, 2011; Poullos, 2014), which underscores the importance of intangible assets for the survival and transmission of a community's distinctive traditions, skills, and qualities.

The key innovation in defining heritage does not stem from distinguishing between tangible and intangible categories but rather from a gradual shift in perspective, from viewing cultural expressions as static objects to understanding them as dynamic cultural processes (Bortolotto, 2006). Categories four to eleven (Tab. 3) can be associated with the intangible cultural heritage, namely: craftsmanship, visual arts and audio-visuals, performing arts, literature, language, gastronomy, traditions, sports. The first category is craftsmanship. Surprisingly, this dimension doesn't show a relevant presence within the corpus. However, references

highlight that craft techniques are seen as valuable qualities that signal the work and creativity of the local community. Next two categories are related to creative industries, namely visual arts and audio-visuals, and performing arts. The first category includes a diverse array of artistic expressions, ranging from sculptures and paintings, enduring testaments to artistic history, to contemporary films and video productions, which convey narratives across time and space, preserving cultural identity in universally accessible formats beyond linguistic and geographical boundaries. Among its subcategories, architecture and design, as well as film heritage and production, receive the highest number of references, underscoring their significant role in shaping a nation's cultural identity.

The second category, performing arts, holds a crucial place in a country's cultural communication, as its evocative and persuasive nature offers a unique gateway to understanding and experiencing national identity. Music, dance and theater are the main artistic expressions that emerged from the analysis and appear to be fundamental as they are deeply connected to the country's cultural identity by being able to pass on its stories and values. This is clearly demonstrated in the descriptions provided by some countries, such as Australia, which emphasizes: "Artistic expression, whether painting, dance, song or story, is integrally connected to cultural knowledge and relationships with a person's country, be it land or sea". The seventh category is "literature". Poetry and other literary works seem to be another pertinent conceptual category that can explain the "true essence" of the national identity that has to be communicated internationally. Furthermore, nations that place a strong emphasis on national literature in their communications offer comprehensive details on the most well-known poets and authors, demonstrating a sense of pride in their country's literary achievements and authors.

The linguistic component is closely related to the literature dimension. Language is the eighth category. Some nations appear to respect their native languages more than others, either because of their universal appeal, extensive use abroad, or long-term preservation. It's interesting to note that Sweden and Australia likewise place a strong emphasis on the existence of linguistic diversity and language communities, as well as the protection that follows. Gastronomy represents the ninth category. Remarkably, the corpus does not demonstrate how important this theme is to cultural transmission. However, Latin American countries are those that emphasize the role of local gastronomy also as a driver of tourism development, for example: "The Peruvian gastronomy is divided in zones or regions, each with typical gastronomy, becoming in a special gastronomic destination" (Peru). "Traditions" is the tenth conceptual category. Folklore (festivals, celebrations) is identified as a recurrent theme in the analysis. These events are seen as a valued cultural expression of local communities to the extent that they have become a distinguishing emblem. The last category of the intangible cultural heritage is "sport". Sports activities are associated with the development of the country as a tourist destination and also with the discovery of the country's natural and scenic heritage, for example: "Our wide range of sporting events will keep everyone entertained with adrenaline pumping action from marathons and round island relays to

open water swims, rowing competitions” (Vanuatu). In some cases, then, the nation promotes sports to support social cohesion especially for the younger generation, for example: “To provide an enabling environment for the sport, arts and culture sector to foster an active, creative, winning and socially cohesive nation” (South Africa).

3.3.3 *The role of national identity*

Finally, the last two categories, “People” and “Diversity, equity & inclusion”, refer to the essence of the country in terms of local communities, diversity and equity. Regarding the first aspect, countries seem to leverage on population traits to emphasize the national identity of the country and to let emerge the warm and friendly nature of its citizens. Specifically, these aspects are judged crucial when presenting the tourist vocation of the country. For example, the Egypt communication states: “Friendliness and smiles are infectious in Siwa, Egypt’s most remote desert oasis”. At the same time, this category is used and promoted to signal the vital bond between cultural heritage and local communities from two perspective. On the one hand, the population is considered the living part of cultural heritage, the actual creator; on the other hand, nations are committed to ensuring that cultural heritage is accessible and usable in various forms to the population as the lifeblood of progress and development. As a result, the communication style becomes more emotive and adopts national storytelling methods through which the nation presents itself, therefore highlighting its real identity and hoping to transmit it outside free from distortions. This aspect is also connected to the next conceptual category: diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity promotes the fusion of traditions, languages, and artistic practices, enriching a nation’s cultural heritage and making it more dynamic and representative of a wide range of experiences. Countries recognize the value of the diversity that characterizes them - whether linguistic, demographic, or cultural - and the need to protect and enhance it.

