

IDENTITY AS A CORE DIMENSION OF NATION BRANDING: AN ANALYSIS OF MARCA PERÚ'S COMMUNICATION IN ITS FIRST DECADE

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ABSTRACT

In 2009, Peru launched its first nation branding strategy to promote investment, exports, and tourism. This study analyses Marca Perú's communication activities to identify the key factors involved in the construction of its brand identity and to assess, drawing on Villafañe's (2014) framework, whether its narrative and attributes have succeeded in establishing a functional brand code. It examines PromPerú's communication strategy during its first decade (2009–2019) through a qualitative analysis of its communication, grounded in a critical discourse approach and in the interpretative perspective applied to nation branding proposed by Silverman (2015). The analysis enabled the identification and classification of the brand narrative, its attributes, the brand promise, and its tailoring to different stakeholder groups. The findings show that Marca Perú has maintained a distinctive positioning based on its cultural and natural diversity, thereby consolidating a recognisable brand identity. However, the coexistence of two distinct social constructs is evident: one internal, aimed at strengthening a sense of Peruvian identity, and the other external, focused on the country's international projection. The study concludes that, although the narrative of Marca Perú has succeeded in articulating a strong identity, it still faces the challenge of reconciling these two constructs into a unified narrative that consistently delivers on its brand promise, both domestically and internationally.

KEYWORDS

nation branding, nation brand narrative, brand identity, place branding, international public relations

A IDENTIDADE COMO PILAR DO *BRANDING* DE NAÇÕES: ANÁLISE DA COMUNICAÇÃO DA MARCA PERÚ NA SUA PRIMEIRA DÉCADA

RESUMO

Em 2009, o Peru lançou, pela primeira vez, uma estratégia de marca-país visando promover investimento, exportações e turismo. Este estudo analisa as ações de comunicação da Marca Perú, para identificar os fatores-chave na construção da sua identidade de marca e avaliar, a partir da proposta de Villafañe (2014), se a sua narrativa e os seus atributos conseguiram estabelecer um código de marca funcional. Através de uma análise qualitativa da sua comunicação, baseada numa abordagem crítico-discursiva e na perspectiva interpretativa aplicada ao estudo do *branding* nacional proposta por Silverman (2015), examina-se a estratégia comunicacional da PromPerú durante a sua primeira década (2009–2019). A análise permitiu identificar e classificar a narrativa da marca, os seus atributos, a promessa de marca e a sua adaptação a diferentes grupos de interesse. Os resultados evidenciam que a Marca Perú estabeleceu um posicionamento diferenciador baseado na sua diversidade cultural e natural, consolidando uma identidade de marca

reconhecível. Contudo, observa-se a coexistência de duas construções sociais diferenciadas: uma interna, orientada para o fortalecimento do sentido de identidade peruana, e uma externa, centrada na projeção internacional do país. Conclui-se que, embora a narrativa da Marca Perú tenha conseguido articular uma identidade sólida, continua a enfrentar o desafio de conciliar ambas as construções numa narrativa unificada, garantindo a percepção coerente da sua promessa de marca no interior e no exterior do país.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

marca-país, narrativa de marca-país, identidade de marca, *branding* territorial, relações públicas internacionais

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20th century, States have implemented diverse strategies to enhance their international positioning and external perception. Initially, international public relations were employed to consolidate legitimacy and project favourable images abroad (Kunczik, 1997). These practices responded to specific geopolitical imperatives and, in several cases, were closely associated with propaganda, particularly during the periods encompassing the First and Second World Wars (Kunczik, 2002). Within this context, nations constructed ideological narratives to reinforce influence and visibility: France promoted revolutionary nationalism, while Germany articulated its identity through a discourse rooted in traditional romanticism (Olins, 2004).

With the consolidation of globalisation, international positioning strategies gradually shifted from geopolitical communication to a more structured, strategic paradigm: nation branding. This approach expanded the objectives beyond diplomacy to include promoting tourism, attracting investment, and developing export markets (Anholt, 2005). In this framework, the nation brand emerged as a central instrument for managing national identity, integrating communication strategies designed to shape external perceptions and generate competitive advantage. However, despite the widespread adoption of nation branding practices, it remains pertinent to critically examine their capacity to represent national identity coherently and inclusively, particularly in contexts characterised by high levels of cultural and social diversity.

In Latin America, the adoption of nation branding has been gradual (Niesing, 2013). Nevertheless, there remains a limited body of empirical research that systematically analyses how these strategies construct identity narratives and the types of national representations they project over time. In Peru, the implementation of Marca Perú marked a turning point in the country's international image. Unlike other nation branding initiatives, which focus primarily on tourism and commercial promotion, Marca Perú has placed particular emphasis on building a shared cultural identity. Through documentaries, campaigns, and its presence in international productions, it has projected a diverse and attractive image of the country, reinforcing place branding and attracting visitors to both emblematic and emerging destinations.

