

Disclosing the cultural heritage dimension of the country image. A comparison between the lexical contents of the web communication from ten leading countries¹

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Abstract

The role of cultural heritage in a nation's well-being has been widely debated in economics and management. However, the international marketing literature has largely overlooked this concept. In order to contribute to a proper understanding of the role of cultural heritage within the theoretical domain of country image (cultural heritage image) and simultaneously highlight the thematic structure of institutional communication adopted by nations characterized by a high endowment of cultural resources, this study carried out a content analysis on the official documents presented on the web for the communication of cultural heritage by the ten countries considered best-in-class according to the annual Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands index (Ipsos, 2023). The choice of the inductive approach stems from the pervasiveness of current communication systems that make the peculiarities and signalling elements of national cultural heritage visible, albeit in extremely different ways (Napolitano et al., 2015; Marino and Mainolfi, 2013). Methodologically, the study was developed through three main phases: data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. The content analysis identified twelve tangible and intangible components of a nation's cultural heritage image, categorized as historic sites, cultural institutions, natural environment, craftsmanship, visual arts and audio-visuals, performing arts, literature, language, gastronomy, traditions, people, diversity, equity and inclusion. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for international marketing strategies employed by national companies and for research on country image.

Keywords: country image, cultural heritage, cultural heritage image, content analysis

1. Introduction

In recent years, the image and reputation of a country have gained particular importance both in the marketing literature, which seeks to develop models for analysing and measuring the different components of the image, and in nation branding strategies aimed at strengthening the notoriety and identity of country systems in global markets. As emerged in the international marketing studies, which began in the 1960s, and which delved into the influence of country image on the perceptions and behaviour of foreign consumers, country image can be defined as "the sum total of all the descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs that a person has about a particular country" (Martin and Eroglu, 1993, p. 193). This synthesis represents a set of generalised representations concerning the level of political maturity, economic innovation, and industrialisation, as well as traditions, culture, and people. Although several contributions on the topic have obtained widely shared results in

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explaining the factors at the basis of country image formation (Gartner, 1993; Han, 1989; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994) and in identifying the main behaviours deriving from a favourable reputation and image - in particular consumption (Costa et al., 2016; Laroche et al., 2005; Verlegh, 2001) or anticonsumption (Ortega-Egea and García-de-Frutos, 2021) of foreign products and the choices of tourist destinations (Zhang et al., 2018) -, the research conducted so far has neglected the role of cultural heritage in the formation of country image (Pereira et al., 2005). Recent literature on country image reveals two recent attempts to systematize the cultural component, though both are predominantly inductive and do not fully capture the complexity of this theoretical construct. The first proposal, by Hakala et al. (2011), acknowledges the scarcity of studies on national cultural heritage and suggests a measurement system based on two dimensions: homogeneity, defined as the dominance of a single language and religion, and endurance, measured by the number of UNESCO recognitions a country has received. The second proposal, from a more recent study by Rojas-Méndez (2013), uses the free elicited response technique to explore perceptions of 26 different nations. It associates a wide range of attributes with the culture and heritage dimension, including monuments, traditions, historical figures, cuisine, religion, education, sports, and colors, but stops short of systematic categorization and operationalization. Finally, more recently Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015) – in an attempt to operationalize the country image construct from a public relations perspective – showed that the aesthetic dimension of a country is based on culture, more specifically on cultural goods, gastronomy, history and traditions, landscape and scenery. However, the main goal of the study was to confirm the distinction between cognitive and affective components of country image, therefore authors didn't elaborate on the nature of items. Moreover, the items were generated through a one country survey involving only University students.

Following this reasoning, the absence of empirical studies focused on the role of cultural heritage image appears even more relevant today, not only considering the objectively decisive role that the perception of cultural components exerts in explaining the competitive advantage of some nations - including Italy - in sectors characterised by a strong experiential vocation (e.g., tourism, fashion, and agri-food), but also in light of the recent revitalisation of the debate on the role of culture in the competitiveness of country systems. In fact, it should be noted that international economic policy choices, even when oriented towards ensuring the development of territories by focusing on innovation and the competitiveness of the industrial system, have conditioned the contents and image elements to be emphasised in a nation's communication strategies. And in this, the thought goes to culture, long considered a separate world from the economy. However, concerning this latter aspect, recent studies have dispelled doubts in this regard by demonstrating the contribution that culture can make to a country's economic growth (Kostakis and Lolos, 2024). It has been recognized that culture contributes to creating new opportunities for economic and social development, acting as a catalyst for local development, generating profitability from the valorization of resources, strengthening social capital and promoting human and cultural development (World Bank, 1999). Consequently, the recent orientation of international organizations, particularly at the European level, is to invest more on research and innovation of green, digital and innovative European cultural heritage since cultural and creative industries contribute decisively to Europe's future prosperity, wellbeing, social and

