



# When place brand and place logo matches: VRIO applied to place branding

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## Abstract

In an ever more interconnected global landscape, countries, regions, and cities leverage place branding as a means of remaining competitive. However, they do not always align their brand and resources adequately for competitive advantage. The main objective of this study is to examine the potential strategic directions for enhancing the attributes and development of a country's brand based on the value, rarity, inimitability, and organization (VRIO) framework. By analysing the logo, as the visual vector of a country's brand image, we demonstrated how a country's resources are integrated into the place brand. The research gathered secondary data and conducted indirect observations, focusing on Brazil's brand as the subject of analysis. The study's primary contributions are encapsulated in three focused guidelines: (i) innovation: emphasizes the importance of researching public (internal and external) perceptions regarding the image and reputation of the country brand; (ii) improvement: underscores the need for collaboration between municipal, state, federal entities, and private sectors and suggests enhancing the positioning within well-regarded country-brand indices, developing public policies to foster stakeholder growth, and strengthening the involvement of all stakeholders; and (iii) extrapolation: suggests the creation of a fresh, competitive, and contemporary slogan. Likewise, we recommend generating specific taglines that reinforce the brand's role across various competitive advantages tailored to specific campaigns and target markets. Furthermore, it suggests identifying and enhancing soft power foundations to elevate awareness and knowledge about Brazil's resources and assets for prospective environmental, social, and economic partnerships. Logos reveal a visual icon portrayal of place branding development yet demand vigorous actions focused on the tangible and intangibles resources and assets of a country, region, or place. The study's implications are valuable for various stakeholders, including brand strategists, local authorities, practitioners, and policymakers, supporting them in refining development approaches to place branding within the realm of strategic management of places.

**Keywords** Place branding · Place brand · Place logo · Country's resources · Strategy · VRIO

## Introduction

The concept of a country's image has been a subject of interest since the 1960s, with researchers comparing consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward products labelled with the country of origin (Schooler 1965; Nagashima 1970). For a while, the focus was on measuring the country image

construct (Pappu et al. 2007; Saffu and Scott 2009), but later, Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) delved into the construct itself. Subsequently, the idea of a country's image evolved through the lens of the country-of-origin (COO) effect, emphasizing the connection between a country's image and the perception of its products, brands, or places. Several studies highlight the differences between the brand of a place and individual products (Anholt 2010, 2016; Govers 2013, 2018; Kavartzis 2005; Mariutti 2015, 2017; Oh et al. 2020; Vuignier 2017), revealing that places are far more complex entities. Historically, places of origin have actively promoted their attractions and images to attract customers, visitors, merchants, investors, immigrants, influencers (Anholt 2010), and even country brand ambassadors (Dinnie 2015).

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The interest in researching the country brand topic intensified after 2000. However, the literature in Brazil began emerging in Business Administration only after 2010, followed by research on place branding a few years later. Since then, scientific works by specialized consultants have advanced in understanding the country's brand, image, and reputation in international marketing, international tourism, public diplomacy, and public administration, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the subject. This multidisciplinary aspect is central to the area's complexity as it also comprises different themes and interdisciplinary areas related to tourism, geography, architecture and urbanism, design and advertising. Therefore, government agencies at all levels, the business community and civil society must be actively involved in managing the country's brand.

The concept of country brand transcends various theoretical perspectives and organizational contexts (Kavaratzis 2005; Govers 2013, 2018; Mariutti 2015; Mariutti and Florek 2022), strengthening the significance of the place identity, image and reputation beyond and within the logo for place branding both projects and campaigns development. A significant point emerges from the understanding that logos and slogans only partially encapsulate the place brand itself accompanying the place branding strategies (Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009; Kelly 2017). According to Govers (2013), logos and slogans should not summarize place branding: "The name or logo is the tool for identification and recognition, but the core of branding is to make sure that consumers attach distinctive associations to this entity (building reputation)" (p. 71). While these may serve as identification tools, the crux of place branding is fostering unique associations that contribute to reputation building of the place linked to its existing resources and assets as brand attributes (the theoretical premise of this study's reasoning). As pointed out by Kelly (2017, p. 1): "The logo plays a significant role in the place-branding process, the extent of which can be demonstrated when you move beyond discussing the logo as a single entity" as the role of the logo in place branding has been not enough researched.

Linked to this, the Resource-Based View (RBV) literature discretely states that the country's image is recognized as a resource that can provide competitive advantage and developments (Galhanone and Decoster 2007; Ashworth and Kavaratzis 2009; Ocke and Ikeda 2014; Mariutti 2015; Suter et al. 2018). Also, there is a need to offer bold proposals and new opportunities for studies and applications to advance the research agenda on the RBV and for the evolution of the concept of resources (Barney et al. 2021). By addressing this theme and integrating it with the place branding principles, we accept the theoretical proposition logic that brands are a means of identification and protection of a place, as they geographically heighten recognition of the resources of the country, region, or city. However, the leading interest here is

the role of a place logo (as a public promotional trademark) in the place branding development. Nevertheless, there are both potentials and constraints of logos in communicating the brand image of a country, a region, or a city. Hence, for our main objective, we examine the potential strategic directions for enhancing the distinct attributes of a country's brand based on the Valuable, Inimitable, Rare, and Organizable (VRIO) framework to advance country branding scenarios.

This study contributes to the literature and practice of place branding and public diplomacy under a strategic resourceful perspective as it is acknowledged that the understanding of brand image and reputation in the context of place branding needs reevaluation to enhance the foundational constructs of the theory. Yet, this article provides a theoretical and practical perspective on country branding with Brazil as a case study, and it can be comparatively applicable by researchers and practitioners involved in managing a city or regional brand. Thus, we offer practical insights for place branding strategists showing an application of the VRIO framework to a place branding context and the connection between the visual aspects of a logo regarding the country resources.

