

Nation branding: a strategic tool for attracting talent globally

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Abstract

Purpose – Governments invest greatly in creating a positive nation image that can enhance the attractiveness of the stakeholders associated with it. However, the existing evidence has not convinced companies to use nation brands to support their recruiting talent endeavors. This investigation aims to empirically show the influence of nation brands' overall image and its potential to predict talented migrants' intention to relocate overseas. We strive to explain this effect as a global phenomenon.

Design/methodology/approach – We surveyed 2,151 participants to study their level of familiarity with and perception of 55 countries worldwide. We followed a batch-based sample strategy and used binomial logistic regression and k-means cluster analysis.

Findings – The results confirmed nation image influence on intention to relocate, revealing that individuals holding a positive overall image of a country are twice as likely to relocate there. Furthermore, we described 55 countries' image worldwide and identified three clusters of countries with differing capacities to attract talent.

Social implications – This evidence underpins the governments' investment in creating a strategic nation image and encourages companies to finally capitalize on said economic endeavor by associating their company with valuable nation brands to attract talent to their headquarters.

Originality/value – To date, research on this topic was based on case studies, mostly from cities in developed countries, and focused on specific features of the place rather than the overall image construct. We extend these approaches by providing generalizable knowledge about this construct's value to attract talent. We further show this effect's global extent, supporting future comparative studies and managerial decisions.

Keywords Talent attraction, Nation branding, Brand image, Relocation branding, Perception, Familiarity

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In a world that is “flat”, quoting Thomas L. Friedman's book, creating strong nation brands becomes more relevant than ever. In the postmodern context, countries, cities or regions are not only holders of everything one can find in there, but the place itself is directly bound to

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This survey is part of wider research that the company Bloom Consulting has been conducting since 2021, with the scientific collaboration of the rest of the authors of this article. The whole research line aims at finding a way to objectively measure the effectiveness of the proactive effort that goes into managing a nation brand. Vinyals-Mirabent is a Serra Hünter Fellow.



meanings and experiences desired by their audiences; i.e. they are viewed as place brands (Eshuis and Ripoll González, 2024). Indeed, branding has consolidated as an area of knowledge that can successfully assist the strategic efforts to build a consistent value proposition by the territories (Kavaratzis and Florek, 2021). And, different to commercial brands, place brands should bring value not only to governments but to its different stakeholders, for instance, companies aiming to attract international talent (Kavaratzis, 2012).

The idea that place branding is an important asset for attracting talent has been reflected in literature about place branding, public diplomacy and public governance (Dinnie, 2022). However, the value that place branding can provide when it comes to attracting talent does not seem to be making much of an impression in the management domain, since it is not reflected in the literature yet (Kravariti and Johnston, 2020).

At an academic level, literature in the management domain is clear about the value of attracting skilled migrants across borders (Belderbos *et al.*, 2023), and the advantages that a location, particularly global cities, can bring along, for instance, as a pull factor (Goerzen *et al.*, 2014). However, research on talent management and employer branding do not seem to take into account the potential that place branding has to offer in this respect (Kravariti and Johnston, 2020). At a practical level, recent evidence revealed that less than one-third of recruiting ads published on LinkedIn were using a nation brand to enhance the attractiveness of their job offer (Vinyals-Mirabent and van Wijngaarden, 2022). This evidence suggests that researchers and companies are not yet convinced of nation brands' strategic value when it comes to attracting talent.

Several unanswered questions about nation brands' value to attract talent may be preventing them from moving beyond public governance into stakeholders' practice and research. First, holistic approaches that can provide generalizable knowledge, support comparative studies and provide an understanding of this as a global phenomenon are missing; so far, this field of research is limited to case studies. Second, most of the knowledge about attracting talent has come from studying city branding, while other territorial forms, such as countries (Silvanto and Ryan, 2018) or regions (Cleave *et al.*, 2016), have received marginal attention. Third, significant progress has been made in identifying features that talented migrants may take into account when considering relocating abroad (e.g. social life; Schade *et al.*, 2018; Silvanto *et al.*, 2015). However, studies assessing the influence of the overall image are missing; it is essential to further evaluate the impact of the overall nation brand image construct (Hao *et al.*, 2021), as it is likely to play a significant role in recruiting talent at earlier stages of the process.

Altogether, while there have been some breakthroughs in understanding place brands' value when it comes to attracting talent, there is still a long road ahead academically speaking (Silvanto and Ryan, 2014); moreover, the various stakeholders still need to be convinced that this asset has a strategic value. Thus, this is not only an academic ambition but also a pressing need for the industry.