cultural cohesion as well as environmental sustainability (European Commission, 2023). Furthermore, in the report "Getting cultural heritage to work for Europe" (European Commission 2015), cultural heritage is highlighted as a vital production factor and a means to enhance economic performance, improve quality of life, and enrich living environments. When, however, the focus is shifted to the country's reputation and positioning, we do not see the same awareness. Cultural heritage is a rooted and vital value, which can act in the creative stages generating new knowledge, referable for example to research and design activities, sustainability, social cohesion as well as communication and interaction with target audiences, especially international ones (Foroudi et al., 2016; Audretsch et al., 2006). A country can engage in innovation and competitiveness, but if it fails to prepare soft power building strategies connected to its cultural heritage its productions will always be less desirable than those competing countries that have succeeded in tying its image to emotional appeal and effective identity values (Sacco and Teti, 2007; Sacco, 2013). Cultural heritage represents a powerful instrument for communicating the identity of companies and territories. Therefore, a strong identity and positive reputation are the foundations of the advantage not only for businesses but also for cities, regions, and global competition (Anholt, 2007). Perhaps, the multifaceted and dynamic nature of cultural heritage has compromised the full understanding of its role in shaping the nation's competitive identity. Although in recent years there has been a move beyond the notion of "narrow culture" with the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage, defined as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO 2003, p. 2), and the attention of scholars and policy makers to the topic of cultural heritage has grown significantly over the years, nevertheless, an unambiguous and shared denominator with respect to the different perspectives of investigation is still lacking in the literature (Loulansky, 2006; Rizzo & Throsby 2006).

This study, guided by the perspective of international marketing, aims to create a preliminary framework for understanding the cultural heritage image. This image encompasses the system of beliefs, perceptions, and visuals associated with a nation's cultural assets. Initially, the study offers a concise review of key insights from literature on country image, particularly focusing on the main conceptual categories used for measuring national image. The paper then presents findings from a lexical analysis of online communication concerning cultural heritage. This analysis was carried out for ten countries identified as the top ten countries according to the Anholt-Ipsos Nations Brand Index 2023 (Ipsos, 2023), one of the most recognized indicators for assessing national brand strength. The countries analyzed include: Japan (1), Germany (2), Canada (3), the United Kingdom (4), Italy (5), the United States (6), Switzerland (7), France (8), Australia (9), Sweden (10). The primary goal of the analysis was to uncover the thematic structure of the official communications employed by nations with a rich cultural resource base. The study identifies the key thematic categories frequently used in promoting cultural heritage and compares these communication strategies with the significant dimensions of cultural heritage as outlined in both literature and practical applications.

2. The role of cultural heritage in country image research

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in a particularly rich landscape of theoretical contributions, as it is generally connected to the country-of-origin phenomenon. The findings of this extensive and abundant literature suggest that a country's image can be regarded as an extrinsic cue, used by consumers to form judgments about foreign-made products (Eroglu and Machleit, 1989; Papadopoulos et al., 2018). Specifically, within this broad area of research, numerous studies have sought to isolate the factors that explain the formation of the country image (Han, 1989; Martin and Eroglu, 1993; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994). Initially, the concept of country image was primarily based on cognitive elements, encompassing rational beliefs about various aspects of a nation. However, more recent studies have definitively established the multidimensionality of the construct, demonstrating the coexistence of an affective dimension - describing the emotional value associated with the country - and a conative dimension, interpreted as the propensity to interact with the country (D'Astous and Ahmed, 1999; Laroche et al., 2005). Within the cognitive-affective framework, various general definitions of country image have incorporated elements related to a nation's cultural heritage. For instance, Bannister and Sanders (1978, p. 152) described country image as "the generalized image, created by variables such as representative products, economic and political maturity, historical events and relationships, traditions, industrialization, and the degree of technological virtuosity." Desborde (1990, p. 44) defined it as "the overall impression of a country present in a consumer's mind as conveyed by its culture, political system, and level of economic and technological development," while Allred et al. (1999, p. 36) emphasized that "the perception of a country is based on the country's economic condition, political structure, culture, conflicts with other countries, labor conditions, and stance on environmental issues". Although these definitions imply that cultural heritage is a significant component of country image, relatively few studies have sought to operationalize the cultural heritage aspect within the broader country image construct (Hakala et al., 2011; Rojas-Méndez, 2013; Buhmann, 2016; Buhmann and Ingenhoff, 2015). Even fewer have examined the underlying mechanisms by which a nation's cultural heritage influences perceptions of its products and services (Tellström et al., 2016; Buhmann, 2016). Furthermore, although place branding scholars acknowledge the importance of cultural aspects in shaping national image - recognizing it as "irreplaceable and irreproducible because it is uniquely linked to the country itself; it is reassuring because it links the country's past to its present, (...) and it is edifying because it shows the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the people and institutions of the country" (Anholt, 2007: 133) - this component of place image has been largely overlooked in this literature. The predominant focus has been on the role of cultural heritage in national or city branding projects (Hall, 2008; Hakala and Lemmetyinen, 2013; Fan, 2010) or its conceptualization as part of a place or tourist destination's brand identity (Skinner and Kubacki, 2007).

Table 1 - Main operationalizations of the country image construct

Dimensions	Operationalisations	Contributions
	<i>People facets</i> (e.g., friendly and likable; artist and creative; well-educated; hard working)	Parameswaran et al. (1987); Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994); Papadopoulos et al. (2000)

