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**THE GAP BETWEEN ENCODED AND DECODED ESTONIAN
COUNTRY BRAND MESSAGES AS PERCEIVED BY THE
FINNISH PUBLIC**

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I declare that I have compiled the paper independently
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ABSTRACT

The new Estonian country brand was published in 2017, however there is no research evaluating the performance of the new brand.

The aim of this research is to assess the performance of the country brand of Estonia by evaluating the gap between encoded and decoded country brand message of Estonia by the Finnish public.

There is previous Estonian country brand related research, but with different methods and aims. This research aims to decode Estonian country brand, reviews relevant literature and through empirical research finds out how Estonian encoded brand image is decoded by the Finnish public.

The results of this research indicate that there is no gap within encoding the country brand. However, there is a partial gap between encoding and decoding the country brand by the Finnish public. Estonians are mostly seen innovative, tech-savvy and hard-working, and the Estonian environment is seen as relatively clean, in accordance with the country brand. There is a gap between encoding and decoding the brand message about E-governance in Estonia and seeing Estonia as one of the Nordic countries.

Keywords: Country branding, Estonia, Marketing, Brand

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this research is “The gap between encoded and decoded Estonian country brand messages as perceived by the Finnish public” and it was chosen for many reasons. The new Estonian country brand was developed from 2014 to 2017, and now more than a year after being published, it is important to assess how well the new country brand has performed.

Developing a country brand is crucial, however the level of awareness of both key concepts and processes is minor. Questions related to country branding are hot topics for research, and especially in Estonia there have been some studies about Estonia’s country brand. However, the studies are slightly outdated as they were conducted before 2017, i.e. before the new concept of Estonian country brand and the tools to be used in promoting Estonia were introduced. Thus, the studies have a different angle and approach: instead of finding out what perceptions and attitudes are associated with Estonia, they concentrate on the matter whether the existence of Estonia is notified abroad. This study addresses that problem by rendering the focus from destination branding to country branding, and make them seem more as a tool to achieve some other outcomes than just an increased number of tourists.

The aim of this research is to encode the brand message and analyse how it is received by the Finnish public in order to map the gap between encoded and decoded country brand message, i.e. comparing the image that the brand owner tries to portray and the perceived message by the target group.

The research problem of this thesis arises from the fact that Estonian latest country brand concept is relatively new and is not been subjected to several studies, this thesis aims to evaluate how this brand concept has succeeded in it’s goals.

The research questions are the following:

Q1: How do Estonian country brand owners portray the message?

Q2: Is there a difference between the brand owners’ message and the EAS-webpage material?

Q3: What are the differences in the way the Finnish focus group perceives Estonia as a brand compared to the message portrayed by the country brand owner?

Qualitative methods were used to answer the research questions. To acquire answers for the questions, the website where the country brand of Estonia is officially portrayed was studied, two written qualitative interviews were conducted with people responsible for the project of Estonian country brand, and qualitative interviews were carried out with five Finnish males residing in Finland.

In the first chapter, literature about country branding, its essence on country's overall success in terms of achieving financial and other desired outcomes with the help of country branding is reviewed, and other relevant concepts such as soft power and its importance to country branding are introduced.

The second chapter gives an overview about the history and current stage of the country brand of Estonia. The third chapter introduces the methodology used in the empirical part of this thesis, including analyses of the written and face-to-face qualitative interviews, followed by concluding the outcome of the research and makes recommendations for future research.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As the essence of this research is to analyse Estonian country brand, its encoding and decoding process, it is essential understand the theory of country branding. Since country and nation branding are associated with soft power, it is crucial to understand the concepts of country branding, decoding and encoding, as well as that of soft power.

1.1. Branding as a marketing tool

Brand is one of the core concepts in marketing and it is seen like a promise (Same 2015, 23).

