



**Faculty of Legal Sciences**

**School of International Studies**

Analysis of the Country Brand “Ecuador Brilla  
Auténticamente”

**Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor’s Degree in  
International Studies**

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I dedicate this work to my grandparents: Melania,  
Elvia, Segundo, and Enrique.

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## **Analysis of the Country Brand “Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente”**

### **ABSTRACT**

¿How can a nation project radiance while suffering one of its most profound energy crisis? This research unravels the paradox of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” nation brand, evaluating its actual capacity to galvanize tourism, investment, and exports within a global environment of volatile perceptions. Grounded in the concepts of competitive identity and soft power, the study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, based on the triangulation of data between the official regulatory framework and in-depth interviews with experts from the public, private and academic sectors. The findings reveal a structurally fragile governance, a concerning operational invisibility across state platforms, and a seismic dissonance between the “Light” narrative and the national reality of insecurity and energy crisis. The evidence demonstrates that the brand operates under a promotional-tourist bias that ignores the ministerial synergy required to attract capital, limiting its impact to an aesthetic and transient dimension that dilutes before the presidential image of the day. Given this scenario, the work proposes a critical roadmap: the legal shielding of the brand to protect it from political volatility and its refoundation as an autonomous State policy that allows Ecuador, finally, to compete with authenticity and solvency in the international system.

**Keywords:** international trade, competitiveness, Ecuador, cultural identity, brand image, foreign investment, tourism.

## **Análisis de la Marca País “Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente”**

### **RESUMEN**

¿Cómo puede una nación proyectar brillo en medio de una de sus mayores crisis energéticas? Esta investigación desentraña la paradoja de la marca país “Ecuador brilla auténticamente”, evaluando su capacidad real para dinamizar el turismo, las inversiones y las exportaciones en un entorno global de percepciones volátiles. Bajo los conceptos de identidad y poder blando, el estudio emplea una metodología cualitativa de carácter descriptivo, fundamentada en la triangulación de datos entre el marco normativo oficial y entrevistas a profundidad con expertos de los sectores públicos, privado y académico. Los hallazgos revelan una gobernanza estructuralmente frágil, una preocupante invisibilidad operativa en las plataformas estatales y una disonancia sísmica entre la narrativa de “Luz” y la realidad nacional de inseguridad y crisis energética. La evidencia demuestra que la marca opera bajo un sesgo promocional-turísticos que ignora la sinergia ministerial necesaria para atraer capitales, limitando su impacto a una dimensión estética y transitoria que se diluye ante la imagen presidencial de turno. Ante este panorama, el trabajo plantea una hoja de ruta crítica: el blindaje legal de la marca para protegerla de la volatilidad política y su refundación como una política de Estado autónoma que permita al Ecuador, finalmente, competir con autenticidad y solvencia en el sistema internacional.

**Palabras clave:** comercio internacional, competitividad, Ecuador, turismo, identidad cultural, imagen de marca, inversión extranjera

## INTRODUCTION

In a deeply interconnected global environment characterized by globalization that accelerates competition at an ever-increasing pace, the relevance of nations no longer rests solely on their territorial extension, but rather on their capacity to manage a robust Competitive Identity before the world. When a country neglects its external image, it risks falling into irrelevance or allowing external perceptions to define its reality. Consequently, Nation Branding has consolidated as a fundamental strategic asset to differentiate a nation and generate the necessary trust to attract international interest. This research analyzes this phenomenon within the Ecuadorian context, focusing on its most recent iteration: “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” (Ecuador Shines Authentically).

The objective of this research is to examine whether Nation Brand management in Ecuador is conducted as a genuine State policy with a long-term vision, or if its execution has been subordinated to propaganda interests that are renewed with each administration. To guide this analysis, the study is founded upon the following inquiries and objectives:

The present study is articulated around the general overarching question of how the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand is configured and perceived, seeking to decipher the critical factors that influence its positioning and competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. From this central question, specific inquiries emerge to guide the investigation: the first examines the process of creation and institutional development of the brand; the second seeks to define the attributes and identity elements that compose it; and the third is oriented toward identifying which strategic aspects require strengthening to consolidate its global presence. This analytical structure allows the Nation Brand to be addressed not merely as a graphic design, but as a complex and dynamic intangible asset.

Accordingly, the general objective of this research is to analyze the creation, configuration, and perception of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand to identify the factors that determine its competitiveness. To achieve this purpose, three specific objectives are proposed: to describe the genesis of the brand within its institutional and communicational context; to identify the identity attributes that define it as a national seal; and, finally, to determine the fundamental strategic aspects to strengthen its positioning. In this manner, the study seeks to transition from a historical and descriptive diagnosis toward

a propositional framework that enhances the country's integration into the international system.

To achieve these goals, a comparative analysis is conducted of the four milestones that have shaped the national image since 2001, ranging from the initial proposals inspired by the artistic heritage of prominent Ecuadorian figures such as Oswaldo Guayasamín, to the notable impact of the “Ecuador ama la vida” (Ecuador Loves Life) campaign. This analysis allows for the identification of how these transitions have molded the country's reputation before the international community.

To ensure the rigor of the findings and minimize bias, the research is grounded in a qualitative methodology based on data triangulation. This approach allows for the contrasting of academic literature and official documents with empirical evidence obtained from high-level primary sources. Furthermore, the study integrates the critical perspectives of six experts and professionals with extensive experience in brand management and strategic communication. This direct approach facilitated the identification of nuances regarding the positioning of the Ecuadorian brand that do not appear in technical manuals, thereby achieving a comprehensive diagnosis based on authentic, high-level testimonies.

The results expose a significant gap between the strategic intent of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” brand and its current perception. The data reveals a lack of organic connection with the country's cultural identity, as it is perceived more as an imposed institutional construction than a national narrative with its own personality. Moreover, a critical dissonance stands out between the concept of “shining” (brillo) and the country's current energy crisis, which generates an ironic perception and weakens the reputation of the message. Nevertheless, the study identifies opportunities in the Country-of-Origin (COO) effect of underutilized natural and cultural resources, as well as the Soft Power generated by scientific and sporting figures. These elements emerge as possible catalysts for the brand to transcend political cycles and consolidate itself upon a foundation of authenticity and systemic competitiveness both nationally and internationally.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **REFERENTIAL FRAMEWORK: THE COUNTRY BRAND AS A STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS**

In an increasingly globalized world, characterized by rising competition not only at the national level but also among subnational territories, countries have increasingly developed marketing and branding strategies as tools to differentiate themselves and project a coherent, attractive image that facilitates the strengthening of their international positioning. Within this framework, the country brand has emerged as a strategic asset of significant influence on both internal and external perceptions, with substantial implications for sectors such as tourism, the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and exports.

This first chapter aims to establish a theoretical framework that defines the context for the analysis of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” country brand as a strategy for international competitiveness. To this end, theoretical concepts of marketing, international marketing, and digital marketing, along with branding and strategic brand management, will be clarified. This involves addressing essential notions such as identity, image, reputation, brand equity, and strategic positioning. These definitions are fundamental to understanding brand construction and management within environments that have become increasingly complex and competitive due to globalization.

Furthermore, this chapter analyzes the conceptual evolution from the “country-of-origin” effect, through tourism marketing and city branding, toward nation branding and, ultimately, the country brand. This section will examine the contributions of pioneers in territorial branding and identify the current characteristics of country brands.

Finally, the importance of the country brand will be studied in terms of competitive identity, public diplomacy, and soft power. Additionally, its structural components: national identity, national image, and national reputation, as well as the primary pillars of the country brand (FDI, tourism, and exports) will be addressed.

Ultimately, this chapter provides the necessary theoretical foundation for the analysis of the Ecuadorian country brand, “Ecuador brilla auténticamente,” and the subsequent identification of potential adjustments aimed at strengthening its national and international competitiveness.

## **1.1 Theoretical Foundations of the Country Brand**

### **1.1.1 Marketing and International Marketing**

Marketing is a multidimensional, strategic process aimed at planning, designing, pricing, promoting, and distributing goods and services to satisfy consumer needs. A comprehensive understanding of the product, price, place, and promotion (the marketing mix) is essential to reaching target markets effectively. Marketing processes are inherently long-term and must account for economic, cultural, and social factors during their execution (Gervase Iwu, 2009).

Based on this premise, marketing transcends its role as an exclusive tool of the private sector, becoming a strategic axis for sovereign states. The transition toward the international arena arises from the necessity to compete in a global environment, where nations must adapt their commercial logic to the complexity of a territory that seeks to project a unique and compelling value proposition to the world.

When addressing country branding, it is crucial to define international marketing, as a country brand is inherently deployed within international markets. International marketing can be defined as the set of marketing decisions and processes that an entity must design, coordinate, and execute when operating beyond its domestic borders (Samiee, 2020). This requires the selection and analysis of foreign markets, the segmentation and definition of target audiences to create value, and the achievement of exchanges beyond the national territory. Furthermore, it involves decision-making regarding market entry modes in light of cultural differences and the regulations of host countries, as well as the coordination of logistics and strategic partnerships, and the measurement of results to adjust and sustain international performance.

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the vast public network composed of millions of users and data—known as the internet—has transformed marketing, rendering the process more agile, cost-efficient, and capable of expanding reach.

Furthermore, ICTs contribute to value creation by providing data that enables the analysis of user behavior and market trends, thereby facilitating the segmentation of target markets and the development of digital outreach strategies (Alonso Valenzuela et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the use of the internet does not guarantee success in internationalization; it

presents its own set of challenges due to the complexity of navigating an increasingly saturated marketplace, such as the lack of presence in destination markets and the need for specialized human capital, among other obstacles.

### **1.1.2 Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing constitutes a critical component of this research, as it has served as an instrumental tool for the foundational development of the brand. This field refers to the utilization of digital technologies and media, not only to implement but also to plan and evaluate marketing strategies aimed at attracting new consumers and accessing markets enabled by digital platforms, such as websites and social media (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016).

In the current digital era, digital marketing holds even greater relevance within the international arena, as it enables a brand to expand beyond its domestic borders. This is a vital aspect for a country brand, given that its target audience is inherently international. García et al. (2024) defined international digital marketing as a set of strategies focused on the communication and commercialization of goods and services outside of the company's national territory through online services.

The objective of this branch of digital marketing is to accelerate and enhance consumer engagement, interaction, and satisfaction within a globalized, digitized context. In this environment, where competition evolves rapidly, organizations must reach new markets efficiently. To excel, organizational strategies must be grounded in specific plans that prioritize personalization and feedback to provide an enhanced experience for the target audience.

Currently, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, chatbots, and social media allows organizations to maintain competitiveness within a constantly evolving digital marketplace. Furthermore, for international digital marketing to be effective, an authentic and transparent communication strategy is required to positively influence the decision-making process of global consumers.

Ultimately, international digital marketing is consolidated as the necessary bridge between a country's core essence and its global audience. Its significance is not based solely on mass dissemination, but rather on the capacity to generate genuine and transparent interaction. This factor is what ultimately allows for the construction of the trust required to stand out within a highly saturated international market.

### **1.1.3 Branding and Strategic Brand Management**

Every country possesses a unique identity that distinguishes it from other nations and products. Branding serves as the essential tool to integrate these inherent characteristics with the country brand itself. Wheeler (2009), in *Designing Brand Identity*, defines branding as the process of creating, maintaining, and shaping a brand within the minds of consumers. It is a long-term process through which a significant presence and brand loyalty are established within international markets.

It is fundamental to note that, while branding and strategic brand management converge toward the same objective, they operate on different planes. Whereas branding focuses on the construction of identity and the emotional values intended for transmission, strategic management serves as the architecture that renders these elements viable. It is not merely a matter of projecting a memorable image, but of managing it with a long-term vision that ensures consistency between what the country promises and what it truly delivers.

Branding is a primary complement to marketing. It must proceed in alignment with strategic brand management to achieve defined medium and long-term objectives. Pöhlman et al. (2024) define strategic brand management as an intentional, long-term endeavor. Organizations must avoid the frequent error of executing isolated actions, such as sporadic advertising campaigns. Instead, they must lead the brand through a comprehensive plan that necessitates the definition and execution of a marketing strategy consistent with the intended brand image. This must always be undertaken with a medium and long-term perspective, allowing for measurement and analysis to monitor and control both the image and the brand equity. Ultimately, these processes must guide the allocation of resources to sustain all previously implemented efforts.

### **1.1.4 Brand and Brand Equity**

To comprehend the nature of a country brand, it is essential to first define what a brand is and how it generates value. This is of paramount importance and entails greater complexity within the international context, as the creation of a national brand requires a significantly higher level of effort and coordination among diverse stakeholders than that required for a private brand.

Kotler and Keller (2021) defined a brand as a name, term, design, symbol, or a combination thereof, intended to identify the goods or services of an individual or group and distinguish them from those of competitors. A brand thus functions as a promise between an

organization and the consumer, aimed at reducing perceived risk and facilitating consumer decision-making. Likewise, brand value is predicated on the capacity to generate a cognitive connection with the user.

For its part, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a set of features and symbols that allow an offering to be distinguished in the marketplace. It is not merely a name or a graphic design; it encompasses any distinctive characteristic that serves to identify such an offering (n.d.).

Brand equity is the added value that a brand incorporates into its offering, consisting of two components: the first is perceptual, or what the consumer perceives of the brand, and the second is behavioral, which refers to the actions the consumer takes based on the information perceived, such as choosing, repeating, or recommending (Foroudi et al., 2018). Brand equity is developed through a set of brand characteristics that may be tangible, intangible, functional, or symbolic. These are directly related to consumer perceptions and the benefits derived from choosing and consuming the brand. Strong brand equity enables the retention of consumers and influences their decision-making. Conversely, when brand equity is negative, it adversely affects consumer loyalty.

### **1.1.5 Identity, Image, and Reputation**

Beyond conventional market tactics, the consolidation of a brand on the global stage is defined through three determinant concepts: identity, image, and reputation. These elements do not operate in isolation; rather, they constitute a strategic foundation that enables a nation to project a coherent and differentiated value proposition among its international peers (Vostriakov & Volokhova, 2021). To achieve this, it is essential to maintain medium-to-long-term internal and external efforts that allow the organization to define its intended projection, given that consumers subsequently receive and interpret the presented information to form a judgment that must be managed by the entity over time.

Balmer (2017) indicates that identity can be defined as the set of distinctive and enduring attributes of an organization that render it recognizable to consumers. It encompasses unique and relatively stable characteristics expressed through communication and symbolism aligned with the organization's values. This does not imply that identity is immutable, but rather a long-term strategy that responds to the institution's reality and the communication it maintains with its stakeholders. This strategy must account for the organization's culture and history to subsequently create a positive image with which the

aforementioned stakeholders can identify. Identity is, therefore, a central component that defines organizational behavior and shapes the entity's image and reputation.

Furthermore, image is the set of associations, ideas, impressions, and meanings that various stakeholders (individuals, companies, or other involved parties) create when interpreting the attributes and identity the brand seeks to express. Image describes how the organization is perceived by the consumer based on the brand's or company's actions and communications (Vostriakov & Volokhova, 2021).

Finally, reputation involves a more complex and enduring judgment of the brand than image. Reputation is constructed through an accumulation of perceptions formed over time. Consequently, it is of vital importance how the perceptions of various actors are consolidated and stabilized until a relatively durable reputation is established, based on a cumulative set of experiences and interpretations (Vostriakov & Volokhova, 2021).

### **1.1.6 Strategic Brand Positioning**

Ries and Trout (1992) finalized the development of the positioning concept they had been refining for years, defining it not as an action oriented toward the physical product itself, but rather as a strategic operation performed within the minds of potential consumers. Positioning serves as the primary communication filter within an increasingly over-communicated society, where the objective is to ensure that messages penetrate the client's mind to occupy a relevant space.

Positioning does not seek to modify or improve the product; instead, it aims to strategically influence existing perceptions and link the product with pre-established mental connections. In essence, it comprises a set of strategies designed to ensure the consumer acquires and retains the transmitted message within a market saturated with advertising.

Nevertheless, the success of any positioning effort does not depend solely on the brand's intention, but in the way in which the recipient processes such information. At this juncture, technical strategy meets consumer psychology, giving rise to the construction of perception: that subjective reality which the public adopts as its own after decoding the received stimuli.

Strategic positioning is a deliberate process to create a distinctive image in the mind of the target audience, requiring the selection and classification of the primary attributes of the brand—or in this case, the destination—to create a clear and competitive proposition. To achieve this, both internal and external analyses must be conducted to connect the

destination's optimal attributes with the needs and desires of tourists. This allows for the development of a marketing strategy oriented toward specific niches, thereby achieving effective strategic positioning (Rejikumar et al., 2021).

Following the discussion of strategic positioning, it is necessary to define brand positioning. This is a vital strategic process for standing out within increasingly competitive global digital markets.

According to Mogaji et al. (2023), within contemporary service markets, organizations must seek to reduce the uncertainty and intangibility of the product for the consumer through positioning signals such as experience or reach, which are increasingly communicated via digital platforms. Brand positioning, much like the related brand concepts previously defined, is not a static image but an active management of various strategic decision-making conflicts that allow the organization to project greater reliability and specialization compared to the competition.

From this perspective, brand positioning ceases to be an end goal and becomes an exercise in sustained consistency over time. This active management seeks not only an immediate competitive advantage in digital markets but also the stability of the message before a global audience demanding authenticity. Therefore, when strategic decisions align with environmental expectations and are consistently assimilated by the public, the brand transcends the stage of mere advertising exposure. This process facilitates the transition from communicative intent toward the formation of deeper and more enduring mental constructs, where the brand is validated through the consumer's accumulated experience.

The reputation of a brand or product is based on the identity and image projected in the minds of consumers over the medium and long term; this is referred to as perception (Saracevic & Schlegelmilch, 2024). These authors defined perception as the global evaluation individuals form about a brand based on the signals, they receive from it: its actions, its manner of expression, and the content of its message. This process is shaped by the brand's actions and gains momentum when the brand takes public stances on social or political issues, as the public contrasts the brand's declarations with its subsequent actions. Consequently, brand perception is divided into two dimensions: perceived authenticity and perceived public commitment.

## **1.2 The Path Toward the Country Brand: From Country-of-Origin to the Country Brand**

### **1.2.1 Country-of-Origin and Prestige**

Historically, every product traded or exchanged has commanded international prestige based on its country of manufacture. This phenomenon is known as "Country-of-Origin" (COO), and it constitutes a pivotal factor in consumer decision-making. Over time, the Country-of-Origin effect has evolved and gained complexity, yet it remains a differentiating factor for product competitiveness (Marzano, 2010).

Robert Schooler (1965) was a pioneer in developing the Country-of-Origin concept by analyzing the psychological barriers present among consumers. He conducted a straightforward experiment: he presented the same product with manufacturing labels from different Central American countries, including Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. The results demonstrated the existence of bias in consumer decision-making depending on the country of origin.

This research, significant at its inception, is of even greater relevance today. Access to international markets has reached such a high level of development that consumers can now access goods and services from across the globe in a matter of seconds. This has intensified not only the competition among products but also the competition for perception within the consumer's mind.

### **1.2.2 Tourism Marketing, Destination Marketing, and Tourism Planning**

Kotler et al. (2011) defined tourism marketing not merely as a promotional tool for a territory, but also as a social and administrative process through which both individuals and organizations satisfy their desires and needs via the creation and exchange of value-added services. Unlike traditional marketing, tourism marketing necessitates specialized attention to the needs and desires of destination markets to successfully meet expectations. This is because, unlike regular marketing, it does not trade in physical goods but intangible products and experiences. The buyer acquires a promise or an expectation and cannot evaluate the tourism product until after it has been consumed. Furthermore, in the tourism sector, staff members cannot be separated from the product; instead, they constitute an integral part of it, including guides, chefs, and waitstaff, among others.

A key difference lies in inventory management: while a seller of goods can store unsold inventory, a provider of tourism services who fails to sell a service represents a permanent loss of potential revenue. Additionally, as services are grounded in the human factor, there is greater variability as well as strong seasonality that fluctuates according to the location of both the service and the consumer, influenced by seasons, public holidays, and peak periods.

Destination marketing is similar to destination branding, as its objective is the promotion of specific locations, whether countries, regions, cities, or points of interest, to raise awareness among potential visitors and stimulate travel planning. To achieve this, communities must carefully determine which products to promote based on their specific target audience. This allows for the subsequent development of coherent communication and positioning strategies that differentiate the destination, manage its image, and generate experiences aligned with market expectations, thereby contributing to the development of the destination's reputation (Kotler, 2007).

For its part, tourism planning represents the subsequent stage following destination marketing. It is the process by which destination management organizations and sectoral stakeholders design and coordinate strategies to guide tourism development and attract specific market niches. Similarly, it seeks to mitigate undesirable effects within the sector, such as overtourism during specific dates that may adversely affect the quality of life or the visitor experience, as well as the degradation of the environment and ecosystems (Camilleri, 2024).

### **1.2.3 Pioneers of City and Country Branding**

The first major milestone in territorial branding was the creation of the “I love NY” brand in 1977. Following World War II, New York City found itself mired in a profound crisis that reached a critical point during the 1975 fiscal emergency, characterized by crime, urban decay, and poverty within a city that underwent continuous expansion. Within this context, illustrator Milton Glaser designed one of the most impactful logos in history, to the extent that it became an icon of popular culture. The development of this city brand emerged from the necessity to shift the narrative and the perception of the city to enhance its attractiveness.

To achieve this objective, Bendel (2011) indicated that the initial step involved an internal analysis of the desired brand projection. This identified Broadway theaters,

museums, restaurants, and shopping as the primary attractions of the urban landscape, alongside outdoor recreation areas in rural regions. With these elements in mind, the brand possessed an identity that subsequently facilitated stakeholder collaboration. The next step involved the creation of the iconic logo and slogan, followed by the dissemination of the brand through tourism promotion campaigns involving various institutions, which catalyzed its expansion.

For instance, the phrase “I love New York” was incorporated into Broadway productions; similarly, the logo began to appear on tourism promotion cards and postcards. These efforts gained significant tourism approval, bolstered by a swift and powerful dissemination that transcended the advertising campaign itself, thereby helping to transform New York into the city we recognize today and establishing “I Love NY” as an icon of popular culture.

**Figure 1**  
*Visual Identity of the "I Love NY" Brand*



*Note.* The logo was designed by Milton Glaser in 1977. Adapted from ILOVE NY Logo Guidelines, by the New York State Department of Economic Development (NYSDED), 2008 ([www.iloveny.com](http://www.iloveny.com)). Reprinted for academic purposes.

On the global stage, Spain can be considered the first country to develop a state-level brand to promote its territory and international image. Following the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship in 1975, Spain sought to transform its perception among international actors under the leadership of Ignacio Vasallo, a tourism professional and member of Turespaña (Spain's national tourism board).

Consequently, they developed the slogan “Everything under the sun” in 1982, identifying the sun as Spain's primary tourism asset, which would accompany visitors in any activity. Subsequently, Vasallo sought the support of Spanish artist Joan Miró to develop a logo, as a visual symbol would be more easily recognized, aesthetically appealing, and require no translation. With this in mind and by drawing upon past works, Miró developed the logo known today as the “Sol de Miró” (Miró’s Sun) in 1983 (Parra, 2018).

**Figure 2**

*Sol de Miró, Official Visual Identity of Spain's Nation Brand*



*Note.* Created by J. Miró, 1983, Turespaña (Spanish Tourism Institute). Adapted from Official website of Spain.info, by Turespaña (www.spain.info). Reprinted for academic purposes.

**1.2.4 Nation Branding**

As with any product, brand image cannot be constructed based solely on marketing strategies; the product itself must be of high quality and must cultivate a reputation that complements all other efforts. There is no singular formula for successful branding, as initiatives must be executed through holistic integration. Nation branding examines the management of a country's image, predicated on consumer perceptions (Anholt, 2005; Fan, 2006). Similarly, destination branding enables countries to gain recognition, although achieving this necessitates the alignment of interests among diverse stakeholders (national, regional, local, and individual) to consolidate these efforts under a unified brand (Skoko et al., 2024).

Just as human beings possess personalities, nation branding is endowed with one through the anthropomorphism attributed to the brand. This facilitates the connection between the consumer and the brand. This phenomenon is clearly observed in the consumer decision-making process when choosing between competing brands. In the case of nation branding, personality refers to the capacity of the nation to differentiate itself in terms of consumer tastes and preferences when acquiring products from that country. Therefore, the personality of nation branding is essential for a nation's strategic positioning (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2013).