Cognitive country image	<i>Economy</i> (e.g., raised standard of living; quality of products; economic environment; level of industrialisation)	Marting & Eroglu (1993); Parameswaran & Pisharodi (1994); Pappu et al. (2007)
	<i>Technology</i> (e.g., technical skills, technological research)	Martin & Eroglu (1993)
	<i>Politics</i> (e.g., political stability, participation in international affairs)	Heslop et al. (2010); Knight et al. (2003)
	<i>Climate</i> (e.g., human, nature and climate factor)	Ittersum et al. (2003)
	<i>Social context</i> (e.g., individual rights and freedom; alignment with own country)	Heslop et al. (2010); Passow et al. (2005)
	<i>Culture heritage</i> (e.g., homogeneity and endurance; national culture, gastronomy, sports, history, attractions, traditions, colours, religion)	Buhmann & Ingenhoff (2015); Rojas-Mendez (2013); Hakala et al. (2011)
	<i>Aesthetic dimension</i> (e.g., cultural goods, culinary, history and tradition, landscape and scenery)	Buhmann (2016); Buhmann & Ingenhoff (2015)
	<i>Sustainability</i> (e.g., environmental pollution controls)	García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea (2015); Heslop et al. (2010); Passow et al. (2005)
Affective country image	<i>Positive and negative country affect</i> (e.g., positive feelings, pleasant feelings, enthusiastic feelings, distrustful, irritated, hostile)	Aydin et al. (2021); Verlegh (2001); Brijs (2006)
	<i>Intergroup affect and stereotype (BIAS)</i> (e.g., contempt and admiration)	Maher & Carter (2011)
	<i>Emotional dimension</i> (e.g., country fascination, sympathy, attractiveness)	Buhmann & Ingenhoff (2015)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3. Unveiling the heritage side of country image: a content analysis of the web communication from ten leading countries

Starting from the scientific gaps found in the relevant literature and with the aim of contributing to a correct interpretation of the role of cultural heritage within the theoretical domain of the country image (*cultural heritage image*), the objective of the study is to specify the domain of the theoretical construct of the cultural heritage image, understood as the set of beliefs, opinions and images elicited by the country's cultural heritage. As highlighted the study will be based on an analysis of the thematic structure of the institutional communication adopted by ten leading countries. The choice of the inductive approach stems from the observation of the pervasiveness of current communication systems, which make visible, albeit with extremely different modalities and outcomes, peculiarities and signaling elements of national cultural heritage (Napolitano et al., 2015; Marino and Mainolfi, 2013). From a methodological point of view, the study was developed through three main phases: data collection, analysis and interpretation of results.

3.1 Data collection

In the first phase, the units of analysis were identified by consulting documents published on the official websites of national public bodies for the enhancement of cultural heritage and tourism responsible for managing and promoting the cultural heritage of the ten selected countries. As mentioned, this study favoured the collection of data from institutional websites. The choice of using websites rather than other communication channels as the source of the units of analysis is motivated by several factors. First, from a heritage marketing perspective, websites are considered an effective tool to implement digital storytelling also aimed at delivering a "historicizing

representation” (Cerquetti and Romagnoli 2023) by enabling the creation of albums, timelines, and multimedia narratives showcasing the nation’s cultural heritage. Consequently, the main focus of this phase was the analysis of the websites of the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, and Cultural Heritage, as well as those of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, which often host sections dedicated to the promotion of cultural heritage. Considering the diversity of governance systems across countries, the investigation was also extended to specific national agencies and foundations responsible for the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, such as national tourism agencies and foundations for the conservation of monuments. Procedurally, within each analysed site, texts used to describe or narrate the characteristics and distinctive qualities of cultural heritage were selected. To allow comparison between the syntaxes adopted by different countries, only texts written in English were gathered and examined. The selection of texts was guided by some keywords - obtained through the literature review – such as “cultural heritage”, “heritage”, “culture”, “traditions”, “history”. Given the exploratory nature of the study, however, the selection criteria were refined and validated during the investigation, including other keywords such as “cultural identity”, “people”, and “community”. In line with the study's objectives, technical descriptive texts of the architectural, historical, and artistic value of cultural assets and activities were omitted. Instead, priority was given to the role that cultural assets play within the system of values and symbols of the national community. Following this approach, the data collection process's perimeter was rigorously limited. Appendix 1 illustrates the list of institutional sources from which the units of analysis were extracted for each investigated country.

3.2 Corpus analysis

The selected texts were analysed using Nvivo 10 software, which facilitated the segmentation and archiving of data. The textual analysis was articulated in three iterative phases (Bolasco, 2005; Carley, 1993). The first step was the data pre-treatment carried out through text normalization. Textual forms were recognized, counted, and subsequently homogenized for orthographic variations, for example, by standardizing the spelling of names, acronyms, and abbreviations. This was followed by evaluating the vocabulary composed of 6,490 word-types and a list of 55,724 word-tokens. This procedure was useful for selecting a set of significant words (*theme words*) to interpret the content. The general vocabulary was finally purified of "empty" words (*stop words*), which represent non-significant terms for the analysis, having only instrumental or grammatical significance (i.e., conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs, etc.) (Riviezzo et al., 2014). The data were subsequently decomposed through an open coding process guided by identifying the most frequent words. As expected, among the most frequent words are terms such as “cultural” (830 occurrences), “arts” (628 occurrences), and “heritage” (503 occurrences). Also significant is the presence of the following word-types: “people” (271 occurrences); “tourism” (268 occurrences); “community” (265 occurrences); “design” (225 occurrences); “historic” (218 occurrences); “museums” (214 occurrences). The word cloud generated by the textual analysis offers a simple and effective initial representation of the most recurrent terms in the communication associated with cultural heritage (Figure 1). Among the most frequent word-types not yet highlighted, the terms "musicals", "artists", and "films" are also significant. This underlines

the importance of artistic expressions and the creative industry in cultural heritage, reflecting the vital role that artists, film productions, and musical performances play in shaping cultural identity and enriching the socio-cultural tissues of communities.