This research is the result of a university–industry collaboration with Bloom Consulting; this type of collaboration is still rare, but it is vital to knowledge development in the management field (Anckaert and Peeters, 2023; Corsi *et al.*, 2022). The purpose of this research is twofold. First, we aim to empirically demonstrate nation branding's influence on workers' intention to relocate abroad as a global phenomenon (i.e. beyond special cases) and its value in predicting candidates' desire to work overseas. Proving that enthusiasm for and investment in nation branding as a public governance strategy leads to a generalizable effect of attracting talent would help convince enterprises to finally capitalize on such economic endeavor by associating their corporate brands with valuable nation brands. Second, we aim to provide a current holistic snapshot of nation brands' potential to attract global talent. Information about different countries' capacity to attract talent would help establish synergy and comparisons between cases in future research, and guide management decisions that may use the strength of a particular nation brand to their advantage.

Theoretical background

Nation brands, key strategic assets for attracting talent

Nation branding can be defined as the “unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2022, p. 5). In this sense, a suitable nation branding strategy can be crucial to attract talent from abroad (Silvanto and Ryan, 2018).

And, it is in the interest of governments to attract highly skilled migrants since they can help develop the economies of cities and countries alike (Oliinyk *et al.*, 2021; Zenker *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, attracting talent to a country is not only a matter of public governance; governments endeavor to involve the stakeholders in this crusade (Klijn *et al.*, 2021; Ripoll-González and Gale, 2020). Early research showed that involving the stakeholders in the branding efforts has a positive impact on the overall place image (Klijn *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, global enterprises, for instance, are certainly stakeholders when it comes to attracting talent since their legitimacy and performance can be bolstered from a direct link with a powerful and appealing nation brand (Martin and Capelli, 2016). As a result, governments all around the world invest heavily in the creation, development and maintenance of strong nation brands (Naidoo, 2023).

However, most of the available knowledge in this domain comes from evidence derived from specific case studies. For instance, of the 10 most cited papers on place branding to attract talent, published in the last decade, 7 addressed case studies and the remaining 3 presented theoretical essays [1]. This output also demonstrates the more extensive attention literature has paid to cities compared with other territorial forms, since 6 out of 7 refer to cities. Given the economic significance that cities acquired, it is understandable that they dominated the topic (Goerzen *et al.*, 2024); however, the global context has been evolving significantly, and it is critical to gain insights that link other geographic forms to the attraction of talent (Tung, 2024).

Nation brand image's impact on intention to relocate

There is no doubt that a brand's image is important to any branding effort (Kapferer, 2012), and it is even more crucial in the context of place branding, since place brands are valued beyond the tangibles we can find in a territory (i.e. companies, heritage, landscape, etc.). In the 21st century, place brands transcend the amalgam of elements (Dinnie, 2022), and the brand itself becomes a symbolic commodity to be consumed (Fernández-Cavia *et al.*, 2018; Pasquinnelli *et al.*, 2024; Rowley and Hanna, 2020). As a result, people's perception about the nation becomes a critical factor in many stages of their decision-making process (Jeong and Holland, 2012).

Drawing from signaling theory, governments' efforts in signaling to consumers all sorts of information about the nation has the ultimate intent to position a strong, positive and distinctive overall image (Veloutsou, 2023). The image construct goes beyond simply being familiar with a specific brand, known as brand awareness (Kapferer, 2012). While these two constructs are related, brand familiarity assumes only that a brand holds space in consumers' minds and may be helpful only in circumstances of low attention (Rosenbaum-Elliott *et al.*, 2018). In contrast, brand image refers to the network of information nodes associated with a place brand and can provide greater value to consumers (Vinyals-Mirabent and Mohammadi, 2018; Zenker, 2014). In this regard, brand signal research either focuses on the overall understanding of the brand image or on registering either a broad or a specific list of brand association cues (Veloutsou and Ballester, 2024).

In the specific domain of talent migration, several studies noted the relevance of signaling different characteristics of a place to influence workers' attitudes toward moving to a particular destination; some of these are social life, cultural affinity, and, recently, the influence of the social responsibility image of countries (Bris *et al.*, 2023; Fona *et al.*, 2025; Schade *et al.*, 2018; Silvanto *et al.*, 2015; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014, 2018). Conceptually, these attributes of a

place can act as push, i.e. conditions that make home not attractive anymore, or pull factors, i.e. conditions that make a destination country attractive to work on (Baruch *et al.*, 2007; Latukha *et al.*, 2022). However, the overall perception of a place is not just a rational result of the sum of signals; in other words, a compilation of characteristics. Construal level theory poses that each individual builds a unique overall image differing on the level of abstraction, which is later used to assist their decision-making process (Saeed *et al.*, 2024). The theory explains that depending on the perceived distance from the object, in this case, moving to a different nation to work, individuals will use different cognitive resources, prioritize different associations and rely on different inferences (Garavan *et al.*, 2022). In other words, brand image recall will come in a heterogeneous way and can be retrieved and used as an independent pull factor.

For instance, among talented migrants, there are at least three known patterns of decision-making, differing on the perceived psychological distance to migrating abroad: those focusing on career building, those interested in minimizing risk and those emotionally driven (Glassock and Fee, 2015). While quality of life, employment availability and high wages, to name a few, may take part in the nation's image for all of them, their overall perception of the place will be more abstract. Thus, it is critical to understand the impact of the overall construct to explain the nation's brand value as a global phenomenon (Hao *et al.*, 2021).

