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# **The Constitution and Effects of Country Images: Theory and Measurement of a Central Target Construct in International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy<sup>1</sup>**

Alexander Buhmann, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway

[alexander.buhmann@bi.no](mailto:alexander.buhmann@bi.no)

## Abstract

The article introduces a model for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images. The model combines well-established concepts from national identity theory and attitude theory with a model from reputation management. The model is operationalized and tested in two surveys. Results show how different cognitive and affective dimensions of the country image affect each other and how they ultimately bear on the facilitation

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<sup>1</sup> The present article summarizes the results from my Ph.D. research conducted at the University of Fribourg between 2011 and 2015. In part, results have previously been published in journal articles coauthored with Diana Ingenhoff (c.f. Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015a, specifically literature review and model; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015a, specifically pretest; Ingenhoff & Buhmann, 2016a, specifically discussion of data analysis method) as well as in a cumulative thesis (Buhmann, 2016). I am grateful for the guidance and support from Prof. Ingenhoff. Further, I am thankful for the Young Researcher Award from the Swiss Association for Communication and Media Research (SACM), which prompted the publication of this summary article. I thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive comments.

### **Introduction**

In times of globalization, countries are increasingly observed by global media and publics. They are rated and compared according to their economic development, political stability, effectiveness and morality of their national and international politics and the attractiveness of their culture (Werron, 2014). As an antecedent of people's behavior toward a country, the country image, i.e., "the cognitive representation that a person holds about a given country" (Kunczik, 2003, p. 412), can critically influence foreign direct investment (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Kunczik, 2002; Wee, Lim, & Tan, 1993), the prosperity of national tourist industries (Chon, 1990; Gertner, 2010; Tapachi & Waryszak, 2000; Walmsley & Young, 1998), the attractiveness of domestic labor markets (Papadopoulos, 2004) and educational no system (Gilboa, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Leonard, Stead, & Smewing, 2002; Sun, 2008; van Ham, 2008). Furthermore, country images have a major effect on the success of exports (Dichter, 1962; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993) because they influence the way people evaluate the quality of products and services (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993) and, by implication, affect peoples' willingness to pay (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1996).

Under these conditions a country's "favorable image and reputation around the world [. . .] have become more important than territory access, and raw materials" (Gilboa, 2008, p. 56). As a consequence, practices of communication and image management are increasingly applied on the level of the nation state system in international public relations and public diplomacy (Dinnie, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Snow & Taylor, 2009; van Dyke & Vercic, 2009). The respective communication professionals need to have knowledge of their target groups (Vos, 2006) and in an inter-national public relations context this means knowledge of how publics perceive a foreign entity (organization or country) and how they behave toward it

(Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). The growing importance of country images has raised the need to analyze and compare these constructs and their effects. In research, various facets of the phenomenon have been studied in the different fields of business studies (Dinnie, 2014; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), social psychology (Brown, 2011; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), political science (Leonard et al., 2002; Wang, 2006b) and communication science (Golan & Wanta, 2003; Kunczik, 1997). But sound conceptual models and appropriate measurement instruments to analyze and compare the constitution and effects of country images in different groups and contexts are rare. Most existing models lack theoretical foundations, cannot be applied to different countries or the comparative analysis of country images in different groups, often fail in comprehensively capturing all relevant dimensions and refrain from clarifying the internal structure of the construct (Magnusson & Westjohn, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2004; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). In international public relations and public diplomacy, there is no widely accepted model and measurement instrument available. While the practitioner literature strongly relies on aggregated indices (such as the Nation Brands Index, Best Country Score, or Country RepTrak), academic literature (much like the seminal works of Kunczik, 1997 or Nye, 2004) favors a conceptual or historical focus. Furthermore, we see that Papadopoulos' (2004) statement of a strict segregation of research on country images between the different disciplinary perspectives is still true and there remains "great need for integrative studies that would merge the available knowledge across the various fields" (2004, p. 47).

These challenges raise the question of how available knowledge from the different fields can be consolidated in order to derive an integrative model for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images for international public relations and public diplomacy research. In the following, three steps are taken to deal with this question: first, advances in the aforementioned research fields are introduced in a comprehensive literature

review to show the central lines of research in studying country images, characterize their respective level of analysis, and outline the underlying conceptual understandings of the construct. Second, an integrative model of the country image is presented by combining concepts from national identity theory and attitude with a model from reputation management. Third, the suggested model is operationalized and tested in two sets of surveys (n = 640, pretest survey; n = 463, main survey). Subsequently, the implications, originality, and limitations of both the model and the empirical study are discussed.

### **Literature Review**

A first set of studies addressing the perception of countries can be found in the 1930s and 1940s (Child & Doob, 1943; Katz & Braly, 1933; Klingberg, 1941; Kusunoti, 1936). Since then the multitude of their possible economic, cultural, and political effects have led to a high number of studies across a range of scientific fields. This has produced a plethora of definitions of closely related concepts (such as country image, country reputation, country brand, country identity) and divergent specifications of their dimensions. The substantial corpus of literature can be systemized by coarsely distinguishing between the following four main research perspectives (see Table 1 for an overview).

#### **The Communication Science Perspective**

From the perspective of communication science, country images are studied as discursive phenomena in personal, organizational, and (mass-)mediated communication. The construct has attracted attention in analyses on media content and effects, and—to a lesser extent—on public relations.

So far, communication science has mainly focused on mass-mediated country images. Analyses of the dynamics and patterns of the international news flow reveal the (unequal) salience of countries in international news (Chang, 1998; Golan & Wanta, 2003; Jones, Aelst,

& Vliegenthart, 2013; Weaver, Porter, & Evans, 1984; Wu, 1998), show the effect of mass-mediated country images on the formation of public opinion about foreign countries (Manheim & Albritton, 1984; McNelly & Izcaray, 1986; Perry, 1987; Salwen & Matera, 1992; Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, & Willnat, 1992; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004) and underscore the gate-keeping role of foreign editors in forming these mediated country images (Marten, 1989). The central role of mass media in the formation of country images has stimulated numerous content analyses evaluating images of certain countries as portrayed in foreign media (e.g., Sreberny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng, Stevenson, & Ugboajah, 1985; Steenhoff, 1996; Wu, 1997). The conceptualization of the country image in these works is predominantly unidimensional (e.g., covering valence from positive to negative tonality) or based on (stereotypical) topics and themes found in media content.

In the field of public relations, which has a strong focus on corporate image and reputation, the study of country images has so far received relatively little attention (Kunczik, 2003; van Dyke & Vercic, 2009). Some researchers have shown a positive effect of public relations activities on country images in U.S. news coverage (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, 1985; Manheim & Albritton, 1984; Zhang & Cameron, 2003) and on public opinion (Kiousis & Wu, 2008). Others have addressed the potential and challenges of communication strategies for the cultivation of country images and brands (Kunczik, 1997; Volcic, 2008) as well as country reputation (Wang, 2006b, 2008). Only few have addressed questions regarding the conceptualization of the country image construct in detail. Passow, Fehlmann, and Grahlow (2005) and Yang, Shin, Lee, and Wrigley (2008) successfully applied a model of corporate reputation in analyses of country reputation. In contrast to the concepts from country-of-origin research, these works not only focus on functional aspects but also stress the importance of normative dimensions, such as the social and ecological responsibility of a country. Despite these advances, there is still much to be done in applying more recent

models from the field of public relations, specifically communication and reputation management (e.g., Eisenegger & Imhof, 2008; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011), to the conceptualization and specification of country images. These newer works led themselves well, because they can be expanded beyond the corporate focus as they draw on more generalizable models including functional, normative, and affective dimensions.

### **The Business Studies Perspective**

This perspective is mainly interested in consumption behavior. Different marketing-based concepts have been developed in the fields of nation branding and country-of-origin research.

In country-of-origin research, the study of country images has along history, starting with the works of Dichter (1962) and Schooler (1965) (see Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999 for an overview of the field). Most of the studies have conceptualized the country image as an attitudinal construct, suggesting a plethora of dimensions and variables (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). An important factor in many of the studies is the evaluation of the state of a country's economy (e.g., Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Wang & Lamb, 1983) as well as of its political system (e.g., Allred, Chakraborty, & Miller, 1999). Heslop, Papadopoulos, Dowdles, Wall, and Compeau (2004) also suggest the work-training and competencies of the people as an important factor. Another factor often referred to is the degree of technological advancement (e.g., Desborde, 1990; Kühn, 1993; Martin & Eroglu, 1993). Despite the substantial body of research in this field, the theoretical foundation and empirical testing of the dimensionality of the country image is still labeled unsatisfactory (Newburry, 2012). When looking at the basic elements of the attitudinal construct, most studies have a strong emphasis on cognitive components and fail to consistently operationalize country affects (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). With a few exceptions (Brijs, Bloemer, & Kasper, 2011; Häubl, 1996; Heslop et al., 2004), researchers also largely refrain from clarifying the internal structure of the construct, raising

the question of how different cognitive and affective image dimensions interrelate and affect each other. Also, if interested in the country image as a generic construct, most models in this research perspective have limited utility due to their prevalent focus on “product-country images” as a joined construct (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). When empirically analyzing country images, the fields’ focus on consumer research has left a gap of understanding with regard to other groups such as foreign investors, politicians, political publics, students or skilled workers (Papadopoulos, 2004). This is also strongly reflected in respective measurement models, since many researchers (e.g., Ptaschunder, Schweiger, & Kirchler, 2004; Reindl & Schweiger, 2006; Schweiger, 1988, 1992; Schweiger & Kurz, 1997) develop these inductively from specific groups of consumers at a specific point in time. This leads to dimensions that depend entirely on the focus of one specific group. This limits applicability of models to comparative approaches analyzing different countries’ images indifferent groups.