Table 2 shows the ten most frequent words in the institutional communication documents of various countries, we can discern significant trends and differences in how these countries exploit and promote their cultural heritage. Many countries, including Canada, France, Germany, and Italy, show a strong interest in "heritage" and "cultural", indicating a shared commitment to conserving and promoting tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This reflects a global trend towards valuing cultural roots as a key element of national branding and tourist attractiveness.

Figure 1 – The word cloud



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Words like "arts" and "culture" are prevalent in countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and the USA, underscoring a universal commitment to promoting the arts as an integral part of national identity and international dialogue. Australia and Canada stand out for the frequent use of terms like "aboriginal" and "indigenous", show a commitment to educating and preserving indigenous stories and cultures. Moreover, in the case of Canada the presence of words like "reconciliation" and "peoples" also highlight a specific effort to recognize and respect indigenous communities.

Thanks to the multicultural structure of these countries, this result confirms the social value of culture and creative industries (intangible cultural heritage) in contributing to social cohesion. European countries, like France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland, instead, highlight a more traditional focus on historical and artistic (tangible) heritage (the emphasis is more on "heritage", "monuments", "museum") whereas Germany and Japan use terms like "tourism" and "travel", underlining a strong interconnection between culture and tourism. This shows

how some countries integrate tourism into their cultural promotion strategy, while others may focus more specifically on the historical and artistic value of heritage sites. The United Kingdom highlights a strong interest towards its creative and historical industries, such as theatres and museums, by using words like "creative" and "historic". Conversely, the USA shows a broad spectrum with "arts", "cultural", and "communities", suggesting a more inclusive and community-oriented approach to culture.

Table 2 - The 10 most frequent words by country

AUSTRALIA	CANADA	FRANCE	GERMANY	JAPAN	UK	ITALY	SWEDEN	SWITZERLAND	USA
Aboriginal	Indigenous	Heritage	Foundation	Cultural	Heritage	Historical	Castle	Art	Arts
Arts	Heritage	Culture	Cultural	Properties	Historic	Tourism	Language	Film	Cultural
Capital	Tourism	Cultural	Heritage	Arts	Creative	Heritage	Palace	Works	Tourism
New	Parks	National	World	Culture	National	Cultural	Jewish	Museum	National
Indigenous	Industry	Ministry	Unesco	Travel	People	National	Museum	Dance	Travel
Cultural	Reconciliation	Tourism	Intangible	International	Places	Law	Arts	World	Communities
Islander	Work	Public	Sites	Information	Local	Places	Culture	Include	People
First	Partners	Architecture	Convention	Tourism	Culture	Activities	Government	Theatre	Strategy
Government	Peoples	Monuments	Inscribed	National	Future	Artistic	Force	International	Support
Music	Council	Directorate	International	Local	Support	Assets	Century	Design	Organizations

Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.3 Content analysis

To elucidate the comprehensive thematic structure underlying the various conceptual categories related to cultural heritage, the selected texts for each investigated country were coded, and an analysis of the words and phrases adjacent to the theme words (high-frequency words) was conducted. This textual analysis allowed for the analytical identification of the constitutive elements of the cultural heritage image, revealing a system of nodes centred on 12 main conceptual categories, from which 46 sub-categories were identified. These sub-categories link coded phrases and paragraphs and represent the main themes of the corpus. The conceptual sub-categories represent a breakdown of the text into homogeneous parts characterized by topic similarity. An in-depth analysis of these sub-nodes led to the definition of the metatext, synthesizing the original text into significant segments that vary in presence across different countries (Table 3).

Regarding the main categories, the results of the analysis indicate that the communication activities of the investigated countries consistently highlight the distinction between tangible and intangible cultural heritage as proposed by UNESCO (2003), along with an emphasis on aspects more closely related to the population and the national identity. Therefore, they were identified *a posteriori* three macro-dimensions of the cultural heritage grouping the 12 categories emerged from the analysis, namely tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage, and national identity.