### **1.2.5 Definition and Characteristics of the Country Brand**

The country brand is a long-term strategic process that seeks to align efforts to enhance a nation's competitiveness across three primary pillars: tourism, exports, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). While it differs from standard commercial branding, a country brand employs a comprehensive marketing strategy that leverages and develops the human, natural, and material assets of a region. The emergence of the country brand was driven by the collaborative necessity for both the private sector and the government to cultivate a distinct identity within the international marketplace to achieve greater competitiveness (Méndez, 2022).

A country brand functions as a living system; it remains in a state of constant evolution, as it is directly linked to the national culture, which is likewise not immutable. The interaction between its various components such as education, commerce, tourism, and investment, it is the catalyst for its perpetual change (Acevedo Duque et al., 2023). By integrating environmental values, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), into the country brand, the state promotes these values across the aforementioned pillars, thereby achieving economic growth that is both socially and environmentally conscious.

Therefore a country brand can be defined as a long-term process through which a State creates, manages, and transmits its unique identity based on the social, cultural, economic, and tourism-related values that encompass and characterize its population and territory (Barrientos Felipa, 2014; Chicaiza Villalba et al., 2014; Marzano, 2010). It is important to emphasize that these values may fluctuate over time; thus, the country brand is not a static creation, but rather one that evolves alongside the population it represents.

### **1.3 The importance of the country brand**

Understanding the importance of the country brand requires recognizing that, in the current era, nations compete in a highly competitive marketplace of perceptions, as aggressive as that of any commercial sector. It is not merely a promotional tool, but a strategic asset that enables a nation to differentiate itself and generate trust internationally. Its relevance is multidimensional: it functions as a legal endorsement that protects national heritage, as a foundation of identity for international competition, and, above all, as the invisible face of soft power, transforming a nation's culture and values into a tangible tool for global influence and attraction.

### **1.3.1 Competitive Identity**

Simon Anholt (2007), a leading authority on nation branding, developed the theory of competitive identity. This theory extends beyond the scope of nation branding itself. It is not simply about promoting corporate brand identity; if not managed with cohesion and vision, such branding will quickly lose relevance. Therefore, competitive identity refers to the management of the brand in conjunction with the promotion of sectors such as tourism, commerce, and investment. These sectors must convey a unified message about the nation to avoid confusing consumers and, consequently, to achieve greater competitiveness.

In conclusion, the country brand is a critical asset that enables a nation to position and differentiate itself within a competitive global market, attract foreign investment and tourism, drive exports, and strengthen its productive matrix. Simultaneously, it projects a cohesive cultural identity that reinforces the country's international reputation and its political and economic influence (Calpe & Bedoya, 2005; de San Eugenio Vela, 2013; Fernández, 2016).

### **1.3.2 Public Diplomacy and Soft Power**

In his book *Bound to Lead*, Joseph Nye Jr. (1990) defined "soft power" as a form of corporate power: the capacity of an actor, typically a state, to influence the preferences of others to achieve desired outcomes through attraction and legitimacy rather than coercion or payment. Soft power emerges when the involved parties voluntarily adopt the objectives of the actor, perceiving them as desirable or correct, without the need for material incentives or threats. The most common sources of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy, provided these are perceived as attractive, coherent, legitimate, and endowed with moral authority. Soft power can be utilized to set agendas with their corresponding narratives and standards, rendering certain decisions preferable. For this to succeed, these narratives must be credible, and a coherence between discourse and actions is essential; a lack of such consistency diminishes soft power.

Given the definition of soft power, the country brand is understood as a vital instrument of this capacity. The soft power of a country brand can be defined as the capacity of a state to project an attractive image consistent with its identity, enabling it to positively influence the decisions of other international actors without resorting to force or economic incentives. According to Saavedra (2012), the country brand transcends marketing, evolving into a tool of public diplomacy based on the dissemination of customs, culture, and values

that generate prestige for the nation. The soft power of a country brand is predicated on its capacity for persuasion and attraction, assisting governments in achieving their strategic objectives by enhancing the recognition of their identity within the international arena. Managing the country brand as a state policy thus strengthens a nation's competitiveness within the international system.

Public diplomacy is directly linked to soft power, as it is the instrument utilized by governments to apply their soft power strategies to communicate with and attract international target audiences, including both governments and private individuals. The objective of public diplomacy is to generate interest by showcasing the most attractive resources of the country—or those it seeks to promote—but its effectiveness depends on the level of attraction generated. Consequently, it cannot rely solely on simple marketing strategies such as advertisements or public campaigns; instead, it must inform and project a positive image aligned with the national identity, fostering long-term relationships that develop a favorable environment for dialogue. To achieve this, it requires daily communication that increases transparency, stable and coherent strategic communication, and the creation of durable links between the state and its key stakeholders through agreements, exchanges, and the development of networks (Nye, 2008).

The Global Soft Power Index created by Brand Finance (2025) measures the influence of nations upon one another through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. This index utilizes indicators such as familiarity, reputation, influence, recommendation, business and trade, international relations, education and science, culture and heritage, governance, media and communication, sustainable future, and people and values. The index provides an annual ranking of the perception of country brands. In the case of Ecuador, the nation is ranked 89th out of the 193 United Nations member states, representing a decline of 3 positions compared to the previous year. For reference, Colombia (63rd) and Peru (72nd) currently hold higher rankings.

### **1.3.3 Pillars of the Country Brand: Exports, Investment, and Tourism**

As previously established, the country brand rests upon three fundamental pillars: exports, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and tourism. Exports are encompassed within the definition of trade developed by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Regarding investment, this research refers specifically to FDI, adhering to the definition established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Finally, tourism is defined in accordance with the standards of the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism).

The World Trade Organization defines trade as the cross-border exchange of goods (tangible and quantifiable products) and services (intangible and complex economic activities) between states. This exchange is regulated by a set of multilateral norms negotiated among member countries, which aim to ensure that trade flows more freely, predictably, transparently, and non-discriminatorily. Therefore, trade pertains not only to the exchange of goods and services but also to the institutional and legal framework that grants rights and obligations to governments, importers, exporters, producers, and consumers, with the goal of reducing barriers and fostering stable, mutual, and equitable economic development (2012).

The World Tourism Organization, through its International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (2010), defines tourism as the activity engaged in by individuals considered visitors; that is, persons who travel outside their usual environment for a period of less than one year, provided that the objective of the displacement is not to perform a remunerated activity in the place of destination. These displacements are referred to as tourism trips, which may be for leisure, business, or personal reasons, and encompass all activities and products consumed before, during, and after the trip.

Finally, the International Monetary Fund defines Foreign Direct Investment as an investment category in which an individual resident of an economy—the direct investor—acquires a lasting interest in an enterprise located in another country—the direct investment enterprise. This relationship implies a long-term connection that requires a continuous exchange of capital, information, knowledge, and, notably, a degree of influence over the management afforded to the direct investor by holding at least 10% of the equity in the direct investment enterprise (Patterson et al., 2004).

## **1.4 Structural Components of the Country Brand**

As with any organization, every nation possesses an identity, an image, and a reputation, which, in this context, are national in scope. Unlike commercial brands, these components are significantly more complex for a State, as they lack the inherent uniformity found in corporate entities. Therefore, it is necessary to provide specific definitions for national identity, national image, and national reputation to adequately address the concept of the country brand.

### 1.4.1 National Identity

National identity is a subjective sense of belonging to a nation—a community defined by cultural, historical, and linguistic ties within a specific geographic space. It constitutes a symbolic community that individuals consider their own. This is not merely an administrative category but a form of self-identification in which the individual decides to be part of a national community and determines the strength of their connection to that group. This connection is not immutable; it fluctuates daily, providing the individual with a sense of identity that combines belonging, history, and social experience (Medin et al., 2025).

Regarding the country brand of El Salvador, Dr. Natasha Grand highlights that its structure revolves around a narrative centered on the citizen as the core of national identity, summarized by the slogan: “El Salvador, grande como su gente” (El Salvador, as great as its people). In this case, the design of the country brand was executed with the objective of highlighting the values of its people, such as warmth, hospitality, and the cultural and natural diversity of the country. The purpose was to generate internal pride and brand cohesion within national borders while simultaneously fostering a positive external perception. Furthermore, the visual identity of the brand employs colors and forms that represent landscapes, vegetation, and historical symbols, which reinforce the identity of warmth and closeness the nation seeks to project (Ancin A, 2018).

#### Figure 3

*“El Salvador, Grande como su gente” Nation Brand*



*Note.* The logo was designed by the Interbrand consultancy in 2017 as part of the national positioning strategy. Adapted from El Salvador Brand Manual, by PROESA (Export and Investment Promotion Agency of El Salvador) ([www.proesa.gob.sv](http://www.proesa.gob.sv)). Reprinted for academic purposes.

### 1.4.2 National Image

Buhmann (2016) defines national image as a subjective attitude toward a country based on two components: specific beliefs and general feelings. The former constitutes the

evaluations made regarding the country's attributes, while the latter represents the affective component attributed to the nation. These components encompass four dimensions: the functional, based on beliefs regarding the country's capabilities; the normative, based on beliefs regarding integrity, morality, and values; the aesthetic, based on beliefs regarding culture and territory; and the emotional, based on sentiments developed toward the country.

National image is more closely related to national identity and competitiveness than to branding strategies. If countries focus solely on brand promotion strategies, such efforts will fail to endure within the competitive global marketplace. The global market is characterized by high intensity, and consumers often do not dedicate time to conducting thorough research on different locations, instead relying on clichés and collective opinions. Consequently, governments must monitor consumer perceptions to cultivate a reputation that is both competitive and authentic (Anholt, 2011).

The case of Argentina stands out due to the consolidation of the country brand as a State policy, which enabled coordinated efforts between public and private sector actors during its design and execution. The establishment of the National Institute of Tourism Promotion (INPROTUR) created a structure tasked with the sustained management of the national image. Following this advancement, tourism became the primary axis of national promotion, subsequently complemented by cultural and commercial promotion (Echeverri, 2012). This facilitated the growth of the tourism sector and strengthened Argentina's perception within the international market, leading to an improvement in its country brand competitiveness ranking. However, focusing predominantly on tourism can present challenges, as positioning pillars must be diversified to include exports and foreign investment.

### **1.4.3 National Reputation**

Kiambi and Shafer (2018) defined national reputation as the collection of opinions that individuals develop about a country over the long term through the accumulation of experiences and perceptions. These are formed through direct experiences, such as visits to the country or contact with its citizens and institutions, and indirect experiences, such as information received about the country, indirect references, or media coverage. All these perceptions are subjective, as they are formed based on information received about competing countries.

In summary, beyond the perception of the country itself, national reputation depends on the comparison with the country's competitors in any aspect of interest to the individual, making it variable and causing it to consolidate over time as the perception held about a country.

The example of Spain's image between 2008 and 2012 is revealing. The "Marca España" (Spain Brand) arose due to the country's need to manage its reputation in the international arena within the context of a financial crisis. As in the Ecuadorian case, the country brand has been a long process, fraught with errors that limited the scope of the country brand until achieving the "umbrella brand" they possess today.

This was achieved over four different governments, until the creation of the High Commissioner for the Government for "Marca España" during the administration of Mariano Rajoy. This entity provided cohesion between the public and private sectors and shielded the country brand, ensuring its continuity and establishing it as a strong brand in the international arena (Rodríguez Gómez, 2023).

#### **1.4.4 Visual Identity**

The final output of a country brand strategy is its visual identity. Although this element is often perceived as the "visible face" of the brand, it must be firmly rooted in the previously established components and the specific sectors the nation aims to enhance. Visual identity is a relatively recent concept that gained prominence at the end of the 20th century, driven by intensifying global competition and the strategic need for brands to be recognized and preferred by international consumers.

Caldevilla (2009) defined visual identity as the physical and visual manifestation of a brand, through which it expresses its core identity to consumers. This identity is materialized through the development of a carefully selected set of visual signs that allow an organization to identify, differentiate, and communicate its meaning to its target audience. Within this framework, the logo and the slogan serve as the two primary pillars of visual identity.

In the context of country branding, the objective of visual identity is to create a robust image that enables the nation to develop a trustworthy reputation, thereby improving its competitiveness in international markets. A successful country brand visual identity is not measured merely by graphic quality, but by its capacity to accurately represent the national identity (Arias Villamar, 2022).

## **CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Approach and Type**

The present research will be conducted using a qualitative methodology. This approach was selected because, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) indicate, qualitative research is an activity that takes place in the real world, within a specific context and setting, allowing the researcher to study phenomena within their environment and identify the meanings that individuals assign to them. In this study, the country brand will not be analyzed as a statistical data point, but as a strategic communication phenomenon.

For their part, Lindlof and Taylor (2010) maintain that qualitative research is essential when the objective is to understand how social actors interpret and make sense of their experiences and institutional processes. This is vital for this study, as it allows for the analysis of the diverse meanings that both brand managers and experts perceive regarding the identity and positioning of the Ecuadorian country brand, both nationally and internationally.

Regarding the type of study, the research will be descriptive in nature. Hernández Sampieri and Fernandez-Collado (2014) state that such studies seek to identify and define the properties and characteristics of the phenomenon being analyzed, allowing for an inductive and progressive thematic development. Since this study involves neither the manipulation of variables nor the generalization of results, but rather an intensive analysis of the country brand creation process, this approach is appropriate for achieving the proposed objectives.

### **2.2 Scope and Research Design**

Bernal (2010) explains that when there is no manipulation of variables by the researcher, and the phenomenon is studied within its natural context, it is classified as a non-experimental research design. This is clearly the case for this research, as it will not modify or alter the management of the national country brand. Instead, information regarding the country brand will be collected to provide a comprehensive diagnosis of its current state.

Furthermore, the design will be cross-sectional, as the data collection process will occur at a single point in time. This approach allows for a precise description of the observed elements and their current manifestations. By taking a "snapshot" of the country brand's

status, this research design facilitates a detailed analysis of its positioning and identity components without the influence of temporal variations, making it highly effective for descriptive studies focused on specific institutional processes.

## 2.3 Sampling

The investigative techniques employed to obtain the primary data for this study consisted of interviews with professionals and experts. The participants were selected based on their capacity to provide value to the research, primarily by offering information that is otherwise difficult to access due to the limited quality and quantity of publicly available data regarding the Ecuadorian Nation Brand (Kvale, 2008).

To this end, two strategic groups were defined, totaling six semi-structured interviews:

1. Institutional Managers: Public sector officials directly linked to the administration and decision-making processes of Place Branding.
2. Experts and Consultants: Private sector and academic professionals specialized in international marketing and territorial branding.

**Table 1**  
*Interviewee Coding Table*

<b>Name or Code</b>	<b>Profile / Position</b>	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Rationale for Selection</b>
Cecilia Ugalde	Communication Expert	Academia	Analyzing the Nation Brand narrative and its brand personality.
Jhonn Alarcón Morales	Graphic Design Expert	Academia	Conducting a graphic analysis of the visual identity and the brand's discourse.
Mónica Malo Jirón	Director of Mucho Mejor Ecuador (Quality Seal Organization)	Private	Providing a perspective on Nation Brand usage by a consolidated company with a national reputation.
E1	Former official of the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism)	Public	Managing the creation process of the "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" Nation Brand.
E2	Expert in Communication and Discourse Analysis	Academia	Analyzing the discourse and institutional utilization of the Nation Brand.
E3	International Branding Consultant	Private	International consultant with extensive experience in territorial marketing.

## 2.4 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

For the development of this research, data collection is grounded in the technical distinction between primary and secondary sources. According to Hernández-Sampieri and Fernández-Collado (2014), primary sources constitute firsthand information—that is,

original data obtained directly by the researcher regarding the phenomenon under study, providing direct and unprocessed evidence of the research object.

Conversely, secondary sources are those that process, summarize, or critique information derived from other sources, such as books, indexed journal articles, and analytical documents. These serve to contrast empirical evidence with academic literature and existing regulations. The integration of both source types ensures that the Nation Brand diagnosis possesses both empirical validity and theoretical depth (Hernández-Sampieri & Fernández-Collado, 2014).

Regarding primary sources, Valles Martínez (2014) defines semi-structured interviews as a professional conversation technique situated between structured and unstructured interviews. These are characterized by the use of an interview guide (Appendix A), operational flexibility that encourages dialogue, the funneling technique (moving from general to specific inquiries), and a qualitative nature that seeks to capture the interpretations, meanings, and senses that social actors attribute to their reality or the processes surrounding them.

Taylor and Bogdan (2000) explain that qualitative interviews are personal encounters that facilitate an understanding of the interviewees' perspectives based on their experiences and knowledge. For this research, it is essential that the interview guide, while structured, allows the conversation to flow, thereby revealing further details for the study. As the authors suggest, genuine knowledge is acquired when the researcher successfully follows the "leads" provided by the expert during the dialogue.

Concerning the phrasing of the questions for the semi-structured interviews, the funneling principle suggested by Valles Martínez (2014) was followed. Consequently, the process began with questions regarding the expert's professional trajectory before moving into the more technical aspects of the Nation Brand, maintaining open-ended questions throughout to avoid conditioning the responses. Likewise, analytical categories were incorporated to ensure that the information remains comparable and contrastable across all interviewees and, subsequently, during the triangulation stage.

To guarantee that the collected information is comparable and contrastable, the analysis of the testimonies was structured through an Analysis Dimensions Matrix (Table 1), allowing the discourse to be organized into four dimensions. As Valles Martínez (2014) notes, the utilization of matrices or tables is pivotal for transforming raw material into

manageable categories, thus facilitating the identification of patterns, similarities, and divergences within the interviewees' discourses.

**Table 2**  
*Analysis Dimension Matrix*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Targeted Questions</b>	<b>Purpose of Analysis</b>
Context and Profile	Expert trajectory and conceptual foundation	Questions 1 and 2 (as per Appendix A)	To validate the interviewee's relevance and align theoretical definitions.
Identity and Narrative	Attributes and brand narrative	Questions 3, 4, and 5 (as per Appendix A)	To evaluate the coherence of the projected identity with national culture and reality.
Positioning and Strategy	Competitiveness and brand differentiation	Questions 6 and 7 (as per Appendix A)	To determine the effectiveness of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand as an international marketing tool.
Governance	Brand sustainability and stakeholder roles	Question 8 (as per Appendix A)	To analyze the brand's viability beyond political cycles.

On the other hand, to obtain theoretical literature from secondary sources, several high-impact academic search engines were utilized, such as Google Scholar, SciELO, Redalyc, Research Rabbit, and ResearchGate. Prestigious university repositories were accessed, prioritizing indexed journal articles and scientific papers. This approach ensured that the theoretical framework was supported by validated, high-quality academic sources.

Likewise, to obtain official information, the research incorporates state sources for both the historical and institutional analysis of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand. These sources include the Registro Oficial (Official Gazette), where all decrees pertaining to the Nation Brand are published, as well as the official portals of state institutions such as the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism), the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Presidencia de la República del Ecuador (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador), and the Viceministerio de Promoción de Exportaciones e Inversiones (Vice-Ministry of Export and Investment Promotion). Furthermore, various official Ecuadorian Nation Brand manuals were consulted to complement the institutional diagnosis.

## **2.5 Methodological Procedure: Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis**

To guarantee the credibility, rigor, and depth of the findings, this research is grounded in methodological and data triangulation as the central axis of the analysis. As Denzin and

Lincoln (2011) suggest, triangulation functions not merely as a tool for information validation, but as a strategy that allows for the study of a complex phenomenon from different angles, providing an integral vision and minimizing the researcher's interpretive bias. Under this premise, the “Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente” Nation Brand is analyzed through the interaction of three axes: the normative and institutional, the theoretical and academic, and the empirical.

Data collection for the empirical axis was conducted via recorded interviews using the "Zoom Workplace" application for telematic sessions, while the computer's integrated sound recorder was utilized for in-person interviews. Subsequently, the audio tracks were initially transcribed by the Google Cloud application using the “Speech-to-Text” API. This generated a transcription in JSON format, which was then converted into a .docx format through the ChatGPT application. Finally, the resulting documents were personally reviewed and corrected by the researcher to ensure the fidelity of the information.

Regarding the normative and institutional axis, data collection encompassed the analysis of official secondary sources, such as Executive Decrees, the Registro Oficial (Official Gazette), the official portals of various Ministries, and the brand’s Visual Identity Manuals, which provide the strategic intent and legal framework of the object of study.

This component is directly contrasted with the theoretical and academic axis, based on a review of specialized literature in Place Branding, international marketing, and Nation Brand studies sourced from indexed databases. This provides the necessary conceptual foundation to evaluate the execution of public policy.

The application of this triangulation strategy was fundamental to the robustness of the diagnosis, particularly in those dimensions where a dispersion of opinions or limited saturation in the interviewees' discourse was identified, such as in the areas of Governance and technical design. In these cases, triangulation allowed for the contrasting of such perceptions with documentary and normative evidence, ensuring that the validity of the results resides in the dialectical interaction between official regulations, academic theory, and the experience of the consulted specialists.

## **CHAPTER 3.**

# **THE GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE “ECUADOR BRILLA AUTÉNTICAMENTE” NATION BRAND**

### **3.1 Background of the Ecuadorian Country Brand**

The path toward developing an Ecuadorian country brand has spanned over two decades and, to date, has involved four distinct attempts. It is therefore necessary to conduct a historical analysis of the Ecuadorian country brand to understand the rationale behind the launch of the new national brand in 2025.

#### **3.1.1 The First Ecuadorian Country Brand**

Ecuador has made efforts to develop and establish its own country brand since 2001, during the administration of former President Gustavo Noboa. As is standard for state projects, a competition was held among various designs. The proposal by artist Max Benavides was selected, as it was considered to effectively represent both the country's diversity and its national identity.

The brand did not feature a slogan; instead, it utilized a logo inspired by the artistic style of one of Ecuador's most renowned figures, Oswaldo Guayasamín. This initial brand focused on Ecuador's geographic position as the "middle of the world." The design featured the letter "E" centered among lines that formed cardinal points, utilizing the national colors (yellow, blue, and red) alongside green to symbolize the country's ecological diversity.

This initiative was supported by the collaborative efforts of several Ecuadorian actors, including the Presidency of the Republic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Integration, Foreign Trade, Fisheries and Competitiveness (now the Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries), and the Corporation for the Promotion of Exports and Investments (CORPEI). The project was led by Rocío Vásquez, the Minister of Tourism at the time. The brand was registered for a ten-year term with the primary objective of facilitating Ecuador's internal and external communication (Ramos & Noya, 2006).

## Figure 4

### *Visual Identity of the First Ecuadorian Country Brand*



*Note.* Logo designed by Max Benavides in 2001, characterized by the letter "E" symbolizing the horizon line. Adapted from Manual de uso de Marca País (Nation Brand Usage Manual), by the Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador (Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador), 2010. Reprinted for academic purposes.

### 3.1.2 “Life at its purest”

Three years later, despite the first brand still being valid, the second country brand, "La vida en estado puro," was launched in 2004 under the administration of Lucio Gutiérrez. This initiative was developed to project a clearer message through a new slogan, accompanied by a redesigned logo. These changes aimed to emphasize the nation's biodiversity by incorporating characteristic elements, such as mountains, flora, fauna, and the sun, all into a logo featuring a varied color palette that represented the country's diverse ecosystems.

The development of this brand benefited from the support of several international experts, including Simon Anholt through the consulting firm Placebrands, as well as ambassadors from European countries such as Spain, France, Germany, and Italy. Domestically, it received backing from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CORPEI. The brand received significant international promotion, with the primary objective of positioning the Ecuadorian tourism sector in Europe, North America, and South America (Onofrio & Rabadán, 2008).

The "La vida en estado puro" brand lasted until 2010 and represented a significant milestone, as it was Ecuador's first major international promotion effort. It successfully reduced consumer confusion by projecting a consolidated image of the country during large-scale international events, such as the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany and the 2004 Miss Universe pageant.

However, Marzano (2012) criticized the brand's narrow focus on tourism, noting that while the brand targeted international visitors, CORPEI simultaneously focused on the competitiveness of Ecuadorian exports and investments. Another key criticism was that the

brand's creation process prioritized international perception over domestic engagement, which ultimately created a disconnect between the brand and the Ecuadorian population.

**Figure 5**

*Visual Identity of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand: “La vida en estado puro” (Life at its purest)*



*Note.* Logo of the “La vida en estado puro” Nation Brand, published in 2004. Adapted from Manual de uso de Marca País (Nation Brand Usage Manual), by the Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador (Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador), 2010. Reprinted for academic purposes.

**3.1.3 “Ecuador ama la vida”**

Six years later, during the administration of former President Rafael Correa, the longest-lasting and most recognizable country brand to date was created: "Ecuador ama la vida" (Ecuador loves life). This brand emerged from the need to revitalize a country brand that had lost its initial impact, alongside the need to re-launch Ecuador's image following the profound institutional changes brought about by the 2008 Constitution and the subsequent oil boom of that same year.