The field of nation branding is rooted in research on the constitution, measurement and management of corporate brands (see Kaneva, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2004 for an overview of the field). The nation brand is commonly defined as “the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2014, p. 15). This construct is often specified in terms of consumers’ general associations with a country (Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2010; Ptaschunder et al., 2004; Reindl & Schweiger, 2006). So far, works on nation branding are strongly influenced by practitioners (e.g., Anholt, 2005; Gilmore, 2002; Olins, 2002). Commonly used country brand dimensions include tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people (Anholt, 2005). Empirical works often have a specialized focus on the target group of tourists (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010; Tapachi & Waryszak, 2000) and are often qualitative, while theory-driven concepts and

quantitative approaches are rare (Gertner, 2011). A central gap is the lack of concepts and measures to evaluate the success of nation branding strategies (Papadopoulos, 2004), i.e., instruments that can track the development of nation brands (Loo & Davies, 2006, p. 208).

Table 1

*Overview of research perspectives*

<b>Research perspectives</b>	<b>Subdomains</b>	<b>Focal concepts</b>	<b>Focal dimensions</b>	<b>Selected works</b>
Communication science	Media content and effects	Stereotypes in media, public opinion, gate keeping	often unidimensional	Golan & Wanta, 2003; Jones et al. 1984; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1985; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004;
	Public relations	Corporate image, corporate reputation	functional, normative, affective	Albritton & Manheim, 1983; Kioussis & Wu, 2008; Kunczik, 1997; Kunczik, 2003; Manheim & Albritton, 1984; Passow et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2008; Zhang & Cameron, 2003
Business studies	Country-of-origin research	Attitudes	Economy, products, work place; cognitive components	Brijs, Bloemer, & Kasper, 2011; Desborde, 1990; Dichter, 1962; Heslop et al., 2004; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Schooler, 1965; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999
	Nation branding	Brand associations, nation brand, place brand	tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people	Anholt, 2005; Dinnie, 2014; Gilmore, 2002; Kaneva, 2011; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010; Olins, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2004; Tapachi & Waryszak, 2000

Research perspectives	Subdomains	Focal concepts	Focal dimensions	Selected works
Social psychology	Intergroup relations	Group relations, stereotypes, prejudice, conflict, in-group/out-group images	political actions, motivations, and abilities; cognitive components; human dimensions	Boulding, 1959; Cottam, 1977; Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Herrmann et al. 1997; Holsti, 1967; Jervis, 1976; Oskamp, 1965; White, 1965
	Collective identity	Group identity, country identity, national identity, identity management, identification, reputation	Emotion, motivation, fate, uniqueness, norms and values, territory, culture and language	David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Ellemers, 1993; Rusciano, 2003; Rusciano, Fiske-Rusciano, & Wang, 1997
Political science	International relations	Image, reputation, nation brand, soft power	Attraction, emotion	Gilboa, 2008; Leonard et al., 2002; Nye, 2004; Schatz & Levine, 2010; Vickers, 2004; Wang, 2006;
	Political anthropology	National identity, nationality	homeland, myths and a shared history, national economy	Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 2006; Hroch, 1996; Smith, 1991; Wehler, 2011

### The Social Psychology Perspective

From the perspective of social psychology country images are analyzed regarding individual cognition, emotion and behavior. The field has developed concepts of country image and country self-image (i.e., country identity) in the two subfields of intergroup relations and collective identity research.

In research on intergroup relations, country images are analyzed with a particular focus on countries' political actions, motivations, and abilities (Herrmann, Voss, Schooler, &

Ciarrochi, 1997; Oskamp, 1965). The perceived quality of the relationship between countries is often an integral part of the image—e.g., in concepts of the “enemy country image” (Jervis, 1976) or the “ally country image” (Cottam, 1977). Further, central elements of the country image are the strengths and weaknesses of a country (Boulding, 1959, 1956; Cottam, 1977; Holsti, 1967; Shimko, 1991; Silverstein & Holt, 1989; White, 1965). More recent models, such as the stereotype content model (SCM) or the model of behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes (BIAS), suggest warmth and competence as two universal dimensions in intergroup perceptions (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Generally speaking, research on intergroup relations—similar to research in marketing—has a tendency to underemphasize affective and emotional components that may affect how people behave toward another group (Hogg, 2006, p. 487) and is interested mainly in extreme forms of prejudice and intergroup conflict (Brown, 2011; Hogg, 2006).

Accordingly, in the majority of the works, especially those on enemy image, but also in the SCM and BIAS models, country images are specified as stereotypes rather than as differentiated attitudes. Furthermore, due to its perspective, this line of research generally applies a dichotomous distinction between in-group and out-group; hence comparative analyses of specific publics are rare. Lastly, the main focus on the human collective excludes important non-human dimensions of countries such as products or scenery and landscapes.

The related field of collective identity research analyzes the identity of countries or nations as one distinct form of collective identity focusing on dimensions such as emotion, motivation, fate, uniqueness, common norms and values, territory, culture and language (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). Country identity can be described as the image citizens have of their own country or their “country self-image” (Rusciano, 2003). It can foster the joint awareness among citizens that they share a common identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004) and cultivate an understanding of a country as a unique

community (Anderson, 1983). While national identity is constructed vis-à-vis a world public that constructs the global reputation of a country (Rusciano, Fiske-Rusciano, & Wang, 1997), the social group of the nation may employ identity management in an effort to improve its global reputation (Ellemers, 1993). Research on collective identity has so far largely focused on small groups and there is still a gap in understanding collective identity on the macro level of countries (Huddy, 2001). Furthermore, David and Bar-Tal (2009) point out that the few existing psychological studies on national identity, such as Herman (1977) or Bloom (1990), generally focus on the process of individual identification and barely address the generic dimensions of national identity and their specific content.

### **The Political Science Perspective**

From the perspective of political science, country images are studied regarding matters of international affairs, political identity and behavior. Concepts of country image, identity, reputation and brand have been developed and applied mostly in the subfields of international relations and political anthropology.

Within the subfield of international relations country images are studied mostly with regard to the concept of public diplomacy, i.e., the strategic communication of a nation state aimed at enhancing the country's reputation among foreign publics (see Leonardet al., 2002; Schatz & Levine, 2010; Vickers, 2004). As such, public diplomacy links the communication science and political science perspectives. A positive country image and reputation is seen as a means of building common understanding in the international system (Wang, 2006a, 2006b), thereby increasing the political action ability of a nation state (Vickers, 2004). The central aspect is often seen in the affective image component or a country's "ability to attract" as it constitutes a nation's "soft power" (Nye, 2004). So far, research in public diplomacy is strongly influenced by practitioners (Snow & Taylor, 2009) and by the nation branding literature (Anholt, 2005), with respective concepts and methods still in the

developing stages (Gilboa, 2008). One of the most pressing gaps is the conceptual and empirical development of instruments applicable for measurement and evaluation in public diplomacy (Banks, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2007; Pahlavi, 2007), in order to make assessable the desired impact on awareness, attitude, and behavior (Banks, 2011, p. 29). In addition, it is argued that analyses need to include a wider range of target groups, such as elites, politicians and journalists (Banks, 2011; Hall, 2010).

The field of political anthropology introduces a differentiated understanding of countries as culturally constructed national entities. Whereas some researchers have adopted a radical constructivist perspective to characterize national entities as mere cultural inventions (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 2006), others have developed ethnographically grounded concepts that allow to define some more or less continuous attributes of the country entity (e.g., Hroch, 1996; Smith, 1991; Wehler, 2011). According to these authors, manifest dimensions are, for instance, the occupancy of a distinct homeland, common myths and a shared history and the existence of a single economy (Smith, 1991). So far, these approaches have mainly been used to analyze nations and nationalism as a political ideology. However, recent works in nation branding (Dinnie, 2014) and collective identity research (David & Bar-Tal, 2009) have started to adopt concepts from leading political anthropologists, such as Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983) or Smith (1987) to study country image and identity.

### **Desiderata and Research Questions**

In sum, it appears that there is hardly a common conceptual understanding in any of the individual fields. Also, the theoretical foundation and empirical testing of the dimensionality of the construct are still unsatisfactory. When looking at the basic components, most models focus on the cognitive component of the attitudinal construct and fail to coherently integrate emotional aspects. Furthermore, the internal structure of the country image remains largely

unexplained, raising the question of how different cognitive and affective image dimensions affect each other. Also, in conceptualizing and operationalizing the construct, most researchers develop models inductively from existing images among a certain group of people at a specific point in time. Such models fit only for the image of specific countries and cannot be applied in comparative analyses of different countries. Such models are, of course, also limited in their applicability to different groups and publics since their dimensions depend strongly on the focus of specific groups, such as consumers or tourists. Despite the calls to deliver more differentiated analyses of country images in various groups (such as politicians, entrepreneurs and investors, foreign political publics, skilled workers and experts, journalists, students) and across countries, research in the different fields has so far largely neglected the development of generalizable models that can be applied to comparative analyses. Concepts of national identity—although they offer promising theoretical grounds for substantiating generic attributes and content of the construct—are widely disregarded in research on country images.