In other words, creating an overall positive perception is the ultimate goal of all the signaling efforts to strengthen a brand's image (Rosenbaum-Elliott *et al.*, 2018; Veloutsou and Ballester, 2024). And at a tourist level, the overall perception of a place has been demonstrated to influence travelers' attitudes beyond specific attractors (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2018). Thus, evidence supports the potential of the overall image to become an independent pull factor when it comes to attracting talent, as formulated in the following hypothesis.

H1. The overall nation image directly influences peoples' intention to relocate abroad.

Furthermore, moving to another country to advance a professional career can be challenging and involves high risks. Indeed, there is significant evidence of the difficulties that come with talent attraction and retention success (Stahl *et al.*, 2024) and the particularities of the international workforce (Morris *et al.*, 2016). Research has endeavored to examine the backgrounds of talented migrants willing to relocate and offer solid guidelines for identifying candidates who would do so successfully (Chen *et al.*, 2014). For instance, recent research highlighted the career prospects, family situation, salary and welfare, education level, gender, and age, among other factors, predisposing candidates to be willing to relocate (Bonneton *et al.*, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2014; Kravariti and Johnston, 2020).

In this vein, research borrowed from the tourism domain noted that the overall country image prompts a higher intention to visit a place (Chaulagain *et al.*, 2019). Based on this evidence, we argue that the candidates' perception of the country will be another valuable predictor of their intention to relocate abroad, as formulated in the following hypothesis.

H2. The overall nation image is a better predictor of intention to relocate abroad than sociodemographic variables.

Finally, the current view in the research also suggests that nation branding is a topic reserved for leading economies. The most cited research on talent attraction so far has been led by countries such as China, Canada, Germany and other European countries, which are known to be leading the gross domestic product [GDP] rankings (World Central Bank, 2022). Furthermore, recent research emphasized the need to pinpoint the specific issues that emerging economies are facing to attract talent (Ewers *et al.*, 2022). In light of this evidence, one may wonder whether nation brands' ability to attract talent is a general phenomenon or a luxury afforded to developed countries and strong economies. Together with economic growth, peace has also been linked to human capital accumulation, and many studies noted significant differences between countries worldwide (Ghazalian and Hammoud, 2021). Furthermore, other macro-indicators indicate that some nations have had greater success than others when it comes to talent attraction, for instance, the share of talent migration (World Population

Review, 2022). Similarly, online information searches about a country (i.e. how much people are looking for information about the nation as a host to talented migrants; Bloom Consulting, n.d.) may also be a tool assisting in this race to attract talent (Kang, 2017). Thus, our investigation concludes by examining a more exploratory research question.

RQ1. What is nation brands' current strategic value to attract talent worldwide?

Methodology

Sample

This study conducted an online survey to 2,151 participants between October 28 and November 4, 2022. Participants were recruited through an international paid panel. Only individuals travelled abroad at least twice in the last year, people working in an international environment and people who would consider relocating were surveyed (filter questions). The questionnaire asked about their familiarity with, perception of and intention to relocate to 55 different countries around the world: 8 from Africa; 13 from America; 16 from Asia and Europe, respectively; and 2 from Oceania. To minimize respondent's fatigue and ensure the quality of the answers, the study followed a sample strategy based on batches. Hence, participants were distributed into 10 different groups based on similar characteristics, and each group only responded the same questions about five or six different countries. The countries (i.e. cases to assess) were randomly assigned to each group of participants (i.e. batch). Figure 1 summarizes the process of collecting the data following a sampling strategy based on batches.

As a result, we gathered on average 215 responses for each of the 55 countries included in the study. Furthermore, two filter questions limited participants to only those who would consider working abroad and people active in the labor market. All in all, a total of 2,087 single answers were used in the final analysis.