The meeting of diverse perspectives stimulates innovation in areas such as art, literature, and music, giving rise to new cultural expressions and fostering social progress. For example, Canada’s communication states: “We believe that Canada’s diversity, its greatest asset, is also, what touches travellers’ hearts most deeply. To that end, we are committed to inclusive leadership within our workforce, workplace, and interactions with partners and travellers alike”. Inclusion, instead, allows the histories and experiences of all communities to be recognized and valued, preventing the marginalization of minority groups and ensuring a more complete and true-to-life historical narrative. An inclusive society fosters mutual respect and cohesion among diverse groups, promoting a sense of common belonging that enhances the stability and well-being of the nation. Inclusion ensures that everyone could contribute to the national culture, overcoming discrimination and barriers that might limit talent and participation. A country, that values diversity and inclusion, presents itself as a strong cultural player on the international stage, fostering intercultural dialogue and improving its image in the world.

Tab. 3: Conceptual categories and sub-categories of the cultural heritage image communicated by the countries

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural heritage dimension of the country image: A textual analysis of web narratives across twenty-four countries

Cultural heritage macro-dimensions	Conceptual categories	Sub-conceptual categories	No. of countries	No. of references	Main references
Tangible cultural heritage	(1) Historic sites	Monuments	11	75	It contributes to the policy of safeguarding and enhancing monuments and sites likely to be listed or already classified as Historic Monuments for their historical, aesthetic or cultural interest (France). The Government of Canada's objective is to preserve its built heritage. Federal built heritage comprises the places, buildings and monuments that have been recognized as having heritage value.
		Historic buildings	6	18	English Heritage cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments and sites - from world-famous prehistoric sites to grand medieval castles, from Roman forts on the edges of the empire to a Cold War bunker (UK).
		Historic sites	7	21	We protect an internationally important collection of historic sites and artefacts which span six millennia, from the ancient past to the present day and include palaces, houses, hill figures, castles, abbeys, industrial sites, Roman forts and even deserted medieval villages (UK). National historic sites have a separate designation process under the Historic Sites and Monuments Act (Canada).
		Churches and religious buildings	6	105	Stories are wrapped up in a building; its use, adaptation, and renewal of sacred spaces over centuries of social, economic and cultural change make historic churches exciting places to visit (UK). The palace is a piece of art in itself - and so too is its resident place of worship, the Royal Chapel (Sweden). The widening of the definition of heritage towards key achievements of the twentieth century (industrial heritage, works of art, housing, public and religious buildings, tourist and sports facilities) (France).
	(2) Cultural institutions	Museums	19	323	There is virtually no other country on earth with as many museums per head of the population as Switzerland (Switzerland). The program increases access to arts and cultural experiences for audiences outside major cities and encourages partnerships between museums and galleries across the collections sector (Australia). As core institutions involved in the preservation and transmission of history and traditional culture, each museum collects objects according to its own individual collection policy to ensure that its collection is systematically and historically balanced (Japan).
		Collections	12	169	Switzerland is a country of collectors. A major part in the art market has long been played by the great industrial families, some of whom assembled important collections. Examples include the collections of Oskar Reinhart in Winterthur and Emmanuel Hoffmann in Basel (Switzerland). St Catherine Monastery in Sinai is Home to the famous "burning bush" and some of the most renowned collections of religious documents and icons in the world (Egypt).
		Archives	11	45	The Directorate-General for Heritage and Architecture defines, coordinates and evaluates the State's action in the conservation, communication and enhancement of public archives (France).
		Libraries	14	59	The Swedish Arts Council is a government agency founded in 1974. We support arts and culture in many different forms - literature, museums, libraries, performing arts, music, reading promotion, arts, culture in schools, crafts etc (Sweden).
		Art galleries	9	56	We also strive to exchange information with and provide specialist/technical guidance and advice to other museums and galleries within Japan and overseas (Japan). There are also numerous galleries and auctions as well as international and regional fairs to delight the hearts of art enthusiasts from all over the world (Switzerland)
		Exhibitions	12	110	The latest round of the Visions of Australia program is now open with up to \$1 million in funding available to assist quality exhibitions tour the country (Australia).
	(3) Natural environment	National parks and gardens	17	249	Our main activity is to take care of the special places that we have received as donations, inheritances or that have been granted to us in management: woods and coasts, parks and gardens, castles and historical residences, villas and abbeys, but also small assets with a high identity value such as a historical shrine or the old barber's shop in the city (Italy). With a multitude of gardens and parks throughout the emirates, it is sure to have something for everyone (UAE)
		Landscapes	18	112	This dynamic has been driven by European visitors, the first to return to France, to discover or rediscover its art of living, its culture, its many landscapes but also a renewed offer, responding to their growing aspirations in terms of sustainable tourism (France).
		Sea and coasts	16	160	Tourism Australia acknowledges the Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Owners of the land, sea and waters of the Australian continent, and recognises their custodianship of culture and Country for over 60,000 years (Australia).
		Lakes	10	58	Views from the top include the nearby lakes and dunes, and it's also a great place to spot some rare eagles or falcons (Egypt). This heritage includes large numbers of coastal fish traps, submerged prehistoric landscapes, rock paintings, and archaeology associated with inland waters such as lakes and rivers (South Africa).
		Ecosystems and biodiversity	8	30	The knowledge generated by scientists and supporting staff within the division and in collaboration with external associates informs park management and promotes the conservation of biodiversity, landscapes and associated heritage assets (South Africa).