This study examines how, during its first decade of implementation, Marca Perú evolved from a traditional promotional model into a communication strategy aimed at consolidating an identity narrative, differentiating itself from conventional nation branding practices, and establishing a significant precedent in the region. However, this process has not been exempt from tensions and controversies concerning national identity, which have generated ongoing debates around culture and representation.

1.1. THE EVOLUTION OF NATION BRANDING: DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND COMPETITIVE VALUE

At present, nation branding is studied and managed from a range of disciplinary perspectives, reflecting an evolution in how States seek to construct and project their identities in the global arena. What is now referred to as “nation branding” (Anholt, 2005) has also been examined from the perspective of public diplomacy (Kaneva, 2011), within which two principal approaches can be identified: the American and the European.

The American perspective has focused on the global role of nations, working primarily through soft power oriented toward international relations, reputation, and status within the international community. In contrast, the European perspective has adopted a broader approach, integrating the management of national image and reputation into a wider strategy of international positioning (Kaneva, 2011). As part of this evolution, Kaneva (2011) more recently introduced the concept of “brand-States”, whereby States have shifted from traditional political paradigms towards a postmodern model grounded in image and influence.

It is important to emphasise that, within these approaches, the terms “nation branding” and “place branding” refer to similar processes under different designations. In this regard, Hanna and Rowley (2010) explain that place branding is a strategy aimed at highlighting attributes that countries consider strategically valuable to reinforce positive perceptions and construct favourable imaginaries within the international community. Consequently, these actions do not merely respond to a logic of tourism or commercial promotion, but also seek to align national identity with broader global positioning objectives.

From this perspective, branding is primarily associated with value and image (Aaker, 1996). Although this framework is traditionally associated with companies and products, it also serves as an active component of the nation brand management. Consequently, a country's brand is associated both with its value and its image, as well as with the broader set of strategies developed to strengthen them. For this reason, everything that adds value to a brand may likewise add value to a nation, collectively defined as “brand equity” (Aaker, 1996). From a similar perspective, Kotler (2002) develops an approach centred on place marketing, understood as the set of efforts undertaken by a nation to position itself as the most attractive location for investment. Within this framework, the concept of “place of origin” also emerges, taking on a more practical economic function, as a country's brand image is managed to support the international positioning of products manufactured there. Examples include the labels *made in Germany* and *made in Japan*.

Building upon this premise, Kotler (2002) argues that, even when countries are not consciously managed as brands, external audiences already associate particular meanings and perceptions with the name of a given nation. For Kotler, these associations are precisely what influence decisions related to purchasing, investment, and tourism. Beyond this, Kotler (2002) recommends a deep understanding of a nation's competitive value, which should be translated into a storytelling strategy that resonates with audiences. There should be an overarching strategy (concept) within which various well-resourced activities can be situated, all aligned with the overall strategic framework. The author also emphasises the importance of controlling the brand or product promise to maintain coherence between what is communicated and what is ultimately delivered.

In light of this trajectory — from international public relations to nation branding — brand management increasingly received support from the field of marketing. More recently, however, nation branding has also been approached from a more critical perspective, with academic debates questioning whether advertising and marketing techniques alone are sufficient to determine a country's image, reputation, positioning, and competitiveness (Anholt, 2010, 2020; Govers, 2020; Ind, 2005; Olins, 2004; San Eugenio Vela, 2013). Similarly, place branding, understood in ways comparable to nation branding, has evolved from a simple extension of product branding into a more complex and differentiated concept. It is now recognised for its symbolic and emotional dimensions, as well as for the need to ensure the participation and inclusion of multiple actors (Villafañe, 2014), alongside the articulation of three interrelated dimensions: the symbolic, the cognitive, and the experiential (Kavaratzis, 2009).

1.2. IMAGE, BEHAVIOUR AND PROMISE: NATION BRANDING AND ITS LINK TO REPUTATION

Capriotti (2009) argues that there has been a terminological overlap between corporate communication and concepts associated with marketing. For instance, while “positioning” may be more closely aligned with marketing, image and reputation have traditionally been studied within the field of corporate communication.

As for image, Joan Costa (2009) defines it as a mental representation held by audiences, constructed through multiple factors ranging from perceptions to experiences. Costa argues that the image is an external mental representation of the organisation, although it refers to it and can be shaped or enhanced by it. Hence, the image is situated within social memory, specifically within the audience's working memory. This explains why the image represents an important and complex intangible that nations also seek to manage. In this sense, Costa (2009) recommends focusing on three levels in its analysis: the attributes that compose it, the structure these attributes acquire in individuals' imaginary representations, and its functioning in everyday life.