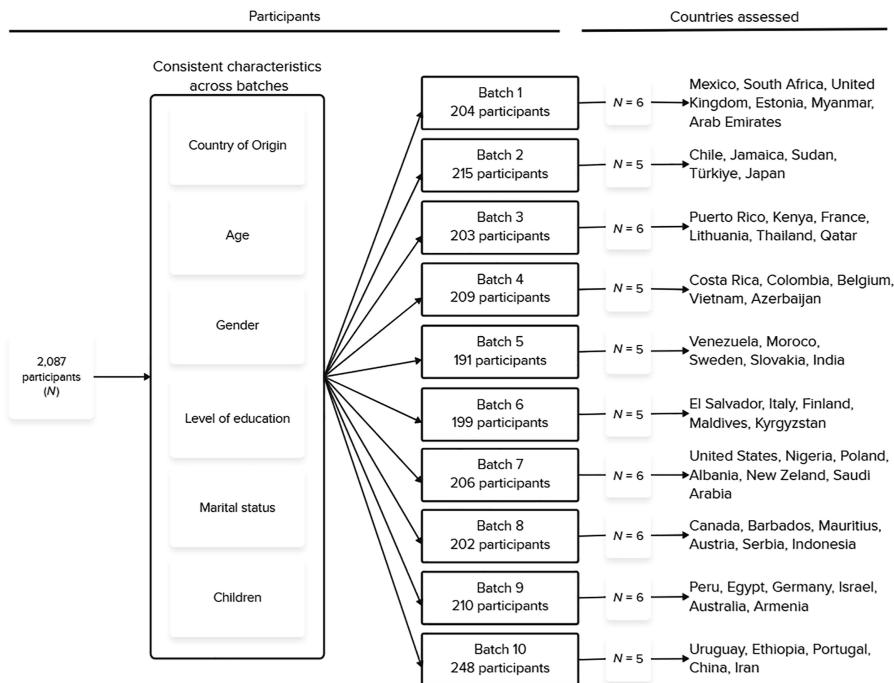


Figure 1. Data collection based on a batch sampling strategy. Source: Authors' own work

Quality of batch sampling

To control the quality and homogeneity of the sample strategy, several chi-squared tests were conducted. The results confirmed that there were no differences between the country of origin ($\chi^2 [180, N = 2,087] = 186, p = 0.369$), age ($\chi^2 [36, N = 2,087] = 32.9, p = 0.615$), gender ($\chi^2 [9, N = 2,087] = 6.31, p = 0.708$), level of education ($\chi^2 [45, N = 2,087] = 56, p = 0.127$), having children ($\chi^2 [9, N = 2,087] = 5.71, p = 0.769$) nor the marital status ($\chi^2 [54, N = 2,087] = 65.6, p = 0.133$) of the participants included in the different groups.

The participants' countries of origin included seven countries from America ($N = 690$), one from Africa ($N = 102$), one from Oceania ($N = 110$), eight from Europe ($N = 708$) and four from Asia ($N = 541$), as summarized in [Table 1](#). Age was recoded to a categorical variable, grouping ages into the following ranges: 18–24 years ($N = 473$), 25–34 years ($N = 794$), 35–44 years ($N = 550$), 45–54 years ($N = 234$) and >54 years ($N = 36$). Overall, 911 participants were female, and 1,176 were male. Regarding the participants' level of education, almost half of the sample finished university-level degrees ($N = 1,044$), followed by postgraduate degrees ($N = 445$), high school ($N = 328$), vocational technical college ($N = 295$), and then middle school ($N = 38$), and a single participant completed only elementary school ($N = 1$). The participants' marital status included married ($N = 954$), single ($N = 677$), living with a partner ($N = 331$), divorced ($N = 52$), separated ($N = 41$), widowed ($N = 8$) and prefer not to say ($N = 24$). Finally, 1,317 participants had children, and 770 did not.

Measures

Familiarity, perception and intention to relocate. Familiarity with the country was operationalized with a composite of informational and experiential familiarity ([Baloglu, 2001](#); [Chen et al., 2017](#)) in a single question. It was assessed on a Likert style scale, where 1 = "I know nothing about the country," 2 = "I have heard or read something about the country," 3 = "I have met people or purchased something from the country and read information about it," 4 = "I have relatives or close friends from the country and read information about it," and 5 = "I have visited, studied, or worked or do business with the country."

The perception of a nation is a complex construct. However, since our study does not aim to understand the composition of this perception, we assess the overall perception of the country in a single question based on the previous work by [Papadimitriou et al. \(2018\)](#). The question (i.e. "What is your overall perception about the following countries?") was assessed using a Likert style scale ranging from "0" (extremely negative) to "5" (extremely positive). Scientific evidence showed no difference in the predictive validity of multiple vs single-item measures of marketing constructs ([Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007](#)), and the latter is preferred when circumstances require brief scales ([Williams and Smith, 2016](#)).

Table 1. Participants' country of origin (21 different countries)

Country of origin	N	%	Country of origin	N	%	Country of origin	N	%
Argentina	67	3.21	France	112	5.37	South Africa	102	4.89
Australia	104	5.01	Germany	113	5.41	Spain	68	3.26
Brazil	127	6.09	India	187	8.97	Sweden	51	2.44
Canada	117	5.61	Italy	79	3.79	Turkey	80	3.83
China	97	4.65	Mexico	122	5.85	U. Arab Emirates	132	6.32
Colombia	3	0.14	Netherlands	56	2.68	United Kingdom	127	6.09
Costa Rica	38	1.82	Singapore	116	5.56	United States	189	9.06

Source(s): Authors' own work

Finally, the intention to relocate to the foreign country (i.e. “Would you consider working in or relocating to the following countries?”) was assessed through the dichotomous question, where 0 = no and 1 = yes. Similar to the previous question, binary answers in the domain of branding provide the greatest stability (i.e. no switching patterns) and are easier to interpret in comparative studies (Dolnicar and Grün, 2007, 2013).