The development of "Ecuador ama la vida" was significantly more complex than its predecessors, relying heavily on deep-seated national identity symbols, which resulted in a logo that was conceptually dense and challenging to interpret.

The Brand Usage and Application Manual published by the Ministry of Tourism (2010) explains the creative variants integrated into the brand design: the country's geographical location in the middle of the world, the diversity of textures, a multi-colored identity, and references to ancestral civilizations. With this in mind, it is evident that the brand aimed to resolve the identity-related challenges of the previous attempt by selecting elements representative of the entire Ecuadorian community.

However, consolidating all these variants into a single logo rendered it highly complex. Ancin (2018) explains that the circular logo featured a void in the center to represent Ecuador

at the center of the world. The squares represented textures utilized by ancestral cultures, while the colors represented the regions of Ecuador in a spiral pattern: yellow for the Galapagos coast, blue for the coastal seas, green for the Amazonian forests, and red and purple for the indigenous communities of the Andes.

**Figure 6**

*Visual Identity of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand: “Ecuador ama la vida” (Ecuador Loves Life)*



*Note.* Logo of the “Ecuador ama la vida” Nation Brand, published in 2010. Adapted from Manual de uso de Marca País (Nation Brand Usage Manual), by the Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador (Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador), 2010. Reprinted for academic purposes.

Like its predecessor, "Ecuador ama la vida" focused on tourism development, executing large-scale international advertising campaigns such as the "All You Need Is Ecuador" initiative, launched on March 27, 2014. The campaign rollout on April 1 of that year focused not only on foreign markets, where the letters forming the slogan were installed across different countries (A in France, L in Spain, L in Brazil, Y in Colombia, O in the United States, U in Chile, N in Germany, E in England, E in Peru, D in Mexico, I in the Netherlands, S in Argentina, collectively forming the phrase ALL YOU NEED IS), but also placed the letters forming ECUADOR in the cities of Cuenca, Manta, Loja, Guayaquil, Tena, Santa Cruz, and Quito, respectively.

The campaigns extended further, reaching the Super Bowl on February 1, 2015, when the Ecuadorian government invested 2.9 million dollars in a thirty-second commercial spot titled "All You Need Is Ecuador" to promote the country as a premier tourism destination.

Promotion also targeted domestic tourism through campaigns such as "Viaja Primero Ecuador" (Travel Ecuador First), which sought to showcase tourist destinations in the

provinces of Guayas, Cañar, and Azuay. Through these efforts, the government not only launched an international advertising campaign within its target markets but also introduced the brand to Ecuadorian citizens, involving them in the campaign and promoting Ecuadorian cities to the entire world.

In summary, "Ecuador ama la vida" stands as the most significant milestone in the history of the Ecuadorian country brand, not only due to its longevity but also its international and national impact, achieved through campaigns that provided Ecuador with unprecedented visibility, with the United States of America as a focal point of its efforts.

However, the administration of Rafael Correa gradually co-opted this country brand, causing it to shift from an economic focus centered on tourism and exports to becoming a governmental political instrument for public diplomacy and soft power. González (2021) noted that the country brand was utilized within all types of state projects and activities to legitimize the government's discourse and domestic authority, thereby acquiring a political nuance. This misappropriation of the country brand would eventually become the reason for its replacement a few years later.

**Figure 7**  
*Timeline of the Ecuadorian country brand (2001-2024)*



### **3.2 The Transition Between "Ecuador ama la vida" and "Ecuador brilla auténticamente"**

To reach the final product published on June 12, 2024, the Ecuadorian country brand underwent nearly ten years of development. This process began after the administration of

Lenín Moreno ended the use of its predecessor, "Ecuador ama la vida," in 2019 due to the political bias it had acquired. However, this transition was not an isolated event; it was the result of several years of collaborative effort across various state institutions.

The Strategic Brand Commission (CEM) is the body responsible for managing state brands in Ecuador. It was created in 2011 to unify the communication strategies of different ministries under a single national country brand, thereby preventing consumer confusion (R. Correa Delgado, personal communication, 2011). In 2018, the management of the CEM was transferred to the Ministry of Tourism with the explicit objective of initiating the development of a new country Brand.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted global economic dynamics, hitting the pillars of the country brand particularly hard. In the export sector, petroleum products were the primary victims. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was also significantly affected by a sharp reduction in gross fixed capital formation—defined as the value of acquisitions of new or existing fixed assets by the public and private sectors. However, the most severely impacted sector was tourism, which experienced a decline of 68.28% (Macías Badaraco et al., 2022; Ministry of Tourism, n.d.).

Regarding the historical and institutional analysis of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand, specific legal mechanisms were identified as the determining factors for the termination of the “Ecuador ama la vida” brand. It is imperative to clarify that, within the governmental context, the State Corporate Brand is equivalent to its Nation Brand (Torres Salinas, 2013). Its primary function is to provide cohesion to Ecuadorian goods and services within international markets. To achieve this, the brand must be promoted with equal vigor across both domestic and international spheres.

In this context, the abandonment of the “Ecuador ama la vida” Nation Brand starting in 2017 facilitated the application of the legal doctrine of non-use (*desuso*). Although there is no formal ruling of non-use issued by the Secretaría Nacional de Derechos Intelectuales (SENADI—National Rights Intellectual Secretariat), the brand was considered effectively dormant since the beginning of Lenín Moreno’s administration. During this period, the government shifted its focus toward utilizing administration slogans such as “Toda una vida” (A Lifetime) and “El Gobierno de Todos” (Everyone's Government).

## Figure 8

### *Visual Identities Utilized during the Lenín Moreno Administration*



*Note.* The image illustrates the visual transition of official communication at the onset of the 2017–2021 presidential term, where priority was given to the government management brands “Toda una Vida” and “El Gobierno de Todos” over the pre-existing Nation Brand. Taken from Comunicado oficial 33, by the Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador (Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador), 2017 (<https://www.turismo.gob.ec/comunicado-oficial-33/>).

The Ecuadorian country brand is protected by intellectual property laws and governed by trademark regulations, which state that a brand cannot generate a risk of confusion or association. This confusion stemmed from the brand's lack of continuity and its use as a tool for political propaganda by the government of the time. This created a risk of the brand being canceled should it become generic. To prevent this, it is essential to evaluate the impact of a new country brand in depth before its implementation, ensuring it remains free from political influence (Pérez Peña et al., 2021).

The creation of the new brand responded not only to the disuse and confusion generated by "Ecuador ama la vida," but also to the need for an adjustment to reflect the social, political, and economic changes the country had undergone. Consequently, in 2022, the Ministry of Tourism finally launched the call for proposals for the project titled "Country Brand for Ecuador," which was designed with an execution timeline of 19 months.

### **3.3 The Pillars of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand**

Since its inception, the Ecuadorian Nation Brand appears to have focused predominantly on the tourism pillar, largely neglecting the pillars of exports and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This historical imbalance has been mitigated by various institutions that have taken on the responsibility of fostering the competitiveness of Ecuadorian companies.

Following Anholt's (2007a) framework on Competitive Identity, the management of a national brand must not be limited solely to tourism promotion; rather, it requires a strategic harmony among diverse sectors, including foreign trade, investment attraction, and diplomacy. Under this logic, the success of a country's reputation depends on all these pillars working in an integrated manner rather than in isolation.

### **3.3.1 The Tourism Pillar**

A clear example of this tourism-centric approach is the heavy influence of the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) in the creation of the first Nation Brand and its leading role in the development of all subsequent iterations.

Since the launch of “La vida en estado puro” in 2004, efforts to boost tourism intensified, consolidating a trend where the nation is promoted as a destination of biodiversity and landscapes, while relegating industrial competitiveness and capital acquisition to a secondary plane.

This institutional bias deepened with the “Ecuador Ama la Vida” brand in 2010, whose explicit objective was to transform the nation into a tourism powerhouse. This resulted in Ecuador being consumed internationally primarily under a logic of leisure travel rather than business.

During previous branding cycles, particularly under “Ecuador Ama la Vida,” an intensive economic investment in international promotion campaigns was registered. While these efforts increased visual recognition, they suffered from a lack of strategic architecture to foster exports and FDI.

The technical diagnosis of the 2022-2023 Nation Brand Project indicates that while significant budget allocations were destined to position the country as a destination, the absence of a strategic guide for productive sectors limited its positioning in trade rankings, such as those published by Bloom Consulting (Ministerio de Turismo, 2022).

This financial dissonance evidences that the Nation Brand has historically operated as a tourism marketing expense rather than an integral investment in Soft Power. This explains the current gap where major Ecuadorian exports, such as cocoa or shrimp, must build their own reputations in isolation from the state narrative, which remains predominantly focused on tourism.

With the creation of the CEM (Comisión Estratégica de Marcas or Strategic Brand Commission) via Executive Decree No. 706 in 2011, the State sought to centralize the administration and licensing of all government-owned brands to reduce the confusion generated by multiple overlapping identities. This commission was designed to coordinate the dissemination, training, and supervision of the national brand's usage. Nevertheless, although the commission considers the foreign trade and industrial sectors, its regulatory

design maintained a hierarchy that favors the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) as the primary manager of the Nation Brand.

In 2018, the CEM became structurally part of the Ministerio de Turismo through Executive Decree No. 488, which established the sitting Minister of Tourism as the head of the Nation Brand. This administrative hierarchy reinforced the institutional imbalance, as the brand remained at the disposal of destination promotion priorities, thereby limiting its capacity to foster investment and trade under the then-new concept of “Ecuador es Luz” (Ecuador is Light).

By granting operational and compliance control to the tourism sector, the management of the Nation Brand in 2024 and 2025 continues to face the challenge of synchronizing visual identity with the urgent need to attract trade and FDI. The latter reached critical levels in the last year due to the absence of a narrative centered on security and legal stability.

In synthesis, the hegemony of the tourism sector in the administration of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand has developed a national identity that is visually and tourism-oriented but economically fragmented. As analyzed, the institutional dependence on the Ministerio de Turismo and the prioritization of destination promotion campaigns have sidelined the consolidation of a competitiveness narrative that supports the exportable offer and the attraction of financial flows.

This saturation of the tourism pillar necessitates a shift in analysis toward the trade and investment pillars. The objective is to determine how productive sectors have managed their own positioning in the apparent absence of a national brand that functions as a comprehensive support platform for Ecuador’s economic development.

### **3.3.2 The Trade and Investment Pillars**

Focusing on the trade pillar, although the first Nation Brand was utilized as a Quality Seal for Ecuadorian products, this initiative was sidelined with the introduction of “La vida en estado puro.” This does not imply that Ecuadorian products have lacked the influence of the Country-of-Origin (COO) Effect to bolster their exports. Despite the brand's tourism orientation, the COO effect has evolved over time, building a robust reputation for Ecuador's primary exports, such as shrimp, cocoa, and bananas.

While the State did not focus on export promotion, evidence exists of collaborative efforts with CORPEI (Corporación de Promoción de Exportaciones e Inversiones) during the tenure of the first two Nation Brands. This private non-profit agency, with over 25 years

of experience, was instrumental in integrating the Nation Brand into export collateral and trade missions—primarily during the “La Vida en Estado Puro” era—ensuring that the national symbol served as an identifier of productive competitiveness rather than a mere decorative stamp.

CORPEI mitigated the previously mentioned weaknesses in state governance, ensuring that the excellence of Ecuadorian products was recognized for its traceability and efficiency in highly demanding markets, such as the European Union. Its work was not limited to trade but also extended to fostering non-oil investment, executing the guidelines defined by the Consejo de Comercio Exterior e Inversiones (COMEXI—Foreign Trade and Investment Council) (World Trade Organization, 2004).

Consequently, in 2001, CORPEI developed the National Non-Oil Investment Promotion Plan 2001-2010, which was adopted as a State policy in 2002 during the administration of Dr. Gustavo Noboa Bejarano. Although this was CORPEI's first major milestone, the agency also participated in the creation of a One-Stop Shop to prevent investor confusion, currently known as the Ventanilla Única de Inversiones (VUI—Investment One-Stop Shop) (Registro Oficial No. 558, 2002).

Under the administration of Rafael Correa, CORPEI lost its prominence, and PRO ECUADOR was created as the strategic arm of the Ministerio de Producción, Comercio Exterior, Inversiones y Pesca (Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment, and Fisheries) to return the role of trade promotion to the State. Although CORPEI did not disappear, it ceased to receive state support, resulting in a significant reduction of its institutional participation.

Since its inception, PRO ECUADOR has functioned as the technical entity responsible for executing export and investment promotion policies, operating as a strategic axis to connect local producers with global markets. Its work focuses on the diversification of the exportable offer, providing guidance to companies so they may achieve international quality standards and position value-added products beyond traditional raw materials. Through training programs and technical assistance, the organization strengthens the capacities of producers, facilitating their competitive insertion into Global Value Chains (GVC) (PRO ECUADOR, n.d.).

The institution manages an extensive network of trade offices distributed across key cities worldwide, which act as the operational arm for market intelligence and the generation

of business contacts. These offices allow for the identification of consumption trends in real-time and coordinate the participation of delegations in international trade fairs and business matchmaking events, ensuring that the national offer has an effective showcase before foreign buyers. This commercial diplomacy structure is vital for opening doors in complex markets and for maintaining a constant presence that builds trust among international business partners.

In the realm of economic development, PRO ECUADOR also plays a crucial role in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), promoting the country as a secure and profitable destination for sustainable projects. By acting as a facilitator between the State and the private sector, it simplifies processes and provides strategic information regarding incentives and legal frameworks to potential investors.

Currently, President Daniel Noboa has integrated PRO ECUADOR into the Ministerio de Producción, Comercio Exterior e Inversiones (Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, and Investment). This represents an encroachment on the institutional autonomy of the entity, as all its competencies have been subsumed by the Ministry of Production (Executive Decree No. 302, 2026). However, consolidating several institutions under a single ministry may prove beneficial in preventing organizational overlap.

In 2005, another private non-profit organization emerged with the goal of fostering the competitiveness of Ecuadorian goods and services: Mucho Mejor Ecuador (MME). What began as a group of companies from Cuenca now boasts more than five hundred member companies affiliated with its quality seal, known as “La Huella” (The Footprint).

MME has successfully established a seal that represents not only quality but also national pride. The organization emerged in 2005 as a response to the poor reputation of Ecuadorian products within the domestic market. Its approach was straightforward: to bridge the gap between companies and consumers by demonstrating that Ecuadorian products are of high quality. To achieve this, they established measurable and transparent quality pillars that allow for the evaluation of companies according to their level of maturity. This provides consumers with the confidence that the purchased product is not only Ecuadorian but of the highest standard (MME, 2021).

Throughout its more than 20-year history, the organization has built a robust reputation in the consumer’s top-of-mind. Beyond the aforementioned elements, this success is attributed to MME’s ability to foster a sense of pride and belonging among consumers. In

fact, a study conducted by the British consultancy IPSOS revealed that 70% of consumers actively look for “The Footprint” (La Huella) seal on the products they purchase.

In conclusion, it is evident that private organizations have managed to bolster the trade and investment pillars more effectively than the official Nation Brand. The primary reason for this is that, as private entities, they have achieved institutional continuity, enduring beyond the political cycles to which the Nation Brand is inherently subject.

## **CHAPTER 4.**

# **IDENTITY, IMAGE, AND REPUTATION OF THE “ECUADOR BRILLA AUTÉNTICAMENTE” NATION BRAND**

The success of a Nation Brand is not based solely on its graphic design or the effectiveness of its slogan, but on what authors such as Anholt (2011) define as the coherence between the projected identity and the lived experience of both citizens and visitors. For Competitive Identity to be effective, actions must align with the message. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of the brand under study has been conditioned by a context of high political instability and national crises.

### **4.1 The Final Stages of Brand Development**

The following section analyzes how the brand development process—marked by changes in government and an unprecedented energy crisis—has generated a significant gap between the narrative of "light" and the country's reality.

The development of the Nation Brand began during the mandate of Guillermo Lasso, with an estimated duration of nine months. It was overseen by the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) through the CEM and the Future McCann consortium, specifically the U.S.-based firm FutureBrand, responsible for the development and management of several renowned brands such as American Airlines and the Peru Nation Brand and Mabecca Corporation, for a total value of USD 698,896.

Like the rest of the country, the Nation Brand was heavily impacted by the political instability of 2023, triggered by the "Muerte Cruzada" (Mutual Dissolution) decreed by then-President Guillermo Lasso. This resulted in his departure at the end of that year and the inauguration of Daniel Noboa on November 23, 2023.

Due to the change in government, the Nation Brand project was postponed and defunded. Initially, the brand was to be officially unveiled at the Feria Internacional de Turismo (FITUR) in January 2024; however, it eventually saw a national launch following a public vote in June of that same year.

The final stage of the development process consisted of an open vote for both Ecuadorians and foreigners, in which they could choose from three proposals focused on three concepts: the ethnic aspect through the slogan “Luz que refleja” (Light that reflects); the geographic position represented by the equator with the slogan “Luz que se expande”

(Light that expands); and finally, “Luz con ritmo” (Light with rhythm). The third proposal was the winner, resulting in the logo we have today.

**Figure 9**

*From Left to Right: “Luz que refleja,” “Luz que se expande,” and “Luz con ritmo”*



*Note.* Visualization of the finalist concepts for the national identity presented in 2023. Taken from “Nueva marca país de Ecuador: Conozca las tres propuestas,” 2023, Primicias (<https://www.primicias.ec/noticias/economia/marca-pais-ecuador-turismo-exportaciones/>). Reprinted for academic purposes.

Having explained the path that led to the creation of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand, it is now time to conduct an in-depth analysis of the brand. According to Simon Anholt’s Competitive Identity theory (Anholt, 2007a), a Nation Brand is not a mere marketing campaign, but the synthesis of what the country does and what the world perceives.

## **4.2 The Dissonance between Identity, Image, and National Reality**

In the Ecuadorian case, the transition to the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” brand represents an attempt to redesign the national narrative toward a concept of brightness and optimism. However, Filipe Torres and Karaburun (2026) warn that a country image lacking support in operational reality becomes a hollow promise that erodes the trust of international consumers.

### **4.2.1 The Concept of “Light” and “Brightness”**

The Ecuador Nation Brand Identity Manual bases its strategy on “Light” as a unifying element, seeking to project a transparent, diverse, and energetic nation. The defined personality attributes (Creative, Resilient, Friendly, Energetic, and Genuine) aim to encapsulate the Ecuadorian citizen. The manual utilizes a vibrant color palette and fluid typography to evoke a sense of movement and rhythm, aligning with the winning concept, “Luz con ritmo” (Light with Rhythm) (Ministerio de Turismo, 2023).

Within the audience-specific manifests, the manual delves into sector-specific promises. For tourism, the discourse centers on “Ecuador, where the light never goes out,”

a metaphor intended to highlight the twelve hours of daily sunlight that allow for a deeper exploration of sensory experiences within the country (Ministerio de Turismo, 2023).

In the investment axis, the narrative focuses on the "strategic advantage" of diversity, proposing "light" as a symbol of clarity and legal certainty for foreign capital. Nevertheless, Jon Tipple underscores that a Nation Brand must be a transversal State policy; here, the manual is perceived more as an aesthetic guide than a long-term reputational management plan (FutureBrand, 2020).

The semiotic analysis of the proposed values—Sustainability, Respect, Quality, Diversity, and Hospitality—reveals an effort to align with global Soft Power trends, such as the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Anholt (2011), these values are reputational assets that should facilitate the export of value-added products. However, the manual dedicates a significant portion to visual standardization, sidelining the strategy for implementing these values within public institutions. This limits its impact to a promotional dimension rather than a structural one, as it should be.

#### **4.2.2 "Brightness" and the Blackouts**

At the domestic level, the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand was officially launched during one of the most severe energy crises in recent decades. A large portion of Ecuador's power generation depends on hydroelectric energy, and the country experienced one of the most severe drought-induced low water levels (estiajes) in its history. This was compounded by disputes between the leaders of Ecuador and Colombia—the latter of which ceased selling electricity to its neighbor—causing Ecuador to be plunged into blackouts of up to 14 hours a day since April 2024 (Cañizares, 2024a).

It was within this context of power outages that the current Ecuadorian Nation Brand was launched, via decree on June 14, 2024. The disconnect between the discourse of “brilla auténticamente” (shines authentically) or “brilla con luz propia” (shines with its own light) and the reality of a country suffering daily blackouts negatively affected the perception and acceptance of the brand both nationally and internationally.

As interviewee Cecilia Ugalde mentions, the concept of “brilla con luz propia,” widely used during the brand's release, felt like a mockery and an insult to Ecuadorians. This demonstrates that the dissonance between the narrative and reality has been profound, negatively impacting the brand's positioning within its own borders.

Just five days after its official launch, Ecuador suffered its first major mass grid failure on June 19, 2024, further undermining the already discreet rollout of the brand. A second wave of power cuts in September 2024 exacerbated the situation. Due to a drought that caused low production in complexes such as Paute, Mazar, and Molino—and which also affected Colombia, which could no longer sell energy to Ecuador at that time—the national energy crisis intensified (Cañizares, 2024b).

On the international stage, the Nation Brand was unable to participate in the 2024 Feria Internacional de Turismo (FITUR) as originally planned. However, it participated in the 2025 edition, winning the “Tourism Excellence Award” (Ministerio de Turismo, 2025a). Similarly, it received a national award in the BestReBrand/Visual Identity category (Ministerio de Turismo, 2025c).

In conclusion, the analysis reveals a profound dissonance between “the Manual’s Ecuador” and “the Empirical Ecuador,” where the promise of an “Energetic” nation is nullified by the reality of mass blackouts, turning the slogan into an irony for the citizen. As Filipe Torres and Karaburun (2026) maintain, the efficiency of a brand depends on its digital demand, which to this day remains neutralized by a global narrative saturated with news regarding the energy crisis and insecurity.

### **4.3 The Ecuadorian Reputation**

The reputation of a nation is configured as a strategic asset that, according to Simon Anholt (2007a), functions as capital determining the global willingness to consume its products, visit it, or invest in its future. This definition is complemented by Kiambi and Shafer (2018), who define it as the set of long-term subjective opinions. These perceptions are nurtured by both direct experiences—namely, contact with citizens and institutions—and indirect influences, such as media coverage and comparative information against competing countries. This consolidates a public image that is not built through advertising but must be earned through the reality of actions and the consistency of character.

To analyze the international impact the Ecuadorian Nation Brand has had since its launch, the same reports used previously to measure the “Ecuador ama la vida” brand will be utilized: the FutureBrand Country Index and the Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Ranking.

### **4.3.1 Global Soft Power Index (Brand Finance)**

The annual Soft Power index published by Brand Finance (2026) allows for a rigorous analysis of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand's evolution. First, it is necessary to detail the criteria used to measure Soft Power and assign a ranking to each of the 175 countries analyzed: the score is the sum of familiarity, reputation, and influence, integrated with eight specific Soft Power attributes defined by the firm.

While this index is not a direct classification of Nation Brands per se, its comparison is highly relevant as it incorporates key brand analysis factors such as investment, trade, country perception, culture, and heritage (Brand Finance, 2025).

The results of this classification have been published annually between January and February since 2020. Regarding the Ecuadorian Nation Brand, there is clear evidence of a downward trend in the rankings: in 2024, months before the official launch of “Ecuador brilla auténticamente,” the country held the 86th position. By early 2025, it dropped three places to 89th. Finally, in the 2026 ranking, it fell to 93rd, placing it only ahead of Venezuela within the Latin American context (Brand Finance, 2024, 2025, 2026).

### **4.3.2 Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Ranking**

On the other hand, the international firm Bloom Consulting, specialized in place branding and Nation Brands, has developed its own ranking since 2003. In this case, the analysis is divided into tourism and trade. Their ranking evaluates the attraction of investment, tourism, and talent, along with public diplomacy and exports—all essential pillars of a Nation Brand (Bloom Consulting, 2020).

The Bloom Consulting Nation Brand Ranking is considered one of the most impartial classification methods available, as it analyzes Big Data through its proprietary algorithm, D2 Digital Demand ©. This allows for results that are more objective and direct than those of firms relying solely on international consultant surveys.

As with the previous index, Ecuador's position will be analyzed both before and after the launch of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” brand to assess its impact. For the 2023/2024 period, the country held the 17th position (regionally), climbing three spots from the previous edition. In that same period, countries like Colombia and Peru ranked 11th and 7th, respectively. In the most recent ranking, Ecuador remained stagnant at 17th, while Peru and Colombia improved their standing to 10th and 9th (Bloom Consulting, 2023, 2025).