From this same perspective, Justo Villafañe (2014) conceptualises “behaviour” as what an organisation “does”, for example, in relation to its corporate social responsibility, environmental commitment, and sustainability practices. In the case of a country,

“behaviour” is likewise linked to its actions, such as social policy at the global level, international development cooperation, involvement in conflict resolution, or concrete contributions to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Similarly, any aspect that reflects a particular way of “thinking” and that, in some way, guides a nation’s conduct is associated with what is conceptualised as “culture”. This dimension is expressed internally through identity-related features specific to each nation, shaped and defined by highly complex, context-specific mechanisms and processes that vary across countries. Alongside this, the “brand promise” is defined as those attributes pre-established by the Marca Perú strategy, which, when recognised by target audiences, are expected to generate value or benefits. The brand promise is effective when it aligns with the experience its intended audiences perceive. Through the interplay of “doing”, “thinking” and “promising”, recognition and reputation are constructed — understood as outcomes that may arise from consumer publics of a product or service, but also from relations between nations, shaped by a collective aggregation of individuals and organisations with diverse expectations and varying degrees of alignment with the delivered promise (Santillán-Vásquez, 2016).

1.3. IDENTITY IN NATION BRANDING FROM REPUTATION THEORY

Villafañe (2014) proposes, for the management of a nation brand (as well as for its analysis), a methodology centred on what he terms the “brand code”. For the author, the variables of the brand code include brand identity, the identity message, the value proposition, and strategic positioning (Villafañe, 2013). Villafañe (2015) argues that a nation brand should be based on a dominant idea that can be used to reach target publics in the tourism, business, cultural, or political sectors. It is precisely this dominant idea of a country that should, ideally, correspond to reality under a principle of coherence that involves two dimensions:

- the dominant idea must be grounded in the nation’s identity;
- the validity of that identity must be coherent and applicable to all of the country’s stakeholders.

According to Villafañe (2014), a nation’s identity is linked to a “social construct” that, in the case of nations, has always been difficult to define and that should ideally be shaped by members of society themselves, who participate in an internal culture constituted in relation to the very object being defined. This perspective reinforces the relevance of the present study, as it enables a deeper understanding of what occurs when analysing nation branding from the author’s theoretical standpoint.

For Villafañe (2014), the social construct may be composed of:

- Signifiers: a set of empirical observations, including geostrategic, historical, cultural, economic, sociopolitical, and globalisation-related signifiers;
- Universes of meaning: a set of attributes that determine the positive or negative positioning of a nation, linked to different scales of attractiveness, whether personal or functional;
- A repertoire of basic assumptions about a nation: a distinction is made here between basic assumptions and argumentative logics, which relate to the evolution of a country’s image and its brand projection, as derived from findings in various scientific studies.

Villafañe (2014) argues that a nation brand must articulate a promise grounded in national identity and aligned with the expectations of its different stakeholders, such as tourists, investors, or international students. This identity is usually structured around a central attribute that serves as the axis of strategic positioning, complemented by other attributes that configure a set of meanings associated with the brand. The aim is for these elements to be recognised by stakeholder groups and, insofar as possible, validated by the country's reality, enabling assessment of both the degree of coherence between identity, value proposition, and positioning, and the level of recognition of the promise by its audiences.

Consequently, the condition for a nation brand success lies in achieving a clear brand identity (reality) and an unambiguous country promise. At a secondary but equally important level, this promise must align with the country's behaviour (doing) and culture (thinking). In the case of nations, this is referred to as the "social construction of identity". The next step is for internal publics who share the same nationality, culture, or territory to adopt or internalise their nation branding identity (Villafañe, 2014).

2. METHODOLOGY

In 2009, Peru launched its first nation branding strategy, aimed at promoting investment, exports, and tourism to the country. The present study seeks to describe nation branding communication actions and identify the factors involved in the construction of brand identity (Villafañe, 2014). A critical discourse analysis approach is adopted, following the methodological perspective outlined by Silverman (2015). This analysis identified, categorised, and interpreted the narrative elements in Marca Perú's communication actions, including the brand narrative, identity attributes, value proposition, and brand promise. In the Peruvian case, particular attention was given to whether the brand narrative and expressed attributes succeed in establishing a "functional brand code".

Accordingly, a descriptive, qualitative analysis was conducted of Marca Perú's communication actions and their distribution channels over the first 10 years of implementation. This approach aims to identify and classify the brand narrative as an instrumentalised discourse, its constitutive attributes, its value proposition, its articulated and re-signified brand promise, and its differentiation across stakeholder groups. This procedure allows for identifying how differential positioning was managed, how brand identity was communicated through the brand message, and how this contributed to a shared social construct, as proposed by Villafañe (Santillán-Vásquez, 2016). The study adopts a qualitative longitudinal case study design (2009–2019), enabling the observation of the evolution of the brand narrative and communicated attributes throughout the first decade of implementation of the Marca Perú strategy.

Specifically, the methodological framework is grounded in the analysis of communication actions understood as nation branding or place branding practices. This perspective is supported by reputation theory (Villafañe, 2013, 2014, 2015), as well as its

application to the study of Marca España (2014), further detailed in a subsequent interview on this work (Santillán-Vásquez, 2016).