Sociodemographic variables. The study included questions about age (open numeric question), gender (male, female or N/A), level of education (elementary school, high school, middle school, vocational technical college, university or postgraduate), income adjusted per country (categories: low I, low II, middle I, middle II, high I, high II or high III), and, finally, organizational role (a nominal list later recoded to a 5-point categorical scale: C-level [C-level executive, chief financial officer, chief technical officer, owner/partner, president/CEO/chairperson, or faculty staff], management level [director, human resources manager, middle management, product manager, project management, sales manager, senior management, or supply manager], administrative level [business administrator, foreman, or supervisor], technical level [administrative/clerical, buyer purchasing agent, craftsman, other non-management, sales staff or technical staff] or not working).

Secondary data. The study also used secondary information to help describe the context of the different countries analyzed and assist in the interpretation of the results. These were GDP in US dollars in 2021 (World Central Bank, 2022), the Global Peace Index [GPI] (Institute for Economics and Peace, June 2022), continent (Africa, America, Asia, Europe or Oceania), share of migrant population (World Population Review, 2022) and D2 Digital Demand©[2] (volume of search queries related to talent migration from April 2018 to March 2019; D2 Digital Demand, 2022).

Results

Familiarity with, image of and intention to relocate to countries

To provide a global view of countries' power of attraction, the average scores of the 55 countries studied are included in Table 2. Familiarity had an overall mean of 2.7. The most familiar countries among the global sample were the United States ($M = 3.83$), the United Kingdom ($M = 3.76$) and Italy ($M = 3.52$), and those that were the least familiar were Kyrgyzstan ($M = 1.86$), Azerbaijan ($M = 2.04$) and Myanmar ($M = 2.11$). The overall perception of the countries was $M = 3.3$. Similarly, the countries that had the most positive perception were Canada ($M = 4.27$), Japan ($M = 4.08$), and Finland ($M = 3.99$) and the United Kingdom, ($M = 3.99$). At the other end were Iran ($M = 1.97$), Sudan ($M = 2.44$) and Venezuela ($M = 2.61$). Regarding intention to relocate to or work in a country, the overall mean was 0.52. Respondents were more open to doing so in Canada ($M = 0.906$), France ($M = 0.837$) or the United States ($M = 0.825$) than in Iran ($M = 0.198$), Nigeria ($M = 0.199$) or Sudan ($M = 0.242$), which had the lowest scores.

Beyond descriptive data, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to statistically determine whether a positive image of a nation (IV) is significantly linked to a greater willingness to relocate (grouping variable). For that purpose, we used all the individual responses per country (i.e. $M = 209$ responses \times 55 countries, $N = 11,460$). Levene's test revealed that the data were not homogeneous ($F [1, 10,602] = 156, p < 0.001$); thus, we proceeded with Welch's ANOVA. Results confirmed the significant difference between the groups ($F_{\text{Welch}} [1, 9,628] = 2,230, p < 0.001$).

On the basis of previous literature, we expected a correlation between the level of familiarity with and the perception of a country. The results of a correlation matrix confirmed the positive association between these variables ($r [10,795] = 0.362, p < 0.001$). Hence, we analyzed the effect of the overall brand image perception on the participants' intention to relocate to the country by controlling for the effect of familiarity using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results in Table 3 show that the covariate familiarity with the country was significantly related to the difference in image ($F [1] = 10,078, p < 0.001$). The difference of