Based on these gaps we can formulate four specific research questions: How can we integrate available approaches to conceptualize the country image as a multidimensional construct comprising both cognitive and affective components? (RQ1) How can we specify and measure the country image and its individual dimensions? (RQ2) How do different cognitive and affective country image dimensions interrelate and affect each other? (RQ3) How do different cognitive and affective dimensions of the country image affect peoples' behavior? (RQ4).

Accordingly, this study aims first for the theoretical development of a new model for analyzing the constitution and effects of country. For this, we aim specifically to derive an integrative model that combines a set of available approaches and can comprise both cognitive and affective components of the country image construct. The model shall be

generalizable and applicable to a wide variety of study objectives. Second, based on this model, the study aims to provide an operationalization of a new measurement instrument, which is to be refined and applied within a first set of empirical tests. Specifically, we aim to introduce and discuss a particular statistical method (PLS-SEM) that allows to handle some of the specific empirical conditions that become relevant in the context of measuring the constitution and effects of country images when testing hypothesized relations between multiple latent and emergent country image dimensions. The presented study does not aim to present representative empirical evidence of any particular country's image in any particular group at a particular point in time, but rather wants to suggest, develop, and test a new model and empirical approach for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images.

### **Conceptualization**

#### **Towards a Four-Dimensional Model of the Country Image**

To develop an integrative model of the country image we draw on three basic concepts: the concept of national identity by Smith (1991) to substantiate generic attributes of the reference object of the country; the attitude theory by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) as a foundation for the attitudinal image construct; and the model of reputation as a multidimensional construct developed by Eisenegger and Imhof (2008) and Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011), which serves as a framework for differentiating between different dimensions of the country image.

The image object of the country is conceived of as the unity of a nation and its state. By drawing on Smith's (1991) concept of national identity, the country can be defined as a named human collective consisting of six basic attributes: a distinct territory or 'homeland', a common history and traditions, a domestic economy, a public culture, a set of common norms and values as well as a sovereign political organization or state.

Having defined the image object as such, the country image is conceptualized correspondingly as an attitude toward a country, i.e., the attitude toward a country's territory,

its history and traditions, its domestic economy, public culture, norms and values as well as its political organization. Thereby, our model uses the same descriptive dimensions to characterize the image and the object, which is favorable for developing generalizable image frame-works (Kelman, 1965). Furthermore, Smith's country attributes lend themselves well as a foundation for the model because they have been successfully applied in research on country identity (in-group perspective) (David & Bar-Tal, 2009), and correspond to categories by which foreigners (out-group perspective) actually perceive and distinguish between different countries (Mittelstaedt, Hopkins, Raymond, & Duke, 2004). As such the model is well suited for comparative analyses of a country's citizens' self-image (i.e., the country identity) and the image of the country as perceived by foreign publics. Following the concept of attitudes from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), country images then comprise a component of beliefs (cognitive component) and a component of emotions (affective component) toward the image object. While the cognitive component can be seen as consisting of multiple specific evaluations regarding a broad range of attributes of the image object, the affective component consists of a necessarily general judgment regarding its emotional attractiveness (Bergler, 2008).

To further differentiate between these two general components we draw on a recent model of corporate reputation (Eisenegger & Imhof, 2008; Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). According to this model, each social object is judged according to one's beliefs about its functional qualities (abilities, competencies, and success), its normative qualities (values and integrity) as well as its emotional qualities (attractiveness and fascination). Ingenhoff and Sommer (2010) also specify the internal structure of the construct by showing that the functional and the normative dimension can be seen as antecedents of the emotional dimension. This is in line with the concept of the Standard Learning Hierarchy from the Theory of Reasoned Action, which assumes a somewhat rational process in which what we

know about an object affects how we feel toward this object. Although this hierarchy of effects can vary according to context (Ajzen, 2001), the Standard Learning Hierarchy can be seen as the normal case of the constitution of attitudes (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & van den Bergh, 2013) and can serve as the basic assumption for the analysis of country images (Bloemer, Brijs, & Kasper, 2009).

Furthermore, to coherently apply this three-dimensional model (which has been developed in the context of corporations) to the image object of the country as conceptualized on the basis of Smith's theory we need to integrate an additional dimension: while functional judgments can refer to Smith's country attributes of the national economy and political organization, and normative judgments can be aligned with Smith's country attributes of norms and values, the attributes of public culture, traditions and territory resist coherent affiliation with any of the three dimensions from the corporate reputation model. These attributes relate rather to aesthetic judgments. Thus, to make this model entirely suited for analyzing country images, we add a fourth dimension that captures beliefs regarding the aesthetic qualities of a country, that is its beauty and attractiveness as a cultural and scenic place.

Accordingly, the country image consists of four different, but closely interrelated, dimensions. Following the two-component model of attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the functional, normative, and aesthetic dimensions constitute the cognitive component, while the emotional dimension constitutes the affective component of the country image. In summary, with respect to the three concepts of national identity, image as attitude, and three-dimensional reputation, we define the country image as a subjective attitude toward a nation and its state, comprising specific beliefs and general feelings in a functional, a normative, an aesthetic and an emotional dimension (Fig. 1).

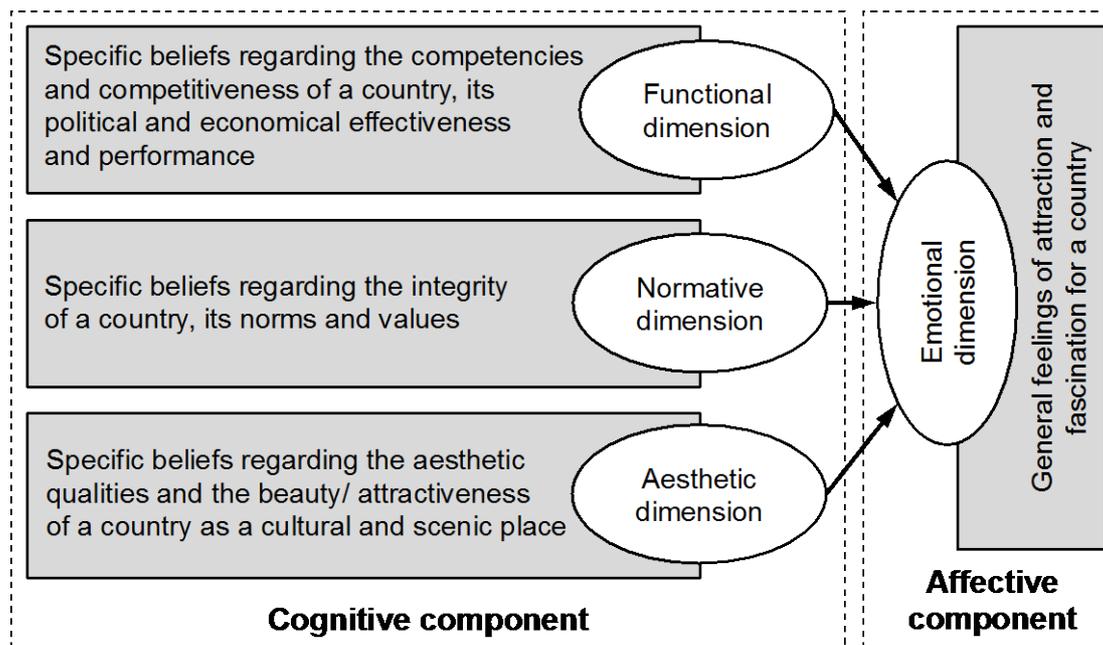


Figure 1. The four-dimensional model (“4D Model”) of the country image (first in Buhmann & Ingenhoff 2015a)

### Modeling the Constitution of the Country Image and its Effects on Behavior

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action intended behavior (conations) can be seen as dependent outcomes of cognitions and affects and are an important predictor of people’s actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992). As such, attitudes are—next to subjective norms—central predictors of behavioral intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In connection to previous results using similar dimension in the case of corporate reputation (Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2010) we hypothesize that each of the cognitive dimensions is positively correlated with the emotional dimension, which has a mediating effect on conations. While aesthetic beliefs are fully mediated by feelings of fascination and attraction, functional and normative judgments are hypothesized also to affect intended behavior directly (see Fig. 2 for an overview of the hypotheses).