Intangible cultural heritage	(4) Craftmanship	Artisans	2	3	The Local Festivals component provides funding to local groups for recurring festivals that present the work of local artists, local artisans, local heritage performers, and local cultural carriers (Canada).
		Craft techniques	1	2	In Japan, "Intangible Cultural Properties" refers to stage arts, music, craft techniques, and other intangible cultural assets that possess high historic or artistic value for the country (Japan).
		Handicrafts	2	4	Endeavouring to inspire professionals and enthusiasts in arts, literature and music locally and internationally, we also work to preserve traditional artistic practices and handicrafts (UAE).
	(5) Visual arts and audio-visuals	Sculptures	9	29	There are two stone galleries to explore within the exhibition hall. The sculptures and busts are displayed in the exact same spots they were placed in the 1790s. Each sculpture is a thing of beauty, but Endymion – created by the artist of the same name – is considered the standout piece (Sweden).
		Drawings	7	25	The museum in Berne therefore has the world's largest and most important collection of paintings, water-colours and drawings by this artist, whose works can be assigned to many movements: expressionism, constructivism, cubism, primitivism and even surrealism (Switzerland).
		Paintings	11	35	Many of the paintings, including centuries-old portraits of kings and queens, hang in the gallery within the beautiful Bernadotte Apartments (Sweden).
		Architecture and design	10	185	America's historic sites are irreplaceable. From icons of architecture to birthplaces of activists, historic sites are physical reminders of the diversity of our experiences and the history we share (USA).
		Photography	11	91	ENIT's Historical Archive relates to the activities of the Italian National Tourism Board from 1919 – the year of its foundation – to the present day and consists of about 4,000 MM. documents and over 200,000 images including slides, photographs, negatives, videos and historical poster (Italy).
		Architects	7	62	From the early 20th century onwards, this country has produced several daring and visionary architects who have achieved global renown (Switzerland).
	(6) Performing arts	Film heritage and production	12	165	The Swiss film scene is flourishing as never before measured by market share and cinema tickets bought, 2013 was the most successful year for the Swiss cinema since 2006, the year when "Late Bloomers" was such a hit (Switzerland). Australia is a popular and world-class destination for filmmaking because of our lifestyle and spectacular and diverse locations (Australia).
		Music	15	172	Switzerland is brimming over with music, with the largest number of music festivals by area of any European country – and the dance scene is equally impressive (Switzerland). Music surrounds our islands like the ocean celebrating a fantastic range of outdoor music concerts happening every year from January to December (Vanuatu).
Performances		13	48	U.S. department of arts and culture contributes to the strength and vibrancy of the movement for collective liberation by resourcing and mobilizing cultural organizers and artists. We do this through political education, connecting cultural organizers and movement, policy engagement and play and performance (USA).	
Dance and ballet		13	142	Artistic expression, whether painting, dance, song or story, is integrally connected to cultural knowledge and relationships with a person's country, be it land or sea (Australia). Fishing, hunting and traditional lore are central to Torres Strait Island culture and are reflected through ceremony, song, dance and spirituality (South Africa).	
Concerts		6	17	The House of Electronic Arts focuses on the conservation, archiving and documentation of digital art. Its exhibitions, concerts, lectures, guided tours and workshops address an extensive public (Switzerland). concerts and festivals are held at heritage sites and on the grounds of historic houses - from Ragley Hall, Kenwood House and Audley End to Hampton Court and Windsor Great Park21(UK).	
Theatre		12	106	Furthermore, the National Theatre conducts training workshops and other activities to train the respective successors of traditional performing arts, such as Nohgaku, Bunraku (puppet theater), Kabuki, and traditional popular entertainment (Japan).	
(7) Literature	Musicians and composers	8	40	Lyrics sung by Swiss pop musicians and rock bands are more often in English nowadays, otherwise no honours or money are to be had at international level (Switzerland).	
	Literature	7	52	Australian literature is vital to our cultural and intellectual life and communicating Australian stories (Australia).	
	Writers	7	38	Max Frisch (1911–1991) is known as one of Switzerland's greatest writers (Switzerland).	
	Poetry	4	17	We are a nation of dream-weavers, we make music, art, architecture, poetry, pottery and plays (UK).	
(8) Language	Poets	4	19	Snow-covered eucalypts, huts in mountain settings and mountain landscapes are distinctive Australian images captured by numerous artists and photographers. The mountain landscapes have inspired poets, writers, musicians and film makers (Australia).	
	Language	17	147	The ILA supports First Nations Australians to express, conserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities (Australia). Romansh literature has been in existence since the 16th century. This language is written in several dialect forms. Romansh is the fourth official national language of Switzerland (Switzerland).	
	Dialect	4	34	Dialects, poems and stories that express the history of the Emirate (UAE). People in the German-speaking region of Switzerland speak various Alemannic dialects such as Baseldeutsch, Berndeutsch, Bündnerdeutsch, St.-Galler-Deutsch, Walliserdeutsch and Zürichdeutsch (Switzerland).	
	Language diversity	2	2	The Act is also intended to protect the Swedish language and language diversity in Sweden, and the individual's access to language (Sweden).	
(9) Gastronomy	Language groups	2	4	The Torres Strait is divided into two language groups: Mirriam Mer is the dominant language in the eastern Torres Strait and originates from Papua New Guinea influence (Australia). This rich and dynamic graphic tradition has developed as a means of communication among the members of some 80 different language groups inhabiting the central and northern islands of Vanuatu (Vanuatu).	
	Food products	16	49	Australia's success as a destination has been built on the combination of our world class natural beauty and unique wildlife as well as our welcoming people and exceptional food and wine (Australia)	
(10) Traditions	Local gastronomy	4	11	In major cultural expressions, in rhythms and dances, in gastronomy, in visual arts, in architecture, in religiosity and in the construction of our history, the historical influence of the black population is present throughout the country (Brazil). The Peruvian gastronomy is divided in zones or regions, each with typical gastronomy, becoming in a special gastronomic destination (Peru).	
	Festivals	14	128	Our mission is to encourage people to discover the charm of Japanese culture while enjoying programs of cultural content, including art exhibitions, performing arts, and art festivals (Japan).	
	Traditions	16	50	The unique culture and traditions shaped by the nature, climate, and people of Japan over centuries can be found in every corner of this island nation (Japan).	
(11) Sport	Ceremonies	9	24	The diversity of these assets reflects the breadth of the Australian Government's interests in the National Capital and provides the setting for ceremonies, activities and events that Australians expect to occur in their capital (Australia). Today, hanbok is more often worn for special occasions than as casual clothes, such as wedding ceremonies, children's first birthdays, and seasonal holidays including the Lunar New Year's Day and Chuseok (South Korea).	
	Sport activities and events	12	39	State to support and coordinate their works it was responsible for setting terms and standards for the establishment of clubs, centers, committees and associations for youth and sports and issuing license for them (Qatar). To preserve and maintain this great posture, the government has through its Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, launched programmes to support its people within these creative sectors through their Annual Performance Plan (South Africa).	