Table 2. Scores of the 55 countries ranked by overall image

Country		Familiarity		Overall image		Intention to relocate	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
CA	Canada	3.49	1.16	4.27	0.95	0.91	0.29
JA	Japan	3.17	1.25	4.08	1.03	0.74	0.44
FI	Finland	2.74	1.11	3.99	0.93	0.71	0.46
GB	United Kingdom	3.76	1.16	3.99	1.07	0.81	0.39
BE	Belgium	3.02	1.18	3.97	0.92	0.82	0.39
IT	Italy	3.52	1.2	3.97	0.91	0.81	0.39
AU	Australia	2.97	1.21	3.95	0.99	0.77	0.42
DE	Germany	3.25	1.24	3.92	0.97	0.81	0.39
FR	France	3.43	1.25	3.88	1.02	0.84	0.37
SE	Sweden	2.8	1.14	3.87	1.1	0.78	0.41
MV	Maldives	2.62	1.16	3.85	1.02	0.59	0.49
NZ	New Zealand	2.81	1.11	3.84	1.12	0.77	0.42
AT	Austria	2.81	1.26	3.83	0.95	0.7	0.46
PT	Portugal	3.15	1.22	3.79	1.01	0.82	0.38
US	United States	3.83	1.13	3.66	1.15	0.83	0.38
CR	Costa Rica	2.58	1.17	3.55	1.05	0.62	0.49
PL	Poland	2.71	1.12	3.46	1.06	0.55	0.5
TH	Thailand	2.81	1.19	3.45	1.1	0.61	0.49
AE	United Arab Emirates	3.13	1.29	3.37	1.37	0.64	0.48
IND	Indonesia	2.67	1.11	3.35	1.03	0.45	0.5
UY	Uruguay	2.43	1.15	3.35	1.08	0.54	0.5
MU	Mauritius	2.13	1.16	3.34	1.11	0.44	0.5
EE	Estonia	2.2	1.1	3.33	1.13	0.46	0.5
QA	Qatar	2.58	1.1	3.33	1.34	0.55	0.5
CL	Chile	2.62	1.24	3.3	1.2	0.5	0.5
CO	Colombia	2.85	1.15	3.29	1.24	0.53	0.5
TR	Türkiye	2.89	1.26	3.27	1.25	0.53	0.5
SK	Slovakia	2.24	1.07	3.26	1.01	0.5	0.5
JA	Jamaica	2.49	1.13	3.25	1.12	0.44	0.5
MX	Mexico	3	1.14	3.25	1.12	0.51	0.5
BB	Barbados	2.16	1.08	3.23	1.08	0.39	0.49
PR	Puerto Rico	2.3	1.05	3.22	1.09	0.47	0.5
LT	Lithuania	2.13	1.07	3.19	1.08	0.44	0.5
PE	Peru	2.37	1.05	3.19	1.08	0.42	0.49
ZA	South Africa	2.86	1.23	3.17	1.15	0.52	0.5
VN	Vietnam	2.54	1.03	3.17	1.2	0.45	0.5
MA	Morocco	2.53	1.12	3.15	1.21	0.47	0.5
EG	Egypt	2.71	1.15	3.14	1.21	0.47	0.5
KG	Kyrgyzstan	1.86	1.01	3.07	1.13	0.25	0.43
IN	India	2.88	1.15	3.04	1.22	0.39	0.49
AM	Armenia	2.14	1.12	3.02	1.14	0.34	0.48
RS	Serbia	2.32	1.02	3.01	1.18	0.35	0.48
SV	El Salvador	2.34	1.03	2.98	1.18	0.35	0.48
KE	Kenya	2.37	1.04	2.98	1.17	0.32	0.47
AL	Albania	2.28	1.07	2.95	1.2	0.31	0.46
AZ	Azerbaijan	2.04	1.01	2.92	1.32	0.35	0.48
SA	Saudi Arabia	2.56	1.12	2.86	1.42	0.41	0.49
IL	Israel	2.42	1.1	2.8	1.4	0.38	0.49
MM	Myanmar	2.11	1.06	2.77	1.34	0.31	0.46
CN	China	2.95	1.18	2.75	1.44	0.43	0.5
NG	Nigeria	2.3	1.04	2.72	1.29	0.2	0.4
ET	Ethiopia	2.17	0.98	2.68	1.29	0.3	0.46
VE	Venezuela	2.43	1.05	2.61	1.33	0.36	0.48
SD	Sudan	2.17	1.12	2.44	1.38	0.24	0.43
IR	Iran	2.3	0.97	1.97	1.43	0.2	0.4

Note(s): Variable ranges: familiarity = 1–5, overall image = 0–5, intention to relocate = 0–1. SD, standard deviation

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Intention to relocate and country image perception with familiarity as a covariate (ANCOVA)

	Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F	p	η^2_p
Overall model	2,904	2	1452.15	1,693	<0.001	
Intention to relocate	1,826	1	1826.36	1,530	<0.001	0.126
Familiarity	1,078	1	1077.95	903	<0.001	0.079
Residuals	12,651	10,601	1.19			

Note(s): DF, degrees of freedom
Source(s): Authors' own work

participants' overall perception of the country between those who would consider relocating and those who would not remain ($F [1] = 1,826, p < 0.001$). These results confirm [hypothesis 1](#); despite controlling for the effect that familiarity could have, the overall image of the country brand still had an "intermediate effect" (Cohen, 1988; Johnson et al., 2008) on the individuals' intention to relocate ($\eta^2_p = 0.126$).

Nation brands' ability to predict talent intention to relocate

Next, we performed a binomial logistic regression (since the dependent variable was dichotomous) to assess the value of nations' overall image when it came to predicting intention to relocate there as a preexisting employee-related trait. We considered the effects of age, education, income, organizational role and gender as variables that had been priorly studied, in addition to familiarity and overall nation image, on the likelihood of considering relocating abroad. To avoid the repetition of any one participant's data owing to the sampling strategy, the answers for only one country for each participant were used in the analysis ($N = 2,087$). The countries chosen were those that had the highest scores in each batch ([Figure 1](#)): G1, the United Kingdom; G2, Japan; G3, France; G4, Belgium; G5, Sweden; G6, Italy; G7, the United States; G8, Canada; G9, Germany; and G10, Portugal. This was a purposive selection made by the researchers.