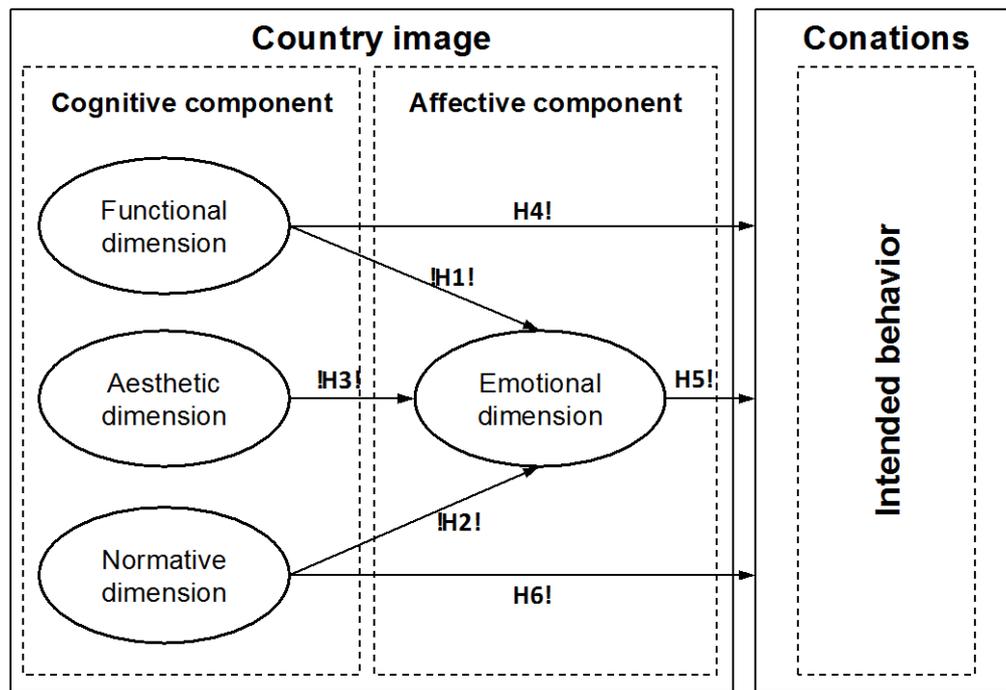


Figure 2. A path model of the constitution and effects of the country image (first in Buhmann & Ingenhoff 2015b)

### Defining the Epistemic Structure of the Country Image

When working with intangible constructs, such as country image, researchers have to operationalize them using observable indicators. This requires a conceptual decision on how the selected indicators are related to their constructs. For this, indicators can be specified as either formative or reflective measurement models (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). In reflective measurement models indicators are conceived as observable consequences of the underlying construct (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). The underlying assumption is that these indicators have a common core (Nunnally, 1978), which explains why they are (generally) highly correlated and considered to be interchangeable (Ley, 1972). In formative measurement models, by contrast, indicators are considered to be the cause of an emergent construct. As such, formative indicators (or ‘cause measures’) constitute the relevant dimensions of a construct, can be independent of each other and must not necessarily be correlated (Bollen,

1984). Other than in reflective measurement models, where indicators are assumed to be interchangeable, omitting indicators from a formative model necessarily leads to a change in the meaning of the construct (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001)(see Fig. 3 for a graphic example of formative vs. reflective specification).

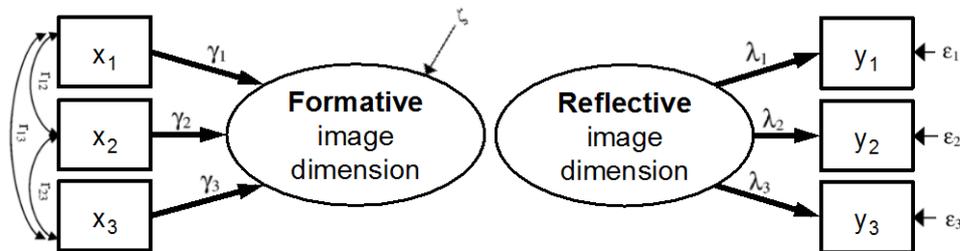


Figure 3. Formative vs. reflective specification of country image dimensions (c.f. Buhmann & Ingenhoff 2015b)

The distinction between both forms of specification (also called epistemic structure) is rarely addressed and many constructs in the social sciences are specified incorrectly (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). In most existing approaches to measuring country images the question of the epistemic structure is not addressed explicitly and there is generally a strong use of reflective indicators (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015b). However, in public relations research scholars have recently argued that intangibles such as image and reputation ought to be operationalized with formative indicators since respective observations on the indicator level are the determinants of the construct and not its consequence (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015b; Helm, 2005, 2011; Ingenhoff, 2012; Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2010; Tong, 2013). Accordingly, when the country image and its latent dimensions are conceived of as the overall evaluation of a country, then the specific variables of the image and its dimensions are to be seen as individual “building blocks” of the image. Thus, in the case of the 4D Model the different characteristics in the functional, normative and aesthetic dimensions of the broader construct of the country image cannot be presupposed as being equally valid and

reliable for measuring a respective image dimension. Hence, we see the various specific beliefs regarding the cognitive country image dimensions as variables that make the underlying constructs appear (suggesting formative specification), not as outcomes of the image dimensions. The general judgments regarding affective appeal and fascination of the country, however, are assumed to be the observable consequences of the underlying emotional country image dimension (suggesting reflective specification).

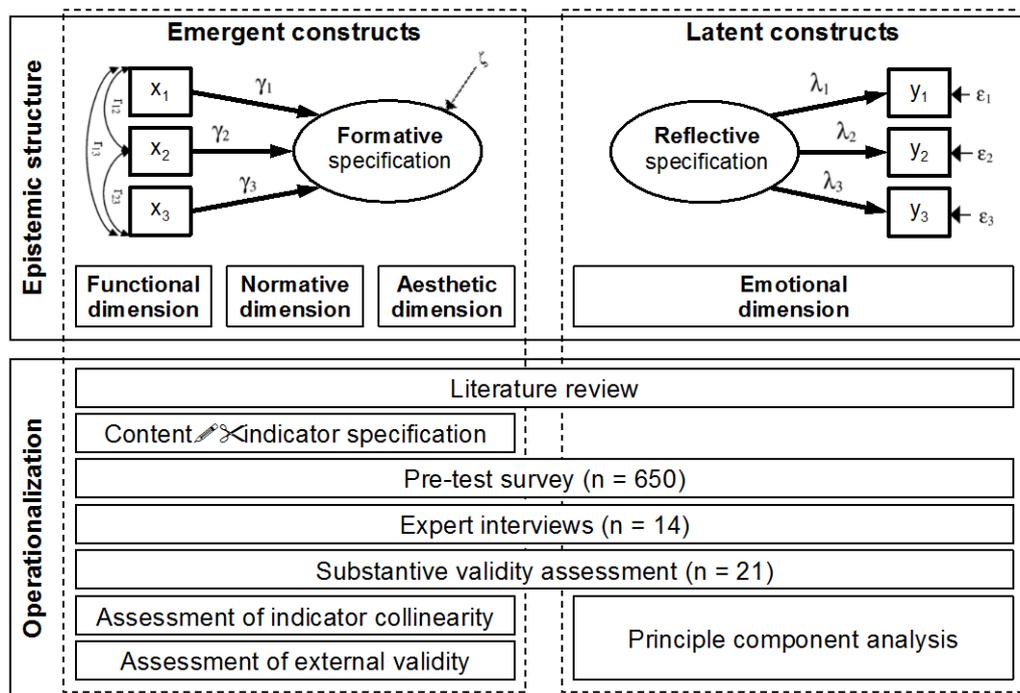


Figure 4. Epistemic structure and operationalization

## Method

### Operationalization and Pre-tests

Due to the novelty of the conceptual model and a lack of consensus on valid measures for country images, a new instrument was developed based on the 4D Model. According to the above argumentation the exogenous constructs of the functional, normative, and aesthetic dimension (cognitive country image component) were operationalized with formative indicators while the endogenous construct of the emotional dimension (affective country

image component) was matched with reflective indicators. As differences in epistemic structure have practical consequences for the respective operationalization procedures, two separate pathways were taken to develop the new mixed-specified reflective and formative instrument (see Fig. 4 for an overview of the operationalization procedure).

In connection to the methodology suggested by Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001), the indicators for the formatively specified dimensions of the cognitive image component were developed not only from the existing literature, but also in close connection to the actual content specification of the different latent dimensions from the 4D Model. In addition to the literature review, an explorative survey (pen and paper) among students ( $n = 650$ ) was conducted in February 2013, in which participants were asked how strongly their image of another country depended on a selected number of items and which further aspects were important to them when forming attitudes about countries. Results supported the relevance of the selected items and the additionally suggested aspects were all consistent with items that have been extracted from literature or derived from the model. Together, the literature review and survey amounted to a total of 62 items, which were pre-tested in expert interviews with 14 scholars from four different countries, checking for content validity, item clarity, and item redundancy. The refined set of 46 items was subjected to an item-sorting task for assessment of substantive validity (see Anderson & Gerbing, 1991) conducted with a group of students ( $n = 21$ ), which were familiar with the conceptual model. These pretests allowed for a further refining of the instrument to a total of 31 items, which, in the data analysis phase, were checked for indicator collinearity and external validity. The refined instrument was then used for an empirical pre-test based on the same sample data ( $n = 650$ ). An analysis of a covariance matrix gave indication of possible cross loadings. All correlations above 0.7 between indicators across constructs were subjected to further conceptual considerations on the basis of the content specification of the latent variables.