National identity	(12) People	Community	17	301	Values sit at the center and cultural organizers, community organizations and movements coalesce around participatory decision making, rigor and care (USA). It makes the Ministry of Culture a nurturing project committed to the challenges facing the country community by strengthening its national identity (Qatar).
		Friendliness	4	8	Friendliness and smiles are infectious in Siwa, Egypt's most remote desert oasis (Egypt). Enjoy every Moroccan product in a friendly atmosphere (Morocco).
		Opportunities	15	117	Together, the Arts Endowment's activities support bringing meaningful arts experiences to all Americans, helping to ensure that everyone in the country has the opportunity to live artful lives (USA). The Visions of Australia program promotes the National Cultural Policy, Revive, by providing opportunities for audiences across the country to engage with our vibrant arts and culture landscape (Australia).
		Identity	7	132	Our main activity is to take care of the special places that we have received as donations, inheritances or that have been granted to us in management: woods and coasts, parks and gardens, castles and historical residences, villas and abbeys, but also small assets with a high identity value such as a historical shrine or the old barber's shop in the city (Italy)
		Minorities	3	11	The Ministry of Culture in Sweden is responsible for issues regarding culture, media, democracy, human rights, minorities, national minorities including Sami culture and language (Sweden).
	(13) Diversity, equity and inclusion	Equity and inclusion	2	39	Our mandate from President Biden is clear: we must address the four intersecting challenges of COVID-19, economic recovery, racial equity and climate change. Read our priorities to learn how we will meet the scope of our challenges and the multiple, overlapping crises (USA).
		Diversity	12	58	The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the United States Department of State strives to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in all aspects of its work (USA)
		Sustainability	10	22	We have identified four major priorities going forwards - Inspiration, Conservation, Involvement and Financial Sustainability (UK). The Strategy also applies a holistic approach to tourism development, including incorporating sustainability- and community-based development and management strategies (USA).
		Disability	2	17	ECA is committed to addressing barriers based on race, ethnicity, colour, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, geographic location, education, income, socio-economic status, and other diversity dimensions, that may hinder inclusion in the organization (USA).

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural heritage dimension of the country image: A textual analysis of web narratives across twenty-four countries

Source: Authors' elaboration.

4. Discussion

Over the past decades, the concept of cultural heritage has undergone a profound transformation, driven by the increasing engagement of academic disciplines that have traditionally maintained a peripheral interest in the subject. As previously noted, cultural heritage has experienced a notable semantic evolution, expanding beyond the classical notion of individual artistic “genius” to embrace a more inclusive framework that acknowledges the collective role of communities in defining, safeguarding, and promoting heritage. This democratization of cultural heritage has introduced new analytical dimensions, enriching its conceptual foundations with interdisciplinary insights and novel theoretical perspectives. More significantly, cultural heritage has transcended its conventional role as a mere repository of historical and artistic value, evolving into a strategic asset that contributes to national identity formation, social cohesion, and economic development at both regional and global levels. However, despite the conceptual advancements in the study of cultural heritage, a persistent gap remains between the intricate system of meanings associated with a nation's cultural image and the institutional mechanisms through which these meanings are structured and disseminated. This disjunction is particularly evident in the field of international marketing and nation branding studies (Mainolfi *et al.*, 2024; Napolitano *et al.*, 2015). Although

research on country image has generated a substantial body of literature over the past five decades (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018; Heslop *et al.*, 2010; Pappu *et al.*, 2007), it has largely overlooked a systematic analysis of cultural heritage's role in shaping perceptions of international audiences. This oversight is reflected both in the absence of conceptual models that explicitly integrate cultural heritage as a measurable construct and in the limited understanding of how a country's cultural image influences consumer attitudes and decision-making processes.