This article starts with the literature review to established the theoretical foundation, which presents three sections (i) Place Brand and Place Logo in Place Branding, (ii) Country-Oriented VRIO, and (iii) Brazil's Resources and Assets; then, an analysis of the contextual setting, methodological procedures, results, discussion with the wider literature, and final considerations in which recommendations and contributions of the study are highlighted.

## Theoretical foundation

### Place brand and place logo in place branding

In this existing understanding of logos as a symbolic representation of a place brand, our initial goal is to comprehensively distinguish them from the place brand itself its development (see vide Table 1). Under the place branding rationale, this paper is part of an ongoing debate on the 'country as a brand' concept (Govers 2013; Hao et al. 2021; Mariutti 2015; Rojas-Méndez and Khoshnevis 2023) or by studying connections between nation branding and foreign direct investment (Schoeneman and Fullerton 2022) since the country's brand construct is still quite understudied (Mariutti and Florek 2022; Oh et al. 2020). Govers (2013) emphasizes that reducing the complexity of a place to a mere logo and slogan can be controversial due to the multifaceted nature of places and their contested identities. Every country is prone to stereotypes and judgments, spanning different realms like politics, economics, academia and culture. A



**Table 1** Definitions of place brand and place logo

Concept	Definition	References
Place brand	“The brand as the guiding light for all marketing activities and not a consideration of the brand just as a promotional tool”	Kavaratzis (2005, p. 336)
	“The need to adapt any branding tools to the needs of cities (country or region) and addresses the necessity of a comprehensive city brand management framework”	Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2009, p. 521)
	Means the multidimensional representation of a place (country, regions, or cities) to convey its historical, territorial, social, cultural, environmental, economic, diplomatic and political dimensions, which are intricate and interconnected for the purposes of the place’s development.	Govers (2013)
	“Country brand benefits international economy and trade; develops diplomatic relations; advances international marketing research; enhances academic and educational exchange programs and; improves both national and global sustainability”	Mariutti (2015, p. 58)
	“Country brand, perhaps, might be an endless research challenge” as it implicates on managing its identity, image and reputation	Mariutti and Tench (2016, p. 13)
	Linked to the place’s “history, geography, art, music and famous citizens” and “involves initiatives regarding competition for resources, investors, skilled workers, and visitors among locations of varying scale and complexity around the globe with branding projects”	Ocke and Platt (2022, p. 20, 41)
Place logo	The use of a logo represents the secondary communication as a the formal and intentional communication, through marketing practices, advertising, public relations, and graphic design	Kavaratzis (2005)
	“After all, attributes form the image of Brazil (Suter, Camargo, Strehlau, and Crescitelli, 2016) based on the country brand whose visual attributes of the logo may or may not be interacted in people’s minds (Mariutti, Giraldi, and Crescitelli, 2013)”	Mariutti and Strehlau (2023, p. 4)
	Works as a visual symbolic representation of a place brand that includes naming, colour, symbol and graphic elements	Govers (2013)
	“Serve as a tool to help form the foundation of the visual strategy for a place branding campaign” (p.18) that is related to a communications-based approach while the place brand is related to policy-based approach	Kelly (2017)

Source developed by the authors

country’s image is a compilation of temporary associations subject to shifts in human perception. In contrast, a country’s brand reputation is a more enduring sum of potent and reiterated historical images. Nevertheless, the place logo expresses the set of visible elements of a place brand, such as naming, colour, symbol and graphic elements (developed by the brand managers) that identify and distinguish the brand in the minds of consumers or stakeholders of any type. While the brand identity is part of the visual identity system, it is different from the image of the brand, which is related to the perception of consumers or any stakeholder groups. Moreover, “the starting point is the core brand, which can be defined by the brand personality, the brand positioning and the brand reality”, affirms Ashworth and Kavaratsiz (2009, p. 528), yet they reinforce that place brand attempts “to cover the needs of different economic sectors and to address multiple audiences” (p. 526). Internal or external stakeholders in place branding imply investors, visitors, and residents—as they should be “co-creators in the place branding process” because “place branding is an approach that supports places in these efforts, strategically and interactively” (Mariutti and Florek 2022, p. 1).

The foundation of brand identity demands the strategic execution of plans to convey the essence of the brand’s name, attributes, values, and culture. A brand entails a name or symbol serving as a distinctive tool for communication and enhancing the brand’s essence, that is, the logo represents the figurative nature of the brand. However, for place brands—representing countries, regions, or cities—establishing a strong brand goes beyond visual identity. Due to their complex scope, place brands are required to address historical, territorial, social, cultural, environmental, economic, diplomatic and political dimensions, which are intricate and interconnected. The efforts to manage a country’s brand transcend the government agencies and consultancy firms, extending to individuals, professionals, and multidisciplinary teams.

Highlighting Kelly’s (2017, p. 3) definitions, that we genuinely agrees with, the debate becomes comprehensive: “a policy-based approach aims to ‘prove the vision’ of the place, using place branding as an agent for change, creating a shared goal and collective purpose with good leadership...The communications-based approach communicates the vision”.



Furthermore, the concept of a country's brand revolves around maintaining a consistent reputation both nationally and internationally, built upon people's experiences, all in pursuit of competitive global positioning (Mariutti 2015; Mariutti and Strehlau 2023). Key aspects of these experiences include elements like logos, symbols, and brand associations (Mariutti et al. 2013; Mira 2014; Strehlau and Bacha 2008; Suter et al. 2018), which influence perceptions of the country. People (citizens or foreigners) hold certain expectations about a country, in this case—Brazil, encompassing its places, inhabitants, and products. Managing a country's brand involves upholding the promises conveyed by its brand identity through communication and aligning them with the impressions formed by its brand image, which includes perceptions held at various levels (country, region, or city). This brand management necessitates a blend of classic principles and contemporary strategies, considering the insights offered by branding experts such as Aaker (1992) and Keller (1998).