Through these two classification systems, it is evident that the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand has not yielded a significant positive impact: it dropped several positions in the first index and remained stagnant in the second, despite the latter being a regional classification. These data reveal an ambiguous international performance for the brand; therefore, it is essential to analyze the underlying causes of this phenomenon.

### **4.3.3 Safety and Security Crisis in Ecuador**

Beyond any ranking, the primary challenge facing Ecuador is its current safety and security crisis. On the domestic front, the Dirección Nacional de Delitos contra la Vida, Muertes Violentas, Desapariciones, Extorsiones y Secuestros (DINASED—National Directorate of Crimes against Life, Violent Deaths, Disappearances, Extortion, and Kidnapping), an arm of the Ecuadorian National Police, conducted a report on intentional homicides comparing 2024 and 2025 figures.

In this context, the overall total of intentional homicides in the country increased by 32% in 2025 (9,161 deaths) compared to 2024 (7,063), with 94.6% of these classified as murders. Furthermore, criminal violence accounts for 95.4% of the overall violence (Policía Nacional del Ecuador, 2026). While these figures do not fall under the direct influence of the Nation Brand, they severely impact national competitiveness, particularly within the tourism sector.

To effectively analyze the impact of increasing insecurity in Ecuador, it is essential to study the country’s international perception. For this purpose, globally renowned classifications such as the Global Peace Index (GPI) and the Good Country Index (GCI) will be utilized.

The GPI represents the most significant challenge to the current brand narrative. Between 2023 and 2024, Ecuador experienced the second-largest deterioration of peace worldwide, with a 12.36% drop in its score. In the 2025 report, the country ranks 129th out of 163 nations—a position that directly contradicts the "Friendly" personality attribute defined in the brand manual. This gap between the desired identity (light, warmth) and the perceived identity (violence, internal armed conflict) generates a cognitive dissonance in tourism-source markets.

In its most recent 2025 ranking, Ecuador maintained its position at 129 out of 163, ranking only above Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia in South America. This is attributed to

various factors, including national protests, the degradation of security, and the increased use of military power within the country (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025).

On the other hand, the GCI, developed by Anholt to measure countries' contributions to the common good of humanity, ranks Ecuador 92nd in its version 1.6, released in late 2024. Although the country stands out in the "Planet and Climate" dimension—thanks to biodiversity policies in the Galápagos—its performance in "Science and Technology" and "World Order" remains limited. The implementation of the new brand in 2024 has attempted to mitigate this perception by focusing on sustainability; however, the global index does not yet reflect a statistically significant change in the perception of the Ecuadorian contribution to the world (Good Country Index by Country 2026, 2026).

#### **4.4 Practical Application of the Nation Brand**

As previously established, a successful Nation Brand must focus on three fundamental pillars: tourism, investment, and exports. Historically, the Ecuadorian Nation Brand has concentrated its efforts on the tourism pillar, leading to its perception as a tourism-oriented or political label rather than a comprehensive national brand that enhances overall country competitiveness.

Before examining the practical use of the brand and specifically analyzing the portals of various institutions, it is pertinent to highlight that on the official Ecuadorian digital governance portal (Gob.ec), the Nation Brand is not utilized in any of the primary sections (Home, Procedures, Institutions, Access).

Furthermore, when accessing the portals of key institutions such as the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) or the Ministerio de Producción, Comercio Exterior e Inversiones (Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment, and Fisheries), the Nation Brand remains absent. Instead, the administration branding of Daniel Noboa, “El Nuevo Ecuador” (The New Ecuador), is prominently displayed. This constitutes a significant strategic positioning error for the Ecuadorian Nation Brand, as all processes are tied to the presidential image—a brand with a limited lifespan from the moment of its creation.

## Figure 10

### *Visual Identity of the Daniel Noboa Administration*



*Note.* Official logo of the 2023–2025 government administration. Taken from the Secretaría General de Comunicación de la Presidencia (General Secretariat of Communication of the Presidency), 2026 (<https://www.comunicacion.gob.ec>). Reprinted for academic purposes.

A more exhaustive search of the Ministry of Tourism’s website confirms the pervasive use of the presidential logo “EL NUEVO ECUADOR” across all sections of the site (Home, *Emprende Turismo*, *Tourism in Figures*, *Programs and Services*, *International Fairs*). The Nation Brand is only found within the *International Fairs* section. This department is responsible for assisting national tourism stakeholders in preparing for and participating in some of the world’s largest international trade shows, such as the *Feria Internacional de Turismo (FITUR)* or the *Internationale Tourismus-Börse (ITB Berlin)* (Ministerio de Turismo, 2025b).

While information exists for 34 international fairs, only two tourism promotion events are advertised within Ecuador. Once again, it is evident that the Ecuadorian Nation Brand has been conceived for the international market, with minimal focus on domestic dissemination or internal branding.

In contrast, the portal of the *Ventanilla Única de Inversiones del Ecuador (VUI—Investment One-Stop Shop)* does feature the Nation Brand at its entry point. It presents the Ecuadorian export catalog with branding aligned with the Nation Brand Manual, emphasizing the primary non-oil export products (shrimp, bananas, and flowers) (*Ventanilla Única de Inversiones - Ecuador*, n.d.).

Conversely, the *Invest Ecuador Tourism* website, tasked with promoting investment in the Ecuadorian tourism sector, suffers from the recurring error of visual identity overlap. Although the Nation Brand is mentioned, it is limited to the inclusion of the brand’s promotional video.

One of the most concerning observations is the absence of a dedicated portal for the Nation Brand. During its launch year, a website was created to disseminate its offer to stakeholders and facilitate global access. Shortly thereafter, this page was decommissioned,

and the domain [marcapaisecuador.com](http://marcapaisecuador.com) is currently listed for sale. Similarly, its social media presence is restricted to its Instagram account (@marcapaisecuador), where the last post was published on May 17, 2025.

The only website that utilizes the brand's identity in its entirety is *Viaja Ecuador*, managed by the Ministry of Tourism. This again reveals the primary use of the Nation Brand: tourism promotion. In this case, it is noteworthy that the site targets not only international tourists but also domestic ones—a practice uncommon for the Ecuadorian Nation Brand (Ministerio de Turismo, n.d.-b).

*Viaja Ecuador* also maintains an active presence on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok; these channels demonstrate the most effective application of the Nation Brand, surpassing even the brand's own official pages and networks. This further underscores the tourism-centric focus of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand.

This extensive overlap of websites, portals, and institutional logos generates significant confusion that undermines the Nation Brand. It is displaced on key institutional portals and social media platforms either by the visual identity of the current administration (administration branding) or by the individual identities of each entity. This lack of cohesion is exacerbated by the non-existence of an official brand portal and the abandonment of its social media accounts (dormant accounts), which limits its effective presence for the export and investment pillars and refocuses it, once again, on tourism.

In summary, the practical management of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand reveals a complex duality. While the brand has received awards both nationally and internationally, its practical validity remains questionable. The coincidence between the launch of an identity based on “light” and the onset of one of the greatest energy crises in Ecuadorian history has eroded the brand's symbolic power before it could even consolidate.

Furthermore, the prioritization of the presidential brand over the Nation Brand reveals a visual overlap that contradicts the very essence of Nation Branding. These recurring dissonances in the history of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand demonstrate that without internal stability and continuity in State policies, the brand risks being perceived as a cosmetic marketing strategy rather than a genuine tool for identity, development, and national reputation.

## **CHAPTER 5.**

# **STRENGTHENING FACTORS AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE “ECUADOR BRILLA AUTÉNTICAMENTE” NATION BRAND**

This chapter presents the findings of the research. Having analyzed the current state and perception of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand in the preceding sections, it is imperative to determine the critical factors that will ensure not only its institutional survival but its consolidation as a strategic international competitiveness asset.

Under the premise that a Nation Brand must be a State policy rather than a government policy, this section identifies the strategic adjustments required to bridge the gap between visual identity and the country’s reality and reputation. To this end, solutions are proposed that go beyond tourism marketing, focusing instead on governance, the integration of the investment and export pillars, and the insulation of the brand against national political instability. The ultimate goal is to transform the concept of “brightness” into a seal of trust, sustainability, and resilience that positions the three pillars of the Ecuadorian Nation Brand distinctively within the global market.

### **5.1 Data Triangulation Based on Analytical Axes**

To provide scientific validity to the strengthening proposals presented in this chapter, a data triangulation technique has been employed, as previously defined in the methodology of this document. This exercise allows for the contrasting of diverse information sources to reduce bias and obtain a more comprehensive view of the problem. Three fundamental dimensions are integrated into this analytical process:

**The Empirical Axis:** Based on primary sources obtained through testimonies and perspectives from key stakeholders in the private, public, and academic sectors, whose insights capture the brand's operational and commercial reality. Within Table 1, this axis is labeled Expert Vision.

**The Theoretical Axis:** Centered on the principles of Nation Branding, grounded in the ideas of international experts such as Simon Anholt and Filipe Torres, who define the standards for national competitiveness and reputation. Within Table 1, this axis is presented as Theoretical Foundation.

**The Institutional Axis:** Derived from official sources, this axis was extracted from technical documents such as the FutureBrand Brand Manual, executive decrees, and an

analysis of the State's digital presence on official portals where the Nation Brand is featured. This corresponds to the Institutional/Legal Framework within Table 1.

It is important to note that, for the sake of analytical efficiency, the analytical axis regarding the "interviewee's context and profile"—previously defined in the methodology—has been omitted. This component is considered irrelevant to this strategic diagnosis, as the research interest lies in the findings obtained and the technical visions regarding the brand's performance, rather than in the individual trajectories of the participants.

Following this, Table 1: Triangulation Matrix of Findings by Analytical Dimensions is presented, summarizing the main dissonances and points of convergence found across the analytical axes: Identity, Positioning, and Governance.

**Table 3**  
*Triangulation Matrix of Findings according to Analytical Axes*

<b>Analytical Axis</b>	<b>Theoretical Foundation</b>	<b>Institutional/Legal Framework</b>	<b>Expert Vision</b>	<b>Integrated Analysis</b>
<b>Identity and Narrative</b>	According to Simon Anholt (2007), identity must be an "inner truth" projected outward. The narrative must be honest; if a gap exists between promise and reality, the brand loses credibility.	The Brand Manual establishes "Light" as the central concept under the slogan "Ecuador brilla auténticamente." It defines personality attributes such as: Energetic, Resilient, and Genuine (Ministerio de Turismo, 2023).	The launch coincided with energy crises (14-hour blackouts) and insecurity. The "Friendly" attribute clashes with the rise in internationally reported crime. The concept of "Light" is perceived as a social irony.	Cognitive Dissonance: There is a rupture between the visual identity centered on brightness and the lived identity (darkness/insecurity). The manual's technical narrative fails the empirical test, generating what Anholt defines as a crisis of brand honesty.
<b>Positioning and Strategy</b>	Torres and Karaburun (2026) maintain that competitiveness is measured by the ability to attract digital demand across three pillars: Tourism, Investment, and Exports. Positioning must be comprehensive, not sectoral.	The Ministry of Tourism prioritizes international promotion (34 international fairs vs. 2 domestic). Historical focus has been on the tourism pillar, neglecting competitiveness in investment and foreign trade.	Digital searches regarding Ecuador are saturated with negative news (prison/energy crises). The brand is perceived as a "tourism fair logo" rather than a seal of trust for international investors or buyers.	Promotional Bias: The strategy is limited to external tourism marketing, ignoring comprehensive competitiveness. Following Torres and Karaburun, the brand fails to position itself as a trust asset due to a lack of grounding in national reality.
<b>Governance</b>	Jon Tipple emphasizes that a Nation Brand is a State policy, not a Government policy. It must be apolitical, transversal, and insulated from electoral cycles to guarantee long-term value (FutureBrand, 2020).	Brand usage is governed by executive decrees. However, on portals like Gob.ec and ministry websites, the Nation Brand is invisible, replaced by the administration logo "El Nuevo Ecuador" of Daniel Noboa.	Evidence shows visual competition: the perishable presidential image displaces national identity. The Nation Brand is relegated to secondary sections of institutional websites, losing its role as a national umbrella.	Institutional Fragility: Governance is weak and personality-driven. By linking processes to the image of the sitting leader, Tipple's premise of the brand as a sovereign asset is violated, turning it into a transitory political instrument.

As observed in the previous triangulation matrix, the analysis highlights a marked cognitive dissonance between "the Manual's Ecuador" and "the Empirical Ecuador." While the theoretical foundation and the institutional framework propose a powerful brand based on light and resilience, expert insights and field reality reveal that external factors (energy crisis and insecurity) and internal ones (visual overlap with political and institutional logos) minimize the brand's effectiveness.

This contrast identifies that the weakness of the Nation Brand does not lie in its graphic design, but rather in its governance and interoperability. The brand's invisibility at key touchpoints, such as Gob.ec, and the exclusively tourism-centric bias in international promotion are findings that serve as the foundation for the SWOT diagnosis and the subsequent CAME strategy detailed below.

## **5.2 Situational Diagnosis: SWOT Matrix of the “Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente” Nation Brand**

Having identified the critical gaps through data triangulation, this section aims to systematize the situational diagnosis of the Nation Brand through a SWOT Matrix. This tool organizes internal factors (Strengths and Weaknesses) and external factors (Opportunities and Threats) that condition the competitiveness of the national identity on the global stage. At this point in the research, the SWOT is not limited to a mere inventory of attributes; rather, it acts as an analytical filter to understand how the visual and conceptual identity designed by FutureBrand interacts with a national reality marked by energy crises, security challenges, and fragmented institutional and digital governance.

**Table 4**  
*SWOT Analysis Matrix of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand*

Strategic Axis	Strengths (Internal)	Opportunities (External)	Weaknesses (Internal)	Threats (External)
<b>Identity &amp; Narrative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic Legitimacy: Selection via public vote among three concepts, providing the brand with an initial sense of belonging.</li> <li>• Graphic Excellence: World-class visual system (created by FutureBrand) awarded for its aesthetics and chromatic versatility.</li> <li>• Concept of "Light": A powerful metaphor symbolizing warmth, transparency, and energy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative Reframing: Ability to pivot the "Light" concept toward values closer to Ecuadorians, such as human resilience and hope during internal crises.</li> <li>• Sustainability Branding: Positioning as a leader in conservation, aligning "brightness" with the global green agenda (Galápagos).</li> <li>• Origin Certification: Use of the brand as a seal of "authenticity" for premium niche products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Semantic Dissonance: The slogan "Brilla" (Shines) clashes with the energy crisis (blackouts) and rising danger, creating a perception of disconnect from reality.</li> <li>• Invalidation of Attributes: Values of "Hospitality" and "Friendly" are neutralized by crime rates and insecurity.</li> <li>• Conceptual Ambiguity: Risk of "Authentically" being perceived as a cliché if not backed by tangible evidence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Credibility Crisis: Risk that the local population perceives the brand as irony or mockery in the face of basic service failures.</li> <li>• Negative Algorithmic Association: Search engines link "Ecuador" to government crises, overshadowing digital branding efforts.</li> <li>• Transnational Media Narrative: Global coverage centered on insecurity nullifies the discourse of peace.</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning &amp; Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-Value Natural Anchors: Backing from umbrella brands like Galápagos ensures competitiveness in international tourism.</li> <li>• Elite Market Recognition: Consolidated presence in major global tourism fairs (FITUR, ITB Berlin).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pillar Diversification: Expansion into Investment and Export sectors, using cocoa, flowers, bananas, and shrimp as commercial flagships.</li> <li>• New Segment Acquisition: Leveraging the digital nomad market and post-pandemic wellness tourism.</li> <li>• FDI Attraction: Positioning Ecuador as a hub of undiscovered opportunities in the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism-Promotional Bias: The brand operates almost exclusively for tourism, neglecting investment and foreign trade pillars.</li> <li>• Dissemination Imbalance: Strong external promotion vs. almost non-existent national dissemination, limiting internal appropriation.</li> <li>• Absence of Metrics: Lack of clear KPIs linking branding efforts to actual ROI.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Competition: Neighbors (Peru, Colombia) with more mature brands capture investment that Ecuador misses.</li> <li>• Country Risk Volatility: Economic and legal instability prevents the brand from serving as a guarantee for foreign investors.</li> <li>• Investment Flight: Energy and political crises drive away industrial capital seeking operational stability.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-Quality Technical Support: Comprehensive Brand Manual ensuring visual and technical coherence across institutional applications.</li> <li>• Regulatory Backing: Institutionalization through executive decrees that formalize its creation and initial management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevation to State Policy: Opportunity to safeguard the brand through a Law of the Republic to protect it from political volatility.</li> <li>• Public-Private Council: Creation of an autonomous body to decouple brand management from the sitting government's interests.</li> <li>• Transversal Digital Integration: Unifying the brand across all State touchpoints for citizens, tourists, and investors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual Brand Cannibalization: The administration logo "El Nuevo Ecuador" (Noboa) displaces the Nation Brand on key portals.</li> <li>• Web Fragmentation: The brand is marginal on the central portal Gob.ec and other State platforms, showing a lack of interoperability.</li> <li>• Progressive Defunding: Postponements and lack of resources due to the priority given to security and energy crises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral Cycle Vulnerability: Threat of the brand being discarded in 2025 by a new government, losing the investment achieved.</li> <li>• Personality-Driven Marketing: Linking the brand to the presidential image limits its perception as a permanent sovereign asset.</li> <li>• Loss of Ambassadors: Risk of the private sector abandoning the brand if perceived as a transitory political tool.</li> </ul>
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The matrix presented highlights a structural tension between the technical excellence of the visual system and the fragility of its institutional execution. It is observed that strengths are concentrated in the quality of the design and the legitimacy of the co-creation process; however, these are undermined by critical weaknesses such as the brand cannibalization exercised by administration logos and the brand's invisibility on the centralized Gob.ec portal.

On the external front, the threats represented by the security crisis and the blackouts generate a semantic dissonance that jeopardizes the "Brilla" (Shines) slogan, while opportunities lean toward sustainability niches and new digital economies. This diagnosis underscores that the Nation Brand is not suffering from a graphic identity crisis, but rather a crisis of safeguarding and governance. This justifies the transition toward the correction and coping strategies detailed in the CAME proposal below.

### **5.3 Improving Factors of the Nation Brand: CAME Matrix of “Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente”**

As the SWOT diagnosis identified the current state of the brand, the CAME Matrix constitutes the strategic and operational response phase. This methodological tool allows for Correcting weaknesses, Adapting to threats, Maintaining strengths, and Exploring detected opportunities. In this section, the Nation Brand ceases to be analyzed as a graphic product and begins to be managed for what it truly is: an intangible competitiveness asset. The actions proposed here aim to bridge the gap between the designed identity and institutional reality, ensuring that the slogan "Brilla Auténticamente" transcends current circumstances and becomes a sovereign guarantee seal before the international system.

**Table 5**  
*CAME Strategic Analysis Matrix of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand*

Strategic Axis	CORRECT (Weaknesses)	ADAPT (Threats)	MAINTAIN (Strengths)	EXPLORE (Opportunities)	Theoretical Justification
<b>Identity &amp; Narrative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual Dissonance: Synchronize the "Brilla" slogan with operational reality to avoid social irony.</li> <li>• Tangibility: Create quality seals to provide physical backing to the "Authentically" promise.</li> <li>• Subjectivity: Reduce dependence on emotional attributes and increase functional ones (security, traceability).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputational Crisis: Shift the "Light" narrative toward resilience, human talent, and culture.</li> <li>• Crisis Response: Implement a narrative response center to mitigate international negative news.</li> <li>• Social Disconnect: Ensure citizens do not see the brand as foreign; foster national ownership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual System: Preserve FutureBrand’s color palette and typography for its high technical quality.</li> <li>• Democratic Origin: Use the public vote as a shield against criticisms of political imposition.</li> <li>• Versatility: Maintain the brand’s ability to adapt to digital and physical formats consistently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainability Markets: Link the brand to the decarbonization agenda; Ecuador as a megadiverse leader.</li> <li>• Country-of-Origin Effect: Use the prestige of cocoa and flowers as a premium export endorsement.</li> <li>• Conscious Luxury: Position as the top destination for post-pandemic travelers seeking authenticity.</li> </ul>	<p>Simon Anholt (2007): Competitive identity is a 360° scheme. If one pillar fails (infrastructure), others (culture, people) must compensate for the value perception.</p>
<b>Positioning &amp; Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism Bias: Integrate the Investment and Export pillars that are currently invisible.</li> <li>• Lack of Measurement: Establish real conversion metrics beyond "likes" to measure ROI.</li> <li>• Dissemination Imbalance: Increase domestic promotion (currently only 2 events vs. 34 international) to achieve citizen buy-in.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Competitiveness: Differentiate from Peru and Colombia through specific niches (Megadiversity, quality services).</li> <li>• Country Risk: Address political volatility by highlighting legal certainty in strategic sectors and low inflation due to dollarization.</li> <li>• Capital Flight: Showcase success stories of local companies that "shine" to rebuild investor trust.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade Show Presence: Maintain leadership in FITUR and elite events, but with a multi-sectoral approach.</li> <li>• Anchor Brands: Continue using positioned brands like Galápagos or Paccari as the "entry point" for exports.</li> <li>• Recognition: Retain awards as third-party validation for new markets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Demand: Invest in recovering the official website and SEO/SEM for searches like "Safe Investment."</li> <li>• Digital Nomads: Leverage cost advantages and geography through a "Nation Brand Visa" to attract talent.</li> <li>• Logistics Hub: Utilize geographical position for Trans-Pacific trade (Americas-Asia).</li> </ul>	<p>Torres &amp; Karaburun (2026): Positioning is not what you say, but what the world finds. Competitiveness is based on digital demand management.</p>

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<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual Overlap: Remove/reduce administration logos (e.g., "El Nuevo Ecuador") from technical State portals.</li> <li>• Invisibility on Gob.ec: Integrate the brand as a mandatory umbrella for all citizen procedures.</li> <li>• Fragmentation: Correct the lack of interoperability between the Ministries of Tourism and Production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political Volatility: Address the upcoming government change through legislative safeguarding to prevent discarding the brand.</li> <li>• Budget Constraints: Mitigate fiscal cuts by creating a self-sustaining fund through brand licensing.</li> <li>• Stakeholder Desertion: Prevent chambers of commerce from abandoning the brand by depoliticizing its management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand Manual: Maintain discipline in technical manuals to prevent identity degradation.</li> <li>• Regulatory Structure: Preserve existing decrees but strengthen them toward an autonomous institution.</li> <li>• Technical Talent: Retain operational teams and utilize the technical studies performed during development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public-Private Council: Create an autonomous entity (Pro-Peru style) to manage the brand with a 20-year vision.</li> <li>• Brand Ambassadors: Empower exporters and international celebrities as custodians of the brand.</li> <li>• Brand Diplomacy: Use embassies as permanent "Showrooms" to improve international reputation.</li> </ul>	<p>Jon Tipple (2020): Governance is the brand's immune system. Without a structure protecting it from political marketing, the asset depreciates.</p>
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The CAME Matrix presented above articulates a strategic roadmap that prioritizes governance and narrative synchronization. Strategies to correct weaknesses must focus on eliminating the brand's invisibility within critical digital ecosystems, such as the primary state portal, Gob.ec. Meanwhile, strategies to address threats propose a resilient response to the energy and security crises—as well as post-pandemic global shifts—by shifting the focus of "brightness" toward human capital.

It is fundamental to highlight that the brand's competitiveness, according to the model by Torres and Karaburun (2026), depends on the State's ability to manage digital demand. Consequently, actions to exploit opportunities integrate the use of tools to develop and position the brand online, as well as the attraction of digital nomads as drivers of investment. Ultimately, the proposal for an Organic Law for Nation Branding stands as the definitive strategic action to provide institutional safeguarding for this asset against electoral cycles, ensuring its permanence as a technical, depoliticized, and long-term result-oriented State policy.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand reveals a structural disconnect between the symbolic construction of national identity and its execution as a State policy. Unlike other nations that have positioned their image as a Soft Power asset, the Ecuadorian case presents governance gaps that limit its overall impact. According to Anholt’s theory (2007), a nation’s Competitive Identity must be grounded in an “inner truth” projected with consistency to be truly effective.

A highly relevant historical benchmark is the “I Love NY” brand, which demonstrates that the success of a territorial brand is not born from aesthetics but from the necessity of rescuing a narrative in crisis. In Ecuador, the “Light” narrative clashes with a complex social reality, generating what Cecilia Ugalde (2024) identifies as “semantic dissonance.” The slogan may be perceived with irony by citizens due to the persistent electricity blackouts and the security crisis affecting the country.