The case study addresses the following specific objectives:

- to describe the main communication actions of Marca Perú and the channels used, both in external communication and in domestic outreach, throughout its first 10 years of implementation;
- to identify, within this description, the components used in the construction of a brand code, characterise the narrative, and examine how it constructs brand identity;
- to identify the characteristics of the brand promise, value proposition, and its articulation across different stakeholder groups, thereby determining the underlying social construct and expressed attributes.

This is a descriptive analysis, from a socio-cultural perspective, of the key stages in nation branding management and how they align with nation branding's objectives. The analysis focuses in particular on communication actions, channels, and messages, with special emphasis on the evolution of the nation branding proposition across stages and campaigns over the first 10 years of implementation (2009–2019), up to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The analytical *corpus* consists of institutional communication materials, promotional campaigns, official documents, public interviews with officials, and other content available through documentary sources and digital platforms associated with the Marca Perú strategy. Information retrieved from public transparency portals of governmental organisations was also included.

3. RESULTS

3.1. COMMUNICATION ACTIONS PRECEDING THE LAUNCH OF THE NATION BRANDING PROJECT

According to the official Marca Perú website, the nation branding project, as it is currently known, began its implementation in July 2009. From the outset, the aim was to develop differentiated messages targeted at both internal and external audiences with distinct profiles and expectations (FutureBrand, n.d.). The nation branding project was led from its inception by the Commission for the Promotion of Peru for Export and Tourism (PromPerú; Silverman, 2015); however, at different stages, other institutions were also involved, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ProInversión. The initial positioning scenarios focused on tourism and exports, with investment attraction subsequently incorporated as a third pillar. These elements laid the foundations for a narrative of national identity, intended to support the strategic objectives established by the nation branding initiative in its initial phase.

However, this narrative also takes into account the pre-launch phases of the Marca Perú project, which were preceded by the following campaigns:

- 2003–2007: *Pack Your Six Senses* — this campaign sought to transform the country into an experience engaging all senses: smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight. The aim was to communicate Peru as an experience beyond the five senses. Key advertising terms included “discover”, “unique”, and “wonders”;
- 2008–2010: *Live the Legend* — in this phase, a stronger emphasis on experiential promotion is evident, particularly through the call to action embedded in the slogan, which explicitly invites audiences to experience the country: “this place exists. Peru. Live the legend” (Silverman, 2015).

Building on these precedents, the development of the Marca Perú strategy unfolded over 15 months. It was officially launched on 10 March 2011 at the International Tourism Fair in Berlin — one of the largest tourism fairs in the world — with the presentation of a new logo replacing the previous one (Silverman, 2015).

3.2. MARCA PERÚ (2011–2012): CONSTRUCTION OF THE NARRATIVE AND BRAND IDENTITY

At the beginning of the branding process, a visual identity was developed and subsequently validated through consultation with experts and professionals. A new logo was introduced, featuring a design entirely different from previous iterations, characterised by bold, minimalist, and distinctive colours rooted in symbols of Peruvian culture. The sequence in which the logo is formed allows us to see how a continuous line gradually builds up the graphic symbol until it forms the word “Peru”. This visual device suggests a narrative of discovery and identity-building, in which the brand emerges from a line inspired by references to ancient Peruvian iconography. The spiral serves as a central symbolic element and articulates dimensions such as cultural memory, historical continuity, dynamism and contemporary projection.

To strengthen the narrative, “brand ambassadors” were introduced — an honorary title progressively bestowed on various public figures in Peruvian society. These are prominent individuals in public life who stand out in fields related to national identity, such as music, film, fashion, sport, literature, and gastronomy. The inclusion of these figures in Marca Perú campaigns has been considered a key component of actions primarily aimed at internal publics, as it fostered greater citizen identification with a shared national identity. At the same time, a licensing scheme was introduced, enabling both Peruvian and foreign companies wishing to use Marca Perú's distinctive elements to obtain permission to do so. The purpose was to allow companies whose commercial activities promote Peru to use the brand's visual identity and contribute to a shared national identity. By the end of 2018, more than 700 companies across various sectors had obtained such licensing (Grupo Imagen SAC, 2016; Herrera Sánchez, 2018).

A few months later, still under the direction of PromPerú, and through the same FutureBrand team, one of the most significant steps in Peru's nation branding strategy was undertaken. For this purpose, FutureBrand commissioned McCann-Erickson WorldGroup to develop a campaign that was considered a milestone, achieving greater international visibility. This phase also, for the first time, triggered a broader public debate in Peruvian society about national identity and the concept of nation branding.

3.3. PHASE 1: STRENGTHENING THE BRAND NARRATIVE AND CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY ATTRIBUTES

Between 2011 and 2012, several short documentaries aimed at internal publics were produced. In addition to presenting the new national symbols, these productions sought to strengthen a sense of belonging, grounded in characters and diverse elements

of Peruvian culture, enabling audiences to identify with them. It is at this stage that the nation branding strategy can be seen to prioritise communication directed specifically towards internal publics.