Specifically, the first three conceptual categories – historic sites, cultural institutions, environment – are most directly connected to the symbolic assets of historical, artistic, and architectural heritage (tangible cultural heritage). The textual analysis also reveals a significant distinction between historic sites and cultural institutions (i.e., museums, galleries, exhibitions). The former are considered tangible expressions of the country's historic and artistic heritage, while the latter are indispensable venues for transmitting the country's history to future generations. This distinction aligns with the dynamic view of cultural heritage, wherein the creation and vitality of cultural assets are increasingly important, alongside their safeguarding and transmission. A notable example from Canada's communication highlights this: "The Government of Canada's objective is to preserve its built heritage, which comprises the places, buildings, and monuments that have been recognized as having heritage value". Regarding tangible aspects, some countries also emphasize the value of landscapes and natural scenery, not only as fundamental elements of territorial identity but also as key contributors to the quality of life offered by the natural and historic environment. The structure of conceptual categories related to the intangible components of the cultural heritage image is much more complex. In line with the definition of "living heritage" proposed by some scholars (Lenzerini, 2011), which underscores the importance of intangible assets for the survival and transmission of a community's distinctive traditions, skills, and qualities. Categories four to nine can be associated with the intangible cultural heritage, namely: craftsmanship; visual arts and audio-visuals; performing arts; literature; language; gastronomy; traditions. The first category of this second group is craftsmanship. Surprisingly, this dimension doesn't show a relevant presence within the corpus. However, references highlight that craft techniques are seen as a perfect synthesis of the qualities and creativity of the local community. Next two categories are related to creative industries, namely visual arts and audio-visuals, and performing arts. The former encompasses a wide range of artistic expressions, from sculptures and paintings, silent witnesses of artistic history, to modern films and video productions, which tell stories across time and space, thereby preserving cultural identity in formats that transcend linguistic and geographical barriers. Among the sub-categories, architecture and design, and film heritage and production are those with the highest number of references, thus testifying their perceived relevance in shaping the culture of a nation. The latter (performing arts) plays a key role in the cultural communication of countries due to their evocative and persuasive power, creating a privileged access to the nation's cultural identity. This is clearly demonstrated in the descriptions provided by some countries, such as Japan, which emphasizes, "the National Theatre conducts training workshops and other activities to train the respective successors of traditional performing arts, such as Nohgaku, Bunraku (puppet theatre), Kabuki, and traditional popular entertainment (Japan)". Additionally, performing arts offer a unique opportunity to bring to life a nation's past and present history, with artistic and literary works - another conceptual category emerging from the analysis - being fundamental for communicating national stories and values, building cultural identity and pride. The seventh category is "literature". Literary works and poetry appear to be another relevant conceptual category that can describe the "real essence" of the national identity to be transmitted at international level. Moreover, countries that emphasize national literature within their communication provide detailed information on the best-known poets and writers showing a national pride in boasting the prestige of authors and literary works. Strictly connected to the literature dimension, there is the linguistic aspect. The eighth category is "language". Some

countries seem to place greater importance on the national language, either in terms of its universal value and widespread international use or its preservation over time. Significant statements can be found with respect to Sweden, for example: "The Act is also intended to protect the Swedish language and language diversity in Sweden, and the individual's access to language," and to Australia: "The ILA supports First Nations Australians to express, conserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities". It is interesting to point out that Australia and Sweden also emphasize the presence – and the consequent protection – of language diversity and language groups. The ninth category is represented by gastronomy. Surprisingly, the corpus doesn't show a strong centrality of this theme in cultural communication. However, references show a focus on food products also as a tourist attraction. For example, Australia also leverages its gastronomy, declaring that "Australia's success as a destination has been built on the combination of our world-class natural beauty and unique wildlife as well as our welcoming people and exceptional food and wine". The tenth conceptual category is "traditions". The analysis identifies a recurring thematic core related to folklore (festivals, celebrations), considered a privileged cultural expression of local communities to the point of becoming a distinctive symbol. Finally, the last two categories – "people" and "diversity, equity and inclusion" – seem to capture the essence of the country's identity, especially in terms of self-perception, sense of community and diversity. Consequently, the communication style takes on a more emotional character, adopting national storytelling techniques through which the country narrates itself, showcasing its authentic identity and aspiring to transfer it externally without distortions. Japan, for example, in line with collective imagination, emphasizes the deep spirituality of its people and – through a simple evocative description – creates a comfortable and reassuring communicative space, highlighting "Our mission is to encourage people to discover the charm of Japanese culture while enjoying programs of cultural content, including art exhibitions, performing arts, and art festivals." Furthermore, "The unique culture and traditions shaped by the nature, climate, and people of Japan over centuries can be found in every corner of this island nation," underscoring the importance of traditions shaped by Japanese nature and climate over centuries. Conversely, countries like Australia and the United States place greater emphasis on cultural diversity, seen as a unifying and valuable element for the national community. Specifically, in describing the characteristics of the Australian population, the Tourism Australia website states, "The diversity of these assets reflects the breadth of the Australian Government's interests in the National Capital and provides the setting for ceremonies, activities, and events that Australians expect to occur in their capital." This emphasis is further underscored by Tourism Australia's fourth Reconciliation Action Plan, which outlines a vision of reconciliation where "the cultures and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are embraced as central to Australia's identity; and that all Australians feel proud of connecting with 60,000 years of storytelling, resilience, and innovation". Similarly, the United States highlight the importance of participation and inclusion in their institutional communication. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State commits to "embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in all aspects of its work". In particular, with respect to the last category, it is interesting to highlight that, compared to the past, compared to the past, countries include diversity issues in their discourses. Specifically, in addition to

highlighting the protection of and sensitivity to these issues, countries consider such values to be foundational elements of national culture.

Table 3 - Conceptual categories and sub-categories of the cultural heritage image communicated by the countries