According to the most narrow definitions, brand is a promise of something or brands are seen exclusively in relation to their logos and other visual elements (AMA 1960; Keller 1993; Kotler and Keller 2006 cited in Ruzzier 2012, 126) and brand image, being an unique set of associations maintained and created by parties behind the brand, relates more to the fact how the parties that build and maintain the brand wish the message to be perceived (Aaker 1996, 68 cited in Kaplan *et al.* 2010, 7).

Brand is a wide concept that can consists of name, terms, signs and symbols. They are developed to differentiate products and services from each other. As brand is not a fixed concept, one could see that brands are created whenever a new name or products are created. Nevertheless, many practising managers rather define a brand of something that has already created some awareness, reputation or prominence within the marketplace. (Chiravalle and Schenck 2007, 10-11)

Having a strong brand has various positive effects. A brand can have an effect of the leading position in the market, products related with strong brands are recognized and consumers are familiar with them and consumers can prefer branded products over smaller players' products and services. Products of a strong brand can enjoy the consumer confidence, consumers are aware and familiar with their products and the general attitude towards their products can be better. Market leading products are relatively immune to price competition and they are more likely to be accepted into shelves of retail stores, and consumers are more receptive to the humour in the advertisements of well-known strong brands. (Chiravalle and Schenck 2007, 10-11)

A brand consists of tangible and intangible components. Tangible components are brand's visual and graphical elements, such as a logo or possible brand related music. Brand image is an intangible component of a brand and it is formed of various components. These components should project the brand's vision and culture and they should be used for positioning the brand in the market. Brand's emotional characteristics evolve from the core values and are represented as brand personality. Brand's relationships are an important part among the way how brand is presented as a whole to form the brand's reputation. (Harris and de Cheratony 2001, 442-445)

When brand components are chosen and assessed, they should follow the following criteria. Brand elements should be memorable, and they should be meaningful; visual elements of a brand should appeal through aesthetics. Brand elements should be transferrable within product categories as well as across geographical and cultural categories. Brand elements should be easy to adapt, they should be flexible, and the brand owner should be able to defend those elements legally. (Kotler ,Keller 2012, 250-251)

Brand consists of mental image and visual elements, and because it is used to differentiate products and services in the market, having a strong brand has an effect on the performance on the market.

1.2. Marketing communication messages

As this thesis evaluates the communication of the Estonian country brand, how it is interpreted to be received and how it is received, and the gaps within this process, it is essential to understand the communication process in marketing and especially in encoding-decoding process.

Encoding in the framework of this thesis means the process where idea is transformed as a message, whereas decoding means the process where message is received and interpreted (Catoera, Gilly, Graham, 2013, 467).

The figure below presents the communication process in marketing communications. “Sender” represents the party that wants to transmit a certain message. “Receiver” represents the party to whom this message is transmitted. “Media” and “message” represent the major tools used to transmit the message. “Encoding”, “decoding”, “feedback” and “response” represent the major communications functions. “Noise” represents the competing messages. Senders of the message have to start by decoding their message in a form where the receivers can decode the message. The message is transmitted through media, so it reaches the receivers. The senders will then develop channels for evaluating the feedback from the receivers and act according to it. (Kotler and Keller 2012, 480)

To succeed in communication, marketers must ensure that their messages are encoded in a way that considers the common way how their target audience decodes the messages (Kotler and Keller 2012, 497).