These analyses led to a final refinement to a total of 21 items: 12 for the functional, five for the normative and four for the aesthetic dimension (for a complete list of indicators see Table A1 in Appendix A).

In the reflectively specified dimension of the affective country image component, individual items are believed to be influenced by the same underlying construct. This dimension was operationalized in accordance with a previous study on corporate reputation (Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2010), using four indicators for measurement (see also Table A1). The items of the reflective latent variable of the emotional dimension were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation, giving a KMO-value of 0.94 and a one-factor solution. One indicator was dropped due to low loading (below 0.70), leaving three indicators reflecting the overall construct.

For the goal variable of the conative component we chose a single item indicator for a person's intention to buy products from a country ("I would like to buy products from this country"). All items for all dimensions in the model were scored with bipolar, entirely verbalized five point Likert scales (ranging from 1, "strongly agree" to 5, "strongly disagree").

### **Data Collection**

Following operationalizing the model was tested in a second survey using the image object of Switzerland in surveys (pen and paper) among two groups. To apply the 4D Model as a measure for the domestic country image (in-group), we surveyed Swiss citizens ( $n = 251$ ). The sample was collected by randomly selecting pedestrians in train stations and on trains in the Swiss-German region. To apply the 4D Model as a measure for foreign country image (out-group), we surveyed German students ( $n = 212$ ) on their image of Switzerland. The sample was collected in undergraduate and graduate courses at a German university in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Both samples were collected between April and

June 2013. The student sample consist 62% females and 38% males, with an average age of 23. The sample of Swiss citizens consists 51% females and 49% males, with an average age of 34.

### **Data Analysis**

**Applying variance-based SEM.** The hypothesized relations between the different constructs in the path model (Fig. 2) are analyzed by means of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS SEM) (c.f. Ingenhoff & Buhmann, 2016a for a recent discussion of the approach). The approach was used because the model contains both formative and reflective constructs. Analyzing such constructs can cause identification problems when using the conventional covariance-based approach to SEM where indicators are by default assumed to be reflections of the underlying construct (MacCallum & Browne, 1993). PLS-SEM, in comparison, has been shown to demonstrate higher robustness with formative measures (Vilares, Almeida, & Coelho, 2010).

**Model evaluation in variance-based SEM.** SEM There is a number of software packages available to conduct model evaluation with PLS-SEM (for a comparison of different tools see Temme, Kreis, & Hildebrandt, 2010). For this study we use SmartPLS as a Java-based tool that processes raw data and uses bootstrapping as its resampling method (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005). The properties of PLS-SEM necessitate a particular two-stage procedure for model evaluation: first, the assessment of the measurement model and then the assessment of the structural model (Fig. 5).

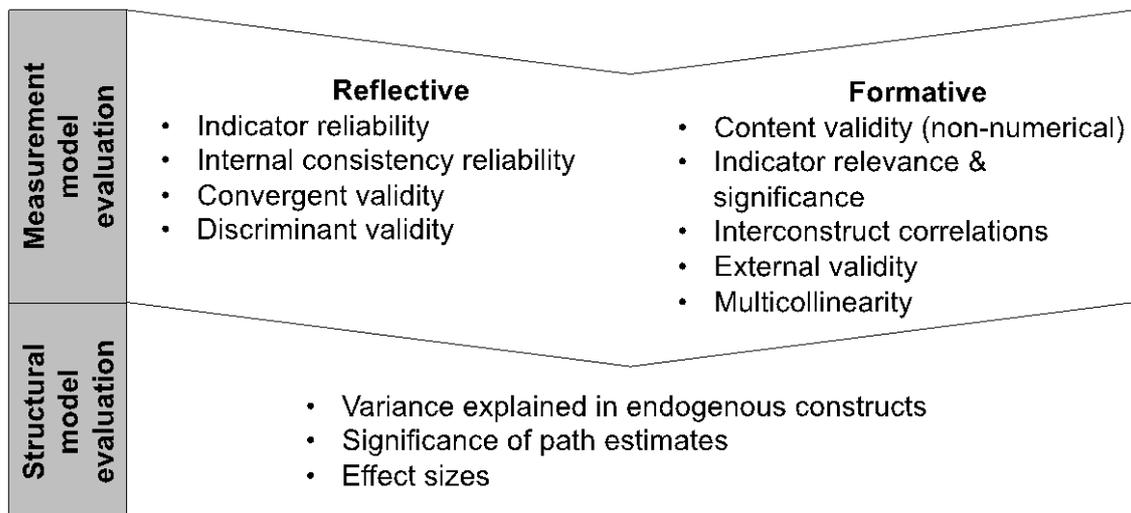


Figure 5. Stages of model evaluation using PLS structural equation modeling (c.f. Ingenhoff & Buhmann 2016a)

*Measurement model evaluation* aims to show how well the chosen sets of indicators measure the respective latent or emergent constructs. Due to the difference in the indicator–construct relation (epistemic structure), the assessment of reflective and formative measurement models has to follow a different procedure (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). In formative measurement model evaluation indicators are examined by looking at indicator weights, indicator relevance and external validity. In reflective measurement model evaluation indicators are examined based on indicator loading, indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity.

*Structural model evaluation* follows as a second stage of analysis directed at an assessment of the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. Here we look at effect sizes, significance, and at the variance explained in the endogenous variables.

Table 2

*Summary of the results in the formative measurement models*

Dimensions and indicators	Weights	T-values	Correlation with summary item
<u>Functional dimension</u>			
Economical innovativeness	.16	1.2	.11*
Quality of products and services	.25	2.8*	.35*
Competence of national businesses	.10	0.8	.23*
Prosperity and wealth	.17	1.3	.13*
Economic strength of country	-.00	0.0	.15*
Labor markets	.01	0.0	.04
Competences of political leadership	.02	0.1	.38*
Political stability	.18	2.1*	.41*
Infrastructure	.16	2.7*	.22*
Innovativeness in science	.11	2.0*	.24*
Educational opportunities	.10	1.5	.09
Level of education	.00	0.1	.10
<u>Normative dimension</u>			
Environmental protection	.20	1.3	.19*
International social responsibility	.00	0.1	.35*
Respect for other nations	-.00	0.1	.33*
Civil rights	.14	2.1*	.20*
Fairness of international economic and trade policies	.01	1.0	.10
<u>Aesthetic dimension</u>			
Cultural goods	.36	2.4*	.41*
Culinary	.41	2.8*	.33*
History and customs	.23	2.1*	.34*
Landscapes and scenery	.00	.10	.19*

## Results

### Formative Measurement Model Results

**Indicator weights.** As the set of indicators is conceptually connected to the content of the respective constructs (functional, aesthetic, normative), item selection for purposes of increasing reliability is in appropriate (Bollen & Lennox, 1991); instead we interpret the weights of the individual models by sign and magnitude (see Table 2). Given the number of significant indicators, the theoretically postulated relationship between the indicators and the latent variables is only partially supported by the data. The weights themselves indicated that, on the level of the functional dimension, four important factors constitute the overall evaluation of the country's competencies and competitiveness: quality of products and services explains most of the variance of the latent dimension, followed by the factors of political stability and functionality of the infrastructure and innovativeness of science and research country. Regarding the normative dimension of the country, the strength of civil rights was identified as the one central factor in constituting this level of judgment. The dimension comprising the aesthetic judgment of the country is formed by three factors, of which the national culinary is the most important followed by cultural assets and traditions and customs.

**Indicator relevance.** Relevance of indicators can be ascertained by testing for multicollinearity. This is necessary because high collinearity between items increases the standard errors of the coefficients and therefore the significance test of the effects becomes problematic. We use the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which represents the reciprocal tolerance value. Tolerance is ascertained by subtracting the coefficient of determination from 1. The coefficient of determination represents the proportion of the variance of an indicator, which is explained by the other indicators in the construct. Therefore: the stronger the multicollinearity, the greater is the VIF. Entirely independent indicators would lead to a

minimal VIF of 1. Though it is not possible to provide a precise threshold value, it is generally recommended that the value should be close to 1 and not exceed 10 (Bowerman & O'Connell, 2000). The resulting VIF values for each of the three cognitive dimensions in the 4D Model were 1.3 (functional), 1.8 (normative), and 1.4 (aesthetic).

**External validity.** In order to assess the external validity, it is recommended to use an external global measure (summary item) (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). Thus, summary items were included in the survey for each of the formative constructs is recommended (see Table A1). External validity was then assessed by controlling whether the formative indicators of the constructs are significantly and positively correlated with the respective summary item (see Table 1). In the two constructs of the normative and aesthetic dimensions all items are significantly and positively correlated with the respective summary item substantiating external validity. Looking at the functional dimension we see that the majority of the items can support external validity. All in all, the specification of the measurement models can be considered satisfactory.