Cultural heritage macro-dimensions	Conceptual categories	Sub-conceptual categories	No. of countries	No. of references	Main references
Tangible cultural heritage	(1) Historic sites	Monuments	7	35	The Government of Canada's Objective is to preserve its built heritage Federal, comprises the places, buildings and monuments that have been recognized as having heritage value (Canada).
		Historic buildings	5	17	English Heritage cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments and sites - from world-famous prehistoric sites to grand medieval castles, from Roman forts on the edges of the empire to a Cold War bunker (UK).
		Historic sites	4	19	We protect an internationally important collection of historic sites and artefacts which span six millennia, from the ancient past to the present day and include palaces, houses, hill figures, castles, abbeys, industrial sites, Roman forts and even deserted medieval villages (UK).
		Historic churches	5	61	This will explore the significance of churches from this period, including interiors, art and liturgy, and practical issues associated with materials and design (UK) The palace is a piece of art in itself – and so too is its resident place of worship, the Royal Chapel (Sweden)
	(2) Cultural institutions	Museums	9	219	There is virtually no other country on earth with as many museums per head of the population as Switzerland The program increases access to arts and cultural experiences for audiences outside major cities, and encourages partnerships between museums and galleries across the collections sector (Australia)
		Collections	9	134	Switzerland is a country of collectors. A major part in the art market has long been played by the great industrial families, some of whom assembled important collections. Examples include the collections of Oskar Reinhart in Winterthur and Emmanuel Hoffmann in Basel (Switzerland).
		Archives	8	33	The Directorate-General for Heritage and Architecture defines, coordinates and evaluates the State's action in the conservation, communication and enhancement of public archives (France).
		Libraries	8	31	The Swedish Arts Council is a government agency founded in 1974. We support arts and culture in many different forms – literature, museums, libraries, performing arts, music, reading promotion, arts, culture in schools, crafts etc (Sweden).
		Art galleries	5	26	We also strive to exchange information with and provide specialist/technical guidance and advice to other museums and galleries within Japan and overseas (Japan). There are also numerous galleries and auctions as well as international and regional fairs to delight the hearts of art enthusiasts from all over the world (Switzerland)
		Exhibitions	8	70	The latest round of the Visions of Australia program is now open with up to \$1 million in funding available to assist quality exhibitions tour the country (Australia).
	(3) Natural environment	National parks and gardens	9	167	Our main activity is to take care of the special places that we have received as donations, inheritances or that have been granted to us in management: woods and coasts, parks and gardens, castles and historical residences, villas and abbeys, but also small assets with a high identity value such as a historical shrine or the old barber's shop in the city (Italy).
		Landscapes	8	54	This dynamic has been driven by European visitors, the first to return to France, to discover or rediscover its art of living, its culture, its many landscapes but also a renewed offer, responding to their growing aspirations in terms of sustainable tourism (France).
		Sea and coasts	5	25	Tourism Australia acknowledges the Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Owners of the land, sea and waters of the Australian continent, and recognises their custodianship of culture and Country for over 60,000 years (Australia).

Intangible cultural heritage	(4) Craftmanship	Artisans	1	2	The Local Festivals component provides funding to local groups for recurring festivals that present the work of local artists, local artisans, local heritage performers, and local cultural carriers (Canada).
		Craft techniques	1	2	In Japan, "Intangible Cultural Properties" refers to stage arts, music, craft techniques, and other intangible cultural assets that possess high historic or artistic value for the country (Japan).
	(5) Visual arts and audio-visuals	Sculptures	6	21	There are two stone galleries to explore within the exhibition hall. The sculptures and busts are displayed in the exact same spots they were placed in the 1790s. Each sculpture is a thing of beauty, but Endymion – created by the artist of the same name – is considered the standout piece (Sweden).
		Drawings	6	21	The museum in Berne therefore has the world's largest and most important collection of paintings, water-colours and drawings by this artist, whose works can be assigned to many movements: expressionism, constructivism, cubism, primitivism and even surrealism (Switzerland).
		Paintings	7	21	Many of the paintings, including centuries-old portraits of kings and queens, hang in the gallery within the beautiful Bernadotte Apartments (Sweden).
		Architecture and design	7	160	America's historic sites are irreplaceable. From icons of architecture to birthplaces of activists, historic sites are physical reminders of the diversity of our experiences and the history we share (USA).
		Photographs	7	86	ENIT's Historical Archive relates to the activities of the Italian National Tourism Board from 1919 – the year of its foundation – to the present day and consists of about 4,000 ML documents and over 200,000 images including slides, photographs, negatives, videos and historical poster (Italy).
		Architects	3	60	From the early 20th century onwards, this country has produced several daring and visionary architects who have achieved global renown. (Switzerland).
		Film heritage and production	7	141	The Swiss film scene is flourishing as never before: measured by market share and cinema tickets bought, 2013 was the most successful year for the Swiss cinema since 2006, the year when "Late Bloomers" was such a hit (Switzerland).
	(6) Performing arts	Music	7	131	Switzerland is brimming over with music, with the largest number of music festivals by area of any European country – and the dance scene is equally impressive (Switzerland).
		Performances	5	19	U.S. department of arts and culture contributes to the strength and vibrancy of the movement for collective liberation by resourcing and mobilizing cultural organizers and artists. We do this through political education, connecting cultural organizers and movement, policy engagement and play and performance (USA).
		Dance	7	91	Artistic expression, whether painting, dance, song or story, is integrally connected to cultural knowledge and relationships with a person's Country, be it land or sea (Australia).
		Concerts	4	12	The House of Electronic Arts focuses on the conservation, archiving and documentation of digital art. Its exhibitions, concerts, lectures, guided tours and workshops address an extensive public (Switzerland).
		Theatre	4	99	Furthermore, the National Theatre conducts training workshops and other activities to train the respective successors of traditional performing arts, such as Nohgaku, Bunraku (puppet theater), Kabuki, and traditional popular entertainment (Japan).
		Musicians and composers	2	27	Lyrics sung by Swiss pop musicians and rock bands are more often in English nowadays, otherwise no honours or money are to be had at international level (Switzerland).
	(7) Literature	Literature	5	43	Australian literature is vital to our cultural and intellectual life and communicating Australian stories (Australia).
		Writers	5	30	Max Frisch (1911–1991) is known as one of Switzerland's greatest ((Switzerland)
		Poetry	3	5	We are a nation of dream-weavers; we make music, art, architecture, poetry, pottery and plays (UK).