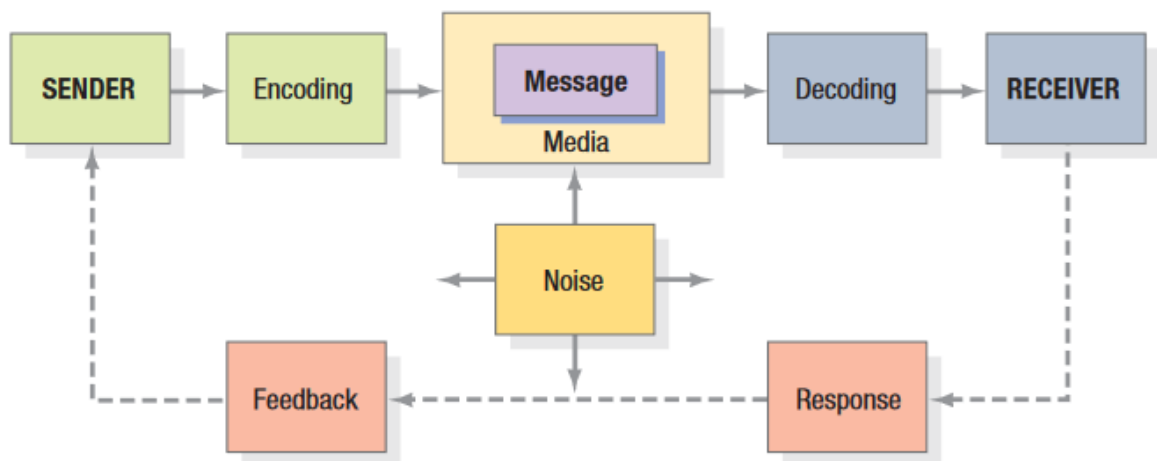


Figure 1 (Kotler and Keller 2012, 480)

1.3 Country branding

A country brand is a composition of various elements that are the factors to differentiate the country and create the image and affiliations in the heads of the target audiences (Same 2015, 9). A good country brand has a positive effect on business, financial markets, people's self-esteem and diplomatic relations.(Same 2015, 9).

A country brand can also be defined as a set of associations and prejudices experienced by customer based on the verbal, visual and behavioural expressions of a place or location that are represented by the values, communication, goals, overall place design and the general culture in which stakeholders operate (Braun and Zenker 2010, cited in Same 2015, 23).

According to Same (2015, 23) several authors –Anholt (2002), Harris and de Cheratony (2001), Kavaratzis (2005), and Pasquinelli (2010) – argue that managing a place brand has many commonalities with managing corporate brands due the similar characteristics of both corporate and country brands. Corporate brands and country brands both have multidisciplinary roots, high level complexity, high level of intangible and tangible elements and the need to acknowledge the social responsibility. When comparing corporations producing different products and services with country brands one can see that despite their specifics, in grass roots level both country brands and corporate brands are competing globally.

A country brand can be broken down into four main subjects/ elements/ levels. The first is destination branding that refers to the branding of the country as a destination for tourists. (Fetscherin 2010, Agarwal and Sikri 1996, cited in Same 2015, 23)

The second is the country of origin that refers to the country where the product comes from and is usually presented with “made in” label, describing how customers' purchase decision, perceptions and attitudes are influenced by the country of origin (Same 2015, 23).

The two fundamental parts of the country brand are country brand identity and country image. The country brand identity shows how country brand owners want it to be presented. Country brand identity represents a vision of how country should be seen in the global marketplace with the goal

of achieving differentiation. The aim of country branding is to communicate country's unique identity. (Pike and Page 2014, 211) Meantime, country brand image is about how the country brand is perceived and experienced in reality and how the country brand exists in people's minds (Anholt 2007, 5).

Each country has its own brand that is composed of various elements and it has effect on construction of the mental image of the country, and products that originate from there as well as tourism.

1.3.1 The essence of country branding

A country brand consists of country's identity and image (Same 2015, 24).

As a brand image is being received by the audience, it may not match the reality due to the individual frameworks of each recipient. A brand image is a set of beliefs of associations related to a name or a sign by consumer. (Ruzzier 2012, 126-127).

The brand image is rather the context in which messages are received than the message itself. Therefore, country branding can be expected to reduce the gap between encoded identity and decoded image, as the country brand is considered effective if the country's image matches with the country's identity. (Anholt 2006, 272)

The goal of country branding is to reduce the gap between how country defines (the identity) itself and how it is perceived by others – to move the latter to a positive economy favourable direction.

1.3.2 Country brand management

Concepts such as identity, image, communication, authenticity, brand equity, attitudes and cognitive-affective-conative perspectives are common for both experience marketing and country branding (Same 2015, 28).