Table 3

*Indicator loadings and reliability*

Emotional dimension indicators	Loadings
Country fascination	.92***
Emotional appeal for the country	.89***
Country attractiveness	.95***

Significance: \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

### Reflective Measurement Model Results

**Indicator loadings.** The first step in the assessment of the reflective measurement model is to examine which indicator is best explained by the latent construct. This requires

examination of the loadings, which no longer correspond to the regression coefficient, as in the case of the formative models, but rather must be interpreted in principle as loadings in a factor analysis. As such, they should have significant values ideally exceeding 0.7 in order to explain at least 50% of the indicator variance (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All loadings are significantly positive and comfortably above the threshold value with “country attractiveness” best explained by the construct (Table 3).

**Indicator reliability.** Indicator reliability can be assessed simply by looking at the share of the explained variance of the indicator with the weakest loading (Table 3). At 0.89 “emotional appeal” has the weakest loading for the emotional country image dimension. Squaring this value results in an explained variance of at least 79%, which is substantially higher than the threshold value of 50% specified above.

**Internal consistency reliability.** This can be tested for by Cronbach’s alpha as a measure for the homogeneity of a construct. A value of  $>0.7$  is considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). In our case Cronbach’s alpha lies at 0.79. However, as an alternative to Cronbach’s alpha, some researchers recently suggested to draw on tests that do not assume tau-equivalence (Sijtsma, 2009). Accordingly, in addition we assessed composite reliability by using Dillon–Goldstein’s rho. Both tests suggest good reliability well above the suggested threshold value of 0.70 (Table 4).

Table 4

*Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity*

Cronbach’s alpha	.79
Dillon-Goldstein’s rho	.88
AVE	.72

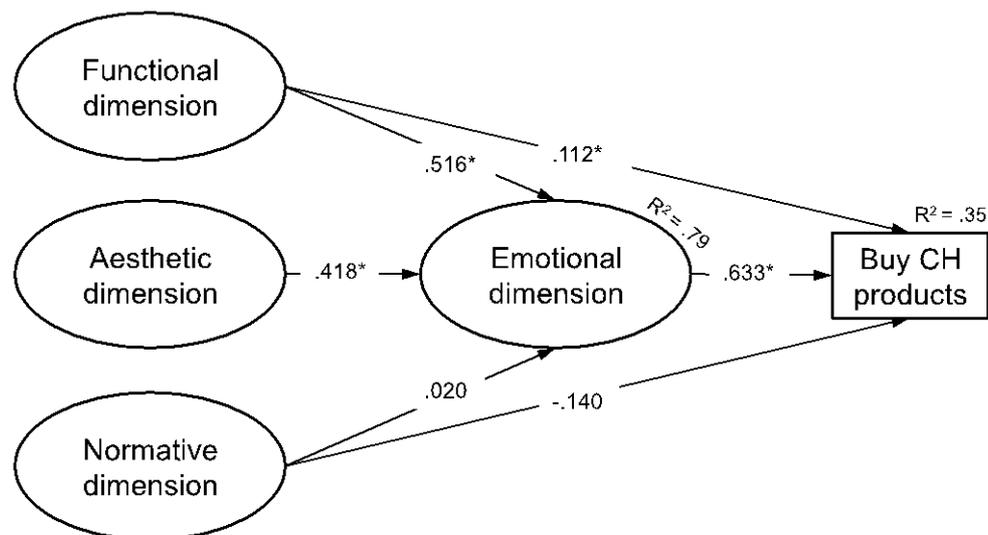


Figure 6. Path model results for the Swiss sample (path coefficients and  $R^2$  values)

**Discriminant validity.** We can assume discriminant validity when the average variance extracted (AVE)—i.e., the shared variance between the indicators and their latent variable—is  $>0.5$  and its square root is greater all correlations between other latent variables in the model (see “Fornell–Larcker Criterion”; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). With an AVE of 0.72 and correlations between the reflective indicators and the other variables in the model at no higher than 0.46, discriminant validity is sufficiently substantiated (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 5

*Cross-correlations*

Reflective items	Aesthetic dimension	Functional dimension	Normative dimension
Country fascination	0.42	0.29	0.40
Emotional appeal for the country	0.46	0.38	0.36
Country attractiveness	0.38	0.30	0.35

### Structural Model Results

Subsequent to the evaluation of the reflective and formative measurement models the structural model needs to be subjected to analysis (see Table 6 for the results in the structural model in both samples and Figs. 6 and 7 for a graphic display of the coefficients for each hypothesized relation between the variables and the R2 values). Results from both samples show that the model is able to explain the endogenous variables very well: while the emotional dimension is explained with around 80% in both cases, the conative target variable attains 35% (Swiss sample) and 46% (German sample) explained variance. In the Swiss sample, all but two of the path coefficients are significant at  $p < 0.50$ . Here the strongest effect is present in the path linking the emotional dimension with the conative variable. There is also a strong effect from the aesthetic dimension onto the emotional dimension, which is consistent with hypothesis 3. Furthermore, while the functional variable's direct effect on the facilitation of the emotional dimension is fairly strong, its direct effect on the conative variable, though significant, is weak. Lastly, only the construct of the normative dimension could not be substantiated as a relevant part of the model in the case of the Swiss sample data (rejecting both H3 and H6).

Table 6

*Path coefficients in the inner model*

Constructs	Swiss sample	German sample
Functional → affective	.52*	.21*
Normative → affective	.02	.21*
Aesthetic → affective	.42*	.50*
Functional → conative	.11*	.22*
Normative → conative	-.14	.11
Affective → conative	.63*	.53*

Significance: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Furthermore, in the case of the German sample, all but one of the path coefficients are significant at  $p < 0.50$ . Here, the strongest effect is also in the path linking the mediating variable of the emotional dimension and the conative variable of intention to buy Swiss products (H5). There is also a manifest effect from the aesthetic dimension onto the emotional dimension (H3). The effect of the normative dimension on the emotional dimension is only slightly stronger than the direct effect of the functional dimension onto the emotional dimension. Even though both of these effects are not particularly strong, they should not be neglected since they show that, apart from aesthetic judgments, the emotional appeal of a country is caused by functional and normative judgments. As the only path, H6 has to be rejected in this model—this is in line with results from a similar model applied to measure corporate reputation (Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2010). The normative dimension's effect, however, just like the aesthetic dimension, is fully mediated by the emotional appeal dimension, while the functional dimension also shows a direct effect onto the conative variable of travel behavior.

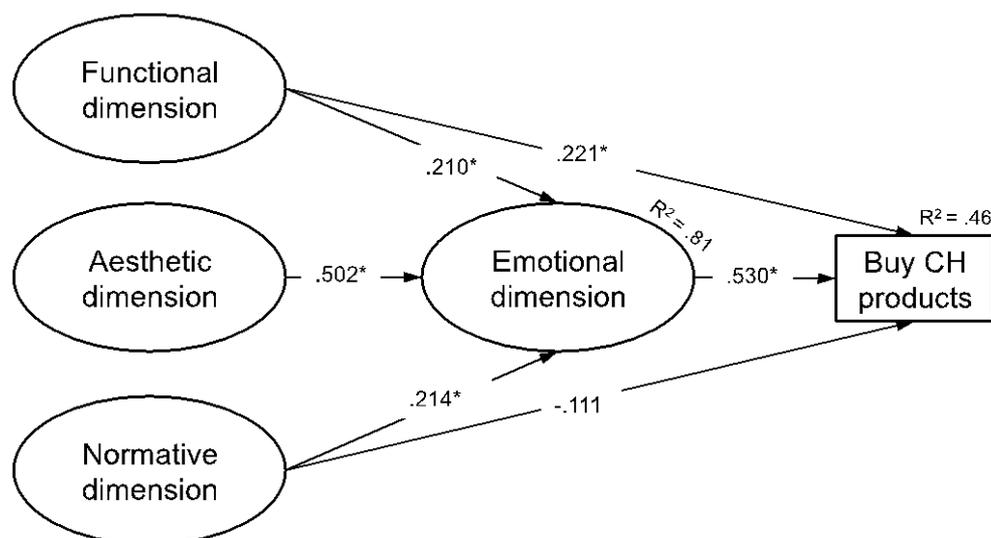


Figure 7. Path model results for the German sample (path coefficients and  $R^2$  values)

## Discussion

### Originality and Value

**Theoretical advances and implications.** It has been argued that conceptual models to analyze and compare the constitution and effects of country images in different groups and contexts are rare. Additionally, there is a segregation of research on country images between the different disciplinary perspectives and a need for integrative studies that can combine and integrate available approaches.

The present study provides a synoptical and interdisciplinary review of advances in conceptualizing country images in business studies (especially marketing), social psychology, political science, and communication science and show how available knowledge from these fields can be interrelated and gainfully applied to inter-national public relations and public diplomacy. Starting from this review, the study combines concepts from national identity theory, attitude theory and reputation management in order to derive an integrative four-dimensional model of the country image. Other than most models, which have been transferred from neighboring domains, the 4D Model not only comprises both cognitive and affective components but clarifies the internal relations of the construct's dimensions.

Due to its integrative character, the model provides a versatile conceptual basis for a variety of further research questions. First, the model's generality allows for analyses of different countries' images in different publics or stakeholder groups. Specifically, through the link to national identity theory, this includes analyses to clarify discrepancies between country self-perceptions (domestic view) on the one hand and the external perceptions (foreign view) on the other.