This lack of alignment between the brand promise and the actual experience of the territory prevents the country from building a solid reputation against its regional neighbors. While in Ecuador the national identity is frequently displaced by the sitting administration's branding, countries like Peru have demonstrated that the key to success lies in institutional autonomy. As noted by Interviewee A, the Ecuadorian Nation Brand lacks a meaningful presence on government portals and within the daily operations of the State.

Similarly, Marca España and its iconic “Miró’s Sun” illustrate how a visual identity can serve as a cohesive umbrella for all national sectors. In the local context, this role has been better executed by the private sector than by the public sector. Mónica Malo Jirón highlights that initiatives such as “Mucho Mejor Ecuador” (MME) have succeeded in building a concept of identity and quality that the official Nation Brand has yet to achieve.

For “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” to transcend its promotional scope, it is essential for the brand to stop being a mere advertising facelift and become a genuine driver for the economy. According to the analyzed regulatory framework, such as Executive Decree 1291, the brand aims to attract capital; however, in practice, it lacks the ministerial synergy required to back it up. The brand demands a management commitment that ensures long-term stability.

The absence of a unified digital marketing strategy exacerbates the brand's invisibility in the global ecosystem. Unlike successful strategies that segment investment and tourism

audiences with precision, the Ecuadorian execution remains fragmented. As Tipple (2020) explains, a Nation Brand must be treated with the rigor of a global corporate brand, where every digital touchpoint reinforces the nation's unique value proposition.

Furthermore, Nation Brand management must be integrated into commercial diplomacy to bridge the perception gap in destination markets. The brand must not only sell tourist destinations but also regulatory trust and productive quality. Based on the interviews conducted, Cecilia Ugalde emphasizes that a Nation Brand is a promise that must be kept; otherwise, foreign investment will seek markets with more solid and reliable identities.

Finally, it is imperative to understand that a Nation Brand is a competitiveness tool where perception directly influences the influx of investment. According to Tipple's (2020) framework, a Nation Brand must be treated as an apolitical State policy to guarantee its survival. Only through safeguarded governance and a coherent internal narrative can Ecuador aspire for its brand to shine as a legitimate certified guarantee.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The “Ecuador brilla auténticamente” Nation Brand, despite possessing a modern and technical visual structure, has failed in its implementation as a genuine State policy. Its management has remained confined to a tourism promotion effort that overlooks the critical importance of the investment and export pillars for national competitiveness. This reductionist framework prevents the brand from functioning as a comprehensive economic catalyst within the international system, leaving the country vulnerable to regional competitors with far more robust and diversified institutional structures.

A critical dissonance exists between the “Light” narrative proposed by the brand identity and a national reality characterized by energy and security crises. Consequently, the message loses the credibility required to attract foreign capital and is perceived with irony by the citizenry itself, weakening the sense of belonging and national pride. Without a foundation of reality to sustain the slogan, the Nation Brand becomes a cosmetic tool that fails to transform investors' risk perception or consolidate a reputation of trust.

Furthermore, the brand's governance is alarmingly fragile due to its direct dependence on political cycles and the rotating ministerial cabinets. The phenomenon of “brand cannibalization,” where national identity is frequently displaced by the sitting administration's branding, prevents the country from building a lasting, coherent, and protected institutional trajectory. This lack of institutional shielding condemns the brand to constant reinvention, wasting high-value economic and symbolic assets that should instead strengthen the Ecuadorian State's soft power.

To correct this course, the immediate creation of an inter-ministerial technical committee is recommended, incorporating the private sector and the Ministries of Production and Foreign Affairs in a binding capacity. This would allow the brand to function as a seal of guarantee for the exportable offer rather than just a logo for international trade shows. It is imperative that Nation Brand management be safeguarded through legal regulations that guarantee its survival beyond presidential terms, following technical and apolitical models such as Marca Perú.

Finally, for future lines of research, it is fundamental to conduct a quantitative impact assessment of the Nation Brand on attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) within

contexts of internal crisis and social volatility. It is also suggested to analyze the role of digital public diplomacy in rebuilding national reputation against high global risk perceptions. Evaluating how these tools can mitigate image crises is vital for Ecuador's strategic positioning in an increasingly competitive and digitized international environment

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### *Questions Script for the Interviews*

1. To begin, could you please describe your professional trajectory and the specific branding initiatives (Nation, City, or Institutional) in which you have participated, specifying the strategic role from which you spearheaded them?
2. From your academic or professional perspective, how do you conceptualize the "Country Brand" (Nation Brand), and what theoretical or practical boundaries do you establish between this strategic construct and a conventional tourism promotion campaign?
3. In your view, what are the indispensable pillars that provide structural solidity to a Nation Brand? I would like to delve specifically into your vision regarding the interconnectedness of Identity, Image, and international Reputation.
4. Regarding the narrative, how is a storytelling framework constructed that transcends purely transactional objectives to reflect the culture and sense of belonging of the citizenry? Furthermore, to what extent should this narrative be aligned with the country's current socio-political reality?
5. Focusing on the contemporary Ecuadorian context, how do you evaluate the value proposition of the brand "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" (Ecuador Shines Authentically)? In your assessment, does it succeed in projecting the country's diversity and identity in a credible and authentic manner?
6. How do you perceive the current Nation Brand management is impacting the national and international competitiveness of the country's strategic sectors, such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), exports, and tourism?
7. Given the prevailing global challenges, what strategic adjustments or shifts in positioning would you consider necessary to strengthen the Ecuadorian Nation Brand relative to its regional competitors?
8. Finally, what specific roles should the State, private enterprise, and civil society play to ensure that the brand remains sustainable and effectively transcends the political cycles of successive governments?
- 9.

## Appendix B

### *Transcript of Interview Number one to the expert Cecilia Ugalde*

Cecilia Ugalde:

I have not conducted extensive academic research on our Nation Brand as such. Obviously, I am familiar with it in a general sense, but I haven't focused specifically on the "Ecuador" Nation Brand. Are you aware of who has conducted a rather interesting analysis of the subject, in case you are interested? Natalia Rincón, I am not sure if you know her, is also a professor of Communication and Tourism. She has developed her own analysis, and you might consider consulting her as well. Regardless, I am happy to help you in any way I can. Please, go ahead.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Excellent, thank you. If you agree, we can begin with the prepared questions. The first one, though you have partially addressed it, would be: Could you briefly describe your professional experience in the fields of branding, communication, or strategic design, and whether you have participated in (...)?

Cecilia Ugalde:

The reality is that I have worked extensively in branding; it is the specific "Nation Brand" niche that I have not analyzed exclusively. However, branding in general is my core focus; in fact, my doctoral dissertation was centered on Brand Theory.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Ultimately, a Nation Brand is a form of Place Branding. Many people mistakenly conflate it with a "presidential brand," but at its core, a Nation Brand is a national asset. Therefore, the principles remain quite similar.

Cecilia Ugalde:

Regrettably, in countries such as ours, it is not managed as a brand should be. Generally, it is used more as a tool for governmental branding rather than state branding, unfortunately. (Exactly). And right here in this very city, with all the brands we have cycled through, yes, precisely. Regarding our country brand, the most stable period we experienced was during the "Ecuador Ama la Vida" (Ecuador Loves Life) campaign, as it persisted throughout the entirety of the Correato (the Correa administration) and slightly beyond. However, in reality, it is illogical to change the brand with every new government; it simply lacks coherence.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Of course. Well then, could you tell me about the branding projects in which you have participated?

Cecilia Ugalde:

Well, regarding branding matters, yes. Beyond my personal interest in the subject, my doctoral thesis focused specifically on that: brand attachment. Essentially, I explored topics related to the brand, specifically brand attachment and the various constructs that influence such attachment. Since then, I have conducted several research projects on the matter and have worked as a consultant for various brands. Therefore, it is not just a topic I enjoy; I am passionate about the discipline of branding, and it is a field where I have studied, worked, and conducted extensive research. I noticed you are also integrating the concept of storytelling from a communication perspective. This aligns with my own research lines in digital media literacy and storytelling, which are subjects I teach directly. In that sense, I can certainly assist you because I have that background. I am constantly updating my knowledge on these subjects, so I believe I can lend you a hand with whatever you may need.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Yes, storytelling is fascinating for country brands. Since my thesis is more closely related to international marketing, storytelling is frequently utilized by governments as a strategy for public diplomacy and soft power. My upcoming questions will follow that line of inquiry. Based on your experience, how would you define the concept of a country brand?

Cecilia Ugalde:

Regarding how I would define the country brand, for me, the country brand originates from... well, I believe we are currently viewing it merely as an end result, whereas the country brand is actually formed from other foundational principles. For instance, we must start from the basis of cultural identity. You cannot discuss a country brand without beginning with the cultural identity that a brand possesses. Beyond a mere definition of what a country brand is, the country brand ultimately reflects a cultural identity anchored in a comprehensive national narrative from which that brand emerges.

Of course, within that cultural identity lies who we are, but it also encompasses what we believe ourselves to be. There are numerous social imaginaries within that facet of cultural identity; however, this is also where values, our symbols, and our histories come into play. I refer to our history beyond just narratives or tales, but our actual history as an integral part of that cultural identity and of what defines us as Ecuadorians. Yet, there are also practices, and even tensions, the conflicts we face are also part of that cultural identity.

Now, that cultural identity must, in some way, be translated into a narrative, a national narrative where the concept of storytelling also originates. This is the account constructed from that identity, which is, as I mentioned, both what we are and what we perceive ourselves to be. If there is no link between that cultural identity and the cultural narrative, you cannot generate a country brand that is otherwise devoid of empirical grounding. You cannot simply imagine it. Ultimately, the country brand is a strategic projection of our essence, and you cannot have storytelling, no matter how aesthetically pleasing, that sells a country in a way that does not coincide with reality.

One can obfuscate reality only to a certain point, but it is no longer like the past where branding was simply intended for tourists to see. Nowadays, people are well-informed about the actual state of affairs; if you publicize something inaccurately or fail to demonstrate what truly lies behind the image, those familiar with the reality will speak out loudly and clearly. Therefore, one cannot deceive through a country brand. If the country brand is not anchored to these other components, to this narrative and this identity, then you cannot produce anything that actually possesses intrinsic value.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. You have actually touched upon several questions I intended to ask, particularly because discussing identity is essential. Following identity, image and reputation are constructed; therefore, you have also addressed the narrative. Consequently, I would like to ask: how can a storytelling strategy be developed that not only promotes tourism and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), which are the primary goals of a country brand, but also reflects the culture and pride of the people living in that country? How can correct storytelling be achieved?

Cecilia Ugalde:

Well, as a country, we possess an immense amount of potential. We often fail to see how much can truly be marketed or the directions we could take when seeking to promote Ecuador as such. Naturally, one must always begin with a central story. While this storytelling or the narrative used to market the country may be anchored in an aspirational narrative, it always represents what the country desires to project. However, before addressing the direction we should take, which is what you are asking, it is vital to clarify that this narrative of our potential direction, or the anchors we utilize to form this aspirational narrative within our storytelling, must always be grounded in a structural reality. This returns to what I mentioned moments ago: nothing we communicate can lack a foundation in structural reality. In this context, I am referring to economic, cultural, and security issues. The latter is paramount when marketing a brand intended to attract investment, let alone tourists. (Yes, everything). The issue of infrastructure is also fundamental because, without that structural reality, what are we really discussing? The narrative would have no basis upon which to settle. Ultimately, none of this carries weight if the experience of those who visit does not reflect the story we are telling. In this era of social media, if we use any platform to tell a story, you will immediately find people who are either here or have been here who will either validate it or state that you are lying.

Now, regarding this aspirational narrative or storytelling specifically, what could we anchor ourselves to beyond the perhaps cliché theme of biodiversity? I believe the "Ecuador Ama la Vida" (Ecuador Loves Life) anchor with its four regions was not a bad approach. Our unique biodiversity is significant; there are not many megadiverse countries on the planet. We are not the only ones, but we possess unique characteristics. This is worth leveraging. It would be absolutely absurd not to utilize this in a country brand because it is one of our primary capitals. Even if it has been used extensively, it must continue to be featured because it is unique. For instance, the "Ecuador Challenge," the idea that you can have breakfast on the coast, lunch in the mountains, and dinner in the jungle, or vice versa, is something only possible in countries like ours. Very few nations offer that option. This is a form of wealth that should not be squandered.

Furthermore, we have the cultural and heritage dimension present in many forms. It is not limited to indigenous themes, which have perhaps been exploited quite a bit. For example, there are areas we have not fully leveraged, such as gastronomy. Consider how much the Peruvians have exploited their gastronomy and how well they have executed it. Ecuador possesses incredible gastronomic wealth. Recently, I spoke with a woman who had collected over one hundred recipes for Ecuadorian dishes cooked in leaf wraps, such as tamales, chumales, humitas, and bollo, among others. Imagine the richness that implies, without even mentioning being the "country of a thousand soups." This gastronomic wealth is present, yet we have not leveraged it; we should. There is also the matter of ancestral knowledge systems. I am currently involved in a fascinating research project; we have just submitted a proposal for Belgian funds specifically regarding ancestral knowledge linked to our natural medicine. These are things that do not exist in other countries. Last year, we concluded an Erasmus project with European Union funds involving Finland, Spain, the Czech Republic, El Salvador, and Ecuador. We developed an educational platform anchored in indigenous themes. We have more than fifteen indigenous nationalities and peoples; in contrast, El Salvador has one, whose native tongue is Nahuatl, currently spoken by fewer than two hundred people. Compared to that, our wealth is significantly greater. We are not fully conscious of this, yet it is there. Beyond the heritage and cultural aspects, there is the potential of community-based tourism and sustainable tourism. This cultural authenticity is part of who we are and should be leveraged. Additionally, there are other elements linked to craftsmanship, which relates to the creative economy and design. We have excellent designers. There are many other areas that can be explored and

leveraged, not only thinking of tourism and investment, but also in sports and science. These areas open doors to a bidirectional flow of contact with people from other regions.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Yes, I completely agree. Since we are discussing storytelling, what types of actors, both national and international, do you believe should participate in the creation of this narrative to ensure the brand possesses coherence and achieves domestic recognition, rather than being recognized only internationally, as has frequently occurred?

Cecilia Ugalde:

I believe that this is an area where we can truly broaden the spectrum of stakeholders. In some instances, compelling brand ambassadors have already been utilized. For example, consider the entrepreneurship sector. Ecuadorian entrepreneurs who excel in various fields, such as Santiago Peralta of Pacari, are indisputable spokespeople who can be leveraged. The same applies to Caro Sánchez; "Carito" has been frequently utilized as an ambassador. Beyond entrepreneurs, we have artists and athletes who stand out in specific disciplines.

Furthermore, we should include the scientific community. Precisely because of our environmental diversity, we have remarkable stories. For instance, here at UDA (Universidad del Azuay; a local research university), we have biology professors who have discovered new species of frogs. Recently, I read a study by a biologist regarding bird songs; the research suggested that birds ultimately chirp or sing with an accent similar to that of the local inhabitants. Consequently, birds in Cuenca likely sing with a specific rhythm. These findings are fascinating and could be integrated into a storytelling narrative that conveys our cultural essence. We should move beyond traditional spokespeople. We have numerous athletes, perhaps someone from the Downhill mountain biking community could narrate the possibilities Ecuador offers. I believe these diverse groups, artists, subcultures, and specialized communities within our cities, open different doors and are inherently interesting. As protagonists, we have many options. We can certainly move beyond the basics and the expected; we could afford to be a bit more creative in that regard.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

And what are your thoughts on the fact that the current country brand, "Ecuador, Truly Authentic" (Ecuador Bella y Auténticamente), was developed by an American firm that also manages advertising for "Nesquik"? Do you believe this diminishes its authenticity or perhaps strips the voice away from the spokespeople you just mentioned?

Cecilia Ugalde:

I believe that... well, it is possible that we are simply not the target audience for the brand. In my view, the current country brand has gone largely unnoticed. As I mentioned, perhaps I am not the target because they are not trying to attract me; I am already here. However, I do not identify with that brand. I stated earlier that a brand must originate from cultural identity. It does not matter who develops it, it could be an external firm, but if that external firm does not execute it correctly and treats a country brand as if it were a commercial brand, we end up with the error we are currently facing. It becomes a brand without personality. It is a brand that definitively fails to reflect our cultural identity; it is not part of a national narrative and, consequently, it lacks connectivity. It simply does not connect.

You cannot simply seize a concept and sell it in a vacuum. This does not only apply to country brands; it applies to any brand. If a brand is not connected to its audience and does not originate from authentic realities, then as an advertising strategy, it is an absurdity. They might be highly creative, and you might have an impressive team behind the project, but if it is not felt, if you do not transmit that brand essence, it fails. You cannot invent a brand essence; it does not emerge from a mere brainstorming session. We must be very clear about that. If you project something that does not truly represent what the country is, you are failing to project the reality of the product or the service.

What we have at the moment is something sterile. Regardless of who created it, it is not projecting what it ought to project. Personally, I do not identify with it. But as I said, perhaps we are not the "buyer personas" they are trying to reach. It is possible they are targeting an investor or someone else, and perhaps they reach them. However, they are committing a strategic error because that is not how one manages a country brand. The local population must feel a sense of brand ownership because, the moment people visit, they must experience what they have been sold. They must live that narrative. If that narrative does not project who we are, what you are selling remains somewhat insubstantial. It remains a bit fragile and cold because it is not grounded in reality.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Exactly; you have reached the same conclusion I have arrived at through my own research. It is very interesting because, as you mentioned, the country brand has had practically no domestic impact. I have only seen it advertised once: at the Pumapungo (a significant archaeological site and museum), where they are currently conducting works and promoting them. That was the first and only time I saw the logo in the entire country. To us, it is a logo that says nothing; it is quite sterile. It uses a somewhat faded yellow, they paid so much for that, and it is ridiculous. What do you think of their communication strategy? They conducted a vote involving both nationals and internationals to choose the country brand from several concepts. I believe this strategy was an attempt to provide some form of validation for the brand, but what is your perspective? Generally, these types of strategies work when you want people to get involved, but in my view, it must be something you actually identify with. Having to vote on which is the "least bad" or the "least ugly" option does not make me feel like I am part of the process.

Cecilia Ugalde:

If you focus on, or begin the creation of, a brand from its symbols alone, we are lost. Because that is not what a brand is; the brand is not the logo. If one starts from the premise that the brand is a logo, a terrible error is already being committed. A brand is much more than that; the logo is simply what will eventually identify the brand, and it is derived later. First, you need to establish that brand essence. What is it that you are truly projecting?

This is especially true when dealing with a country brand. Creating a country brand is not easy; it is not the same as branding a box of crackers. This is because there is so much history and complexity behind it. A country brand represents something very pluralistic and diverse, which you are trying to encapsulate. Therefore, the strategic framework must be broad enough so that this "container" reflects the content you intend to provide or the image of the country you wish to showcase. Regardless of its size, Ecuador has a great deal to offer, and the brand must reflect that.

This reflection occurs beyond the logo; it is manifested in the narrative. If the logo is accompanied by a message with which you identify, you will come to love the logo. Consequently, the logo itself is not the problem; the narrative is the problem. What you are communicating, or failing to communicate, is the issue. Ultimately, people grow accustomed to a logo, even if it is aesthetically unappealing. However, if that logo is paired with a strong, potent, and powerful narrative that provides identity and makes you feel proud, one that makes you say, "Yes, indeed, that is us", then you will share it with friends living abroad and say with pride, "My friends, you must visit; look, this is Ecuador." When it invokes that visceral sense of national pride, then you can truly engage with that logo. But if you create a country brand by simply asking which logo looks "prettier" without communicating anything substantial, it leaves me entirely cold. It is neither one thing nor the other; it says nothing to me.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Well, one would also have to consider the period in which the brand was launched along with its narrative. Because for them to talk about a "Truly Authentic Ecuador" while the national reality was defined not only by insecurity but was literally a moment of energy blackouts when the brand was launched, it made the situation even more, well, absolutely ironic. You want to transmit a concept, clearly, and I understand the concept behind it, but with the two hours of light that we have here every day, being in Ecuador and so on... but yes, in the middle of the blackouts, it was absolutely, besides that, it was absurd when they tried to position this. To us, it gave me a mixture of laughter and sorrow, I will be honest with you. I mean, you say, "My God, how can they commit these types of errors?" One assumes there are professionals behind this. Totally, yes. And what do you consider indispensable so that a brand, now at a State level, a country brand, becomes sustainable over time and transcends changes in government, something that the majority of brands have not managed to do?

Cecilia Ugalde:

The first thing is that it has to be established as a State Policy, not as a Governmental Policy. That is to say, it must remain institutionalized at a State level, not a governmental one, so that even if the government changes, that remains part of an identity. And then, it must be anchored in and reflect what we truly are. I do not mean to tell you with this that the country brand does not change. Of course, the country brand adapts itself to the situations, you understand? But a country brand, by theoretical definition, is something that must function in the long term. It is something that must function in the long term so that it serves as an anchor for identity, you see? And so that it is reinforced and continues growing. This does not mean, well, in marketing everything is...

Everything evolves, everything is dynamic, it is not static. A country brand is not going to be static, but it will go on evolving as society evolves, you understand? It will be modified. I don't know, it can have different

focuses. Now you have a certain focus, let's say, toward the gastronomic, let's think, and later we move on to extreme sports, and later... but that does not mean that we stop varying or that we stop or lose the essence, right? So you can focus on different areas or put emphasis on different things, but yes, from a very solid image. Yes, we are all like that, we keep changing, we keep evolving, and a brand is nothing else because of that very reason, and the brand personality, you understand? Because the brand is associated, it has many things, they are associated with humans in the sense that they have human characteristics. So, give it those human characteristics and allow it, like a human, to evolve throughout time. So, clearly, there are many things to which the brand can be anchored, oh, but there are others that can go on evolving. So, first you start from giving stability to the, well, by not having, I mean, by protecting it so that it does not change with the next government, and then you go on creating and building and consolidating it upon itself, you understand? Giving it the option to breathe and somehow evolve according to the different needs and circumstances.

Right now, it is super difficult to manage a narrative, right? Because how do you manage, how do you attract a tourist? Let's think about Cuenca. You say, "Cuenca is a safe city, one of the safest cities in Ecuador," but did you know, I don't know if you knew, that last month in Cuenca, six deaths due to violence were registered? That is a very high index for a city of our size. So you want people to come by selling something about security because nobody wants to go to an insecure place, right? You see how the reservations in Mexico have fallen with the events of a couple of weeks ago. Who wants to come here to Ecuador when we have six cities that are among the ten most dangerous on the planet? Six among the ten. Six are from Ecuador. That is to say, what used to be Mexico or Venezuela, right now it is Ecuador. So, clearly, no, every type of argument you have collapses, right?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

I completely agree. Well, what challenges and opportunities do you see for the current Ecuadorian country brand?

Cecilia Ugalde:

Oh, the challenges for that one... it has everything stacked against it, truthfully. The situation is very complex, right? It could start positioning itself, obviously without touching any security issues; it should begin to acquire a personality, to have a personality, but right now it has none, does it? It is like... well, the advantage when you are not poorly positioned, but rather not positioned at all, is that you can start almost from zero, right? So this brand has the chance to be able to reinvent itself, and that is the opportunity it has, right? The challenge is to emerge from the inertia in which it currently finds itself, right? But as I told you, it doesn't make much sense to invest in a brand or waste time on a brand that is not going to endure. If this is going to be a governmental policy that the next president is going to change, they are just wasting their time.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

No, they keep wasting their time. Well, in the case of this brand, I do not see the government as such using it as a State brand; they continue to maintain a strong stance with their narrative of the "Nuevo Ecuador" (New Ecuador), but what I did see, for example, that the "Ecuador Ama la Vida" brand did was not to change the country brand, but rather to change campaigns, right? They went from "Ecuador Ama la Vida" in 2010 to "All You Need Is Ecuador" in 2014; they stayed with that one, so they were anchored to the same personality in some way. That concept of "Ecuador Ama la Vida" lasted thirteen years, so it is... it's good. I don't know if you have studied the one from Colombia, for example, with "The risk is wanting to stay."

Cecilia Ugalde:

Ah, interesting, right? To change narratives, I imagine it goes exactly... clearly, with the whole issue of the guerrillas and so on, that nobody wanted to go to Colombia due to a security issue. They didn't distance themselves from the word "risk"; rather, they took it and changed its meaning. So their slogan was "Colombia, the risk is wanting to stay," and it completely boosted them. The flow of tourists, yes, it was... it was gradual, right? It was a sustained increase, moreover. But of course, there was a change of government, there was a change of campaign, and all of that was lost. They realized that, they tried to return to the campaign, they left it again, and so on.