The documentary *Peru, Nebraska* was the first of these productions and accumulated hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube. The audiovisual piece was filmed in the United States, in a town named Peru, to which well-known Peruvian public figures travelled while bringing elements of Peruvian culture with them (Marca Perú, 2011). Various aspects of “Peruvian identity” are presented and, when relocated to a different context, seek to generate a sense of pride in national culture through humorous situations. This audiovisual proposal undoubtedly constitutes a milestone not only in the country’s cinematic and advertising history but also as a key moment marking the beginning of what Marca Perú would become in subsequent years.

Following the same audiovisual approach, a second short documentary was produced, this time filmed in Loreto, Italy, where other figures from Peruvian social and cultural life travelled, bringing aspects representative of Peruvian culture (Marca Perú, 2012c). It is worth noting that the context in which this second documentary emerged was already removed from the surprise factor that characterised the first production. As a result, it did not achieve the same impact as the initial version and was received far more critically by broad sectors of Peruvian society.

3.4. COMMUNICATION DIRECTED AT EXTERNAL PUBLICS AND THE PROJECTION OF THE BRAND PROMISE: *PERÚ, IMPERIO DE TESOROS ESCONDIDOS* AND 2032 (2012)

In 2012, a three-minute documentary-style advertising spot entitled 2032 (Marca Perú, 2012b) was launched for external publics. The audiovisual production helped project the new Marca Perú to international audiences. The message developed for this campaign centred on the idea that Peru is a life-changing experience. This was aligned with the slogan used in a parallel campaign promoted across 16 countries, which also continued throughout 2013: *Perú, Imperio de Tesoros Escondidos* (Peru, Empire of Hidden Treasures). What distinguished the advertising spot 2032 was its strong nostalgic and testimonial elements, and the fact that, given its duration and narrative style, it resembled a film sequence more than a conventional advertisement. The production was directed by Claudia Llosa, who had received the Golden Bear in Berlin months earlier for her film *La Teta Asustada* (The Milk of Sorrow).

3.5. PHASE 2: STRENGTHENING BRAND IDENTITY — *MÁS PERUANO QUE* AND *REPRESENTANTES DE LO NUESTRO* (2013–2016)

Other campaigns launched during 2013–2016 were again directed primarily at internal publics. One of these was the campaign *Representantes de lo Nuestro* (Representative of What Is Ours), which encouraged individuals to become representatives of “Peruvian identity” by registering on a website specifically created for this purpose (<https://peru.info/es-pe/marca-peru/detalle-campanas/4/representantes-de-lo-nuestro>). The campaign’s

dynamic consisted of encouraging participants to commit to the brand and share their experiences of “Peruvian identity” through photographs and stories (Marca Perú, 2013).

Subsequently, in 2015, another campaign aimed at reinforcing the brand idea among internal publics was launched under the title *Más Peruano que* (More Peruvian Than). The campaign sought to highlight reasons to take pride in being Peruvian by presenting cases of foreigners who had incorporated elements of Peruvian identity into their everyday lives, professional work, or culture. The format adopted was once again documentary and testimonial. Initially, three documentaries were produced, followed later by two additional productions. These campaigns particularly sought to strengthen audience participation on social media through the hashtag #MásPeruanoQue (Marca Perú, 2015).

3.6. INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND THE POSITIONING OF PERUVIAN IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF GASTRONOMY AND TOURISM IN NATION BRANDING

While campaigns targeting internal publics were being implemented, Peru simultaneously participated in various international events, including thematic fairs on textiles, organic food, and tourism, as well as international film festivals. Commercial roadshows and Perú Day celebrations on Wall Street in the United States complemented these initiatives. At this stage, Peru's international positioning had intensified, with gastronomy emerging as its central component. This attribute received extensive coverage in international media, which helped amplify the nation branding narrative.

In 2017, the online platform NewWorlder (<https://www.newworlder.com>) released a series of five-minute short videos featuring prominent representatives of Peruvian gastronomy. The aim was to connect gastronomy with culture through testimonial narratives from around the world. This further reinforced the international positioning of Peruvian cuisine, which by 2017 had already achieved significant global recognition. In the same year, the Netflix series *Chef's Table* dedicated an episode to one of the leading figures of Peruvian cuisine, Virgilio Martínez Romero. These are instances of earned media content that strengthened the visibility of gastronomy as an identity attribute of Marca Perú.

Also in 2017, through owned media channels, a stronger emphasis on external publics became evident, explicitly reflected in the campaign *Peru, The Richest Country*, which, in a clear advertising language, highlights the country's wide diversity of tourist attractions. To support this campaign, the official tourism portal Peru.Travel (<https://www.peru.travel/perutherichestcountry/usa/#home>) included a dedicated section featuring downloadable materials, such as videos, logos, posters, and style manuals, aimed at standardising the use of visual identity across different regions and even other countries.