Second, the conceptual link to attitude theory allows for the specification of the country image as an antecedent of conative variables. Thus, the 4D Model can be applied in analyses of the effects of the country image on behavior. Including variables on intended

behavior regarding political support, travel, cooperation, or investment practices helps to better understand the specific economic, cultural or political implications of the construct. Combined with a comparative perspective on different groups, such analyses can deliver important insights on relevant differences in how the four country image dimensions influence the behavior of central groups such as politicians or investors.

**Advances and implications in measures.** It has been argued that many of the studies available in the domain of international public relations and public diplomacy research that touch on the construct of the country image have a conceptual or historical focus. Other than works in neighboring disciplines (such as marketing or branding, where the development of country image measures is more central) few researchers in inter-national public relations and public diplomacy produce their own conceptually based instruments. The present study operationalizes a generalizable and integrative instrument for measuring country images in international public relations and public diplomacy. The study takes up recent advances from the discourse on measures in the fields of reputation management and transfers them to measures of the country image. As a result, the work proposes a mixed-specified model using both formative and reflective specification for measuring the country image.

**Methodological advances and implications.** Innovating new models for analyzing the constitution and effects of country images in international public relations and public diplomacy involve particular challenges such as limited a priori theoretical information, high numbers of variables, or the necessity of mixed-specified formative and reflective instruments. This study uses variance-based structural equation modeling as a statistical method to handle these challenges. As such, the study also adds to the recent discussion on methods in public relations (Cutler,2004; Everett & Johnston, 2012; Pasadeos, Lamme, Gower, & Tian,2011) and shows how the variance-based approach can be applied to assess

effects within networks of multiple latent and emergent constructs, helping researchers understand image dimensions in amore sophisticated way.

### **Advances and implications for international PR and public diplomacy practice.**

The complex relation between research and practice in public relations and the role of social scientific knowledge for the ‘real world’ of PR are issues of an ongoing debate in the field (e.g., Femers,2009; Grunig & White, 1992; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007). In todays ’research environment, however, the course distinction between basic (scientific) research, applied research, and reflexive research (Signitzer, 1988) does not hold up any more in some cases. This is also true in the case of this study. Though—like any scientific research—it has a descriptive and explanatory focus and cannot provide direct and clear-cut answers for common questions in practice, there remains an element of possible transfer. Mainly this concerns those aspects of the study that can be related directly to questions of measurement evaluation (M&E) in international public relations and public diplomacy. M&E constitutes a cornerstone in the overall process of designing, and implementing communication strategies, and it guides conduct within the whole practical framework between the input and outflow level of communication (Watson & Noble, 2007). Other than in research, where evaluative methods and measures of the country image help to develop a systematic understanding of the constitution of country images and their effects on behavior, practice can use these measures as an evaluative and interpretative basis for the development and implementation of cross-national communication strategies.

### **Limitations**

Though not entirely separable, the limitations of this study can be made explicit by addressing the theoretical framework and model and the empirical approach one by one. In addition to the above assessments of the originality and value, both of these levels of

discussion are necessary to adequately contextualize the presented research and give an adequate picture of the overall contribution.

**Theoretical framework.** Framework From a theoretical standpoint, we can identify three basic limitations that relate to the underlying assumptions behind the developed country image dimensions and the integration of concepts used to specify these dimensions and their structural relations.

First, the model builds on a particular hierarchy of effect between cognition, affect, and conation that is derived from the Standard Learning Hierarchy in attitude formation and its effect on behavior. This hierarchy of effects assumes a somewhat rational process in which what we know about an object (in this case a country) affects how we feel toward this object. This effect is often seen as the “normal case” of the constitution of attitudes (Pelsmacker et al., 2013) and widely used as the basic assumption for the analysis of country images (Bloemer et al., 2009). As noted earlier, however, this hierarchy of effects can vary according to context, such as personal preferences or situational cues (see also Ajzen, 2001). In adhering to this hierarchy of effects, the model shows a certain degree of rigidity in terms of the empirical real-world situation in which personal preferences and situational cues are in constant flux. This limitation manifest specifically in combination with the chosen survey approach, in which such varying contexts cannot be controlled.

Second, next to the attitudinal component mentioned above, the 4D Model combines knowledge from national identity theory (Smith, 1991) and an established models on corporate reputation (Thiessen & Ingenhoff, 2011). As such, it was possible to enrich the conceptual process of image model building by introducing a holistic approach to national identity. Thus the systematization of Smith’s country attributes was matched with the universal dimensions of judgment applied in the reputation model. This theoretical discussion made it possible to identify distinct country image components that are commonly left

unattended in extant models. However, it also brought about an inherent theoretical incommensurability, since both theoretical approaches address the construction of the image object (the country) at different levels: while Smith's ethno-symbolist concept speaks of common or historically generalizable attributes (e.g., in terms of national values, economy, history etc.), Thiessen and Ingenhoff address the image or reputation object through a system of generalizable dimensions as (cognitive and affective) forms of judgment. As such, the matching of certain country attributes with certain country image dimensions (e.g., matching the homeland/territory attributes with the aesthetic country image dimension) remains a choice of the researcher and, to some degree, a conceptual prescription that may 'overwrite' extant empirical realities. To give an example: an individual with a strong professional interest in agriculture may build a country image by matching the attribute of the natural territory of a country with a functional form of judgment, not an aesthetic one.

Third, through integrating and consolidating different conceptual models on attitude, national identity, and reputation the study arrived at a general model that goes beyond the particular focus of extant models in, e.g., marketing or social psychology to serve the more general research interests in international public relations and public diplomacy. As with any theoretical approach, however, this model has an inherent limitation of its generalizability, which is related to its most basic axiomatic assumptions. Specifically, this model—with its differentiation of functional, normative, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions as separate forms of judgment—assumes a particular modern rational worldview and modern forms of consciousness, which are common in social scientific research (for an in-depth discussion see, e.g., Habermas, 1984, pp. 75–142). This means that the model is limited to contexts where this worldview can be seen as serving as the prevalent paradigm. Wherever non-modern, mystical or religious (metaphysical) forms of thought prevail, we cannot assume the applied forms of judgment to constitute the best or even a valid systematization.

**Empirical approach.** Limitations of the empirical approach arise at two basic levels. The first concerns the specific procedure (measures, data situation, statistical tools), the other concerns the general approach (i.e., the general social-scientific empirical procedure).

In terms of the specific procedure, the main limitation of this study concerns the data situation. While the focus of this project was on the theoretical development, operationalization and first empirical application and testing of the new model, the non-representative samples used in the studies pose a significant limitation. Though it was not the proposed aim of this study to achieve validation within a representative setting, such an application would certainly be desirable.

Second, as in any such study, some limitations are rooted in the implicit assumptions behind the specific procedures of social-scientific measurement (Cicourel, 1964). In the case of this study, they relate to the reliance on survey instruments for measurement of attitudes and behavioral intention. The core challenge of such an approach is that people do not always say what they really think or behave in ways that reflect their underlying attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; see also Fazio & Olson, 2003). Inferring underlying attitudes from expressed attitudes or overt behavior may always be unreliable.

## **Conclusion**

### **Summary**

The country image is an important target construct in international public relations and public diplomacy. Under the conditions of a globalized world and the spread of modern media societies a country's image is becoming more important compared to territory access and raw materials when it comes to the cultural, economic, and political competitiveness of nation states in the international system (Gilboa, 2008; Nye, 2004).

While other research domains, such as marketing and social psychology, have devoted considerable attention to the constitution and effects of country images from their

field perspective, in public relations and public diplomacy research there is no widely accepted conceptual model and measurement instrument available. Until now it has remained an open question, how the available concepts from other domains may be gainfully combined to derive, specify, and operationalize a comprehensive model of the country image suitable for analyses in international public relations and public diplomacy. Such a specific model and instrument is needed, however, to clarify the constitution of this central target construct in international public relations and public diplomacy and understand how its different dimensions interrelate and affect each other and how they ultimately lead to the facilitation of favorable behavior.

The present study combines extant approaches from national identity theory and attitude theory with a model from reputation management to derive an integrative four-dimensional model (4D Model) of the country image as a subjective attitude toward a nation and its state, comprising specific beliefs and general feelings in a functional, a normative, an aesthetic and an emotional dimension. Furthermore, the work adds to the debate on methods: in the field by working with mixed-specified formative and reflective constructs and using the PLS SEM approach for analyzing effects between different latent and emergent country image dimensions and behavioral intentions. Subsequently, both model and method were empirically applied in two sets of studies, which, due to the novelty of the model, serve the development and testing of a new model and instrument. The latter is developed successively through semi-structured interviews, expert interviews, and item sorting tasks and is then tested and validated by means of two standardized surveys in Switzerland and Germany.

The results retrieved in this study support the proposed model and underscore the value of measuring the country image as a four-factorial construct comprising both cognitive and affective dimensions. The results (a) demonstrate how functional, normative and aesthetic country image dimensions vary in affecting the formation of the affective country

image component and (b) support the mediating role of the affective component in the country image's effect on behavior.

### **Outlook and Future Directions**

The possible areas of application of a new model of the country image in international relations and public diplomacy are versatile. First of all, as with any new model, it is desirable to approach further options for application that involve representative samples. This would provide a needed further validation. Furthermore, the following two areas of application can be envisioned.