		Poets	2	10	Snow-covered eucalypts, huts in mountain settings and mountain landscapes are distinctive Australian images captured by numerous artists and photographers. The mountain landscapes have inspired poets, writers, musicians and film makers (Australia).	
	(8) Language	Language	8	105	The ILA supports First Nations Australians to express, conserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities (Australia). Romansh literature has been in existence since the 16th century. This language is written in several dialect forms. Romansh is the fourth official national language of Switzerland (Switzerland).	
		Language diversity	2	2	The Act is also intended to protect the Swedish language and language diversity in Sweden, and the individual's access to language (Sweden).	
		Language groups	1	3	The Torres Strait is divided into two language groups: Mirriam Mer is the dominant language in the eastern Torres Strait and originates from Papua New Guinean influence (Australia).	
	(9) Gastronomy	Food products	6	16	Australia's success as a destination has been built on the combination of our world class natural beauty and unique wildlife as well as our welcoming people and exceptional food and wine (Australia)	
	(10) Traditions	Festivals	6	87	Our mission is to encourage people to discover the charm of Japanese culture while enjoying programs of cultural content, including art exhibitions, performing arts, and art festivals (Japan).	
		Traditions	3	27	The unique culture and traditions shaped by the nature, climate, and people of Japan over centuries can be found in every corner of this island nation (Japan).	
		Ceremonies	1	16	The diversity of these assets reflects the breadth of the Australian Government's interests in the National Capital and provides the setting for ceremonies, activities and events that Australians expect to occur in their capital (Australia).	
	National identity	(11) People	Community	5	230	Values sit at the center and cultural organizers, community organizations and movements coalesce around participatory decision making, rigor and care (US)
			Opportunities	8	117	Together, the Arts Endowment's activities support bringing meaningful arts experiences to all Americans, helping to ensure that everyone in the country has the opportunity to live artful lives (USA)
Identity			7	27	Our main activity is to take care of the special places that we have received as donations, inheritances or that have been granted to us in management: woods and coasts, parks and gardens, castles and historical residences, villas and abbeys, but also small assets with a high identity value such as a historical shrine or the old barber's shop in the city (Italy)	
Minorities			3	11	The Ministry of Culture in Sweden is responsible for issues regarding culture, media, democracy, human rights, minorities, national minorities including Sami culture and language (Sweden).	
(12) Diversity, equity and inclusion		Equity and inclusion	2	39	Our mandate from President Biden is clear: we must address the four intersecting challenges of COVID-19, economic recovery, racial equity and climate change. Read our priorities to learn how we will meet the scope of our challenges and the multiple, overlapping crises (USA).	
		Diversity	9	47	The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the United States Department of State strives to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in all aspects of its work (USA)	
		Sustainability	7	18	We have identified four major priorities going forwards - Inspiration, Conservation, Involvement and Financial Sustainability (UK). The Strategy also applies a holistic approach to tourism development, including incorporating sustainability- and community-based development and management strategies (USA).	
		Disability	2	17	ECA is committed to addressing barriers based on race, ethnicity, colour, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, geographic location, education, income, socio-economic status, and other diversity dimensions, that may hinder inclusion in the organization (USA).	

4. Discussion, conclusions and implications

In recent decades, the concept of cultural heritage has garnered considerable attention, expanding its research scope into the fields of economics and management. Nevertheless, the international marketing literature, particularly studies focused on place image, has surprisingly overlooked the significance of cultural heritage as a factor in a country's international appeal. There has been limited effort dedicated to developing measurement scales that capture the cultural and heritage aspects of country image or to analyzing the impact of cultural heritage on foreign consumers' perceptions and evaluations of national products and tourism destinations. This study aims to contribute to integrating cultural heritage studies with the literature on country image, with the dual objective of providing an initial interpretation of the theoretical domain of the cultural heritage image and understanding the current role of cultural variables in the communication practices of countries.

A content analysis of discursive categories used in the web communications of nations ranked in the top 10 of the Anholt-Ipsos Nations Brands Index 2023 (Ipsos, 2023) revealed that the cultural heritage image encompasses a broad spectrum of both tangible and intangible elements that contribute to the cultural identity of a nation and, consequently, to its perceived image. Specifically, the study identified twelve categories traceable to three macro-dimensions, namely tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and national identity. The analysis of narrative structures connected to the main textual units shows that the communication entities of the investigated countries have embraced the radical changes characterizing the concept of culture. In almost all the investigated countries, the institutional communication of cultural dimensions features a complex semantics, where the narrative structure extends beyond merely describing tangible attractors or assets. Countries show that the intangible cultural heritage and the features related to the population – both in terms of sense of community and of diversities to be protected – play a key role in the institutional communication strategy being able to let emerge the real cultural identity of the nation. Therefore, it is appropriate to assert that these components deserve priority attention, both in scientific exploration and in formulating marketing strategies that successfully enhance national and territorial brands. While existing place image literature tends to focus on the tangible aspects of a country's heritage, such as historic assets and natural environment, and to interpret the cultural dimension of a nation only in terms of population's traits, our analysis highlighted a more complex and varied range of elements that indicate the need to prioritize intangible components of cultural identity. Countries demonstrate to recognize the value of their intangible heritage not only in terms of its absolute value but also as a differential driver that makes the nation unique. In such intangible elements, a primacy value is then held by the population, which with its traits, sense of community and internal diversity constitutes the “true” identity of the country. Compared to the past, nations incorporate new but extremely important elements into their communicative discourses, namely the preservation and protection of the cultural diversity characterizing the country.