In the same year, additional campaigns aimed at strengthening national identity were launched, including *Intercambiados* (Exchanged), *El Sabor de la Victoria* (The Taste of Victory), and *Maletas del Perú* (Suitcases of Peru), all of which contributed to this objective and received awards and recognition within the advertising industry. Marca Perú campaigns are regularly documented on the official portal: <https://peru.info/es-pe/marca-peru/campanas>.

3.7. COMMUNICATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF INVESTMENT AND EXPORTS: THE VALUE PROPOSITION FOR THE WORLD

While the analysis has shown that the main emphasis of the brand message is to promote Peru as a tourism destination, the other objectives — namely the promotion of exports and investment — were not neglected. To strengthen Peru's international presence, Peruvian Trade Offices abroad were established to foster commercial relations and conduct studies to identify investment and tourism opportunities. In addition, these offices promote Peru as a country with a diverse export offering, highlighting its value proposition through various strategic activities and platforms (Comisión de Promoción del Perú para la Exportación y el Turismo, 2025).

According to Daniel Caverro, head of press at PromPerú, Marca Perú's participation is primarily focused on advertising, press trips, participation in tourism fairs, and participation in export trade fairs.

3.8. IDENTITY NARRATIVE AND VALUE PROPOSITION IN NATION BRANDING COMMUNICATION

Since its launch, Marca Perú has used its own communication channels, primarily two websites aligned with its narrative and visual identity: Peru Info (<https://peru.info/es-pe/>), oriented towards general communication of the nation brand, and Peru Travel (<https://www.peru.travel/es-pe/>), focused on promoting the country as a tourism destination. Both portals have disseminated the main messages and campaigns of the nation branding strategy.

In the case of Peru Info, content related to the broader objectives of Marca Perú beyond tourism has been included, such as foreign trade, investment, gastronomy, and, since 2019, the theme of "talent", highlighting successful Peruvians in fields such as the arts, culture, sports, fashion, and innovation. Its social media channels have also disseminated these key nation branding themes, targeting both internal and external publics, as reflected in content produced in English and other languages.

3.9. PHASE 3: EVOLUTION OF BRAND CONSTRUCTION, NARRATIVES, AND NEW ATTRIBUTES IN THE VALUE PROPOSITION

It is important to note that in 2017 and 2018, Marca Perú began to incorporate themes that had not previously been addressed. While the initial focus was on cultural heritage, tourism attractions, and gastronomic strengths, from 2016 onwards, the emphasis of communication gradually expanded to other areas. Since 2017, the nation branding has positioned Peruvian fashion as a key element, highlighting not only design but also the high quality of the raw materials used in production. Communication efforts sought to foreground Peruvian Pima cotton, as well as alpaca and vicuña fibres. In addition, in response to the global trend towards healthy food consumption, rising market demand, and Peru's agricultural potential, the promotion of organic and sustainable food products, particularly those with high nutritional value, also gained prominence. This was framed through the term already circulating among European consumers: "superfoods".

Furthermore, increasing attention was given to cinema and sport. In the film sector, Peru has sought to position itself as a destination for audiovisual productions. For this purpose, the Film Commission was tasked with managing participation in international festivals and promoting film production and advertising shoots in Peruvian territory. A dedicated section on the Peru Info website provides details on productions that have taken place, including international brands such as Samsung, Apple, Kia, and Audi. Regarding sport, Marca Perú also incorporated prominent athletes into its communication strategy, not only to showcase sporting success but also to strengthen national belonging and civic pride. For the same purpose, from 2017 onwards, the Marca País communication strategy also placed particular emphasis on talent in other areas, including innovation, music, the arts, and culture. This demonstrates that the brand message has progressively diversified in line with institutional objectives, adding value to the nation brand while addressing both internal and external publics.

3.10. OWNED AND MASS MEDIA IN BRAND PROMOTION

Throughout the phases described above, brand communication generated online conversation through content shared by Marca Perú on its social media platforms. A monitoring of hashtags used during this period identified that the conversation was associated with keywords such as “visit”, “biodiversity”, “gastronomy”, “conservation”, “forests”, “Cusco”, “adventure”, “Machu Picchu”, “culture”, and “products”, among others. The countries with the highest levels of engagement were, after Peru, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as neighbouring countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Colombia¹.

At the same time, the Peruvian Trade Offices abroad maintained a narrative more strongly focused on exports, tourism promotion, and investment attraction, carrying out an average of approximately 15 activities per quarter, as is the case with the Peruvian Trade Office in Hamburg, Germany². Similarly, the Sub-Directorate for the International Promotion of Export Supply, the unit responsible for promoting exports domestically and internationally, conducted 72 international promotion activities in 2017, including trade fairs, buyer missions, and business-matching events. This was complemented by more than 163 activities organised by the Sub-Directorate for Export Development during the same year (PromPerú, 2017). All these communication efforts appear to align with a single narrative that not only promotes tourism, investment, and exports but also integrates identity-based components to reinforce the country's positioning and add value to its brand proposition in the global arena.