This study seeks to address this gap by bridging cultural heritage studies and the country image literature. It pursues a dual objective: first, to develop an initial conceptualization of the cultural heritage image as a theoretical domain, and second, to explore the role of cultural elements in the communication strategies employed by advanced nation branding systems. Given the exploratory nature of the research, a grounded methodological approach was adopted, allowing theoretical categories to emerge inductively from empirical analysis of secondary sources selected based on their relevance and originality.

The findings derived from the statistical-lexical analysis of institutional communication materials from twenty-four selected countries provide significant insights into both the diversity of cultural heritage components and the sophistication of communication strategies related to cultural variables. The empirical results confirm the relevance of the intangible components (Unesco, 2003) that incisively connote the discourses and narratives conveyed by countries in official communication. Most interesting is the variety and breadth of thematic cores that emerged ranging from arts to language, from craftsmanship to sports testifying to the multifaceted and fascinating complexity of the phenomenon.

Notably, national identity emerged as a third fundamental component, framed around the characteristics of a country's population and its cultural diversity - both of which are increasingly regarded as integral elements of heritage that warrant preservation and promotion. Across nearly all the countries analyzed, official communication regarding cultural heritage exhibits a complex and multidimensional narrative structure that extends beyond the mere enumeration of tangible cultural assets. The methodological framework adopted in this study facilitated the identification of thirteen key subcategories that underpin the cultural heritage image, encompassing historical-artistic sites, cultural institutions, natural environment, craftsmanship, visual arts and audio-visuals, performing arts, literature, language, gastronomy, traditions, sport, people, diversity, equity and inclusion.

These findings underscore the increasing integration of cultural heritage into national branding efforts and highlight the necessity for more nuanced theoretical and empirical frameworks to capture its impact on international perceptions. Specifically, the study contributes to an advancement of knowledge of the country image construct by delving into the role of cultural heritage in shaping the perceptions boasted toward a country. This result is extremely relevant as it systematizes the interpretive boundaries of the cultural heritage dimensions and draws a line of inquiry for the proposal of a measurement scale for the cultural heritage image.

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

The results of this study contribute to the academic debate on country image and cultural heritage by attempting to fill an obvious scientific gap concerning the decline in the value of the cultural component in the process of forming a country's image, through a conceptually based categorisation of communication themes relating to heritage. Firstly, the conceptual categories identified enrich current interpretative models on cultural heritage by highlighting, through empirical research, the dynamism and elasticity of the concept of cultural heritage. Furthermore, through its analytical approach, the study seeks to bridge the missing link between the image of a country and the image of its cultural heritage by questioning the narrative symbolism and contemporary reinterpretation of the fundamental elements of what can be considered cultural heritage today.

Secondly, the analysis advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating that the image of cultural heritage is not only a static reflection of historical assets, but a dynamic communicative construction shaped through digital dissemination and narrative framing. This highlights the importance of considering communicative intentionality and digital rhetoric as clear evidence of a country's self-perception of identity. Third, this study highlights the theoretical significance of cultural heritage as a semiotic asset in the construction of national narratives. By examining the structures and content used in official digital communication, the research reveals how narratives about heritage represent symbolic vectors of collective identity and projected national self-awareness. This offers a conceptual bridge between studies on country image and broader theories of collective memory and national identity construction. From here, the results suggest that country image models should consider not only the informational content related to heritage, but also the symbolic and ideological traits inherent in heritage narratives. Hence, the results suggest that current country communication requires a more "modern" interpretative theoretical model capable of reading and interpreting the new compositions and directions of the cultural heritage image in order not only to reconnect with the overall image of the country but also to aim at modules for measuring the value of heritage. This perspective encourages future research to integrate heritage-based dimensions into multilevel models of soft power, consumer behaviour, and cultural diplomacy.

As for the contribution and originality of this research, it is, to the best of the authors' knowledge, one of the first studies to integrate the concept of cultural heritage in the context of international marketing, with the aim of identifying a conceptual framework suitable for representing the multiplicity of contents and images evoked by national cultural heritage. Given the limited attention given to this topic to date, the results obtained warrant a more in-depth analysis of the perceptual modes of cultural heritage image and the related enhancement strategies adopted by both public institutions and businesses (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009).

