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## Nation Branding as a Strategic Approach for Emerging Economies: The Case of UAE

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### Introduction

The concept of nation branding covers the application of branding and marketing communication strategies and techniques to promote a nation's image (Kaur, 2020; Rojas-Méndez, 2013). Although researchers, academic stakeholders, and other public policymakers have shown their

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reasonable interest in the subject of nation branding (NB) (Aronczyk, 2009), it is still in the infancy stage and lacks concrete or generally accepted definition and constructs. Meanwhile, one of the growing points in the field of NB is that in the contemporary time, various nations are competing with each other to attract more international tourists, foreign investment, the flow of goods and services, and many other activities (Aronczyk, 2013; Steenkamp, 2019). For this purpose, NB includes topics like nation-related country image, country reputation, nation brand personality, and nation brand strength (He et al., 2020; Papadopoulos et al., 2016; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2019).

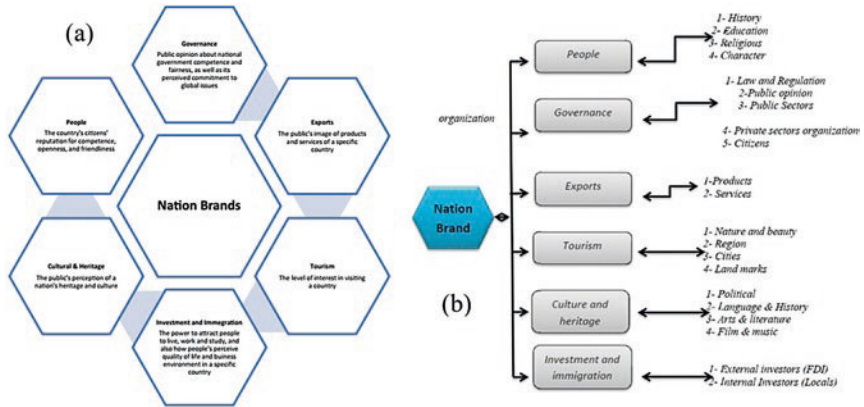
Many scholars have theorised concepts and definitions of NB over the past decade. For instance, NB is a sum of beliefs and impressions that people may carry about that particular place or group of places (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Fetscherin (2010) considers that a country brand is linked with the public domain, covering multiple levels and components with the collective involvement of various stakeholders. For this reason, it comprises the whole image of a country, covering economic, social, environmental, historical, political, and a range of cultural aspects. However, NB can also be explained as an outcome of the interpenetration of the public sector and various commercial interests while communicating the national priorities among the domestic as well as international population (Pasotti, 2014). Consequently, NB helps not only towards the regeneration of capital, but also to combine various public and private resources towards creating some fiscal advantages. As such, its objective is to help and compete in successful manners for the international capital, import-export trade, skilled labour, and shifting of intellectual capital (Papadopoulos et al., 2016; Pasotti, 2014).

## Theoretical Significance of Nation Branding

During the start of the last decade, Anholt (2002) argued that a country needs to significantly manage its reputation in a strategic way in order to position itself as an appealing brand. This is due to the fact that people make subjective judgements about the multiple facets of a state through its image. For this reason, a country's reputation is built on how it is

perceived based on the information available about it and people's personal experiences in the country (Kang & Yang, 2010). This would further clear various arguments regarding why a nation needs to focus on its image. For example, consumers' thoughts and perceptions about any country primarily depend upon two dimensions, micro- and macro-level, where the former is dealing with the beliefs about the products/services and latter covers the country domain itself. Meanwhile, the belief aspect involves the character and competencies of both people and country.

The significance of NB can be viewed through Anholt's National Branding Model, which comprises six dimensions to cover the overall horizon of NB (Mary & Misiani, 2017; Pop et al., 2020). Anholt claims to have coined the idea of "nation branding" in 1996, and since that time to date, he has been accepted as the most prolific author on the subject, with significant efforts to institutionalise NB as an academic field (Kaneva, 2011). Furthermore, considering the significance of the NB, few indexes have been developed, which include the core components as provided by Future Brand and the Anholt-GfK nation brands index<sup>SM</sup>. Such models reasonably help organisations, governments, and various businesses to understand, measure, and finally build a strong NB image and reputation. One of the most reliable models of NB is provided by the Anholt-GfK index, which measures the quality and power of each country's brand image while combining the factors like governance, exports, tourism, investment, and immigration, culture and heritage, and finally, the people itself (see Fig. 3.1a). This would justify the argument that for NB, the strategic role of all the above factors is quite significant and can help to develop long-term positive image in the mindset of the global community about a state, country, or group of states. The model also outlines various sub-factors to provide a more comprehensive view of the Nation Branding Index (NBI), as illustrated in Fig. 3.1b. Figure 3.1b indicates that the title of governance reflects the law and regulation in the economy, public opinion, and public sector in any economy, whereas the factors like culture and heritage indicate the political situation, language and history, arts and literature, and film and music as well (Alam et al., 2013). However, the term, investment and immigration has more financial implications with the presence of external investors in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI), as well as domestic internal investors.