¹ Using the Keyhole tool, three selected hashtags from March 2019 were analysed. Data were collected over five days from a randomly selected week within that month. Keyhole retrieves data from social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram, as well as from news websites and online forums. The three hashtags selected for analysis were #Peru, #VisitPeru, and #PeruTheRichestCountry.

² The communication activities of the Peruvian Trade Offices abroad are documented on the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism's website (<https://transparencia.mincetur.gob.pe>). However, updated information is not available; as of March 2019, the most recent report corresponds to the second quarter of 2016.

Alongside the actions undertaken by the aforementioned institutions, the nation brand message was also communicated through more direct channels, such as participation in major international fairs and, in recent years, through Casa Perú (Peru.info, n.d.). The latter initiative sought to create a more immersive experience for audiences, as was evident in South Korea, the United States, and Russia, where Casa Perú installations were deployed to showcase the distinctive elements of Marca Perú. Casa Perú was first introduced in Gangneung (South Korea) as a small-scale installation located in a strategic area during a major international event with high foreign attendance, namely the Winter Olympic Games (January 2018). It was subsequently presented at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, United States (March 2018). It reached its largest scale during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia (July–August 2018).

These initiatives marked an important milestone in promotional techniques by enabling direct, experiential engagement with audiences and offering samples of Peruvian gastronomy, music, dance, fashion, and other cultural expressions. This type of international presence continued in subsequent years; however, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly interrupted these activities and forced a rethinking of the communication strategy.

The review of the main communication actions of Marca Perú over its first 10 years shows that the “differentiated” brand promise (Villaña, 2014) — understood as a differentiated value proposition adapted to distinct stakeholder groups — is, in the Peruvian case, primarily directed towards two segments: internal publics (Peruvians) and external publics (tourists and investors). Specifically, the brand promise is addressed to potential tourists and Peruvian citizens without significant subsegmentation, and to foreign companies and investors, albeit with relatively limited subsegmentation (Table 1).

STAKEHOLDERS (INTEREST GROUPS)	BRAND PROMISE DIFFERENTIATION
Tourists: segment-based, redefined, and strategically reoriented to emerging opportunities; includes developing the tourism offer by empowering internal publics.	A multifaceted and captivating country, offering tailored experiences according to specific interests. Peru is not a jewel, it is a chest, a cupboard full of small drawers.
Foreign companies: targeted at foreign companies to offer a wide range of Peruvian products, and also invited domestic firms to join an “export group”.	Specialist, interesting opportunities, quality products.
Investors: segmented groups of potential investors in the most attractive sectors of the Peruvian economy.	Specialist, interesting opportunities.
Peruvian citizens: through various campaigns, segmented by representativeness as Marca Perú carriers or engaged publics.	“Todos hacemos Perú” (We all make Peru) — Peru is a major brand, and we are all called to be its ambassadors.

Table 1. Brand promise differentiation (Marca Perú)

In the final years of nation branding management (2018–2019), additional stakeholder groups were incorporated, such as those seeking new film locations, as well as audiences interested in “superfoods”, organic products, and Peruvian Pima cotton. Regarding internal publics, the differentiation of the brand promise also extended to artists and athletes. This line of activity was resumed in 2022 following the extended pandemic period.

The 10-year review of nation branding management allows for the identification of a “brand code” (Villafaña, 2014), composed of identity, which translates into the value proposition and defines a distinctive positioning. This represents a transversal “brand code” across all communication actions, emphasising a multifaceted, diverse offer associated with warm, captivating people (Table 2).

BRAND IDENTITY	VALUE PROPOSITION	DIFFERENTIATED POSITIONING
Multifaceted, diverse.	A diverse country with cultural plurality in gastronomy, folklore, and criollo traditions.	Peruvian warmth: welcoming, affectionate, captivating.

Table 2. Brand code: brand Identity, value proposition and differentiation positioning

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The identity narrative of Marca Perú has been the central axis of its construction and projection, seeking to consolidate a storyline that reinforces the country's diversity and authenticity as distinctive elements. This narrative aimed to articulate what Peru represents and how this identity translates into a unique experience for those who visit, invest in, or consume its products. In this regard, and as observed throughout the analysis, the message aligns with its initial framing: a brand promise based on a diverse, attractive, and positive nation, intended to position the country as an appealing destination for investment, tourism, and exports (FutureBrand, n.d.).

In this sense, the identity-building attributes identified over 10 years of brand management point to this diversity: “there is a Peru for everyone” (Marca Perú, 2012a). Consequently, the brand narrative seeks to highlight natural diversity, authenticity, and a wide range of globally unique attractions. The promise lies in the idea that, through a multiplicity of cultural and natural offerings, each visitor to Peru — regardless of purpose — can find what they are looking for.