From a managerial perspective, the use of cultural heritage as a strategic marketing lever is becoming increasingly relevant, especially for companies belonging to nations with a rich and globally recognized historical heritage. In particular, companies that embody national brands that are considered “prototypical” can capitalize on the image of their country’s cultural heritage to build a distinctive set of associations that uniquely connect national identity with local products (Anholt, 2002; Banerjee, 2008). A thorough understanding of the constituent dimensions of cultural heritage image also proves essential for policymakers who aim to increase their nation’s international attractiveness and align promotional strategies with a unique repertoire of tangible and intangible associations. Prominent cultural emblems, such as the Eiffel Tower, Italian gastronomy, and Shakespeare’s literary corpus, are not merely “cultural assets,” but convey symbolic meanings that serve as conceptual aggregators for different categories of products and services, thus consolidating national branding strategies (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2015).

The results provide concrete guidance for tourism agencies, cultural institutions, and national authorities responsible for place branding. The categories identified can be used as strategic levers to define more coherent heritage communication strategies, for example by prioritising authentic cultural narratives over generic promotional messages, or by integrating community-based storytelling to strengthen the perceived legitimacy and emotional relevance of heritage assets.

At a more macro (institutional) level, the findings of the study can support governments and policymakers in defining a holistic strategy that helps identify the “new” branches and possible connections between the constituent dimensions of cultural heritage. In this sense, the value of such an approach may also lie in increasing the likelihood of cross-fertilisation between sectors, such as the cultural, creative and manufacturing industries. Furthermore, a multidimensional view of the phenomenon can help in the development of policies to support sustainable cultural promotion, such as incentivising the digital documentation of cultural heritage practices, supporting local cultural intermediaries or promoting collaborative partnerships between cultural heritage custodians, creative industries and tourism operators.

Finally, this categorization proposal may provide a benchmarking tool that can help countries assess the maturity and consistency of their cultural heritage communication compared to their international counterparts.

6. Limitations and future research

It is necessary to acknowledge certain limitations of the study. First of all, the analysis is based exclusively on web communication and therefore reflects the strategic representations of cultural heritage decided and controlled by official bodies. This choice was motivated by the desire to prioritise communication flows that influence public opinion and fuel the process of consolidating judgements and perceptions of identity makers.

This excludes other areas of communication, such as social media discourse and user-generated content, which could provide a more grassroots perspective on heritage representation.

Secondly, the study examined 24 countries, offering broad geographical coverage but not covering the full potential diversity of cultural heritage communication strategies adopted globally. Some cultural regions may therefore be underrepresented, limiting the generalisability of the conceptual categories identified.

Starting from these limitations, future lines of research can be identified. Future studies could expand on this work in several ways. First, the integration of additional communicative sources, such as social media discourse, user-generated images, and digital storytelling by local communities, would allow researchers to capture grassroots representations of cultural heritage alongside official narratives.

Second, broadening the geographical scope to include, for example, countries from underrepresented cultural regions would strengthen the generalisability and robustness of the identified heritage categories. Comparative studies between cultural clusters could enrich the interpretation of communicative strategies at the national level. Third, future studies could validate the conceptual categories identified in this study through the consumer perspective by developing a transnational measurement scale similar to those commonly used in country image studies. Such an approach would not only allow for a more rigorous comparison of cultural heritage images across different nations but also allow for a deeper understanding of the role it plays in foreign consumers' perceptions of national productions. The results of this survey would be particularly useful for companies and territories where the image of national cultural heritage, particularly in its intangible and identity components, is a strategic competitive advantage in international markets (Dinnie, 2015).

References

- ALLRED A., CHAKRABORTY G., MILLER S.J. (1999), "Measuring images of developing countries: a scale development study", *Journal of Euro-Marketing*, vol. 8, n. 3, pp. 29-49.
- ANHOLT S. (2007), *L'identità competitiva. Il branding di nazioni, città e regioni*, Egea, Milano,
- ANHOLT S. (2002), "Nation branding: A continuing theme", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 10, 1, pp. 59-59.
- AYDIN B., ERDOGAN B.Z., BALOGLU S. (2021), "Examining the role of country image in the relationship between cuisine image and intention to visit a country", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, vol. 23, n. 4, pp. 555-568.
- BANERJEE S. (2008), "Strategic brand-culture fit: A conceptual framework for brand management", *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 15, pp. 312-321.
- BANNISTER J., SAUNDERS J. (1978), "UK consumers' attitudes towards imports: The measurement of national stereotype image", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 12, n. 8, pp. 562-570.