**Fig. 3.1** (a, b) The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Hexagon. (Source: Hassan and Mahrous (2019, p. 4) and Alam et al. (2013, p. 3))

In addition, the elements of NB can define and differentiate one nation brand from other nations in the mindset of larger community members. For this purpose, researchers have categorised NB into two groups: nation tangibles and nation brand intangibles (Hassan & Mahrous, 2019). Furthermore, nation brand elements can be examined while considering the perception of tourists and various other stakeholders of a country. Elements of a nation brand can play a significant role in developing the character of the brand, and for this reason, countries must choose a distinct bundle of elements which can secure the nation brand from imitation or attack from other nation brands. Figure 3.2 provides an example of some of the nation brand characters. For instance, Barbados and Dubai are reputed as some of the friendliest countries in the world as compared to Germany and Japan, which are widely known for competence.

<b>Friendliness</b> (Barbados, Dubai)
<b>Exotic</b> (Spain, Egypt)
<b>Amazing</b> (UAE, Mexico)
<b>Competence</b> (Germany, Japan)
<b>Ruggedness</b> (Australia, South Africa)
<b>Sophistication</b> (USA, France)

**Fig. 3.2** Some examples of nation brand character. (Source: Adopted from Hassan and Mahrous (2019, p. 5))

## Nation Branding as a Strategic Approach in UAE

### Relevance, Scope, and Evolution of Nation Brand in UAE

In order to develop a positive image in the world economy, globalisation has created a lot of opportunities and complexities as well. It is believed that the world is now a single market with growing competition every single day. In fact, the recent single global market has heightened the significance of managing various strategies for different nations in order to attain the highest benefit from foreign investment, skilled labour, and many factors. However, one of the significant factors which can help any nation for building a good impression in the world is “perception”. Many countries have been able to leverage perception and gain international recognition for their particular brand. These widely known reputations prove that nation brand does indeed exist, yet for research purposes, it is still challenging to study and articulate.

In addition, over the past couple of years, the level of interest from different researchers and market analysts regarding NB has been increased, specifically in the context of Asia (Anholt, 2008; Huang, 2011; Jordan, 2014; Lee, 2009; Marat, 2009). Being a part of Asian economies, United Arab Emirates (UAE) is assumed as among the most famous destinations for doing work, holidays, and a range of business-related activities due to tax-free structure and luxurious lifestyle (Ahmed, 2015a; Parceró &

Ryan, 2017). Currently, the region of UAE is widely recognised as a significant driver of various reforms in order to increase economic progress and financial development. It has won the bid for Expo 2020/21 and emerged as a market leader, not only in the Middle East, but also in North Africa. It has to put some significant efforts towards achieving the title of the top ten most valuable NB, which has motivated the researchers to examine the economy of UAE in terms of NB and its current and future outlook as well.

In 2012, UAE was recognised as the 35th most valuable NB in the world and rose to 21st in 2017. While attaining a higher level of foreign direct investment from both developed and developing economies, it has become the third strongest NB in the world, and at the most recent time of 2019, it is revealed that among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies, UAE brands are at the top of the list. As established in 1970, UAE has promoted itself since the 1980s as a global financial gateway through the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (Ahmed, 2018; Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2018).

Since the 1990s, UAE has actively been working to build its country and its brand, allowing the country to emerge not only as a regional leader but also as a global player in the field of tourism, business, finance, innovativeness, information technology, and media (Allagui & Al-Najjar, 2018). For the development of NB, the leaders of UAE have reasonably recognised the significance of culture and national identity. Furthermore, during the last decade, UAE management has been able to portray a positive image through investment, tourism, and film industry (Saber et al., 2018). It is no doubt a historical reality that a nation less than 50 years of age has now become an NB leader (Zeineddine, 2017).