In managing a place's brand, the image of a place is a simplified representation of its multifaceted associations and information related to a place or a set of beliefs about it (Gertner and Kotler 2004). While an image can be changed because it is immediate, fleeting, or illusory, the brand's reputation becomes more stable and solid over time (Mariutti and Giraldi 2019, 2021). Moreover, the image and reputation of a country's brand hold significant value in country branding efforts. Both reputation and brand name have been critical moderating variables in studies on consumer preferences for decades and are equally relevant for other stakeholders associated with a place's brand.

Thus, the notion of projecting a brand image onto a country aligns with understanding the brand and its various associations in the minds of individuals. It includes recognizing the nation's name, recalling its main attributes, and embracing cognitive, affective and conative attitudes towards the country and its offerings. In brand management, particular attention is given to mitigating "cognitive dissonance", where the intended identity communicated by brand strategists aligns with the perceived image among people, thus solidifying the nation's reputation.

Communication plays a pivotal role in developing a country's brand identity, encompassing various possibilities that impact the image of the brand by applying place branding approaches. This communication of a place brand operates on three levels, as suggested by Kavartzis (2005): primary, based on the place's physical attributes and attractions; secondary, involving official communication channels managed by public or private institutions; and tertiary, comprising word-of-mouth communication amplified by media and locals. Moreover, there are two types of place brand communication—Primary Communication, which is procedural and participative place brand communication (Landscape Strategies, Infrastructure Projects, Organizational and

Administrative Structure, Public–Private Partnerships and Place Behaviour) and Secondary Communication, which is formal and intentional place brand communication [Advertising, Public Relations and Graphic Design (i.e., logo)]. We trust that this first complex type of procedural and participative place brand communication should also be linked to the strategical management of the resources and assets of a place as research requests "to delineate conceptual principles, expand theoretical consistencies, and probe methodological approaches, particularly in accordance with place management and development" (Mariutti 2017, p. 249). Furthermore, places are positioned as imaginative communities: "neighbourhoods, cities, regions, countries—possibly even continents that reinforce or build local character and civic pride, while simultaneously captivating outsiders" (Govers 2018).

The scope of a country's brand goes beyond communication, encompassing interactions with local media and utilizing media for disseminating messages, especially in diplomatic, innovation and technological contexts (Silva Machado 2021). Furthermore, the literature extensively discusses the intricate interplay between nationality, cultural identity and the management of place branding (Anholt 2010; Skinner and Kubacki 2007). Adding to these issues is the association of the country's brand with negative economic, political, social, and environmental aspects. These associations are recognized within the country and beyond, either through media representation or public perception. These cannot be hidden by the place branding campaigns.

### **Country-oriented VRIO (Value, Rarity, Inimitability, and Organization)**

The VRIO theoretical lens is rooted in the Resource-Based View (RBV) within the field of Strategic Knowledge. It centres on the idea that the resources existing within a company or nation play a pivotal role in its competitive advantage within the market. This concept is an extension of the notion put forth by Porter (1990) regarding the competitive advantages of nations. Essentially, this perspective rephrases the age-old question of how nations can enhance their wealth (Smith 1937). In the RBV framework, Barney (2001, p. 64) defines resources as "tangible and intangible assets that the company controls and that can be used to create and implement strategies", while capabilities "are sets of resources of a company". The literature summarizes that tangible and intangible resources create capabilities (Hitt et al. 2002), escalating potential dynamic capacity (Teece 2009).

Expanding upon Barney's (1991) original definition, resources encompass tangible and intangible assets like brand reputation, technological knowledge, personal skills, innovation procedures, routines, machinery efficiency and



perceptions of quality. Intangible resources, as highlighted by Hall (1993), hold the potential to amplify competitive advantages. Alternatively, Teece (2009) associates reputation with an organization's name, representing its quality products, trustworthiness, and recognition (Barney 1991; Bulgacov et al. 2007; Hitt et al. 2002).

For over 30 years, the VRIO analytical tool has been primarily used for industries and companies' internal context investigations (Barney et al. 2021; Dagnino et al. 2021; Ferreira et al. 2022) and more recently is discretely applied to places. For instance, a regional-level VRIO model was tested and applied to different stakeholders from two Portuguese island regions (Madeira and Azores) by Lopes et al. (2020).

From the RBV standpoint, competitive advantages emerge when organizations utilize their resources and skills to outperform rivals. This process involves the formation and defence of strategic content by using resources and capabilities (Bulgacov et al. 2007). The resources of a nation are the main strategic pillars for its growth and development, in which one of the necessary conditions includes superior resources in terms of heterogeneity of resources, in addition to ex-post limits to competition, imperfect mobility of resources, and ex-ante limits to competition (Peteraf 1993).

By applying this perspective to country branding, it can serve as a competitive advantage for a place when branding strategies improve its attributes. These strategies involve leveraging internal marketing resources to establish valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate, and complex resources for the organization (Suter et al. 2018). This study assessed four dimensions applied to a business perspective: visual and textual elements, sensory experiences, natural resources and cultural resources. Moreover, transposing this perspective to nations, encompassing cities, regions, and communities, requires adapting strategies to changing economic conditions and seizing new opportunities for place branding (Kotler et al. 1993). Developing an advantageously promoted country brand becomes a fundamental objective in international business as nations strive to convey their attributes on the global stage. Monitoring and managing the image of a locality, along with its associations, have become significant topics of interest. Each nation tries to transmit its attributes internationally—not only its products and services but also its general image, in search of the country's brand's reputation and value (Mariutti and Giraldo 2019, 2021). After all, branding is about reputation management or, more specifically, brand equity management (Govers 2018) in which invokes attributes and resources.