- BILETSKA O. (2021), "Culture as a nation branding tool within the international interaction system", *Culture and Arts in the Modern World*, vol. 22, pp. 22-33.
- BOLASCO S. (2005), "Statistica testuale e Text-Mining: alcuni paradigmi applicativi", *Quaderni di Statistica*, vol. 7, pp. 17-53.
- BORTOLOTTO C. (2006), "From the 'monumental' to the 'living' heritage: a shift in perspective", in *World Heritage. Global Challenges, Local Solutions. Proceedings of a conference at Coalbrookdale* (pp. 4-7),
- BRIJS K. (2006), *Semiotics as a theoretical basis for a meaning-centred approach towards country-of-origin effects*, SI: SN.
- BUHMANN A. (2016), *Measuring country image. Theory, methods and effects*, Fachmedien Wiesbaden: Springer.
- BUHMANN A., INGENHOFF D. (2015), "Advancing the country image construct from a public relations perspective: From model to measurement", *Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 19, n. 1, pp. 62-80.
- CARLEY K. (1993), "Coding choices for textual analysis: A comparison of content analysis and map analysis", *Sociological Methodology*, vol. 3, pp. 75-126.
- CERQUETTI M., ROMAGNOLI A. (2023), "Milieu and cultural heritage as a resource for digital marketing: Exploring web marketing strategies in the wine industry", *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review*, vol. 7, pp. 347-364.
- CHAO P., RAJENDRAN K.N. (1993), "Consumer profiles and perceptions: country-of-origin effects", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 10, n. 2, pp. 22-39.
- COLBERT F., ST-JAMES Y. (2014), "Research in arts marketing: Evolution and future directions", *Psychology and Marketing*, vol. 31, n. 8, pp. 566-575.
- D'ASTOUS A., AHMED S.A. (1999), "The importance of country images in the formation of consumer product perceptions", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 16, n. 2, pp. 108-126.
- DESBORDE R.D. (1990), *Development and Testing of a Psychometric Scale to Measure Country-of-Origin Image*, Ann Arbor: Florida State University.
- DINNIE K. (2015), *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice*, Routledge, New York.
- EROGLU S.A., MACHLEIT K.A. (1989), "Effects of Individual and Product-specific Variables on Utilising Country of Origin as a Product Quality Cue", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 6, n. 6, pp. ??
- GALLARZA M.G., SAURA I.G., GARCÍA H.C. (2002), "Destination image: Towards a conceptual framework", *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 29, n. 1, pp. 56-78.
- GARCÍA-DE-FRUTOS N., ORTEGA-EGEA J.M. (2015), "An integrative model of consumers' reluctance to buy foreign products: do social and environmental country images play a role?", *Journal of Macromarketing*, vol. 35, n. 2, pp. 167-186.
- HAKALA U., LEMMETYINEN A. (2013), "Culture is the message': The status of Cultural Capital and its effect on a city's brand equity", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol. 9, pp. 5-16.
- HAKALA U., LÄTTI S., SANDBERG B. (2011), "Operationalising brand heritage and cultural heritage", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 20, n. 6, pp. 447-456.

- HAN C.M. (1989), "Country image: halo or summary construct?", *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 26, n. 2, pp. 222-229.
- HARMEILING C.M., MAGNUSSON P., SINGH N. (2015), "Beyond anger: A deeper look at consumer animosity", *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 46, pp. 676-693.
- HESLOP L.A., NADEAU J., O'REILLY N. (2010), "China and the Olympics: views of insiders and outsiders", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 27, n. 4, pp. 404-433.
- ICOMOS (2002), *International Cultural Tourism Charter. Principles And Guidelines for Managing Tourism at Places of Cultural and Heritage Significance*. ICOMOS, International Cultural Tourism Committee.
- IPSOS (2023), *Nation Brands Index 2023*, retrieved from: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/nation-brands-index-2023>, accessed on 26th June 2024.
- JUNG JUNG H., LEE Y., KIM H., YANG H. (2014), "Impacts of country images on luxury fashion brand: facilitating with the brand resonance model", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, vol. 18, n. 2, pp. 187-205.
- KAVARATZIS M., ASHWORTH G. (2015), "Hijacking culture: the disconnection between place culture and place brands", *Town Planning Review*, vol. 86, n. 2, pp. 155-176.
- KNIGHT G.A., SPRENG R.A., YAPRAK A. (2003), "Cross-national development and validation of an international business measurement scale: the COISCALE", *International Business Review*, vol. 12, n. 5, pp. 581-599.
- LAROCHE M., PAPADOPOULOS N., HESLOP L.A., MOURALI M. (2005), "The influence of country image structure on consumer evaluations of foreign products", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 22, n. 1, pp. 96-115.
- LENZERINI F. (2011), "Intangible Cultural heritage: the living culture of peoples", *The European Journal of International Law*, vol. 22, n. 1, pp. 101-120.
- MAHER A.A., CARTER L.L. (2011), "The affective and cognitive components of country image: Perceptions of American products in Kuwait", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 28, n. 6, pp 559-580.
- MAINOLFI G., ROMOLI A., PERLANGELI G., DE NISCO A. (2024), "Disclosing the cultural heritage dimension of the country image. A comparison between the lexical contents of the web communication from ten leading countries", *Italian Society of Marketing, Annual Conference, 17th-19th October*, Milan.
- MARINO V., MAINOLFI G. (2013), *Country brand management*, EGEA, Milano.
- MARTIN I.M., EROGLU S. (1993), "Measuring a multi-dimensional construct: Country image", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 28, n. 3, pp. 191-210.
- MILLAR S. (1989), "Heritage management for heritage tourism", *Tourism Management*, vol. 10, n. 1, pp. 9-14.
- MOILANEN T., RAINISTO S.K. (2009), *How to brand nations, cities and destinations*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London.
- NAPOLITANO M.R., MAINOLFI G., DE NISCO A., GRASSO L., MARINO V. (2015), "Cultural heritage e immagine Paese. Una content analysis sulla comunicazione istituzionale di dieci nazioni", in *Heritage, management e impresa: quali sinergie?* (pp. 189-205), Proceedings Sinergie-CUEIM Conference, 9-10 luglio 2015, Termoli.
- NEBENZAHL I.D., JAFFE E.D. (1996), "Measuring the Joint Effect of Brand and Country Image in Consumer Evaluation of Global Products", *International Marketing Review*, vol. 13/4, pp. 5-22.