The historical assessment of UAE has confirmed that the development of the whole image of NB is not only because of the natives, but also due to the contributions of its ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse workforce. It is estimated that over 80 per cent of the labour force working in the UAE comprises expatriate workers, covering the titles of more than 100 ethnic groups (Ababneh & Hackett, 2019). Recent data from 2018 expressed that the share of the UAE nationals out of the total workforce as working in the region was only 7.19 per cent, which has provided enough evidence to claim that UAE depends significantly upon the

expatriate skilled labourers who are constantly working to help the country in developing and maintaining a positive image (Pereira et al., 2020). Although the gigantic percentage of skilled foreign workers has made it clear that UAE depends heavily on expatriate labour, however, in the coming years, the labour gap constitutes 110,000 skilled labour by the end of 2030.

The journey towards NB by the top leadership of the UAE has not been stopped yet. During the year 2020, one of the significant steps towards the promotion of NB was observed when a logo of “seven lines” was officially launched by His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, and His Highness Shaikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. Figure 3.3 presents the layout for the logo of NB, which covers the slogan of “Make it Happen” while covering the status of ambitions, openness, hope, achievements, and culture of possibilities as well. Additionally, the above-stated slogan also drives the country’s story, thinking about its leaders while defying the impossible. Besides, the land of Emirates has been observed as a land of significant opportunities for opening doors to people across the globe while unleashing the concept of creativity, achieving full potential, and many other initiatives too.



Fig. 3.3 UAE logo for nation brand

## **Efforts Towards Nation Branding by UAE: A Holistic Approach**

As stated earlier, the leadership of UAE is constantly working for the improvement of NB across the world through various innovative mechanisms. During a Cabinet meeting in 2010, UAE “Vision 21” was launched by H.H. Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, with the core aim to make UAE among the best countries in the world by the Golden Jubilee of the Union. For achieving this mega target and turning it into reality, six national priorities have been defined. This vision is accepted as the next stage for the journey of UAE, which will lead the country to a sustainable environment and infrastructure, world-class healthcare, a first-rate education system, competitive knowledge economy, and a safe public and fair judiciary as well. Although these key dimensions of Vision 21 are mainly aimed at improving the internal functions and systems in the country, the outcomes of these improvements will significantly and positively impact the country’s global image and nation brand.

More specifically, for building a higher level of sustainable development while preserving the environment, a significant focus was made towards the higher level of air quality, preserving water resources, and contributing towards clean energy and green growth across UAE’s economy. One of the common notions is that the development of a sustainable competitive position in the market must consciously incorporate environmental and social concerns. For this reason, the government of UAE, with the help of Vision 2021, is striving to diversify itself in a variety of sectors and has taken up an initiative to build a green economy for sustainable development. Under this initiative, UAE seeks to become a global hub for the new and green economy while increasing the positive image of the country and preserving the natural environment at the same time. A range of programmes has been initiated in energy, investment, agriculture, and sustainable development. Some of the key points the UAE government used to build a green NB are usage of green and renewable energy throughout the product value chain



- Government policies that encourage investment in the green economy for production, export, and import.
- Policies on urban planning and housing development that will increase efficiency and reduce environmental repercussions.
- Work towards better environmental outcomes such as tackling climate change, promoting organic agriculture, and protecting biodiversity.
- Rationally utilising the natural and water resources in the country.
- Putting maximum efforts towards the promotion of green technology.

UAE government's focus on creating a sustainable environment is further illustrated in Fig. 3.4 created by the Emirates Green Building Council. The figure demonstrates the country's green goals by 2050, including a 70 per cent reduction of the green footprint, a 50 per cent move to clean energy, and a 40 per cent increase in consumption efficiency. By focusing and developing some sustainable measures, the government has successfully developed a good image of their region in front of global audiences.

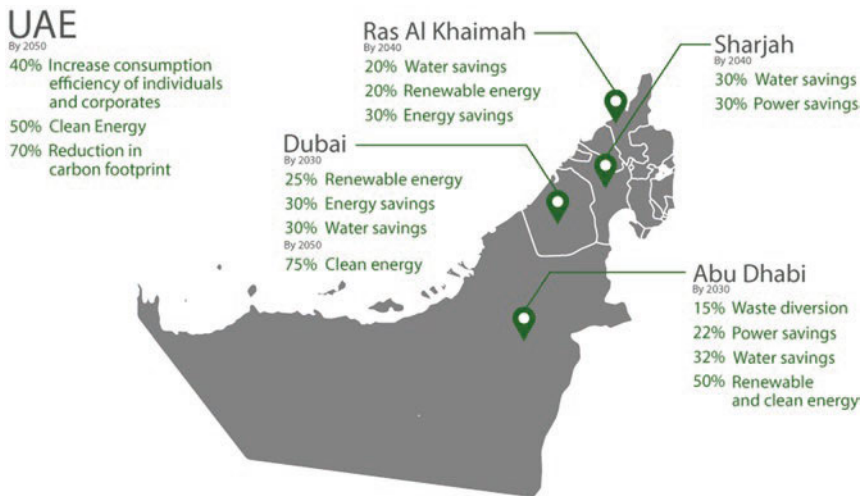


Fig. 3.4 Sustainable efforts by UAE. (Source: Emirates Green Building Council (<https://emiratesgbc.org/uae-sustainability-initiatives/>))