It is more or less what happens here, right? For example, something that makes me say, "My God, someone please advise them," is, for example, here when the thing with the Hormiga Chuba (The Chua Ant) happened. Well, the Hormiga Chua is... look, positioning a character of that nature, well-positioned, is super difficult. And we had the Hormiga Chuba; the kids would go, the Hormiga Chuba would go to the schools, they would see him and the children identified with him and everyone, "Wow, the Hormiga Chuba!" I mean, on Halloween there were people who dressed up as him; reaching that level is brutal. Yes. And suddenly you kill him

because... it's just stupid. That level of stupidity is what that is, yes, because it belonged to the previous government. It didn't improve... I mean, totally. So, unfortunately, that is the management that is given, right? But the challenge, the challenge is to try to have a clear positioning. Hopefully they can anchor themselves, right, to a theme of cultural identity that identifies us. And luckily they have the opportunity to do it, to do it better than they are currently doing it, because they are not positioned yet and they could do it better.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Great, well, those are the questions for now. I could therefore pause the recording and, if you would like to keep talking for about five more minutes regarding branding because it is super interesting... whatever you want, however you like, whatever you need. Just ask me. Very well, thank you very much for the interview then.

Cecilia Ugalde:

No, not at all, you are very welcome. But as I was saying, if you want, I mean, specifically regarding the country brand, eh? I once heard Natalia in a talk, she has... she gave... well, she is a tourism analyst. We have analyzed the country brand from the perspectives of marketing and tourism, then.

# FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO Y AUTORIZACIÓN

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### III. CONFIDENCIALIDAD Y MANEJO DE DATOS

De conformidad con los estándares internacionales de protección de datos, se establecen las siguientes opciones (marque con una "X" según su preferencia):

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- **Identidad Protegida (Anonimato):** Deseo que mis aportes sean utilizados de forma anónima, refiriéndose únicamente a mi perfil profesional (ej. "Representante de Mucho Mejor Ecuador").

### IV. REGISTRO AUDIOVISUAL

- Autorizo la grabación de audio de la sesión únicamente para fines de transcripción y análisis académico.
- No autorizo la grabación; prefiero que se tomen notas manuales.

### V. DECLARACIÓN DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Al firmar este documento, confirmo que:

1. He sido informado/a sobre la naturaleza y el propósito de la investigación.
2. Mi participación es estrictamente voluntaria y puedo retirarme en cualquier momento sin necesidad de justificación.
3. La información proporcionada será utilizada exclusivamente con fines académicos y científicos.

Lugar y Fecha: Cuenca, Ecuador. 5 de marzo de 2026.

Firma del Entrevistado/a: 

Nombre Completo: Cecilia Ugarte Sánchez

Firma del Investigador: 

Trosky Serrano Alvarez

Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas - Universidad del Azuay

## **Appendix C**

### *Transcription of Interview Number Two conducted with Jhonn Alarcón Morales*

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Very well, the first question would be: could you describe your professional trajectory and the brand projects—whether nation, city, or institutional—in which you have participated?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: I have been a designer since the year 2000. I am a designer by generalist training, but I have always dedicated myself to graphic design. From there, I have been able to work not only on brand issues but in various areas of design. Specifically regarding branding, we have generated several manuals for companies and startups, and we also worked at one time on the redesign of the university's brand. We have worked on specific corporate projects and brand management manuals.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: From your academic or professional perspective, how do you conceptualize a "Nation Brand," and what differences do you establish between a nation brand and a conventional commercial brand?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: I believe that when we talk about a brand, we are talking about representation and identification. On one hand, if it is a commercial brand, I try to represent the values of the products and, above all, the companies that represent those products through an identifier. This identifier should show, at a glance, the entire philosophy and all the values the company wants to display to its users and customers. A nation brand is the same, except that it involves other concepts; it has to be a more global brand because it must represent the entirety of the territory. Generally, these values are more complex to configure because, our country being such a diverse territory with pluriculturality and different contexts—where the Coast seems like one country, the Highlands and the Amazon another, and let's not even mention the Insular region—conceptualizing a nation brand is complex. It should highlight all those values, traditions, and the culture present in a people. The nation brand is, without a doubt, one of the most complex exercises in terms of identity due to the multifaceted complexity that must be represented in a single symbol.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: What do you consider to be the indispensable pillars that grant solidity to a nation brand?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: A nation brand must present contexts appropriately and must be able to transcend time. This transcendence often does not occur because it responds to the governments in power, which dilutes the concept and prevents it from being strengthened. On the other hand, it must have pregnancy (visual impact), representing heritage and customs if we speak of qualitative values. If we move to the quantitative or generic, it must have simplicity, be reproducible, and adapt to a graphic branding system so that it can be the medium for transmitting the entire philosophy of a country.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: How aligned do you consider the reality of the country should be with the projected brand?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: Brands are used to promote countries, and often a brand wants to represent ideal values. If our country is in a terrible situation, or if any country were going through a bad moment, first, it would not be the propitious time to develop a nation brand. But since the policy of governments is always to promote places, there must always be an identifier that sells a country with its values and customs; we always need this identification. Ultimately, it's about promotion, and when I promote, I need to sell through the brand and a branding system that shows images, criteria, and concepts of interest. It will always be necessary. I don't think it's ideal in bad contexts, but I believe the nation brand can help improve a country's economy, politics, and many other things.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Focusing on the current case, how do you evaluate the value proposition of the brand "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" (Ecuador shines authentically)? Do you consider that it manages to project the country's diversity and identity clearly?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: I think so, but the situation is that this nation brand is not promoted enough internally. It is a brand seen at an international level, at international fairs, more as a tourism brand. I dare say, without having the data, that the majority of the population does not identify with that brand because it hasn't been sold internally; they haven't made it possible for me to identify with it. There has to be a process or some characteristic of this brand that allows us to take ownership of it and feel pride. That has not happened, and I don't think it will because, from the way these brands are conceived, they are meant more for international projection. We need to feel pride through something, and that should be what they sell us: what makes me feel proud to be Ecuadorian.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: How do you evaluate the visual identity of the brand, both the logo and the slogan?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: Technically, it is moderately well-crafted. I think the word "Ecuador" needs to be read a bit more clearly. In the letter "E," there is a distortion that makes it confusing, and there are many elements. You read an "E" that transforms into a sun, and then you read "cua" and then "dor." There is an error in the structuring of the brand that prevents it from being read well and makes the message indirect. If we consider that the principles of a logo should be simplicity and pregnance, it would not be fulfilling some of them. It should be simplified. Regarding the slogan, what they tried to do with the logo is literally transfer that concept to the graphic identifier, and I believe it shouldn't be that way. With the sun, we are saying it is shining; it could be a sun, a glow, or shapes indicating luminosity, but visually it is not read correctly.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: What do you think about using light, brightness, and the sun as identity attributes? Does it reflect the identity of Ecuadorians well?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: It is very difficult for us. If we speak from the gastronomic area, today they tell us that encebollado is the flagship dish, but although it is eaten everywhere, it is not necessarily the flagship dish for everyone. Finding a unique concept for us is very difficult because we are such a diverse country. What we need to do is a concept of symbolic construction that does not necessarily take geographical elements or those from the first settlers and cultures. It would have to be a more symbolic and abstract construction of what we can be. If I use the sun, it's not enough; if I use the Venus of Valdivia, it doesn't represent the whole; if I use the sea or the mountain, I don't represent all regions. The icon that is built should be more global, general, and abstract. It will always be a subject of debate and criticism because we won't please everyone. In the international designer community, there is always a lot of criticism; they are never happy with each other's work. The problem is that there is no participatory construction process. If there were a process where representatives of civil society, politicians, and cultural and tourism entities created a single brand and joined forces so that it could be shielded for 15 or 20 years and protected by law so it couldn't be changed, the country would be much better known. But if every time a president passes, we change the brand, there is no longer recognition or pregnance. An example is the Peru brand, that spiral based on Nazca. Because they have maintained it for so long and successive governments haven't changed it but rather empowered it, when you see it elsewhere, you say: "that is Peru." We don't have something like that.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: There was no citizen participation, but a vote was held among three options. Which do you think was the best of the three?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: The best of the three won, or the "least bad." If we look at the technique of how the brand should be, there are errors in legibility, composition, and pregnance. It is not very clear; it wants to be a

symbol, but since each letter becomes a symbol, it looks like a very complex issue. The winning option is the one that reads best and is the most solid. Compared to the others, this one has more weight and solidity. I understand that in the others, they were looking for something related to the equatorial line or cultures, but it's not clearly understood; it's very forced. Sometimes clients want to cram all concepts—trust, solidity, etc.—into the same logo, and that doesn't work. The best of the three won, but it wouldn't be optimal.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: In the face of global challenges, what strategic adjustments would you consider necessary to strengthen the nation brand? A brand change or empowering it through campaigns?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: I believe very much in dissemination. The investment made to promote is not adequate because we are in a country where there are other priorities that are often not well attended to either. The issue of promotion and dissemination must ensure that this reaches people not just as a visual image, but as an insight that represents me and makes me feel proud. The brand system must be built. Currently, it doesn't transmit pride to us because it's sold outside, but I don't know if it transmits the pride we should have. Much more internal and external dissemination is needed. If I generate a campaign based on "You shine, Ecuadorian," there are many creative concepts that can be used, but that doesn't happen. Strengthening that would allow the Ecuadorian to "wear the jersey" (feel committed) and, when a tourist comes, we ourselves can sell our country. More than a brand change, it is necessary for the people working within the "country-company" to be proud. In other countries, the taxi driver is the primary salesman for his country because he has cultural conviction. That is what we are missing.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: I will mention the values (sustainability, respect, quality, diversity, hospitality) and the personality (friendly, resilient, genuine, creative, energetic) of the brand. Do you consider it reflects them?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: I would say 50/50. The brand tries to represent all of that, but there are too many values to be represented by a single symbol. It ends up being something that doesn't really represent; I have to concentrate on something and not put everything in there. This isn't the first time we've fallen into this. In previous times, there was a logo that had the little fish, the church, etc. They wanted to cram everything in there, and it's not appropriate because it doesn't become pregnant; people don't remember it.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: What role should the State, private enterprise, and the citizenry play so that the brand is sustainable and transcends political cycles?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: There should be something that shields the brand for 10 or 15 years, where it cannot be modified regardless of who comes into power, and that it truly represents what the country wants. It must be built communally, not just through a vote, because that tends to be the vision of an agency and not of the entire people. It must be State policy that Ecuadorians feel proud through the nation brand. It's what happens with the national team: the yellow jersey represents me, there is the spirit and everything good I want to do. When they show me a brand like this, they don't tell me to "live it." Efforts are focused at an international level to attract tourism and investment, but if the tourist comes and we don't have the jersey on, the effort doesn't work. State policy has to be strengthened to generate a brand that endures and doesn't belong to the government of the day.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: The brand was created by a US consortium, FutureBrand. What is your opinion on this?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: As a designer, I can work for another country, but I would have to immerse myself in that context, live it, and belong to it. I'm not saying they don't know how to do their job, but when that feeling or vision isn't there, the most effective element might not be generated. I don't know why it was hired outside

when there are so many designers here. I would form a strategic group of designers from various provinces for a participatory co-design and invite civil society to evaluate it. Hiring outside is a big mistake because those who are outside don't understand the true feeling of being Ecuadorian, no matter how much they research.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Do you consider that brand ambassadors could be used?

Jhonn Alarcón Morales: Yes, because they reach many people. There are many emblematic people (athletes, writers) who have visibility and could be ambassadors. But this must be complemented by the everyday people, the working people, and the community. I believe in a combination of brand ambassadors and everyday people talking about the experience of being Ecuadorian. Sometimes ambassadors are paid to say what they say, but there is nothing like the organic: generating that feeling from the naturalness of the unpaid.

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#### IV. REGISTRO AUDIOVISUAL

- Autorizo la grabación de audio de la sesión únicamente para fines de transcripción y análisis académico.
- No autorizo la grabación; prefiero que se tomen notas manuales.

#### V. DECLARACIÓN DE CONSENTIMIENTO

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2. Mi participación es estrictamente voluntaria y puedo retirarme en cualquier momento sin necesidad de justificación.
3. La información proporcionada será utilizada exclusivamente con fines académicos y científicos.

Lugar y Fecha: Cuenca, Ecuador. 27 de marzo de 2026.

Firma del Entrevistado/a: JALD

Nombre Completo: Jhon Alarcón Novales

Firma del Investigador: Trosky

Trosky Serrano Alvarez

Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas - Universidad del Azuay

## **Appendix D**

### *Transcription of Interview Number Three conducted with Mónica Malo Jirón*

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: This interview will follow a funnel approach, moving from the general to the more complex. To begin, could you describe your professional background and the brand projects you have participated in, specifying the leadership roles you held?

Mónica Malo Jirón: My professional career began at the age of 17, in 1990, when I started working at one of the city's financial institutions and gradually moved forward. The most important aspect, and what has most enriched my professional trajectory, is that I have gone through every single sector and position.

I always started in the operational part, in the day-to-day management, and later ascended to management positions. I am certain that this gives me the capacity to lead, transmit knowledge, and teach my staff or teams, because I have firsthand knowledge of how things are done daily; not just from a supervisory level, but from the "doing" itself.

Regarding brand projects I've been involved in, which have been quite significant, I was, for example, within the Cuenca Chamber of Commerce. There, we established the Study and Business Center, which was quite interesting in supporting continuous training and the development of professional skills.

Later on, I was also part of the creation, construction, sales, and implementation of the Hospital del Río in Cuenca. After that, I went through some other personal projects and joined the food industry at La Europea, where I had the opportunity to learn everything about mass consumption—how you develop a brand and how that brand positions itself in the minds and hearts of people.

Brand positioning is not just about positioning a logo; it is about positioning a concept, an experience, and the impact a product generates in people's lives. For the last 12 years, I have been in charge of the Mucho Mejor Ecuador Corporation, which is the most emblematic and important project in my professional career.

Based on this, I have had the opportunity to know the workings of all the business, industrial, and productive sectors of Ecuador. Upon arriving at Mucho Mejor Ecuador, I realized the importance of the Ecuadorian company because you see it with different eyes. When you are inside a company, regardless of the sector, you are in the day-to-day struggle to make it grow, meeting objectives, goals, the strategic plan, promotion, and commercial targets.

But when you are at Mucho Mejor Ecuador, you have the opportunity, from the private sector, to see the complete picture. I no longer think only about how to position the "Huella" (the footprint logo) so that it adds value to a company, but how to position it so that it connects with the consumer, supports companies so they, in turn, grow, and based on this, together generate this feeling of pride and nationalism in the country.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Perfect, you have already answered several questions I had planned for later. How do you conceptualize a "Nation Brand"?

Mónica Malo Jirón: A nation brand must meet certain requirements: it must be high-impact and easy to remember. A nation brand must denote origin, quality, and belonging—that is, pride. It must be able to "sign"

(endorse) all types of products and services; in other words, it must be absolutely versatile so that it can coordinate all of a country's productive sectors under its umbrella.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Regarding the narrative, are you aware of the current nation brand, "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" (Ecuador shines authentically)? How do you view the fact that they focused on "brightness" and perhaps not so much on culture, but once again on the physical aspects of the country, such as mountains and nature?

Mónica Malo Jirón: As I said, a nation brand must denote that it belongs to that country and must serve tourism as well as investment attraction and the export of our products under an umbrella brand.

From my point of view, my analysis of the current Ecuadorian brand is that it is a 100% tourism brand. It is a logo that tells you that Ecuador shines, based heavily on the concept of the "center of the world." However, it is a brand that loses identity by using only two colors. There was a lot of international criticism regarding this nation brand because, although it says "Ecuador," it can be confused globally with the equatorial line because it lost the yellow, blue, and red (the national colors).

The nation brand is basically sustaining itself with blue and yellow. I believe that, as it stands, it is essentially a brand that supports tourism attraction.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: A nation brand should focus on three main pillars: tourism, exports, and product promotion. How do you think the nation brand should work with public and private companies to improve the promotion of exports and investment?

Mónica Malo Jirón: First, the nation brand should be franchised or managed by the private sector, creating a public-private articulation to ensure consistency and permanence over time.

We see that since 2009, when the nation brand was born during President Rafael Correa's government, there has been a sea of nation brands. Initially, there was "Primero Ecuador," then "Ecuador ama la vida," then "Primero viaje a Ecuador," and later "Hace bien, hace mejor." There is no consistency; unfortunately, with every change of minister or government, each ministry believes it can launch a new seal or nation brand. That cost the country nearly 56 million dollars, only to be immediately decommissioned.

Placing "Ecuador ama la vida" (Ecuador loves life) on a mineral export product is, perhaps, incoherent. The nation brand must be able to cover all products and services made in a country. There are huge successes where the nation brand is simply "Made in USA" or in Germany it's "Made in Germany," because they have already built a name.

A nation brand is much more than a logo: it is the entire concept, the statutes, and it must definitively respond to the interests of the tourism, exporting, manufacturing, domestic consumption, and service communities. There are wonderfully managed nation brands, like the Peru brand, because they have an administration articulated between the public and private sectors, with clear boards where you must meet requirements to hold the brand.

The promotion plan is consolidated by thinking not only about how I sell the country for tourism or to export shrimp and bananas, but how I support the development of the consumption of home-grown products and services, both outward and inward.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: In its early days, the Ecuadorian nation brand did rely heavily on private companies, especially MSMEs (MIPYMES), but in 2010 that was cut short, and entities like Pro Ecuador were developed. Do you believe the private sector should have a more leading role and Pro Ecuador a more secondary one?

Mónica Malo Jirón: It should be articulated. Pro Ecuador had a very good intention, but the results were not 100% implemented or adequate. In 2010 and 2011, when I was in the food industry and traveling to fairs with Pro Ecuador, they provided the stand, but the second part was missing: the business matchmaking that Pro Ecuador should generate for producers. Right now, I don't know what state Pro Ecuador is in; I don't have it mapped.

The State has a great opportunity in the "Mucho Mejor Ecuador" footprint. It is a brand absolutely positioned in the consumer's mind that meets the parameters I mentioned. Mucho Mejor Ecuador can be used on export products under the name "Ecuador Premium Quality," as we have already done, clearly stating that the product has guaranteed quality and premium quality.

The "Huella" (footprint) fulfills the role of providing origin, quality, and security because it has a traceability model. It is a high-impact brand and easy to remember because it is a fingerprint; we all see ourselves reflected in it, and it has the tricolor. But it is in the private sector, and perhaps that is a "but" for governments, which prefer to generate something new rather than articulate and empower something that already has 20 years of work and recognition at a much lower cost.

During the 10 years of Rafael Correa's government, 56 million dollars were spent on brands that were later lost. Mucho Mejor Ecuador's budget is 300,000 dollars a year; in 20 years we have invested 6 million. The impact of the footprint is that we have sustained ourselves over time, it endorses all types of products, and it denotes origin, quality, and belonging. It is a brand built under an evaluation scheme and clear statutes to achieve the relevance of the Ecuadorian brand.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Just to mention, the Pro Ecuador website has practically not been updated since 2025 and they have no catalogs for 2026. It seems the nation brand has remained as a tourism thing and does not encompass the other sectors.

Mónica Malo Jirón: That is my assessment. Even if the brand manual says they focus on investment and exports, research shows it remains a tourism brand, as it has been practically always. Furthermore, the nation brand is often confused with the government brand or the presidential brand of the day.

That is why the role of the private sector is crucial—and not necessarily the chambers of commerce, because they have another reason for being: representing their members before ministries. When different civil society actors articulate with the national government, it allows for the generation of policies to sell the country to the world and also to Ecuadorians.

That is one of the major problems with the current nation brand and one of Mucho Mejor Ecuador's strengths: the brand "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" is practically unknown to Ecuadorians.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: What do you think should be done with the current nation brand? Promotion strategies, changing it for an existing one, or creating a new one?

Mónica Malo Jirón: I would leave it as a seal to support tourism; they have to make it work, but from my point of view, it will not be able to meet the objectives of a nation brand. It was a brand pushed by figures from the tourism sector and, although FutureBrand was behind its creation, I believe it was poorly conceptualized.

It cost us 850,000 dollars. If we keep changing the brand, no reputation will be generated or maintained over time. There are solid things like the Peru brand, "Hecho en México," or the Mucho Mejor Ecuador footprint, which has built a concept of identity and quality. Mucho Mejor Ecuador has achieved the "country-of-origin effect": that when people see the seal, they say the product is of excellent quality. We need that for the nation brand as well.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Those would be the questions I had planned. Everything Mucho Mejor Ecuador has done is quite interesting.

Mónica Malo Jirón: Whatever you need from Mucho Mejor Ecuador, I am at your service.

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- **Identidad Protegida (Anonimato):** Deseo que mis aportes sean utilizados de forma anónima, refiriéndose únicamente a mi perfil profesional (ej. "Representante de Mucho Mejor Ecuador").

#### IV. REGISTRO AUDIOVISUAL

- Autorizo la grabación de audio de la sesión únicamente para fines de transcripción y análisis académico.
- No autorizo la grabación; prefiero que se tomen notas manuales.

#### V. DECLARACIÓN DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Al firmar este documento, confirmo que:

1. He sido informado/a sobre la naturaleza y el propósito de la investigación.
2. Mi participación es estrictamente voluntaria y puedo retirarme en cualquier momento sin necesidad de justificación.
3. La información proporcionada será utilizada exclusivamente con fines académicos y científicos.

Lugar y Fecha: Cuenca, Ecuador. \_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_ de 2026.

Firma del Entrevistado/a: Monica Molo

Nombre Completo: Monica Patricia Polo Jison.

Firma del Investigador: Trosky

Trosky Serrano Alvarez

Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas - Universidad del Azuay

## **Appendix E**

### *Transcript of Interview Number four to the expert E1*

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Excellent, then we shall begin now. Of course, let us commence. Perfect. To start, could you describe your professional background and the country brand or territorial branding projects in which you have participated, specifying the role you held?

E1:

Perfect, thank you very much. My name is E1, and I have worked in the tourism and hospitality sector for approximately more than twenty years. I have developed professionally in sectors such as hospitality, the restaurant industry, catering, and tourism operations, and subsequently in tourism marketing. Professionally, I am a Naturalist Guide, graduated from the Universidad Católica (Catholic University) with a specialization in ecotourism. I managed the country brand project very closely when I served as the Undersecretary of Promotion at the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism). In that position, I served on two different occasions during two separate terms under the administration of President Lasso. Later, I rejoined the Ministerio de Turismo under the presidency of Mr. Daniel Noboa. During both periods, I had the opportunity to work closely on the country brand project with both Minister Olsen and Minister Estrella. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to implement some of the strategies developed for the country brand, given that my role required the international tourism promotion of the country at various global events. From that professional standpoint, I am familiar with the contracting process of the project and the initial steps of its implementation.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect, thank you very much. From your academic or professional perspective, how do you conceptualize the country brand, and what boundaries do you establish between this concept and a conventional tourism promotion campaign?

E1:

Certainly. First of all, a country brand is not a tourism brand. The country brand is a brand that must identify the whole of Ecuador, specifically regarding three fundamental pillars: the positioning of the nation to attract foreign tourists to Ecuador, the attraction of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) to Ecuador, and the third pillar is the positioning of exports in international markets, which is obviously framed within the overall positioning of the nation, aligned with the values that the country is interested in communicating and announcing. Within these spheres, the tourism sector is, of course, included. Although the country brand was a process led by the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) and I believe it continues to be led by the Vice-Ministry under the umbrella of the Ministerio de Producción (Ministry of Production) this is due to a brand delegation established by a presidential decree. This decree mandates the Ministerio de Turismo to preside over a technical council, which is the body responsible for making decisions regarding the use of the country brand.

This is a collegial body that was originally composed of the Presidency of the Republic, the Ministry of Production, and the Ministry of Tourism. It has been adjusted over time because the original decree mentioned other public institutions that no longer exist. Consequently, while it was initially a collegial body of five institutions, it was adjusted to reflect current realities, resulting in three participating institutions. The Presidency delegated its attendance on this council to the Secretaría General de Comunicación (General Secretariat of Communication, SECOM), and the representatives were the ministers themselves, in this case, the Secretary General of Communication by delegation of the Presidency, the Ministry of Production, and the Ministry of Tourism. Among these three, the Ministerio de Turismo was designated as the leading entity; it was entrusted with directing the country brand strategy. Therefore, any initiative related to the country brand originated, and still originates, from the Ministerio de Turismo.

In legal terms, despite the existence of several brands, the only one legally registered at the time was "Ecuador Ama la Vida." Originally, "Ecuador Ama la Vida" began as a promotional campaign. Promotional campaigns have a specific lifespan; they have a duration and are designed to achieve certain specific objectives. Later, "Ecuador Ama la Vida" evolved from being a campaign and a tourism brand, several tourism brands had existed previously, into the official country brand during the administration of Mr. Rafael Correa.