Therefore, the VRIO model is the chosen strategic management tool applied to this contemporary concept of place branding. It facilitates micro-meso-macro environmental analyses by linking resources to brand attributes, thereby generating recommendations rooted in competitive

advantage (Barney 1991, 2002) of a city, region, or country. This strategy hinges on the pivotal role of resources in a nation's growth and development, where superior resources characterized by resource heterogeneity, limited resource mobility, and constrained competition stand as essential prerequisites for success.

### Brazil's resources and assets

The academic research regarding place branding in Brazil is relatively new compared to international publications. It is also essential to have a comprehensive, integrated model for communicating the country's identity towards a consistent image and robust reputation. These include the intricate nature of the country, the diverse range of interest groups and stakeholders, the level of government involvement, and the need for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches for effective country branding (Mariutti 2015; Ocke and Platt 2022). Moreover, the Brazil brand faces challenges due to its cultural diversity, social disparities, regional variations, political turmoil, economic woes, unique biophysical environment and historical heritage. These factors also encompass racial dimensions. Another challenge lies in the inconsistent engagement and cooperation from the various publics involved. As highlighted by Ocke and Ikeda (2014), the multifaceted nature of the concept necessitates a collective understanding that spans diverse fields. Distinctly, the complexities of communicating a country's brand, particularly for Brazil, are numerous, wherein the logo is not enough for the country's branding development.

Thus, Brazil's image has been characterized by complexity and dichotomy with contradictory perceptions, as noted by Anholt (2010), Buarque (2023), and Mariutti et al. (2013), reflecting both positive attributes like carnival, natural beauty, sports and cultural icons, as well as negative aspects including crime, violence, environmental issues and social challenges. Moreover, the qualitative study of Mariutti and Giraldo (2019) has indicated the favourable associations and unfavourable associations with Brazil, as follows: regarding People and Environment: happy, joyful, lively, vibrant, welcoming, and warm; Geo-Cultural: carnival and samba, beaches, jungles, good weather, and football; Agribusiness: coffee, and fresh fruit juices. As unfavourable ones, Socio-Political: political problems, government problems, corruption, bribery, social inequality, economic problems, ethical issues, poverty, crime, lack of safety, violent, social class inequality, and *favelas* (slums).

Previous research has examined both the positive and negative aspects of Brazil's image and discussions about the country's brand. Several factors contribute to the development of place brand equity, including government initiatives, stakeholder perceptions, resident engagement, news



media, social media and reliable index data (Mariutti and Giraldi 2019). These factors have implications for ongoing monitoring research, exemplified by the International Interest Index, which has tracked mentions of Brazil in foreign press since March 2022 (iii-Brasil, 2023). Highs and lows of the country's news influencing its reputation in the international media are reported weekly as positive, negative or neutral (Buarque and Mariutti 2023). Several indices are interrelated to a country brand scheme (Mariutti and Tench 2016). According to the Good Country Index, out of 169 countries, Brazil's position is 62nd considering the order of the following dimensions for the global contribution: World Order, Planet & Climate, Prosperity & Equality, Health & Well Being, Science & Technology, Culture and International Peace & Security (Good Country, 2023).

Despite Brazil's familiar image and being the 12th among the most recognized countries, its ranking in 'governance' scores (86th globally) is significantly below the global average (Buarque 2023). Moreover, the Global Soft Power Index (GSPI) recently revealed that Brazil's soft power influence has declined, with the country falling three places to rank 31st globally (Buarque 2023). Consequently, Brazil is no longer among the top 30 most influential countries. Despite this setback, the implications of this development should not be overemphasized (Buarque 2023). This hold-up underlines the importance of pertinent and demanding issues, like the one mentioned, which should be considered when assessing the results of campaigns only focused on the country's logo.

Another study by Souza et al. (2014) involving over four thousand individuals from various countries with differing levels of familiarity with Brazil reveals that the country possesses a mildly positive image, with the emotional dimension garnering higher evaluations. Despite the belief among Brazilians that their country enjoys a favourable international image, primarily due to their warmth and friendliness, foreigners do not recognize this sentiment widely. Although the assessment of the communication dimension remains neutral, indicating room for improvement, it encompasses the presentation of the country and its products (Souza et al. 2014).

Briefly, we present some main resources and assets.

According to the CIA (2023), the population of Brazil is 218,689,757 (2023 est.) with a population growth rate of 0.64% (2023 est.). The ethnic groups' distribution is White 47.7%, Mixed 43.1%, Black 7.6%, Asian 1.1% and Indigenous 0.4% (2010 est.). Brazil has a federal presidential republic with a bicameral legislature. This leads to a political landscape where municipal, state, and federal governments develop intricate relations in the implementation of laws and regulations (Loomis et al. 2021). The main agricultural products include sugar cane, soybeans, maize, milk, cassava, oranges, poultry, rice, beef and cotton. The main industries are textiles, shoes, chemicals, cement, lumber, iron ore, tin,

steel, aircraft, motor vehicles and parts, other machinery and equipment.