The logistic regression model was statistically significant ($\chi^2[6, N = 2,087] = 165, p < 0.001$) ([Table 4](#)). The model explained 12.5% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in intention to relocate to a country and correctly classified 65% of the cases. Individuals who had a

Table 4. Different variables' predictive value

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
Intercept	-1.7240	0.39260	-4.39113	<0.001	0.178	0.0826	0.385
Age	-1.44×10^{-5}	0.00636	-0.00227	0.998	1.000	0.9876	1.013
Familiarity	0.1099	0.05180	2.12105	0.034	1.116	1.0084	1.235
Perception	0.6072	0.05593	10.85731	<0.001	1.835	1.6448	2.048
Income	-0.0413	0.03298	-1.25144	0.211	0.960	0.8995	1.024
Education	0.0804	0.06367	1.26247	0.207	1.084	0.9566	1.228
Organizational hierarchy	0.0992	0.04898	2.02481	0.043	1.104	1.0032	1.215
Gender							
Male/female	0.2613	0.12067	2.16558	0.030	1.299	1.0251	1.645

Note(s): Estimates represent the log odds of "intention to relocate = 1" versus "intention to relocate = 0". SE, standard error
Source(s): Authors' own work

Furthermore, we explored whether clusters had significant differences regarding hard-data indicators using one-way ANOVA. Owing to the lack of data normality (Shapiro–Wilk $p < 0.001$), we used the Kruskal–Wallis nonparametric algorithm. Results showed that the share of talent migration (H [2] = 15.8, $p < 0.001$), GDP (H [2] = 20.8, $p < 0.001$), GPI (H [2] = 19.3, $p < 0.001$), and digital demand (H [2] = 36.0, $p < 0.001$) were significantly different between clusters.

Post-hoc tests, using Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner [DSCF] pairwise comparisons, were subsequently conducted (summarized in Table 5). Results revealed that the GPI and the level of talent migration was significantly different between only cluster 1 and clusters 2 and 3 ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.002$, respectively), but not between clusters 2 and 3. GDP appeared to be significantly different between only cluster 3 and clusters 1 and 2 ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.002$, respectively). Finally, results also indicated significant differences between the digital demand of the three clusters.

Discussion and conclusions

The strategic value of nation brands

At a conceptual level, nation brands are not only representatives of a collection of different dimensions but also meaningful units capable of recalling abstract meanings, symbolism and experiences in consumers' minds. Both understandings of nation brands (i.e. a set of characteristics and an overall perception of the place) provide valuable insights to make strategic decisions. However, while literature so far provided detailed knowledge about the dimensions of a nation brand that play a significant role in convincing talented migrants (Schade *et al.*, 2018; Silvanto *et al.*, 2015), the influence of the overall nation image as a separate pull factor has remained an assumption. Furthermore, the majority of research in this regard is based on specific case studies of cities belonging to leading economies (Cleave and Arku, 2020; Yigitcanlar *et al.*, 2016; Zenker *et al.*, 2013).

Our results shed light on the generalizable relationships between the overall perception of place brands and talent attraction at a country level, and we show that this effect is not exclusive to developed countries. This evidence confirms the assumption made in the past by a number of authors (Dinnie, 2022; Fetscherin, 2010): a nation's brand perception has a direct influence on that country's attractiveness as a place to work in. From the construal level theory lens, the overall perception of a nation brand, instead of specific dimensions, is likely to assist talented employees' decision-making process when they experience a big psychological or temporal distance with the relocating event. For instance, when encountering a recruiting ad for the first time, the temporal distance to relocating is big, thus individuals are more inclined to value abstract versions of the nation brand rather than specific traits. The results of this research support that strategic efforts to strengthen a nation's image to attract talent should not be limited to signaling more pragmatic characteristics of the place but should further emphasize the overall narrative.

At a pragmatic level, this variable's ability to predict an individual's intention to relocate is highly valuable: an individual with a positive perception of a nation is twice as likely to

Table 5. Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner (DSCF) pairwise comparisons

DSCF pairwise comparisons	GDP W	p	Share of talent migration		Digital demand		GPI W	p
			W	p	W	p		
1 versus 2	−2.40	0.206	−4.81	0.002	−3.63	0.028	5.16	<0.001
1 versus 3	−5.64	<0.001	−4.90	0.002	−6.87	<0.001	5.59	<0.001
2 versus 3	−4.81	0.002	1.50	0.539	−6.88	<0.001	1.45	0.562

Source(s): Authors' own work

consider relocating to that country than someone who does not have a positive perception of said country. Compared with gender or an individual's position in a company's hierarchy—previously identified as predictors of intention to relocate (Bonneton *et al.*, 2022; Chen *et al.*, 2014; Kravariti and Johnston, 2020)—a positive nation image showed an outstanding ability to predict intention to relocate. Furthermore, only being familiar with the country, i.e. knowing it exists, had a level of predictive value similar to other sociodemographic variables, compared with a positive image, which stood out. Other sociodemographic variables did not predict intention to relocate.

In our study, we did not distinguish between the perception of those nation brands actively managing their image and those who benefit (or suffer) from historical events or a past reputation. What is certain, though, is that there is a benefit to making this strategic effort to increase the capacity of a place to attract talent at two levels: the dimensions valued in the specific context of talent migration and the overall narrative of the place, as we have been able to show.