Unfortunately, "Ecuador Ama la Vida" was a brand that lacked a technical foundation at the moment of its creation. Although the message, and I say this from a very personal perspective, is extremely powerful and strong, a technical analysis conducted by a firm specialized in nation branding revealed that it possessed a political undertone that stripped it of the prominence it should have had. This was due to the politicization of the country brand; in other words, it no longer represented the country exclusively but also significantly represented a specific political movement. This undermines its international standing. It was a brand that could no longer be refreshed or decoupled from a political ideology, and the recommendation of this technical analysis was the creation of a new country brand.

To achieve this, a public procurement process was initiated. The Strategic Brand Commission approved and tasked the Ministerio de Turismo with continuing to lead this process. This public contract was valued at a total of \$700,000, which included the baseline study to assess the perception of the existing brand and determine if a change was pertinent. If it was deemed necessary, the process for the creation of a new country brand would follow, involving the public sector, the private sector, academia, and civil society to ensure it was as inclusive as possible. The goal was for it to reflect the values that Ecuadorians believe they possess, providing a sense of belonging and turning us into ambassadors for the country brand.

Changing a country brand is a delicate matter; in general, making a brand evolve is very complicated. The primary characteristics of successful country brands have been precisely that their creation process was executed with high technical rigor, followed by excellent work in their subsequent positioning. Basically, this is an introduction to illustrate the difference between a promotional campaign and a country brand. The country brand must survive the different stages of its lifespan across various promotional campaigns, which are designed to support the life cycles of the brand in general. Therefore, campaigns at the beginning might focus on positioning, perhaps ensuring the brand and its represented values are etched into people's minds. After positioning comes strengthening, and finally, application, when all export products carry the country brand mark.

We are currently in the implementation process, which naturally involves evaluation and feedback. In Ecuador, we saw cases such as "Ecuador Ama la Vida" as the country brand and "All You Need Is Ecuador" as a campaign. This marketing campaign was so powerful and well-executed that it overshadowed the actual country brand of the time. Many people continue to remember "All You Need Is Ecuador" and think it was the country brand, but in reality, the country brand until the decree expired was "Ecuador Ama la Vida." Sometimes a campaign transcends the brand; it is larger, more powerful, achieves better positioning, and transcends the data. All these elements that we gathered for evaluation led us to the conclusion within this technical commission was that it was not merely time for a brand refreshment, but that the implementation of a new brand was necessary. This implementation required a brand that would, first and foremost, remain apolitical, and secondly, be capable of being absorbed by civil society. Naturally, all of this always requires a budget. A country brand necessitates substantial budgetary requirements, yet being a collegial body, it does not actually have a state budget specifically assigned for its operation. Each participating institution must make this work through their own budgetary allocations. In this case, the Ministerio de Turismo (Ministry of Tourism) internalized all the costs involved in the generation of the country brand.

Ultimately, when the procurement process for the creation of a new brand was launched, the winning consortium was one specialized in the creation of other country brands. It was a very rigorous process; several major international agencies participated, but the winning consortium was composed of Ipsos, a highly significant market intelligence firm with vast experience and the necessary robustness to perform the work required, alongside a branding firm tasked with creating the logo, capturing the values, and handling the visual

representation. This procurement process began in 2022, because in 2021 the country brand issue was resumed at the ministerial level, leading the initiative after numerous meetings with the Strategic Brand Commission. It is this Commission that authorizes these actions; while presided over by the Ministerio de Turismo, it is a multi-ministerial body that authorizes everything. Personnel from the Chancellery and ProEcuador were constantly invited to these meetings. Although they did not have a vote because they were not part of the presidential decree governing the Commission, their contributions were invaluable. Their input encompassed what we represent abroad through our embassies and consulates, and ProEcuador's mission is inherently linked to the three pillars of a country brand: positioning Ecuador, promoting exportable products, and attracting FDI.

Looking at the experiences of other countries, for example, Spain has a country brand logo that I believe was created by the painter Joan Miró; that flag with those strokes has remained in effect for over 50 years. The Peru Brand is also very well positioned with its iconic "P," which utilizes the Nazca lines, which are not Incan, but something different, as a very strong anchor rooted in civil society. Interestingly, the firm that worked on the Peru Brand is the same one that advised Ecuador. To be perfectly honest, that firm also experienced certain failures, such as the Argentina Brand, which the Kirchner government co-opted, causing it to lose its validity through politicization. Unfortunately, a country brand cannot represent an incumbent government or a political party, as this undermines its legitimacy. Over time, people associate it with a political administration rather than a destination, a country, or a territory as it was designed.

Additionally, we resumed the country's attendance at international country brand forums. At the South American level, there is a strong association of experts from all Latin American and Central American countries that meets annually to evaluate these topics. After many years of absence, Ecuador returned to the Country Brand Forum in 2022. These forums are held once a year in different Latin American countries, where shared regional experiences are combined and the processes through which country brands are obtained are strengthened. Some countries also undergo changes to these brands. For instance, Costa Rica used "Costa Rica Pura Vida" for many years before updating it to "Esencial Costa Rica." This is the new country brand accompanied by specific campaigns. Costa Rica has managed to position itself, at least in the tourism sector, as the quintessential ecotourism destination worldwide; they are ranked as the number one ecotourism destination in the world. I do not know if you are familiar with Costa Rica, but while it is exuberant and diverse, I believe Ecuador possesses significantly greater diversity and potential. The difference lies in how they communicated that potential, which has helped them, after 20 years of work, to position themselves where they are today. This must be continuous work; country brand positioning is accompanied by campaigns, but campaigns must never overshadow the brand itself.

The procurement process concluded in 2023, at which point implementation began. Following the evaluation, several roundtables were held for the creation of the new brand. These included sessions with technical experts, the private sector, and academia. Workshops were developed, and perception studies were conducted regarding national identity, focusing on how I perceive myself as an Ecuadorian. Numerous interviews and several focus groups were carried out to establish how I see myself as an Ecuadorian, how I perceive a brand, what I want it to represent, and what my values are. We also analyzed external perception, specifically how others view Ecuadorians. Finally, with groups of experts, we determined how we want to be perceived. Thus, we established the three analytical lines for the creation of the brand: how we see ourselves, how they see us, and how we want to be seen.

To design this new country brand, we worked with a group of designers following a call for proposals, utilizing the values obtained from these interviews, focus groups, and surveys. This resulted in three country brand logos that graphically accompanied the information gathered during nearly a year of research. These were presented for a public vote. At that time, I was not linked to the Ministry, as I was in a professional transition. Regrettably, I believe the change in presidency between Lasso and Noboa diminished the momentum or the level of commitment. There was a very large commitment from Guillermo Lasso's presidency to strengthen the brand; a budget had been established for its promotion and positioning through initial national campaigns so that Ecuadorians would first get to know it and foster a sense of brand citizenship.

However, although the process began with him, a positive aspect was that Daniel Noboa's presidency did not withdraw the project; they allowed us to continue. Nevertheless, they did withdraw the positioning budget. We had hoped for campaigns through SECOM (General Secretariat of Communication), which possesses a massive communicative apparatus that transcends what a single ministry can achieve; it represents the government and the entire State apparatus. We expected a positioning campaign and, above all, a brand awareness campaign regarding the public vote for the country brand to ensure it was as inclusive as possible. We would have desired at least five million Ecuadorians to enter the site to vote, but given the lack of more potent communication, that was not the case. Still, tens of thousands of us did vote. As I mentioned, I was not with the Ministry then, but I saw the communications and cast my vote. Ultimately, the most voted brand was the one selected. The Strategic Commission had established in the procedure that the most voted graphic option among the three would be the one adopted.

The firm presented six graphic options. The Commission, through its experts (and I also had my advisory committee within the Ministry, composed of experts in branding, communication, and design, since my strength was tourism) evaluated them. I had my internal committee and even the possibility of bringing renowned national designers to these tables to determine which three options were the most viable, which ones we liked most, and which ones we felt truly represented the message we wanted to convey. Those three went to the public vote. The winning country brand became the basis for all graphic development and was immediately implemented in certain actions.

Although the presidential decree instituting it as a country brand had not yet been issued, a soft launch was carried out. An international pre-launch took place at the FITUR trade fair in 2024, taking advantage of the fact that Ecuador was the Partner Country that year. We had the King of Spain visiting the stand and a series of highly significant events. Leveraging that situation, the international pre-launch was executed, where all stands, graphic materials, promotional items, and gifts already featured the new branding. Finally, in July 2024, it was officially established by presidential decree as the country brand, followed by its respective implementation.

For this implementation, the brand was obviously shared with the entire public sector; however, its application depends on the budgets each institution possesses and their belief in applying it. There is a Brand Identity Guidelines manual posted on a website that is accessible to the general public. There was also a process (I am not sure of its current status) for non-exclusive licensing. This is because it is one thing for a citizen to want to embrace the country brand (perhaps they want to put a sticker on their car) but it is quite another to use it at a commercial level. While it is positive for a brand to disperse and go viral, there are certain standards we intended to safeguard through the identity manual. For commercial use, it is necessary to obtain a license through SENADI (National Service for Intellectual Rights) so that the intellectual property is not compromised. Above all, we need certain control over uses we do not want. If it goes viral and people start making t-shirts and using it, there is no problem. But large companies (take Marathon, for example) cannot afford to use a brand without a license, as the State could sue them for unauthorized commercial exploitation or misuse of intellectual property. This intellectual property belongs to the State and it is registered to the Ecuadorian State, not to a government or a presidency; therefore, that part is a bit more delicate because private companies can market and engage in the commercial exploitation of this brand. There is no problem in doing so; the government has no profit motive and does not charge for its use. However, you do need to obtain a non-exclusive usage license. Why non-exclusive? Because anyone who wishes to use it may do so; it is not as if I grant it solely to you for your administration, but rather it basically opens the door so that all private companies interested in utilizing and applying it have a legal supporting document stating that the Ecuadorian government authorizes them to use the brand for such and such a purpose.

Basically, regarding misuse and restricted activities, as established in the identity manual already registered in the procedure, the presidential decree indicates the correct way it must be used. This provides a legal protection so that, ex officio, SENADI, the Ministry, or even any citizen can prevent its misuse. Examples of misuse include illegal activities, political activities, or religious proposals, because we are in a secular state. Fundamentally, we do not want any misuse of the country brand. This identity manual also allows us to register and defend it in international courts. The cost of registering this brand in the intellectual property institutions of other countries is onerous; it is high. Therefore, it is a gradual process. To give you an idea, I believe Peru

has its country brand registered in more than thirty countries, but they do not have it in the hundred-plus existing nations. It is a process where every year they have a budget to register it in a new country and thus continue protecting their brand.

Why do I mention Peru so much? Because at the Latin American level, it is one of the most successful brands. I believe the Peru country brand is unfamiliar to no one, at least for those of us who follow this topic or stay informed and see how strong its positioning has been. Obviously, PromPerú, which manages the country brand, has nearly forty years as an institution and possesses the economic backing and a level of financial independence to continue that promotion. This has changed somewhat with the political instability in Peru in recent years, but for nearly thirty years they had a healthy budget to promote this brand. Colombia is the same, as are other countries we compete with directly for product positioning, investment, and tourism; they have budgets that are much more robust than those managed at the Ecuadorian level.

Unfortunately, the creation of the, pardon me, the creation of the Tourism Promotion Fund had precisely that objective: that the levies collected at airports would feed a fund destined solely for tourism promotion. Obviously, the Ministry of Production and Exports also has the promotion of exports within its mission and statutes. But the important thing is to have this umbrella that consolidates what we want to show the world, beyond extending tourism campaigns which, to have a good impact, must last three, four, or five years. Campaigns from other countries in the region have that duration because they possess a strategic vision and an assigned budget that is respected and allocated on time. For Ecuador, this is still a challenge. I believe it lacks some of that drive, that strength for its brand positioning. For now, it has been somewhat isolated efforts. All of Ecuador's international events carry the country brand; it is not just a tourism brand. All other institutions should utilize it; in fact, for a long time, we supplied promotional products to all the institutions that requested them from us.

We have also seen some evolution in the export promotion area under the country brand. The Ministry of Production, at the time before returning to the Ministry of Tourism, already established that all its attendance at international fairs, the banana fair, the coffee fair, the flower fair, should always feature the presence of the country brand, the new country brand. The Ministry of Culture also requested material for its delegations, as did the Ministry of Sports for its delegations. Sometimes it was caps or whatever else could carry this country brand to identify them. So, we saw that they somewhat joined this wave of updating the country brand. Unfortunately, I was linked to the Ministry until July, so I could not tell you what the current status is, or what my perception is of the current status of its application or use. But it is definitively in a presidential decree, and it is basically everyone's obligation to continue strengthening it.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Thank you very much. With what you have just told me, you have practically answered all the questions I had prepared. It has been very extensive. It is interesting that you spoke to me, for example, about the Strategic Brand Commission, as there is actually not much information on the internet beyond its creation and subsequent modification during Lenin Moreno's government. So, you have given me information of great value. Now, let us finish with one last question: what role should the State, private enterprise, and the citizenry play to ensure the brand is sustainable and transcends the political cycles of incumbent governments?

E1:

Well, I believe that the positioning of a brand stems largely from the communicative aspect. I believe it is an obligation of public institutions and the central government to empower the citizen; once the citizenry embraces that country brand, its growth becomes much more organic. We have seen this with several brands. For example, the "I Love New York" brand

is a destination brand that is so famous that people make t-shirts and the City of New York does not legislate against them or audit these businesses; it does not say to them, "Hey, you are using my brand." On the contrary, it goes viral. Then, brands like "I Love New York" or Las Vegas (which does not have a logo in a traditional sense, but it is written in a unique way) so that you see that brand and you know what it refers to. There are country brands of some European destinations that have been very, very strong, which have positioned themselves very strongly, but that comes hand in hand with the empowerment of civil society.

Therefore, I believe that as a government, there is indeed an obligation to position it among society so that it achieves greater penetration, greater representation, and so that it is the citizen who feels empowered to do so. Obviously, it is a message that would have to be repeated many times, but in a very subtle way, in a way in which it does not align itself with a political current. Thus, the line is super thin, it is very fine, so that people know we are conducting a pertinent communication about the country brand, but it is not a brand of the government. When I leave, that brand is going to remain there; that is the idea.

Consequently, I believe it is necessary to have a greater communicative power so that it achieves greater penetration, greater positioning, greater recall, and finally, an empowerment on the part of society so that they are the ones who contribute to it with pride and represent it with pride. It should be on the jersey of the national football team; it should, I mean, it should have a much larger reach that even transcends institutionalism. The way I see it (just one example) the football team. Yes, it represents us, basically, whether we like it or not, whether we agree or not, whether we like football or not, or whether we like the sports industry or not. In the end, it represents Ecuadorians and it does not represent the Ecuadorian Football Federation; it represents Ecuadorians.

Therefore, it should feature the country brand; through certain agreements, this can be achieved, also through the use of brand ambassadors who position the brand more strongly. And here, I believe that athletes can play a key, determining role for the use of the brand, having these heroes or these brand standard-bearers who are people who truly have a trajectory that allows them to deliver the message appropriately. They are Ecuadorians; they are not politicians, they are not of the moment, they are not part of the current political situation. They are simply trying to position that brand. And finally, well, once it goes viral

among society, its permanence and its transcendence are much easier. As I told you, it is a thin line. A communication strategy was established at the time together with SECOM and with the Ministry of Production to be able to expand it, but I do not know if they are applying it. I hope that if they are not applying it, they do so, or they create one soon so that this can be strengthened a bit more.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

I completely agree. And what do you think about the coherence that must exist between the brand's storytelling and the national reality? Because, for example, one of the major criticisms the country brand received at its launch is that, well, the slogan is "Ecuador shines with its own light," and it was launched during a period of blackouts. There were many criticisms regarding that; it is just a small example. So, what do you think about the relationship between storytelling and national reality?

E1:

I believe that is where campaigns come in. If we say, "This is the logo, this is the slogan," the campaigns are the ones that can work with the current situation at that moment. For example, Colombia: Colombia's country brand is "Colombia," followed by four symbols, but it does not have a slogan. The country brand is the name; I believe it is actually a puzzle of four pieces representing their four riches or their four strengths. But they launched a campaign within a specific context: "Colombia, the danger is that you'll want to stay." That is something that reached all of us; it was etched into our minds. It marked us; it was a stroke of genius. It was a way to reverse the message using the very concept of danger.

So, that is where campaigns come in. Campaigns should address the current situation. As you say, at the moment of the launch, there just happened to be blackouts, etcetera. But campaigns exist for those specific circumstances, because campaigns are there to help mitigate the message of the moment so that the brand continues to prevail at a higher level. Therefore, yes, there must be coherence in the message, obviously; but I believe this must be created by having a great deal of creativity in the design of the campaigns. Campaigns also have their stages, right? So, at the moment of launching campaigns, you have in the first stage precisely the evaluation of the Canvas in which you are going to launch: What is the current situation? What is the baseline? What is the perception of society? And what are the political, economic, and social contexts under which your campaign will be released so that you can reach people with the appropriate message?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Understood. Thank you very much, Santiago. Honestly, you have given me a very complex perspective because the information available is not very extensive, especially regarding this latest brand. So, thank you very much for everything you have contributed today.

E1:

It is a pleasure, my dear Trosky. I have some material; I have your WhatsApp. So, I have some material, the presentation that has some of the information I gave you but with more specific dates, the number of the decree when it was launched, and of course, a bit of the history and the process of its creation. That was the presentation I used to give to other institutions and at brand forums. I will gladly share that presentation with you; it is a PowerPoint. And I will also share... well, actually, on the website, if you don't have it, the "Marca País Ecuador" page, you register there and you can also download the identity manual for any brand manual. But the country brand page itself was taken down, or I don't know what happened, but it no longer exists because...

E1:

Because, of course, that was the page designed for the voting process, but it is no longer in operation. Well, in any case, you do have the identity manual?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Yes, I do.

E1:

Alright then, I will send you the presentation I used to use, which has some data and might perhaps help you look for more information because you would already have certain keys. If you have the decree number, you can look for the decree and see what it says, etcetera.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Thank you very much, Santiago. It was a pleasure meeting you.

E1:

A pleasure for me as well. Have a good day. Take care.

## **Appendix F**

### *Transcript of Interview Number 5 to the expert E2*

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Good morning. To begin, could you describe your professional trajectory and the branding projects, whether they be country, city, institutional, or general branding, in which you have participated, and what your role was in that participation?

E2:

Let's see, well, I am a communicator; I graduated in the year 2020. I am the recipient of the Honorato Vázquez Award for Academic Merit, having the highest grade point average of my generation. Later, I went to do my Master's degree at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in Political Communication, and right now I am doing my doctorate in Media, Communication, and Culture, but with a research line in Political Communication at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. That is as far as my studies are concerned. Regarding work, I have been working here at the Universidad del Azuay for three years, and before that, I was a high school teacher. During these three years, I have been a professor of subjects that might be close to what you are doing, subjects that interest you, such as Communication Theories, especially the aspect of semiotics and symbols, and in language subjects that always speak of the construction of reality. So, those could relate to country branding, with brands in general, right? With brands, I have obviously worked within the political line. I was involved in, and it is a different kind of brand, it is a special brand, an atypical brand, let's say, working in politics. I have worked on campaigns, both for university elections at the Universidad de Cuenca, as well as on a presidential campaign, a campaign for the Prefecture, and obviously there, beyond promoting the candidate, one has to promote a political party, and in that process, one must build a brand.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Super interesting profile. I think it fits very well. I hope, I hope I can contribute to you. From your academic or professional perspective, how do you conceptualize the country brand, and what boundaries do you establish between this concept and a tourism promotion campaign, well, tourism or general promotion?

E2:

Well, I am going to speak to you about semiotics, which is one of the lines of research I handle. You may perceive it as complex or difficult. Therefore, I will attempt to oversimplify it, but in a way that provides a meaningful contribution. In semiotics, I always tell my students that beyond complex theoretical definitions, what we must consider is that there are symbols and signs that we perceive with our senses, not only through sight but through other means, and they evoke a series of mental images in us that go beyond what we merely perceive. That series of evoked mental images depends on each of us and will obviously depend on our culture, our education, and the environments that surround us. Those are the general terms of what a symbol is. For me, the country brand is a symbol; it is a sign.

However, the country brand symbol or sign must evoke a similar series of mental images in people, regardless of their ideology, their socioeconomic level, or their cultural environment. This is because the country brand must be able to evoke "country." Generally, what we want with the country brand is for it to evoke good things about the nation, right? We want to see a symbol that says "Ecuador" and have it reach us all with the idea that "This is being Ecuador; this is belonging to the country; this is national pride," right? And for people outside, we want them to see it and say, "Ah, this is this country, this idea, this place." As I said, if we think of Ecuador, seeing that symbol should make one think of, I don't know, the four worlds we have, think of Galápagos, Quito, Cuenca, regardless of the cultural or intellectual background they may have.

In that sense, it is different from a mere tourism promotion campaign, because the country brand should endure over time and should evoke this idea of Ecuador beyond the government of the day. A tourism campaign or any promotion campaign, whether tourism-related or not, has a beginning and an end; it has a temporal framework and established dissemination channels. The country brand does not. The country brand should be

a transversal umbrella for all communicative efforts, both inside and outside the country. As I said, it does not have a beginning or an end; it should not have an end, because we want the idea of the country to be perpetuated.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

I completely agree. Since you have begun to speak about identity, what do you consider to be the indispensable pillars that grant solidity to a country brand?

E2:

Let's see. First, the first pillar is evidently a well-structured concept, and that is something we have always lacked in Ecuador. It is not very clear why we design the country brand the way we do, and furthermore, we change it with every change of government. In fact, the country brand, or what attempts to be a country brand, turns into a government brand or an attempt at one. The fact that it changes so much indicates that the concept is not solid; the concept behind the attempt at a country brand is not strong enough to be perpetuated. If you think of the multicolor circle of the correísmo era, it was changed when Lenín Moreno arrived for the "tree" logo, and then under Guillermo Lasso, it was changed again.

I am doubting here, perhaps you know better if the current country brand, which is this "Ecuador between lines," was already made with Guillermo Lasso. It began to be made and was practically finished with Guillermo Lasso, but then came the moment of brand promotion, and that is why there was this disconnection. But if you stop to think about it, the person who managed the process was part of the Lasso government and is now part of the new government, and again, if someone else arrives tomorrow, they will surely change it. Therefore, there is a lack of a concept, right? That is the first pillar I mentioned: a well-constructed concept. I always like to speak about, and I assume you have studied, the country brand of Peru. Peru changes governments almost more often than a washing machine changes filters, yet the "P" from the Nazca lines is perpetuated over time. Why? Because the concept is well-constructed, the concept is well-explained, and the concept is well-socialized with the people inside the country and evidently with those outside, but especially within. People see that and think of Peru; they do not think of a specific government.

That is important because here, you think of "Ecuador Ama la Vida" and the multicolor circle, and you do not think of Ecuador; you think of the government of the Citizens' Revolution. You see the tree and you think of Moreno, or pardon me, of Noboa... First, a very clear concept. Then, regarding the second pillar, it is evidently the sense of identity: that people see the brand and not only say "Ecuador," but within the country, they say, "What pride to be Ecuadorian." If the people inside do not take ownership of it, it is impossible to export that country brand. Therefore, we need that sense of pride and that sense of identity, which in turn requires many facets. We could spend an entire hour speaking only about that, but it is not enough for it to be well-designed, right? It must be accompanied by concrete actions in various areas that generate and contribute to this sensation. And the third pillar, so as not to go on too long, is obviously its perpetuation over time. I return to the point I mentioned: we cannot be changing the country brand every time the government changes. If we are doing that, we are achieving nothing. People do not come to take ownership of it because it already changed. How many people were able to take ownership of the tree logo? How many people are taking ownership right now of the Ecuador.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

No, because very little time has passed and, who knows, if another government arrives later, we won't even remember the current country brand. Well, and here you speak of something super interesting because, for example, Moreno's "tree" is not a country brand, but since there is such a close confusion between the country brand and the government brand, this is what happens. For example, we have here (correct me if I am wrong on this), this is the one from Rafael Correa that started as a country brand and became a government brand; it was placed in all institutions, the Millennium Schools, the Police Units (UPCs), everything. But then it moved to this one here because Lenín Moreno said, "This was too politicized," it stopped being used, and then only the government brand was used for everything. But perhaps that is where the confusion lies because it is not a country brand. Lasso did not have a country brand either; the project was launched to finally develop the country brand, and here it is as well, for example, the "Nuevo Ecuador" (New Ecuador). That is the government

brand (pardon me), but there is also "Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente" (Ecuador Shines Authentically), which is this one here, and that one is the country brand. I mean, they both exist. There is this duality, but I believe there is a confusion as well, no?