The Britannica (2023) website specifies that Brazil is the fifth most-populous country on Earth and accounts for one-third of Latin America's population and has long been a melting pot for a wide range of cultures. Brazilians of mainly European descent account for nearly one-half the population, although people of mixed ethnic backgrounds form an increasingly larger segment; more than two-fifths of the total are people of mixed White and Black races) and mestizos (*mestiços*, or *caboclos*; people of mixed European and Indian ancestry). Thus, Brazil is notorious for extreme social inequality that stems from its past colonial and slavery systems, furthermore it faces environmental degradation (internationally this is seen mostly via deforestation in the Amazon region), has seen various financial crises since its return to democracy in 1985, and occasionally suffers from a deadlocked political system due to opportunistic rivalrous political parties.

Furthermore, the tropical North (comprising the states of Acre, Rondônia, Amazonas, Pará, Tocantins, Roraima and Amapá) covers more than two-fifths of Brazilian territory and includes the largest portion of the Amazon rainforest. Brazil's soils form a vast and intermixed pattern, a large band of nutrient-rich, deep reddish-purple soil (*terra roxa*), that lies in the Southeast and South between central Rio Grande do Sul and southern Minas Gerais, including large areas of Paraná and São Paulo states (Britannica 2023).

Brazil has some of the world's most abundant renewable and non-renewable resources. Most of the country's proven mineral reserves, agriculturally productive land, and other sources of wealth have been exploited in the Southeast and South, the country's economic heartland; however, other regions have been growing in prominence. Improved transportation has made more of these resources accessible either for export or for use by Brazil's burgeoning industries and growing population (Britannica 2023).

Although Brazilian destinations can be found from diverse internet sources, Embratur (the Brazilian Tourist Board) is the federal, state-owned agency reporting to the Brazilian Ministry of Tourism (Embratur 2023b). Marca Brasil (translated as Brazil Brand from Portuguese) campaigns and tourism business trade fairs have been launched throughout 2023 after the rebranding process. In February 2023, the Brazilian brand underwent a relaunch (the Brasil brand, spelled in Portuguese with the letter "S"), aiming to promote tourism and trade through Embratur and Apex-Brasil in collaboration with the government. This renewed brand seeks to harmonize the diverse aspects of Brazilian culture and prioritize the nation's natural beauty. Historically, the Brazil brand from 2004, discreetly improved in 2009, returning to harmonize the diversity of tropical "Brazilianess", strengthen folkloric cultures, and prioritize the



national fauna and flora. The emphasis here lies in practicing place branding beyond a fixation on logos and slogans, recognizing their importance but not overattributing powers they do not inherently possess, “diverting focus, resources, and effort from what is important in place branding” (Govers 2013, p. 71).

Grounded on this previous supporting literature review, we move to the procedures and dataset collection and analysis of the study.

## Methodological procedures

By analytically examining the logo originally created to represent the brand identity and image, the existing resources of the country are strategically integrated into the brand attributes. To comprehensively analyse the country brand using the VRIO theoretical framework (see Table 3), we gathered secondary data from research institutes, specialized media reports and materials from Embratur and ApexBrasil. Also, we used indirect observation in the methodological protocol, whose data analysis uses content analysis predicted by Bardin (1977), used in previous research and studies on the brand Brazil. We also adopted Fisher’s (2022) contextual categorization for developing impact articles. We organized this study analysis in three phases:

1. Past orientation: Academic research on country branding offers practical and valuable applications based on resources.
2. Present orientation: based on the challenges a country brand faces today, it seeks solutions by applying brand management actions based on existing academic theory.
3. Future orientation: details practical possibilities, theoretically based on the VRIO perspective, oriented towards the future with plausible applications in international business to support local brand management and public diplomacy.

## Analytical-contextual outcomes: VRIO applied to the place brand

We contextually examined the interrelationships between national resources and the attributes of a country brand to produce practical knowledge for application in other brands of communities, cities, regions or countries. Below are the three study guidelines from the results (Fisher 2022).

### Past orientation

Starting in 2003, the federal government of Brazil, specifically the Ministry of Tourism and Embratur, officially undertook international promotional activities. The initial version of the “Brasil” brand features a distinct visual identity incorporating a unique font. The word “Brasil” was handwritten in green, set against a yellow artistic background (Fig. 3). However, this graphic concept was eventually abandoned due to concerns about the design’s inability to represent the nation authentically.

In 2005, a fresh communication approach for the “Brasil” brand emerged through the innovative National Tourism Plan (NTP). The genesis of the visual identity for the “Brasil” brand (Fig. 2) can be traced back to the Aquarela Plan, a component of the NTP initiative. The development of the project plan included consulting the direct agents of the professionals and clients (tourists) sectors, divided into three surveys with more than 6000 people in 18 countries, which formed the basis for its formulation in 2004 (Marca Brasil, 2010). This research showed that tourists choose Brazil as a destination abroad for nature and people. By amalgamating qualitative and quantitative methodologies within marketing research, the team responsible for constructing the new brand and its management identified specific attributes associated with the Brazilian brand. These attributes included joy, fluidity, radiance, brilliance, exuberance, cultural fusion, racial diversity, modernity and competence.

The next step was creating a competition to encourage the development and inspiration of the nation’s visual identity to continue the creative evolution of the brand’s visual representation. This endeavour garnered support from the Association of Graphic Designers of Brazil (ADG). The artistic foundation for this identity drew upon an illustration of the suspended garden crafted by renowned Brazilian architect Burle Marx in 1938 (portrayed in Fig. 1). This homage pays tribute to the remarkable landscape architect whose artistic legacy resonates through contemporary narratives advocating for tropical ecosystems. His impact endures even in the present era of sustainability and environmental consciousness.