All in all, the evidence supports governments' efforts to build a strong overall nation image, strategies that include but go beyond the specificities of attracting talent. Similarly, it seems to be in the companies' interest, as well, to be involved and support these strategies, as they can become valuable assets in different stages of their recruiting periods.

Nation brands' potential to attract global talent

In completing this study, we provide descriptive data that is valuable when it comes to identifying the strength the brand images of 55 nations worldwide. Being able to compare cases is key to progress. Many previous studies have sought to establish comparisons between cases linked both geographically (Zenker *et al.*, 2013) and strategically (Jain and Bhatt, 2015). The evidence presented sets a baseline from which to develop further comparative studies and judge cases in a global context.

At a practical level, these results can help managers shape their talent recruiting strategies (Belderbos *et al.*, 2023) either by assessing the strength of their host nation's image or choosing the country where they will expand or move their headquarters considering the attractiveness of the nation brand. As for governments' strategic efforts, our cluster analysis revealed some remarkable challenges that must be faced.

Nations included in cluster 1 showed the most competitive results in terms of familiarity, image and intention to relocate. These good results were also linked to the best results regarding the share of talent migration, GPI and digital demand, which were significantly different from the other two clusters, and GDP, which were significantly higher than those of countries in cluster 3. It must be noted that cluster 1 was significantly dominated by European countries, supporting the need to better understand nation branding to attract talent in emerging economies (Ewers *et al.*, 2022).

However, the overall statistics of countries included in cluster 2 showed that, despite having a similar level of economic power (i.e. GDP) to cluster 1 and better overall scores in terms of nation image than cluster 3, they were not attracting a greater share of talent migration than cluster 3. From a place branding perspective, this could be interpreted as being due to a misguided strategy, wherein the positive image is not aligned with the interests of the key economic sectors. While this may be oversimplifying a complex reality, since other variables may be affecting this scenario (e.g. tax barriers, the volume of local talent, etc.), the data on digital demand seem to support this argument. In other words, talent from around the world is searching online for information about advancing their careers in those countries more than in those from cluster 3; thus, the information conveyed in the search results was not enough to convince them. Consequently, we can state that, for countries in cluster 2, there is still greater potential for attracting talented people from around the world than the current figures show (Hao *et al.*, 2021; Oliinyk *et al.*, 2021).

Countries in cluster 3 have a different challenge. In addition to scoring lowest in nation image, it contained the countries with the lowest GDPs as well as the lowest digital demand. However, the share of talent migration was no different than countries in cluster 2. Thus, these countries may be facing an economic barrier to create awareness and building a strong and appealing brand image, rather than a problem with the focus of their strategy. Nevertheless, lessons from destination branding – i.e. tourism – indicate that, in the digital age, opportunities for visibility and for creating a strong brand image should be within the reach of every economy (de San Eugenio-Vela and Xifra, 2014). Finally, there were no differences between the GPI of countries in clusters 2 and 3.

In light of this evidence, it is in the hands of each nation to weigh the insights provided according to the efforts made. Those countries actively managing the nation's brand now have a global vision that allows them to assess their efforts' return while considering the perception of potential competitors. This further provides insight into potential ways to strengthen their image. Those countries that do not actively invest in their nation brand can assess whether it may be convenient to do so in order to maximize their attractiveness to attract talent.

Practical implications

The findings of this study have important implications both for the governments and for the companies. From the nation's perspective, the empirical evidence showing the power of the overall nation's perception to attract talent encourages governance worldwide to invest or keep investing in cultivating an overall strategic nation image. This transcends the traditional promotional strategies seeking to increase awareness or, in other words, ensure peoples' familiarity with the country; it points to the need of investing in creating a rich strategic brand image. Thus, countries must endeavor to clearly define the target groups and the strategic industries of the territory, promote the country's key attributes accordingly, and maintain and improve the quality of their country image being projected across all touch points.

For the private sector, our results provide solid evidence that tying a company to a powerful and appealing nation brand will bring opportunities to attract talent to the enterprise. In this sense, signaling the country brand together with the attributes of the company in their communication efforts (e.g. recruiting advertising) is likely to entail a competitive advantage. Furthermore, nation branding to attract talent cannot be seen as a luxury that is only for those companies located within major cities of a territory; on the contrary, companies from all over a country can benefit from appealing nation brands acting as an impetus to attract talent to their headquarters.

Limitations

To test our main hypothesis, this study relied on a broad and global sampling strategy. While many measures were taken to ensure the reliability and comparability of the data, some limitations must be acknowledged. For instance, the number of responses per country was limited; thus, we could not draw any conclusions about how respondents of specific nationalities perceived an image. Furthermore, our aim was to assess the overall nation brand image; however, future research and managerial decisions should also consider the specificities of each country and the particular associations that may dominate the overall perception.

Notes

1. Search in Scopus on August 30, 2023, using the following combination of keywords: (place branding OR city branding) AND (talent OR recruitment OR talent management) AND (Year = 2013–2022).
2. D2 Digital Demand© proprietary tool measuring the search volume internationally (outside of the subject's borders) for the subject of study. In this case, search queries about working abroad

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