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural
heritage dimension of the
country image: A textual
analysis of web narratives
across twenty-four
countries

- PAPADOPOULOS N., CLEVELAND M., BARTIKOWSKI B., YAPRAK A. (2018), "Of countries, places and product/brand place associations: an inventory of dispositions and issues relating to place image and its effects", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 27, n. 7, pp. 735-753.
- PAPADOPOULOS N., HESLOP L.A., IKON Research Group (2000), *A cross-national and longitudinal study of product-country images with a focus on the US and Japan* (pp. 1-67), Marketing Science Institute, Massachusetts.
- PAPPU R., QUESTER P.G., COOKSEY R.W. (2007), "Country image and consumer-based brand equity: relationships and implications for international marketing", *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 38, pp. 726-745.
- PARAMESWARAN R., PISHARODI R.M. (1994), "Facets of country-of-origin image: An empirical assessment", *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 23, n. 1, pp. 43-56.
- PARAMESWARAN R., YAPRAK A. (1987), "A cross-national comparison of consumer research measures", *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 18, pp. 35-49.
- PASSOW T., FEHLMANN R., GRAHLOW H. (2005), "Country reputation-From measurement to management: The case of Liechtenstein", *Corporate Reputation Review*, vol. 7, pp. 309-326.
- POOR J.P., SNOWBALL J.D. (2010), "The valuation of campus built heritage from the student perspective: Comparative analysis of Rhodes University in South Africa and St. Mary's College of Maryland in the United States", *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 11, n. 2, pp. 145-154.
- POULIOS I. (2014), "Discussing strategy in heritage conservation: Living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation", *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, vol. 4, n. 1, pp. 16-34.
- RIVIEZZO A., GAROFANO A., MARINO V., NAPOLITANO M.R. (2014), "'C'era una volta...'", *Racconti d'impresе storiche della manifattura campana*, *Atti del XXVI Convegno annuale di Sinergie*, pp. 483-499.
- RIZZO L., THROSBY D. (2006), "Cultural heritage: Economic analysis and public policy", in Ginsburgh V.A., Throsby D. (Eds.), *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, vol. 1, pp. 984-1016.
- ROJAS-MÉNDEZ J.I. (2013), "The nation brand molecule", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 22, n. 7, pp. 462-472.
- ROTH K.P., DIAMANTOPOULOS A. (2009), "Advancing the country image construct", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 62, n. 7, pp. 726-740.
- UNESCO (2003), "Convenzione per la salvaguardia del patrimonio culturale intangibile", retrieved from: https://www.unesco.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Convenzione-Patrimonio-Immateriale_ITA-2.pdf, accessed on 9th August 2024.
- VAN ITTERSUM K., CANDEL M.J., MEULENBERG M.T. (2003), "The influence of the image of a product's region of origin on product evaluation", *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 56, n. 3, pp. 215-226.
- VEGHEÈ C. (2022), "Cultural heritage and nation branding: a marketing driver for sustainable development", *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 42-42.
- VERLEGH P.W. (2001), *Country-of-Origin Effects: on Consumer Product Evaluations*, Wageningen University and Research.

- VERLEGH P.W., STEENKAMP J.B.E. (1999), "A review and meta-analysis of country-of-origin research", *Journal of Economic Psychology*, vol. 20, n. 5, pp. 521-546.
- WANG C.K., LAMB C.W. (1983), "The impact of selected environmental forces upon consumers' willingness to buy foreign products", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 11, pp. 71-84.

Giada Mainolfi
Alessandro De Nisco
Myriam Caratù
Genni Perlangeli
Exploring the cultural heritage dimension of the country image: A textual analysis of web narratives across twenty-four countries

Academic or professional position and contacts

Giada Mainolfi

Associate Professor of Management
University of International Studies of Rome (UNINT) - Italy
e-mail: giada.mainolfi@unint.eu

Alessandro De Nisco

Full Professor of Management
University of International Studies of Rome (UNINT) - Italy
e-mail: alessandro.denisco@unint.eu

Myriam Caratù

Tenure-track Assistant Professor of Management
University of Catania - Italy
e-mail: myriam.caratu@unict.it

Genni Perlangeli

Research Fellow of Management
Bocconi University - Italy
e-mail: genni.perlangeli@unibocconi.it

sinergie
italian journal of management

ISSN print 0393-5108
ISSN online 2785-549X
DOI 10.7433/s129.2026.05
pp. 99-121

 **FONDAZIONE
CUEIM**


**S
I
M
A**
Italian Society of
MANAGEMENT