After being approved by a diverse jury and with a unanimous decision, the winning icon by Kiko Farkas is chosen as a now figurative brand (changed in 2009 and relaunched in 2023), with sinuous curves, and is dynamic and colourful. Each colour represents the main characteristics of Brazil, green represents the forests; yellow, the sun’s brightness and luminosity; blue, the waters and the sky; orange and red represent folk and popular festivals; and white is cultural and religious festivals (Embratur 2023a, b; Plano Aquarela 2020).

Embratur and ApexBrasil now employ this brand identity in their communication initiatives for advertising materials,





**Fig. 1** Artistic basis of the Brand Brazil (Burle Marx, 1938). *Source* Revista FAPESP (2019)



**Fig. 2** Brazil brand from 2009 renovated and relaunched in 2023. *Source* Embratur (2023a, b)



**Fig. 3** Country brand launched in 2019. *Source* Panrotas (2019)

gifts, packaging, and international endeavours. Since its adoption, the multi-coloured Brasil brand, characterized by its distinctly Brazilian essence, has gained global recognition. It takes centre stage in institutional communication, promotional events, media coverage, academic research and scholarly publications. The Brazilian government's investments in promoting the Brasil brand have been acknowledged since 2004, following naming principles from the branding literature.

The symbol has found application across diverse practices. It has graced products such as Varig airplanes, CVC

advertisements, goods exported by Pão de Açúcar to France, and fresh export packaging by Matte Leão (Crescitelli and Giraldi 2011, p. 291). In tourism, the symbol has frequently appeared in advertisements by national and international tourism agencies and operators. It adorns promotional materials for hotel chains and car rental companies, official tourism body websites, embassies and chambers of commerce. The Brazil brand has been prominently displayed on billboards at airports and streets in major international cities (Mariutti et al. 2013). Furthermore, Embratur has fully integrated the Brazil brand into its efforts to promote, advertise and facilitate the global commercialization of Brazilian tourist destinations, products and services (Crescitelli and Giraldi 2011, p. 291).

In 2009, the visual identity passed a subtle adjustment; the font used for the name "BRASIL" was refined, and the colours of the symbol were nuanced to create a shading effect, enhancing its curvilinear dancing dynamic (Fig. 2). The slogan "Sensational!" continues to accompany the logo, underscoring its enduring relevance.

Using a creative concept inspired by the renowned designs of Burle Marx, the versatile logo serves a strategic role in promoting tourism and foreign trade and enhancing Brazil's social, cultural, political, economic and environmental positioning on the global stage. This approach emulates the practices other nations have employed for many decades, if not centuries. Such countries have used well-directed initiatives aimed at various interested audiences, employing both soft power tactics and more assertive strategies, often tied to their monarchy or government.

In contrast, starting in 2019, a new brand direction was adopted, featuring a graphic design (Fig. 3). Embratur





(2023a, b), the Brazilian Tourism Board, unveiled this logo, which featured the country's name spelled with the letter "z" in English and the slogan "Visit and Love Us" in capital letters, with an imperative tone and linguistic nuances (Panrotas 2019). This visual approach depicted a stylized version of the national flag, utilizing military green shades. However, this design failed to capture the essence of *Brazilianness* and neglected to convey the richness of the country's culture and diversity associated with the Portuguese language and the name BRAZIL. This shift in branding was justified by the Embratur team as a more cost-effective alternative at the time (Panrotas 2019).

"Governments often wonder how they can enforce the use of their 'brand' (that is, logo) and regulate who can and cannot carry it and in what way. It is the wrong question to ask, and asking it is recognition of defeat", as Govers (2013, p. 74) stated. Instead, place brand managers at the national, regional, or municipal level should identify and address issues contributing to a negative image. This proactive stance involves engaging relevant stakeholders before embarking on efforts to restore the country's image or alleviate unfavourable associations.

Following the tracing of the historical route of the country's brand, we now move to the contemporary landscape of Brazil's logo, brand, and branding in 2023.

### Present orientation

In February 2023, re-introducing the 2005 Brazil logo garnered attention from Brazilians and foreigners. This fact was observed across institutional, professional and personal domains, making national and international media headlines. The event prompted celebratory content in digital platforms and physical gatherings in select Brazilian cities. A collective nationwide endeavour was evident by illuminating prominent landmarks with vibrant lights featuring the logo. These iconic sites spanned various towns and regions in Brazil, such as Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro and the Luminous Fountain of the TV Tower in Brasilia. Additionally, there is an active presence of business and cultural missions worldwide to promote Brazil throughout 2023.

With no concrete results yet, we can still say as an effective outcome of the logo promotion along with branding campaigns worldwide for enhancing Brazil's place brand, international tourism growth increased by 111% through August 2023, with the main visitors coming from Argentina, United States and Paraguay (Embratur 2023a, b). Additionally, Europeans are spending more here. Regarding foreign direct investment (FDI), it has decreased since the beginning of 2023, falling to USD 3.3 billion in October, down from USD 5.8 billion in October 2022. This value represents 3.21 percent of Brazil's gross domestic product (GDP), the lowest index in a year (The Brazilian Report 2023). However, these

statistics cannot be characterized as originating from actions of place branding themselves.

### Future orientation

Country branding involves continuous and long-term management. Therefore, the Discussion and Final Considerations sections are integral to shaping the Future Orientation. In this strategic-tactical perspective, we present the four dimensions of a country's resource types, as analysed through the VRIO framework. Managers can use these resources to uphold their competitive advantage and secure a favourable market position. When it comes to positioning or managing the brand of a location, such as a territory, its significance is not absolute; instead, it is always about a social-human context or an economic-political structure. It evolves through processes that create, sustain and attribute meaning to spaces (Mariutti and Florek 2022).