Meanwhile, like any other sector, healthcare and related facilities are to be assumed as a significant player towards building a higher level of NB in the world. The findings of USnews (2021) revealed that various approaches are followed by the developed economies to provide some outstanding health-related facilities to their citizens and to the rest of the globe. Furthermore, it is found that Canada has achieved the title of the best healthcare system in the world, followed by Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Turning towards the economy of UAE, Vision 2021 has reasonably focused on the delivery of world-class healthcare. For this purpose, the government has started working with all the health authorities to improve the quality standards both in public and in private hospitals. Figure 3.5 shows some of the key output as linked with the healthcare system.

In addition, the concept of knowledge economy not only helps to generate a higher level of economic and financial output, but also creates some dramatic change for building a higher level of NB in the world. Knowledge economy refers to a system where the consumption and production are based on the intellectual capital, which considers the skills and expertise of the community members and workers in any sector

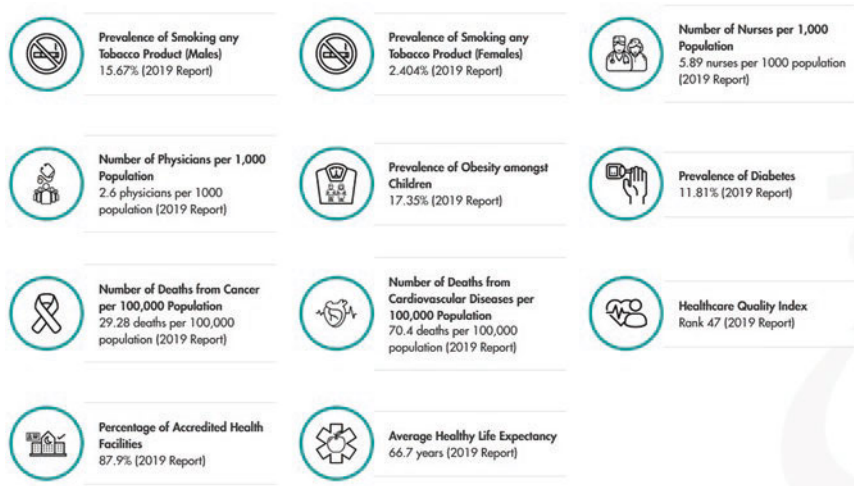


Fig. 3.5 Key statistics as observed for overall healthcare system in UAE

(Hijazi et al., 2019; Parceró & Ryan, 2017). A historical review of UAE shows a longstanding lack of development; however, the country underwent industrial development rapidly in the 1980s by establishing public sector organisations associated with oil and gas, including refineries, fertilizer plants, and aluminium smelters (Ghanem, 2001). Since the last decade, the UAE has ranked among the world's richest economies. This remarkable growth was achieved through a high dependence on expatriate workers, who make up almost 90 per cent of UAE's workforce (World Population Review, 2021), and other various localisation programmes like sector-specific jobs for UAE nationals, and general and increased localisation targets and quotas have been offered by the country in order to increase the economic and financial outcomes. Knowledge and innovation have always played a big role in the competitiveness and building of a country's image (Nurunnabi, 2017; Wang et al., 2012). It means that more focus on being a knowledge-based economy may reasonably change the current and future status of any country in the world. Observing this significant association, Parceró and Ryan (2017) have assessed the performance of UAE and Qatar in terms of their achievement for being knowledge-based economies while taking a sample of 17 benchmarking countries through the pillars of education, information and communication technologies, innovation, and finally, the factors of economy and regime. The efforts over the last three years have made it evident that UAE has earned a better ranking of 19 compared to Qatar out of 131 countries. However, still there is need for the improvement of knowledge economy in terms of quality researchers and highly talented workers.

Lastly, factors like tourism and NB are highly correlated with each other where the role of NB is observed while creating a direct perception in the mindset of the global community. Overall, in recent years, the recognition of the UAE in the global community has been very high and extremely positive, evidenced by UAE's popularity as a tourist destination. From 2018 to 2019, an increase of 5.09 per cent in the number of global visitors to the UAE was observed, which shows a dramatic increase and higher level of NB. Additionally, the top visitors came from locations such as India, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Oman, China, United States, Germany, Pakistan, and France (Ahmed, 2015b).