This is consistent with Anholt (2005, 2010), who argues that nation branding is based on the strategic selection and amplification of cultural, historical, and economic elements capable of generating positive associations, with the aim of projecting a coherent and competitive image in the global arena.

In this regard, it is possible to affirm that over 10 years, this objective has been pursued consistently. However, this does not necessarily mean that it has been perceived or internalised coherently by all members of society. This observation, noted by Kaneva (2011), is consistent with the critique that nation branding does not always produce

homogeneous social appropriation, since the brand narrative designed by institutions may differ from the multiple identity interpretations present within society.

Within this context, the elements of the brand code were primarily oriented towards a value proposition centred on tourism, exports, and investment, in line with the logic of place marketing, which aims to position territories to attract visitors, capital, and economic opportunities (Kotler, 2002). However, the brand promise was largely grounded in natural and cultural attributes, with a particular emphasis on tourism attractions, while leaving aside other social and identity-related components.

Overall, it can be concluded that, in its initial phase, Marca Perú placed strong emphasis on cultural heritage. This asset had already proven effective in promoting Peru as a tourism destination. The more complex challenge was promoting Peru as a country with strong export potential, which did not depend solely on the nation branding managers, but also the development of exportable products. Nevertheless, efforts were made to channel and articulate this potential into brand messages that, over time, enabled the inclusion of new export categories. This process confirms Aaker's (1996) view on the strategic value of brand equity, insofar as the construction of positive associations around country-of-origin products enhances the symbolic value of the brand as a whole.

It is also possible to conclude that, unlike in other countries, particular attention was given to a strategic narrative for the brand code directed at Peruvian citizens. Although the initial intention was not explicitly to embed national identity, this dimension was progressively developed, particularly through the notion of Peruvian identity. This approach aligns with Villafañe (2014), who argues that nation brand construction requires a brand code capable of connecting strategic identity with internal and external publics, ensuring that the brand narrative is socially recognised and legitimised.

The "social construct" (Villafañe, 2014) and its attributes were strengthened from 2017 onwards, when new themes were incorporated into Marca Perú communication, including Peruvian talent, fashion, music, film, sports, art, culture, and innovation. The extent to which audiences have effectively internalised these new attributes remains an open question for future research.

The coherence of the "dominant idea", as defined by Villafañe (2013), is reflected in the intention to ensure that the message projected internationally by Marca Perú aligns with the reality and experience intended domestically. The underlying objective is to positively influence tourist satisfaction, insofar as visitors are expected to perceive a correspondence between promise and perceived reality (Capriotti, 2009). This explains the sustained effort to communicate the brand code internally within the country. The particular emphasis that nation branding places on differentiating its brand promise for internal publics may represent a distinctive feature that reinforces its core strategic axis, contrasting with practices observed in other national contexts. This also highlights the need for deeper empirical research on the relationship between brand promise and visitor experience, particularly regarding tourist satisfaction in Peru.

It can also be argued that, although the Marca Perú had a strong commercial component from the outset, it also came to contribute to a broader societal debate on the meaning of Peruvianness, national identity and the country brand itself, becoming part of the repertoire of basic assumptions about a nation. This interpretation is based on the interview with Villafañe, particularly his reflections on the hegemonic, dynamic and emerging identity of the country brand and on the role of attributes embedded in the social imagination (Santillán-Vásquez, 2016, p. 179). In this regard, it is also important to distinguish between “brand identity” and “cultural identity”, the latter being a dynamic construct subject to continuous evolution and redefinition. These are, fundamentally, distinct concepts.

Identity is embedded in the social imaginary and is shaped, adjusted, and transformed according to the attributes that become associated — or disassociated — with it. In the case analysed, the intended identity (as projected by the sender) is associated with natural beauty, gastronomy, and biodiversity. These three elements, therefore, constitute the primary differentiating factors of the brand proposition. However, it may be questioned whether the dominant idea has sufficiently incorporated other identity dimensions intrinsic to the country, such as literature, diverse musical expressions (both traditional and contemporary), folklore, crafts, and prominent visual artists and intellectual figures.

Based on these findings, it is evident that the construction of a nation brand identity in the Peruvian case does not correspond to a single, homogeneous narrative, but rather to the coexistence of two differentiated social constructs: one shaped internally and the other formed through external perception. However, the findings suggest that Marca Perú has successfully projected the values it seeks to be associated with, while still facing the challenge of reconciling these two social constructions into a unified, functional narrative.

In this sense, the trajectory of nation branding — from its origins in international public relations to its evolution towards reputation management and strategic differentiation — allows for the identification of this identity duality and the complexities involved in its integration into the collective imaginary. Nevertheless, beyond analytical and managerial approaches, it is important to acknowledge that national identity and culture cannot be fully defined by nation branding alone. Instead, they should be understood as dynamic constructions emerging from the interaction between communication practices, social perception, and the ongoing evolution of the nation within the global context.

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

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Submitted: 16/09/2025 | Accepted: 20/03/2026



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