### Discussion

In addition to communicating and promoting the attributes of the country's brand identity, which is considered valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and has unique resources, there is a strategic need to address unfavourable real issues associated with the Brazilian reality. These issues include deforestation, illegal mining, slave labour, domestic violence, international trafficking, child prostitution, tourism and institutional corruption. Biased stereotypes, such as viewing Brazil only as a country of carnival or soccer the sexualisation of Brazilian women, negative associations related to tourist safety, political instability and economic volatility, also need to be addressed.

Therefore, this study proposes strategic guidelines for differentiating the attributes of the country's brand. It draws inspiration from the fundamental principles of the Resource-Based View, specifically the VRIO framework, as these principles align with the fundamentals of country-brand attributes. This study analyses the following dimensions of the Brazil brand:

- Value dimension: Can the resources be utilized to seize environmental or marketing opportunities or to counteract negative associations that could affect the reputation of the country's brand, thus establishing and sustaining a competitive advantage?
- Rarity dimension: In what sectors do the resources (directly and indirectly) compete with those of other countries? What aspects distinguish the Brazilian market, and how might these threaten market share or contribute to its growth?



- Non-imitability dimension: Do inherently non-imitable resources, such as natural resources, carry any disadvantages as competitive differentiators? For instance, are resources like the forest and its attributes vulnerable to depletion? If so, what are these vulnerabilities, and how could they be addressed to enable Brazil to lead specific markets or preserve its natural spaces?
- Organization dimension: How can the country's reputation be enhanced through essential, pressing, well-structured public policies? Furthermore, what is the potential of patents and national registrations in this context? Are regulatory matters tied to the country and its products appropriately designed to support its patents and thus the preservation of its valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources?

Table 2 presents the main complexities of branding Brazil. It is undoubtedly impossible to mitigate all of these challenges visually, it requires keen marketing knowledge and practice.

Given the challenges associated with managing a country's brand, as outlined in Table 2, it becomes evident that the foremost focus should be on policy making and procedural content, followed by the development of the logo. Regrettably, place branding often operates in disjointed ways, where logos and slogans are not effectively aligned with the planned foundation that underpins a country's heritage and the perpetuation of its competitive advantages.

In Table 3, we present the strategic alignment of the VRIO framework—applied to the distinctive positive attributes represented by the colours of the logo (in parentheses)—which significantly contribute to the identity and brand image of the place. This alignment pertains to the competitive resources specific to Brazil. Considering the attributes of the resources outlined below, the central

question arises: how difficult would it be to replicate these distinct Brazilian resources?

The VRIO model anticipates various competitive implications, including competitive advantage, competitive disadvantage, competitive parity, temporary competitive advantage and sustainable competitive advantage in relation to its strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats. These implications are contingent upon comprehensive studies rooted in strategies and tactics related to country branding activities specific to each case.

Future alternatives of this strategic alignment of resources can also walk along with the ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) agenda in business models based on corporate or public policies to encourage organizations to work responsibly in the principles of this imperative tripod. Also, the potential actions converge with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN 2023), which are currently and globally needed. Brazil can and some of its multinational enterprises (MNEs) do leverage its uniquely high levels of social-biodiversity for branding (Boehe et al. 2014). Moreover, “sustainability as place brand positioning could be a global market opportunity for Brazil since its natural environment and a potential clean energy matrix deployment are strong assets of its competitive identity (Ocke and Platt 2022, p. 51).

Creating a strong brand for places (cities, regions or countries) requires a comprehensive approach encompassing tangible and intangible efforts (Vuignier 2017) focused on the country's resources and assets. On the concrete front of Brazil's existing places, actions like enhancing or maintaining architectural landmarks, monuments, public spaces, infrastructure, and public service quality play a pivotal role. Then, promotional endeavours that physically represent the country, such as logos, designs and cultural and sports tourism offerings, can also contribute. Intangible actions, such as urban planning, public diplomacy, quality of life,

**Table 2** Main country brand management challenges

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- Lack of incentives for scientific and opinion research
  - Lack of a fully integrated composite or reporting model for countries
  - Difficulty identifying attributes
  - Diversity of target markets
  - Lack of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary models for opportunities to leverage country brand management
  - Large amount of biased stereotypes
  - Non-levelling of participation and cooperation between the publics involved
  - Vastly multifaceted nature of country's attributes
  - Participation of different stakeholders in brand management
  - Ambiguous conceptual relationship between nationality, national/cultural identity, and place brand management
  - Variation in the degree of government involvement
  - Variety of stakeholder groups and individual stakeholders within these groups in the country
- 

Source previous referenced literature



**Table 3** VRIO strategic alignment applied to the Brazil brand

Country identity and image attributes	Valuable resources	Rare resources	Inimitable resources	Organizational resources
Natural resources (blue and green)	Sources of sustainable development with unique Brazilian fauna and flora biomes that exhibit some of the highest levels of biodiversity Exotic destinations and unique places	Meeting of cultures, mixture of races and racial diversity Fun people Cordiality and affection Friendly with foreigners		Public policies and incentives for scientific research
Human resources (yellow)	Population with creativity and flexibility Cheerful, receptive, and hospitable lifestyle			Public policies for education and training
Sports resources (orange and red)	Multiple sport talents (especially in football, volleyball, and basketball)		Brazilian Ginga (move) Body intelligence	Public policies to promote sports practice Public policies to promote cultural events
Cultural resources (white)	“Brasildade” (Brazilianness) “Jeitinho brasileiro” (Brazilian way) Cultural and religious celebrations Popular and folk social gathering			Public policies to improve the economic and political environments, which are characterized by corruption, inequality and violence
Geo-Political and Economic Resources (black)	Engagement with innovation, governance, and public diplomacy			

Source developed by the authors

cultural heritage, and history come to the forefront. These actions involve a holistic country branding strategy for the Brazil brand’s needs, that involve urban development, public engagement, cultural preservation and meticulous brand planning, which itself includes promotional campaigns and follow-up research. Moreover, the communication of the country brand needs to operate at the three levels (Kavaratzis 2005): after identifying the place’s physical attributes and attractions, apply the official communication channels managed by public or private institutions and cover word-of-mouth communication elevated by media and locals.