As already highlighted, these insights may shed light about the necessity to enlarge the country image domain by incorporating dimensions of the cultural heritage that could intercept – better than other elements – the dynamic essence of a country.

From a managerial perspective, the use of cultural heritage as a marketing tool is becoming increasingly significant, particularly for companies from nations with rich and captivating histories, such as Italy and France. These companies, especially those representing "prototypical" national brands, can leverage their country's cultural heritage image to create a distinctive set of associations uniquely tied to the relationship between national identity and national products (Anholt, 2002; Banerjee, 2008). A deeper understanding of cultural heritage image dimensions is also crucial for policymakers seeking to enhance their country's international appeal and align advertising strategies with a unique set of tangible and intangible associations. Icons like the Eiffel Tower, the Italian cuisine, and the works of Shakespeare, are more than mere "cultural goods"; they carry symbolic meanings that can serve as a cohesive umbrella across various product and service categories, thereby strengthening national branding strategies. A recent example of this is the Paris Olympics. The opening ceremony showcased grandiose celebration of French culture and diversity, thus confirming the focal role played by intangible cultural heritage and national identity to shape the contemporary image of a nation.

Regarding the contribution and originality of this study, it is, to the best of the authors' knowledge, the first research to incorporate the theme of cultural heritage within the international marketing perspective to identify a structure of conceptual categories suitable for representing the variety of content and images evoked by a country's cultural heritage. Given the limited attention to this topic, the findings warrant a more comprehensive and exhaustive exploration of the perceptual modalities of the cultural heritage image and the related valorization strategies by policymakers and national enterprises. Future research could validate the conceptual categories identified in this study from a consumer perspective by developing a cross-national measurement scale like those commonly used in country image studies. Such a scale would not only enable more reliable comparisons of cultural heritage images between different countries but also deepen the understanding of cultural heritage's role in foreign consumers' perception of national offerings. These findings would be particularly valuable for businesses and territories where the national cultural heritage image, especially its intangible and identity components, represents a fundamental competitive advantage in international markets.

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Appendix 1 - Institutional websites consulted for the content analysis

Countries	Sources	Websites
Australia	Australian Government National Capital Authority	www.nca.gov.au/planning/heritage
	Australian Government Office for the Arts	www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/cultural-heritage
	Australian Heritage Council	www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/organisations/australian-heritage-council
	Australian Museums and Galleries Associations	www.amaga.org.au/
	Tourism Australia	www.tourism.australia.com/en
Canada	Canada Council for the Arts	canadacouncil.ca/
	Canadian Heritage	www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage.html
	Destination Canada	www.destinationcanada.com/en
	Parks Canada	parks.canada.ca/
	Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre	www.pwnhc.ca/en
	Tourism Industry Association of Canada	tiac-aitc.ca/index.html
	Center of National Monuments	www.monuments-nationaux.fr/en

France	Directorate-General for Heritage and Architecture	www.culture.gouv.fr/en
	Ministry of Culture	www.culture.gouv.fr/en
	National Tourism Development Agency	www.atout-france.fr/en
Germany	German Cultural Heritage Committee	www.artefakt-berlin.de/en/current-projects/german-cultural-heritage-committee/
	German Foundation for Monument Protection	www.klassik-stiftung.de/en/about-us/your-support/promoters-and-sponsors/german-foundation-for-monument-protection/
	German National Tourist Board (GNTB)	www.germany.travel/en/about-us/about-us.html
	Minister of State for Culture and Media	www.kulturgutschutz-deutschland.de/EN/Home/home_node.html
	Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation	www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en
Italy	Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI)	fondoambiente.it
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	italiana.esteri.it/italiana/en/
	National Agency for Tourism (ENIT)	www.enit.it
Japan	Cultural affairs agency	www.bunka.go.jp/english/
	Japan Arts Council	www.ntj.jac.go.jp/en/
	Japan Heritage	www.japan.travel/japan-heritage/
	Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO)	www.jnto.go.jp/
	National Institute for Cultural Heritage	www.nich.go.jp/en/
	National Parks Foundation	en.npfj.or.jp/
Sweden	Ministry of Culture	www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-culture/
	Swedish National Heritage Board	www.raa.se/in-english/swedish-national-heritage-board/
	The Swedish Arts Council	https://www.government.se/government-agencies/swedish-arts-council/
Switzerland	Federal Office for Culture	www.bak.admin.ch/bak/en/home.html
	Swiss Heritage Society	www.heimatschutz.ch/en
	Switzerland Tourism	www.myswitzerland.com
United Kingdom	Arts Council England	www.artscouncil.org.uk/
	Department for Culture, Media, and Sports	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-culture-media-and-sport
	English Heritage	www.english-heritage.org.uk/
	Heritage Council	www.gov.uk/government/groups/heritage-council
	Historic England	historicengland.org.uk/
USA	National Trust	www.nationaltrust.org.uk/
	Cultural Heritage Center of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs	eca.state.gov/program/cultural-heritage-center
	National Endowment of the Arts (NEA)	www.arts.gov
	National Travel and Tourism Office	www.trade.gov/national-travel-and-tourism-office
	National Trust for Historic Preservation	savingplaces.org/
	Department of Arts and Culture	usdac.us
	Department Office of Cultural Heritage	oboculturalheritage.state.gov/