E2:

No, actually, thank you for clarifying that. I would have sworn that Lenín Moreno's tree was the attempt at a country brand, and it wasn't. So, no, that's excellent; I have just learned something here. But of course, that also speaks to you about the problems of consolidating a country brand in Ecuador. If you have had, or rather, if we have not had brands since "Ecuador Ama la Vida," it results in years of a void; years of a void where the message only originates from the government and is a purely governmental message. Because, of course, I remember this one from Guillermo Lasso, from the "Gobierno del Encuentro" (Government of the Encounter). Of course, right now I recognize the "Nuevo Ecuador" one, but if the communicative weight falls solely on the government brand and government communication...

E2:

It is impossible for you to consolidate a country brand because the government tends to polarize; whatever the government may be, it is going to polarize. There are people who love it, there are people who do not; there are people who see this "Nuevo Ecuador" and are already negatively predisposed. There are people who see "Ecuador Ama la Vida" and are already negatively predisposed. So, yes, the conclusion of this part for me is evidently that the country brand cannot be the government brand; you are not going to consolidate any strong message if you do that.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Well, here we have practically touched upon Identity, Image, and Reputation, which are probably the three indispensable pillars of branding. Moving on to the narrative: how is a storytelling constructed that transcends the commercial to reflect culture and a sense of belonging for the citizenry? And how aligned must this narrative be with the current reality of the country?

E2:

Let's see, it is a challenge because being aligned with the current reality of the country at this moment is complex, especially because right now, at an international level, we have to fight against the stigma of a country that is becoming a hotspot of violence, a country that is becoming a highway for drug trafficking, a country that killed a presidential candidate. These are things that affect us internally, but they also significantly impact the image being generated abroad. And one must always remember that the country brand is important both...

E2:

Composed from the inside as well as from the outside, right? So, returning to the question, it is difficult because that is the current reality of the country, right? And that is the current reality even in the international collective imagination. But you cannot do that; I mean, you cannot incorporate that into a country brand because then no one visits you. But we are not only that; we are not only what reaches international media and the violence. We continue to have a great deal of potential: immense tourism potential, and even more than tourism, immense human potential.

Just yesterday I saw some videos of people visiting Ecuador, specifically foreigners who are arriving with this idea of "I am going to the most dangerous country," but they still find they can eat delicious food, they can still visit places, and all of them said that one of the things they love is that the Ecuadorian person is very kind. That is human capital; it isn't even tourism capital, but we have many good people, right? And for me, it goes through there. Ecuador is a beautiful country in terms of landscapes, food, activities to do; it is a beautiful country in its history to be discovered, and above all, it is a beautiful country in the people who will receive

you. Speaking about the people in a country brand makes it easier for you as an Ecuadorian to feel identified with that symbol, and at the same time, as I said a moment ago, if it is consolidated internally, it is easier to understand externally.

At the same time, to distance yourself from commercial guidelines... because the commercial aspect is important in the construction of a country brand since you have to sell yourself, but I understand that sometimes you want to move away because it shouldn't only be seen from a mercantilist perspective. Simultaneously, if the country brand "is the people," let's say, if it is thought of in terms of how beautiful our people are, that distances it a bit from the commercial because it puts the focus on the human, on the stories that Ecuadorians can tell, and the stories that people visiting from outside can tell about their contact with Ecuadorians. If the narrative is not seen from the cold logic of numbers or all the millions of tourism potential assets we have (volcanoes, seas, islands, jungle, animals, and so on), but instead the focus falls on the human story, on the story of the ordinary Ecuadorian who builds this country and receives visitors with a smile, your country brand will be, precisely, more human. And by being more human, it moves away from commercial guidelines, and I feel it can also align much more with the current reality of an Ecuador that is hurting, that is going through whatever it is going through, but remains a country that receives you with a smile and a hug. And hopefully (because right now it is difficult, I won't lie to you), hopefully, people will take pride in their country. I don't know if I answered that, or if you want me to expand.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Focusing now on the current case, the current brand: how do you evaluate the value proposition of the "Ecuador Brilla Auténticamente" brand?

E2:

Well, the fact that I didn't even remember "Brilla Auténticamente" before this interview tells you a lot. Let's see, in general terms, I do not like it, but that is a subjective assessment. I do not like it, nor do I like how it has been developed.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

In what sense do you mean the implementation of the country brand?

E2:

No, I do not know what the methodology of your research is, whether it is qualitative, quantitative, or strictly qualitative. Of course, if you were to conduct surveys right now in Ecuador, or take statistically representative samples from certain cities, how many people would know the brand? Very few. I mean, without even conducting the survey officially to provide an exact percentage, it is very low. And that speaks to the fact that it is not being implemented well, that it has not been developed correctly.

The implementation of this new country brand, as I was saying, and I will not tire of emphasizing this, if the country brand is not consolidated domestically, it is impossible to export it abroad. It is as simple as that. So, the fact that people do not know it suggests a lack of communication efforts. In the field of Communication, we always say that one of the ways messages are most effectively consolidated is when you see something everywhere. But you almost never see the current country brand; you see the government brand much more, the "Nuevo Ecuador" logo, the communicative themes of Daniel Noboa. You do not see the country brand, or what is intended to be the country brand, which I hope survives because we cannot be changing the country brand every five minutes. But you don't see it, so there is no repetition; there is no bombardment of stimuli to make people at least begin to record it in their subconscious. Therefore, I do not like how it has been implemented, or the efforts that have been made so far.

Furthermore, I repeat, I do not like the concept as such. I do think it was the best of the three options presented to us by Olsen, I remember when he was Minister of Tourism, developed with FutureBrand, the agency that manages the Peruvian country brand. Yes, I remember he posted on Twitter something like, "These are the three options we have right now," and it generated some conversation as an attempt to validate the brand and make it better known. I do not necessarily think that was wrong, because it was an attempt to get people to know it and start taking ownership. However, the conversation regarding those discourses was mostly on Twitter, and Twitter is used by only 10% of Ecuadorians. So, it is a very niche space. I believe it was also shown on Instagram and published on the official portal of the Ministry of Tourism, but very few people were involved.

In Communication, there is a concept called the Public Sphere, which is the space where we converse about matters of social relevance. The country brand is part of that public history. The conversation in the public sphere shifted too much toward Twitter, which is a niche network in Ecuador. So, from the start, there were certain problems. Then there is another issue: the fact that it was presented by Niels Olsen, who is synonymous with both the Lasso and Noboa governments. This caused opposition sectors, especially the Revolución Ciudadana, to have a direct partisan predisposition to reject it. They are predisposed to say, "I don't like it, it doesn't contribute to me, it doesn't add value." They could have released the best country brand in the world, the best-designed one, and those sectors would have still complained because of this predisposition, because it was seen as a very political act.

As I was saying, I think it was the best of the three options, but I feel it fails to truly reflect who Ecuadorians are. It fails to reflect that narrative I mentioned: that we are kindness, we are beautiful landscapes, but beyond that, we are beautiful people. We are more than just the closest point to the sun; we are more than the equatorial line. I feel that is missing in the country brand; the human narrative is missing, the storytelling that encompasses 18 million people who get up every day to work and, despite adversities, can offer a smile to a stranger, to someone they don't know, or to someone in need.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Of course.

E2:

I don't know if that helped you?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Yes, absolutely, because the second part of the question was whether you consider it successfully projects the diversity and identity of the country brand in a faithful manner. But you have just answered that.

E2:

Just for the record, no. I do not feel that it successfully captures who we are.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Understood. In what way do you perceive that the management of the Ecuadorian country brand is currently impacting national and international competitiveness in the country's strategic sectors, namely tourism, investment, and trade?

E2:

Ah, let's see, I am going to give you a response that is very much rooted in political communication. I find it interesting that you have approached me from the perspective of an International Relations thesis; I feel that International Relations and International Studies often intertwine with Communication, yet we are two sciences that are, well, united but distinct. In that sense, perhaps the answer I give you now, and please stop my explanation if you do not understand something I say, is that I feel we are currently living in an era of highly personalist communication. Generally, in the world, political communication has become very personalist. In Ecuador, it is extremely personalist, and Ecuador's political communication toward the rest of the world (which is ultimately what serves to attract tourists and investment) relies heavily on the personalism of the government of the day.

I feel that right now, rather than a country brand, both nationally and internationally (which is your focus), we depend heavily on the communicative focal point that is Daniel Noboa. That is to say, it is not the country brand, nor even necessarily the idea of the "Nuevo Ecuador," but rather Daniel Noboa himself. Now he goes to Chile for the inauguration of José Antonio Kast; it is his thirty-fourth or thirty-fifth trip in just over two years of government. Daniel Noboa goes and participates in forums, takes photos with Donald Trump, meets regarding the "Shield of the Americas," goes to Belgium to meet with the European Union, meets with the prince and the sheikh in the United Arab Emirates, and attends Formula 1 events to inaugurate the Ecuadorian chocolate stand, if my memory serves me correctly.

International communication from Ecuador, or rather, the communicative efforts originating from Ecuador, are passing through the figure of a single person, accompanied by Gabriela Sommerfeld, sometimes by John Reinberg, but at the end of the day, it is Daniel. I do not know in how many of those spaces he is attempting to consolidate the idea of the brand or simply the idea of Daniel Noboa. And that, as I mentioned earlier, is why I do not like how it has been implemented nationally, but internationally a country brand must be perpetuated beyond the government of the day. Daniel is supposed to leave the government at some point (I put "supposed" in heavy quotation marks), but he is supposed to leave. What will happen then? What happens if the next president of Ecuador does not have as much interest in making those trips and being the direct intermediary who speaks for Ecuador? You need a communicative, semiotic, and symbolic apparatus that can reach any location and sustain the Ecuadorian narrative beyond a single person. We are not achieving that.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Linked exactly to this: what strategic adjustments or changes in positioning would you consider necessary to strengthen the Ecuadorian country brand against regional and international competitors?

E2:

I will be very honest with you: since this country brand is not consolidated, I would build another one. I would start by building a new one, despite what I said about how we shouldn't be changing it all the time. But if this current one is not being consolidated, and the people who do know it either love it or hate it because they have a political predisposition to love or hate whatever comes from Daniel Noboa (just as they did with Rafael Correa), then it fails. A country brand must be non-partisan. The construction of a country brand must be a non-partisan effort.

It becomes difficult to do something non-partisan in today's Ecuador because our constitutional system is established in such a way that political power, both executive and legislative, has significant incidence and power. But if we are being utopian, the National Assembly is a space where ideas should converge, where political dissidence and opposition should meet to reach agreements. To me, the country brand should be proposed from a space of plurality. I don't necessarily mean the Assembly, though it is supposedly the space of greatest plurality in the country, but rather a plural initiative arising from an agreement between the different political lines of Ecuador. In the end, we all benefit from a strong country brand that symbolizes us all.

In Peru, everyone benefits; it doesn't matter if they are from the left, the right, the center, the top, or the bottom. Everyone benefits from the Peru brand being strong because it means more tourism, which means more investment, and more investment means more possibilities for employment and development. We lack that realization here: that the country brand is not, or should not be, a tool for the government of the day, but rather a tool for the country (not the "country of the day," but the country we actually have). In that sense, if it cannot be a political tool, it should not be constructed from a figure as political as the president or his minister (who is, after all, his representative). It should be constructed from plurality.

Since this question allows for a utopian response, I would build one from scratch, even if that takes us another two or three years. It is more necessary than having a country brand that 80% of the people do not know, 10% hate, and 10% love. In those two or three years, I would return to human storytelling: let our country brand be Ecuadorian plurality. We are plural, but within that plurality, one can still find common traits such as joy, kindness, and affection. I am not a designer; I cannot even begin to sketch the idea of how it would look, but I would follow that line. I suppose that answer might not be very useful to you, as it might be better to identify strategies for the current country brand, but since you asked me, I would build one from scratch, distanced from the president of the day, because otherwise, another president will come and replace it.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Well, a final question: after everything you have mentioned, what role do you consider the State, private enterprise, and the citizenry should play to ensure the brand is sustainable and transcends the political cycles of incumbent governments, which we have seen is the greatest problem?

E2:

That is a great question to close with. As I mentioned a moment ago, if a country brand is strong and consolidated, we all benefit. Everyone. Along those lines, consolidating the country brand is a collective effort. Just as we all benefit, we must all "put our shoulder to the wheel," as the saying goes, because Ecuador (remember what I told you at the beginning about semiotics) is something I perceive that evokes a series of mental images going beyond mere perception. The country brand is supposed to evoke "Ecuador" for us, and Ecuador is something worked on by everyone, defended by everyone, and promoted by all eighteen million Ecuadorians. Therefore, we should all work on, promote, and take ownership of the country brand. You mentioned private enterprise, citizens, and the State, right?

Well, in political science, you will know better than I that "State" is sometimes confused with "government," but the State is all of us. Many people refer to the "Ecuadorian State" when they mean the president, the ministers, the Assembly, or political power in general; but no, the State is everyone. So, if we substitute "State" for "political actors," their role (if we are being utopian and starting from a more plural, less politicized brand) lies in coordinating the constant repetition of the brand so people incorporate it into their cultural repertoire. Their role is to show it constantly but also to back the brand with concrete works and well-being. It is much easier to feel proud of your country if you don't see news reports about a lack of supplies in hospitals, children being outside the education system, or roads being closed all the time. It is easier to take ownership of the brand if you don't open Twitter or the newspapers and see only death and drug trafficking.

The solution is not to tell the media to stop talking about those things, because that is part of the reality; the solution lies in guaranteeing a quality of life in the long term that makes it easier to be proud of your country. From the perspective of political actors, it is about showing the brand and socializing it well, but then providing conditions that are in concordance with what we want to say through the brand. If the brand wants to shout "pride," then let's give the country conditions to be proud of.

Private enterprise must do the same: take ownership, display the brand wherever necessary, and sell their products alongside the country brand, conveying that what they produce is Ecuadorian, and what is Ecuadorian is good, kind, and human (in terms of warmth, not climate). But at the same time, private companies must be

part of the narrative that this is not just a pretty facade. Inside the house, things must also be beautiful: pay your employees' social security, do not look for ways to cheat the system, and so on.

And from the citizenry, it is the same. Take ownership, show the positive aspects; but if we are genuinely proud to be Ecuadorian, let us do what is in our power as citizens so that Ecuador is genuinely a country to be proud of, so it is not just a "pretty door" on an "ugly house." There are many things we as citizens can do, from respecting laws to not taking advantage of the system. I often think about the streets; there is something I dislike about Ecuadorians, which is the lack of respect for traffic laws or lines (people trying to cut in). Even those tiny things undermine the narrative we want to build: the body of a beautiful country. It cannot be a beautiful country only in the logo or the slogan; that brand must be backed by a nation of which we are genuinely proud.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. A couple of additional questions: do you consider that through promotional campaigns, the brand could be redirected toward a closer or more authentic identity?

E2:

Yes, campaigns help, depending on how well they are executed. As I said, I am concerned about the current country brand in the sense that it was political, it was politicized from the start. And the fact that it is politicized (just like "Ecuador Ama la Vida," which became a political symbol as well) unfortunately generates polarization. We live in polarized times globally and in Ecuador, which causes many topics to be split into two opposing camps.

However, campaigns will always help if they are well-crafted. A good campaign will help people take ownership of the subject. But I am worried about the current country brand due to the fact that it is already politicized; there will be people who, because of that politicization, will not accept any campaign, regardless of how well-funded it is. It could be an attempt by the current government's communication department to consolidate the brand; it might help somewhat, yes. Would it help all Ecuadorians feel represented in that brand? Unfortunately, no. And if we look at the practical side, I do not feel that the current government has intentions of executing these campaigns. I feel they are much more focused on executing the campaigns for "Nuevo Ecuador." And again, "Nuevo Ecuador" is a government brand, and a government brand will never be representative of 100% of the people.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez:

Perfect. Well, that would be all for the interview. Thank you very much.

E2:

No, thank you. It was great; I hope what we discussed is useful to you.

## **Appendix G**

### *Transcription of Interview Number Six conducted with Interviewee E3*

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: This session is being recorded. Perfect. Very well. Shall we begin?

E3: Yes, let's begin.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Perfect. To start, could you describe your professional background and specific brand initiatives? Whether in nation, city, or institutional identity brands you have participated in, specifying the strategic role you played.

E3: Could you repeat the question one more time? It is quite a broad inquiry.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Of course. Could you describe your professional trajectory and specific branding initiatives? This refers to your participation in nation brand projects, city brands, or institutional identity initiatives.

E3: Well, I would go back to my time at Johnson & Johnson (J&J). Specifically, I worked on a brand initiative within the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sector focused on contraceptives. The core of the project consisted of understanding the target segment—young women—and analyzing the fundamental insights that motivated their choice, ensuring that direct-to-consumer communication resonated with the target audience. That has been part of my work in recent years. We have also collaborated with various NGOs on brand strategies based on their identity. For example, we worked in Peru with an organization that marketed Andean food products; the challenge was how to capitalize on a suitable brand identity that balanced altruistic aspects with the communication of quality and authenticity. Those would be my most recent works.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: That is extremely interesting. You mentioned the concept of identity, a topic we will address in greater depth later. From your academic or professional perspective, how do you conceptualize a Country Brand or a Nation Brand? Furthermore, what theoretical or practical boundaries do you establish between this strategic construct and a conventional tourism promotion campaign?

E3: How do I build the identity of a regional brand? That is an interesting question. How would I define a Nation Brand, and what is the difference with a conventional tourism campaign? They are two distinct entities. A Nation Brand encompasses services, products, and a national identity founded on brand personality and values. On the other hand, there is the tourism brand.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Exactly. Usually, in Latin America and many other countries, when talking about a Nation Brand, some actors limit themselves to thinking it is solely a tourism initiative. Therefore, I wish to establish a clear distinction.

E3: A brand is a brand, regardless of whether a service or a product is being marketed. Clearly, if products are being sold, it is imperative to reflect on how to communicate brand value through price, access channels (whether luxury stores, mass markets, or e-commerce platforms like Amazon), and packaging. Everything must be consistent with the predefined brand identity. From a tourism perspective, this depends on the value proposition. Nowadays, many tourism brands bet on the "authentic experience," but that is only one position. One can also opt for a luxury proposal, where all imagery and associated experiences convey exclusivity and

high-level service. Alternatively, one can target the "backpacker" seeking to connect with the local community; that is a very different brand value. The key is to understand the interlocutor, understand their needs, and develop the product—whether tourism-related or physical—that manages to connect with those individuals. I don't know if this answers your question.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Totally. In fact, it connects with the following question: What are, for you, the indispensable pillars that provide structure and solidity to a Nation Brand? I would like to delve specifically into the triad of identity, image, and international reputation.

E3: What is identity?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Yes, I am referring to the relationship between the identity, image, and reputation of a Nation Brand.

E3: All those elements are interrelated and co-create the value proposition. If you do not have a solid reputation or the necessary credibility to sustain brand promises, the identity becomes unstable. They are interconnected dimensions that must be addressed integrally to build robust brand equity. Does that make sense for your research?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Absolutely. Let's talk now about narrative or storytelling. How is an effective story built around a Nation Brand?

E3: When you mention Nation Brand, could you be more specific?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Of course, I am referring, for example, to the case of the Ecuador Nation Brand. I don't know if you are familiar with it.

E3: I understand. If the goal is to promote tourism to Ecuador, I want to better understand your focus. Your questions are relevant, but I need more clarity on what you are looking for. Repeat the question, now that I understand we are focusing on the Ecuadorian case.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Let's do the following: I will share my screen to show you the 2024 Ecuador Nation Brand manual. My research seeks to determine if this brand is suitable or what changes it requires to guarantee stability and reputation growth. I want to analyze if its identity reflects who we are and what we wish to project. Ecuador currently faces significant challenges, with the perception of security being the main critical factor. Globally, security is the number one priority for travelers. Let me show you the brand manual... in English I'm not sure what to call it, perhaps a Brand Book.

E3: I love the colors! Yes, it is a Brand Book that defines the color palette and typographies for institutional communication. I understand—before, I thought we were talking about marketing in general theoretical terms, but I see your analysis is specific to the country. Visually it is beautiful, very clear. So, is your specific question how the brand is currently perceived?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Before that, how do you build a good Nation Brand that relates storytelling with the Ecuadorian reality? How do these factors influence each other?

E3: Building a Nation Brand lies in understanding why people visit Ecuador and, crucially, why others do not. Market research is the axis for understanding identity perceptions. Once the motivators are understood—whether it's the coast, the highlands, heritage, or cultural exchange—consistent themes can be extracted to develop a compelling narrative about the profound impact the experience has on the traveler. It depends on the predominant visitor profile. Visa statistics and collaboration with strategic partners (hotels and tourism professionals) are vital information sources. It's about empowering the narrative based on what people genuinely love about the country. There is an example I'd like to send you from the Northwest Territories in Canada; they have identified their brand value in an incredible way, using stylized language and images that connect with indigenous culture and emotional impact, beyond scenic beauty.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: That is very interesting. Let me show you the storytelling of the current brand. The slogan is "Ecuador brilla auténticamente" (Ecuador shines authentically). It focuses on geographical location (12 hours of sunlight), biodiversity, and the four worlds (Coast, Highlands, Amazon, and Galapagos). However, it seems to omit certain cultural aspects. The symbology alludes to light and a sense of belonging, although the images focus more on nature than on people. How do you perceive this brand, and do you believe it manages to project the country's diversity and identity in a credible and authentic way?

E3: Visually, the imagery is powerful, though I would need to analyze it more closely. It connects well with nature, landscapes, and that "sunny disposition." Could you show me the list of values again?

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: The values are sustainability, respect, quality, diversity, and hospitality. Regarding personality, they mention: energy, authenticity, creativity, kindness, and resilience. Resilience is defined here as the ability to overcome adversity and persist even in difficult times. I feel the brand is more focused outward, toward the tourist, than toward the Ecuadorians themselves. In fact, there was no massive national launch, and many citizens are unaware of the brand.

E3: It is true that much of it seems oriented outward. The attributes of energy, authenticity, and kindness are very suggestive of the visitor experience. Regarding resilience... it is a laudable quality, but I am not sure how it fits into a consumer value proposition platform. The critical issue for Ecuador today is security in international perception. How do you reassure the public on this issue? That is the question I would pose. As for personality, the traits of creativity, energy, and kindness seem very accurate and specific to what one discovers in Ecuador. Resilience still raises doubts for me regarding its strategic fit.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Do you believe this brand will help boost tourism, exports, and attract FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), making people feel safe to visit and buy our products?

E3: For different sectors, different values will gain greater relevance. If seeking to attract investment (FDI), resilience and stability become fundamental. Therefore, the importance of each value fluctuates depending on the strategic sector being addressed.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: I understand. Given the global context, what strategic adjustments or positioning changes would you consider necessary to strengthen the Ecuador Nation Brand against its regional competitors?

E3: As I mentioned, I would need to study the material with greater rigor to offer a conscientious opinion. Nonetheless, based on what I've seen, the positive and "radiant" energy is a great asset. But, whether for tourism or investment, the notion of security and stability remains a question mark that the current graphic material does not seem to address directly.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Instability is a complex issue. In Ecuador, we have had frequent government changes that have affected nation brands. We had "Ecuador Ama la Vida," which had great exposure but was criticized for its political use and finally dismantled by the next government. This left the country without a defined brand for years until the current transition. This lack of consistency has seriously affected investments.

E3: A fundamental principle in brand building is consistency over time. If the brand changes with each political cycle, that is a major problem; the brand ends up hurting more than it helps. The best brands are those that maintain their imagery and values persistently. For this brand to achieve international recognition, it needs to be maintained for years.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: That is precisely the point. To conclude, what specific roles should the State, private enterprise, and civil society play to guarantee that the brand is sustainable and transcends political cycles?

E3: There must be widespread adoption. It cannot just be a government image. All partners—private enterprise, civil society, etc.—must agree to use this imagery in all their promotional activities to amplify the impact. "Living the brand" of a country requires all actors to feel part of it.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: Thank you very much for your time. This has been extremely valuable.

E3: It has been a pleasure. As a suggestion, for future interviews, send the material beforehand so that experts can offer deeper reflections. It seems to me you are on the right track, but you need to bolster the message of stability and national growth. It is interesting that the brand is not yet known; if foreigners and Ecuadorians themselves do not know it, there is significant work to be done. A public dissemination campaign is not just an option; it is an absolute necessity to achieve the desired positioning.

Trosky Serrano Alvarez: I fully agree. Thank you again.

E3: Take care. Goodbye.