### Final considerations

A strong and distinctive country brand, like the Brazil brand, is established and upheld over time through various interactions with the country’s presence. It includes elements such as the logo and the national flag. Yet, citizens’ engagement is required, acting as ambassadors for the branding through their personal, official and professional endeavours both within the nation and worldwide.

Creating and managing a consistent place brand reputation necessitates a strategic fusion of effective governance and public diplomacy achieved through an autonomous body dedicated to aiding the government in delivering public services. This body would oversee and regulate activities related to building and sustaining the country’s brand identity. It is not strategically or tactically beneficial for entities like trade associations, cities or regions to haphazardly develop their brands solely based on their interests. As a contribution to knowledge in national and international place brand management, this article briefly indicates the following recommendations according to the approaches on scientific research of maximum impact by Gregor and Hevner (2013):

As for the focus on innovation, new solutions for new problems are recommended, such as:

- Researching the perception of the image and reputation of the place brand.
- Replication of previous research to update findings.
- Insertion in the metaverse as a destination for tourism, events and investments.

As for the focus on improvement, new solutions for known issues are recommended, such as:

- Engagement between the municipal, state and federal spheres and the private sectors.
- Improved positioning of renowned country-brand indices.



- Promotion of postgraduate courses on place branding.
- Development of people development policies at different levels and points of contact with different stakeholders.

As for the focus on extrapolation, known solutions to new problems are recommended, such as:

- Creation of a new competitive and contemporary slogan.
- Creation of potential taglines to strengthen the brand as a strategic resource in the different competitive advantages of the country according to specific campaigns and target markets.
- Identifying and strengthening soft power elements to improve knowledge about Brazil and Brazilians.
- Development of promotional actions to publicize the country beyond exhibition fairs, promoting cultural and sports activities that publicize Brazil and Brazilians.
- Creation of an institution responsible for articulating the development of the Brazil brand and relating to and supporting the development of regional and/or city brands that are integrative and collaborative with each other.

From a business perspective, corporations can benefit from participating in place branding initiatives. These projects facilitate the professionalization of place branding activities at various levels and cultivate individuals capable of nurturing and enhancing the nation's identity. The application of the brand logo extends to commercial aspects like products, services, and tourism. For instance, Brazilian industrial products for export feature the brand logo in collaboration with APEX Brasil. In the tourism sector, the brand is incorporated into art pieces, tourism publications, and by various stakeholders such as airlines, operators, travel agencies, hotels, and events, both domestically and internationally. The Embratur website shows detailed guidelines on the logo's use and branding plans.

From a societal standpoint, investing in place branding elevates residents' self-esteem, fostering pride and attachment to their homeland. This phenomenon was evident in Colombia's experience, where a positive investment in the country's brand improved self-esteem amidst a challenging global image shaped by issues like drug trafficking (Candeloro et al. 2011). Similarly, Brazil grapples with internal image concerns, as seen during the 2014 World Cup with the slogan "Imagine in the Cup", which highlighted the amplification of the country's problems. Widespread scepticism exists, and even in specific sectors, a sense of disillusionment prevails, leading to doubts about the country's success or fulfilment of its potential (Buarque 2023).

An effective place branding strategy transcends its external implications and fosters unity among internal stakeholders, instilling a sense of belonging and a shared purpose and nurturing a dedication that is unique and difficult to replicate

elsewhere (Govers 2013). So, citizens must be intrinsically motivated and actively involved in bolstering the country's international reputation.

From a theoretical standpoint, we advocate that place logo supports the place brand along with place branding efforts, such as primarily, the procedural and participative place brand communication (Landscape Strategies, Infrastructure Projects, Organizational and Administrative Structure, Public-Private Partnerships and Place's Behaviour) and then, the formal and intentional place brand communication [Advertising, Public Relations and Graphic Design (i.e., logo)]. We trust that this first complex type of procedural and participative place brand communication should also be linked to the strategical management of the resources and assets of a place. Therefore, the logo brand undoubtedly offers the starting point to symbolic consistency through communication applications and branding campaigns, that requires to be strategically attached between communication-based and policy-based initiatives and innovations.

To this end, place branding as a set of actions that aim to build strong brands requires a collaborative public-private entity, consolidating essential activities across different levels of branding (city, region, and community) besides a country. Despite Brazil's institutional management of a relatively young country brand, this initiative gains significance as a bicentennial nation (2022 in the case of Brazil). Navigating the intricate interplay between the dualistic concerns and the diverse micro and macro landscapes of the nation's five macro regions requires ongoing purposeful attention, seeking enhancements and investments for a continually evolving Brazil.

For this reason, it is advisable to sustain this exploration by systematically and consistently analysing the potential correlations between these resources and existing ones. Furthermore, future inquiries could delve into the strategic alignment outlined by the VRIO model when applied to a place brand. This alignment aims to achieve competitive parity, temporary or lasting competitive advantage. The nation's organizational frameworks should be managed based on national competencies, employing efficient practices through public-private collaborations. These partnerships would leverage distinct competencies in competitive markets while capitalizing on the nation's competitive strengths, using strategies and tactics beyond a mere logo. This approach should centre on motivating citizens as key targets, allowing each country to solidify its beneficial global positioning for itself and the planet.

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