For boosting the economic dynamic of tourism, the UAE government has introduced a term under the auspices of competitive tourism, which comprises key sets of indicators such as regulatory framework, regulations, and legislation, business environment infrastructure, human resource, culture, and nature.

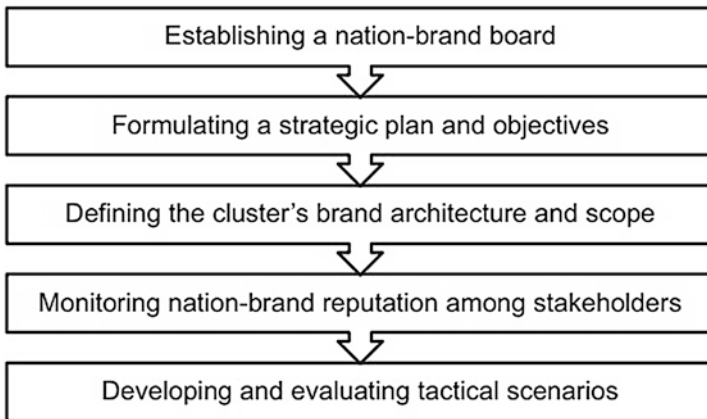
## Strategic Lessons for Emerging Economies

As previously discussed, a remarkable achievement has been made by the leadership of the UAE towards NB and creating a significant positive image among the world community. Considering the pillars of Vision 2021, UAE does well in most of the indicators and has extended a practical guideline to various emerging economies who desire to enhance their positive image in the world. In this regard, the concept of NB is new for most emerging economies. For this reason, emerging economies must learn to manage and harness their physical and financial resources as well as their intellectual capital in ways that will showcase the country's potential and opportunities and help it gain global recognition for positive developments. As in the case of UAE, countries hoping to build a positive nation brand need a long-term strategic plan such as Vision 2021 to guide their development in sustainable environment, health, education, infrastructure, telecommunication, information technology, and competitive knowledge. More specifically, it is the obligation of the national governments to acquire and practice the title of NB to attract international skilled human capital in order to increase such stock and to boost economic competitiveness as well. This approach is similarly adopted by the government of UAE, where more than 80 per cent of the workforce comes from different regions and contributes towards the achievement of strategic objectives. Baruch et al. (2016) have further justified this concept while claiming that due to globalisation and war of talent, more than 232 million individuals are termed as "foreign" as they live and work outside their region of origin. This statement and the practical approach as adopted by UAE have provided some outstanding pathway for those economies who desire to increase their NB or country image.

Besides, other lessons for the emerging economies specify that strategic focus for building a sustainable differential advantage is needed in order to defy the regional or national stereotypes. In this regard, the NB identity can be implemented while following the key model as provided under Fig. 3.6, which comprises developing an NB board, establishing a strategic plan based on some measurable objectives, defining and articulating a cluster's brand architecture and scope, and examining the reputation of the NB among various stakeholders including policymakers, community members, business groups, and more specifically, international audiences.

## Conclusion

The strategic decision-makers in any economy are more assertive towards international visibility and recognition of their country. For this reason, more commitment is required towards international marketing techniques like nation branding. To empower a country on a world map, it is a recurrent idea that NB is a core mean. Various methods and approaches are highlighted by the researchers in the field of NB, both in developed and in developing economies. However, extant literature reveals that



**Fig. 3.6** Suggested model for building NB. (Source: Hassan and Mahrous (2019, p. 8))

those who show a higher level of resilience in the process of NB can manage to yield higher results over some longer period of time. The need for nations to actively manage their image has been widely acknowledged in the literature as it is a multifaceted term and may carry both factual and affective information. Three dimensions of NB can be viewed from the perspective of micro- and macro-dynamics for which beliefs and perceptions are fundamental to consider. This chapter provides some meaningful contributions regarding NB through past and contemporary literature and some practical approaches adopted in different economies. Furthermore, an in-depth focus is made on the economy of the UAE regarding the NB and key efforts towards it. It is determined that leadership of UAE has taken some expressive steps to promote their national identity and image recognition among global audiences. Additionally, steps towards sustainable development, environment and infrastructure, competitive knowledge economy, cohesive society and preserved identity, and gigantic growth of tourism in the region of UAE have laid out its path towards global recognition and a strong nation brand. Furthermore, practical insights for some of the emerging economies based on the key measures taken up by the government of UAE for promoting NB are also discussed.

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