**The effects of country images on behavior and the role of norms.** As demonstrated in this study, country images can be measured and analyzed as attitudinal constructs. Effects of the image are then assessed by analyzing how these attitudes affect different behavioral variables, such as the intention to buy products from a country, travel to a country, politically support a country, investor work in a country. But the constitution and effects of country images can of course be seen in an even wider context. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), intended behavior is affected not only by a person's attitude but also by a person's subjective norms. For example, a person's behavior regarding foreign investment does not only depend on this person's attitude toward a respective country but also on normative predispositions as antecedents of this type of behavior. This would mean that a person which is imbedded in an immediate social setting with a high degree of ethnocentrism may decide not to invest in a neighboring country, even though according to this person's functional judgments, that country's economy rates exceptionally high. The different magnitude to which country images and subjective norms affect people's behavior is still largely unknown (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009).

**Understanding image transfer in crises.** In the field of international public relations and public diplomacy more attention has recently been paid to the complex relations between

the country and sub-country actors (such as corporations, national agencies or other organizations), specifically in cases of crises (Ingenhoff & Buhmann, 2015, 2016b; Wang, 2006a; White, 2014).

It is commonly accepted that corporate crises can significantly damage a corporation's reputation (Coombs, 2007). But when it comes to large corporations, it is not just the corporation's reputation that is at stake: critical actions of these large players attract global media attention and significantly influence how their home country is perceived abroad (Gotsi, Lopez, & Andriopoulos, 2011). As such, these actors can critically influence opinions and attitudes in foreign countries, which, in consequence, can have a far-reaching effect on international political and economic relations (c.f. Gilboa, 2008; Ingenhoff & Ruehl, 2013; Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2008; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006; Zaharna, 2000).

In future research on image transfer in crises, two aspects are of primary interest: first, country image and image transfer need to be understood by analyzing variations of actor associations: since countries are complex macro entities, the way in which sub-country entities such as corporations are associated with their home country can vary greatly, leading to varying effects in processes of crisis attribution. Second, research on country image and image transfer needs to consider buffer effects: the image that a country has prior to a crisis situation may act as an important 'buffer' for how severely a country suffers the reputational spillover when a sub-country entity is publicly accused of misconduct.

*Image transfer and actor associations in crises.* Countries are highly complex and diverse macro entities. Their high diversity poses significant challenges for international public relations and public diplomacy research when it comes to understanding the role of communication and perception in the formation and effects of country images and the cultivation of beneficial relations in the international system (Fan, 2006; Kunczik, 1997; Volcic, 2008; Wang, 2006a, 2008). Due to this complexity, the way in which a country is

cognitively constructed as a social object can vary strongly. People's perceptions of social objects have been shown to vary depending on the focus of the perceiver as well as the context factors of specific situations (Lickel, Hamilton, Wierzchowska, & Uhles, 2000). In international public relations and public diplomacy research, however, this has so far remained a theoretical realization and has not led to the development and specification of an empirical instrument for analyzing differences in country-level actor associations.

An integration of an empirically applicable concept of constructing actor associations can be proposed on the basis of extant research on the perception of collective entities (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, in press; Ingenhoff & Buhmann, 2016b). Here, the degree to which complex social entities are constructed as coherent objects is defined as the respective social objects' entitativity. The construct of entitativity is commonly conceptualized as being based on two interrelated components: the ascription of common surface-level attributes (called "phenotypic entitativity") as well as common inner qualities (called "genotypic entitativity") (e.g., Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001).

According to this approach, the degree to which a country together with its sub-country entities is constructed as a 'uniform entity' will affect how people process information in the case of crises: this applies, e.g., to the degree of organization in the cognitive formation of impressions, the drawing of inferences regarding core characteristics of the entity, the expectance of consistency in its traits and actions, and the need to resolve perceived inconsistencies (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Recent research suggests, for instance, that the higher the perceived entitativity, the more readily and spontaneously do people transfer knowledge or inferred traits between sub-entities and make implicit comparisons between them (Crawford, Sherman, & Hamilton, 2002; Pickett, 2001; Pickett & Perrott, 2004). Thus, in contexts in which a country is constructed as a highly entitative object, the country and its different sub-country entities may become "interchangeable for the

perceiver” (Hamilton, 2007, p. 1088). As such, entitativity can impact dynamics of image transfer between a country and its domestic corporations and national brands. In consequence, constructions of country entitativity become relevant in the case of crises of sub-country entities because entitativity also affects ascriptions of collective responsibility. Lickel, Schmader, and Hamilton (2003), for instance, show that if perceived entitativity is high, sub-entities are held collectively responsible for an act of wrong-doing that may have only been committed by one particular sub-unit. This happens because when entitativity of an entity is high, people tend to assume that other members of the greater collective should have had the capacity to prevent the wrongdoing, or they suspect them of being sympathetic to the act.

*Buffer-effects of country images in crises.* The country image can be expected to serve as an important buffer for how severely a country suffers the reputational spillover when a sub-country entity is publicly accused of misconduct (Matyassy & Flury, 2011). The relation between country images and crises has recently attracted strong attention in international public relations and public diplomacy research (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Chua & Pang, 2012; Dai & Chen, 2014; Peijuan, Ting, & Pang, 2009; Santana, 2004; Wang, 2005). However, these recent efforts remain qualitative and conceptual. Some quantitative insights may be possible by drawing on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). SCCT models how stakeholders’ perceptions of organizational crises impact reputation and how appropriate crises responses can minimize reputational damage (Coombs, 2010). Ultimately, if attributed responsibility is strong, the reputational impact of a crisis is most severe (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002). Also, since crises are always part of a wider pattern of behaviors, a central factor in how severely a crisis may affect an organization’s image or reputation is its image or reputation prior to the crisis (Coombs, 2004). In this sense, a positive prior image or reputation can serve as a buffer (or halo) that protects from severe reputational spillover of a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Transferred to the context of

understanding reputational spillover in the case of countries and the role of the country image, this provokes the question of how a positive country image may or may not ‘cushion’ the severity of crisis effects for a country in case of a preventable crisis of a sub-country entity (see Ingenhoff, Buhmann, White, Zhang, & Kioussis, 2016 for first empirical evidence on this).

## Appendix A

**Table A1. Complete List of Items for Measuring the Country Image**

Item	Dimension	Specification
*This country’s economy is highly innovative.	Functional	Formative
*This country produces high quality products and services.	Functional	Formative
*This country has highly competent businesses.	Functional	Formative
*This country is very wealthy.	Functional	Formative
*This country holds a strong position in the global economy.	Functional	Formative
*The labor markets in this country are equipped with highly competent people.	Functional	Formative
*Competent political officials govern the country.	Functional	Formative
*This country has a very stable political system.	Functional	Formative
*This country has a well-functioning public infrastructure.	Functional	Formative
*This country is highly innovative in science and research.	Functional	Formative
*This country supplies great possibilities for education.	Functional	Formative
*The level of education in this country is very high.	Functional	Formative
This country provides for the safety of citizens and visitors.	Functional	Formative
This country provides well-functioning welfare systems and pension plans	Functional	Formative
This country has a globally influential culture.	Functional	Formative

Item	Dimension	Specification
This country is technologically highly advanced.	Functional	Formative
Athletes and sports teams from this country are internationally known for their success.	Functional	Formative
*This country is very active in protecting the environment.	Normative	Formative
*This country is a socially responsible member of the international community	Normative	Formative
*This country respects the values of other nations and peoples	Normative	Formative
*This country as excellent civil rights	Normative	Formative
*This country acts very fairly in international politics.	Normative	Formative
This country is known for its strong commitment to social issues (e.g. development aid, civil rights).	Normative	Formative
This country has high ethical standards.	Normative	Formative
This country takes responsibility for helping out in international crises.	Normative	Formative
This is a welcoming country	Normative	Formative
This country has a very just welfare system.	Normative	Formative
*This country is home to beautiful cultural assets (e.g. arts, architecture, music, film etc.).	Aesthetic	Formative
*This country has delicious foods and a wonderful cuisine.	Aesthetic	Formative
*This country has a very fascinating history.	Aesthetic	Formative
*This country has beautiful scenery.	Aesthetic	Formative
This country has rich traditions.	Aesthetic	Formative
This country has a lot of preserved nature.	Aesthetic	Formative
This country has lots of charismatic people (e.g. in politics, sports, media etc.).	Aesthetic	Formative
*I like this country.	Emotional	Reflective

Item	Dimension	Specification
*This is an attractive country.	Emotional	Reflective
*The country is fascinating	Emotional	Reflective
If somebody speaks negatively about this country, it bothers me.	Emotional	Reflective
How do you rate the country's competitiveness, its political and economical performance and effectiveness?	Functional	Summary item
How do you rate the integrity of the country, its norms and values (e.g. in civil rights, sustainability, and international politics)?	Normative	Summary item
How do you rate the country in terms of aesthetics, i.e. its beauty and attractiveness as a cultural and scenic space?	Aesthetic	Summary item

*Note:* The above items are translated from the German original. Items that were included in the final analyses after the empirical pretests are marked with an \*.

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