Both managing and building country brand require a long-term commitment that goes hand in hand with adopting a strategic view. Creating an attractive logo, political campaign or attractive

advertisement are not enough in order to succeed in creating and maintaining a country brand successfully. (Same 2015, 27).

Successful country branding comprehends of incorporating all the stakeholders into the process of branding the country. The ultimate goal of country branding is to incorporate activities in such a way that it reduces the gap between the desired image by country and the actual image and the perceptions that customers have on their mind about the country. (Same 2015, 23)

Country brand's performance can be measured by assessing the gap between image and identity promoted; the smaller the gap is the higher the performance of the country brand is (Same 2015). Country image has a big influence on mental constructions about the attributes related to the place; it affects customer behaviour and as a consequence the decision-making process is affected by the country image (Kemp, Childers, and Williams 2012, 508-509).

Positive country image generates potential for higher tourist income, higher level of foreign investments, higher level of export, higher country brand equity and other desired outcomes that differ among the countries (Same 2015, 8).

In a globalized world, countries compete to attract the attention, preference and trust of investors, international media, tourists and talented people. A powerful and positive place provides a crucial competitive advantage. Branding is a popular strategy for countries to differentiate themselves on the world stage, promote investment and strengthen commercial performance. (Same 2015, 8)

Managing a country brand, like a corporate brand, is a process that requires holistic approach and is used to differentiate from other countries because country image has various effects on export, income from tourism and on the investment flow to the country.

1.4 Soft power

One's ability to have such an effect on others that it will adjust their actions towards one's goals is called soft power. The word "soft" in this concept refers to intangible resources and

characteristics that make country or individual powerful enough to steer other players, countries or people to act as one wishes. (Nye 2008, 94)

A country may achieve the desired outcomes in the world politics because other countries wish to follow its example, admire its values, emulate its example and are aspired by its level of openness (Nye 2008, 94).

The fundamental idea of soft power is to shift other's behaviour in desired manner and it is achieved through generating attraction and this is affect by various aspects. Another way to present the core idea of soft power is to show it as ability for one to achieve international desired outcomes by becoming more attractive to others. Soft power creates attraction by promoting culture and its values and achieving goals through multilateral communication created through promotion of culture and values desired to follow. (Hudson 2015, 332)

Classical diplomacy becomes less important in this modern era where international communication becomes less informal. The diminishing importance of classical diplomacy has increased the importance of soft power. Both public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy remain important tools, while classical diplomacy has a smaller audience only at official level, individuals are not operating within the official framework, and one needs more appealing ways in order to attract the individual. (Kaldor 2014, 374)

By examining effects and the usage of soft power one can see that it has been beneficial for the United Kingdom in various ways. Utilizing soft power in the government of the United Kingdom has reduced the likelihood of an attack towards them, to build alliances, to increase the level of protection of the UK's citizens and to increase the level of international goodwill. (Kaldor 2014, 374)

Utilizing soft power has helped the UK to gain friends and supporters and has reduced hostility towards the UK and its citizens. The usage of soft power has increased the attractiveness of the UK in the eyes of foreign investors and has opened ways for heavily expanded export of British products supporting the UK's internal social stability and cohesion. (Kaldor 2014, 375)

The aims presented in the example of the UK are important for every country utilizing soft power. It is in every country's interests to reduce the threats and building alliances to protect its citizens

and itself. International forums and cooperation are the key factors of the soft power. Besides security every country holds certain financial interests, such as increasing trade flows and attracting foreign investments. These economical and safety related issues make soft power crucial to countries. (Kaldor 2014, 375-377)

Other's behaviour can be changed either by threats, inducements, payments and attraction, which draws a line between soft power and hard power when it comes to execution and the availability of resources (Nye 2004, 6-7).

Executing soft power differs dramatically from executing hard power. In contrary to hard power, soft power is executed through making culture more attractive, adjusting policies, promoting values and institutions. Promoting one's values, making culture more attractive or adjusting policies help to attract more subjects, to achieve more attractive agenda, and attract more cooperation. Soft power can be broken down into two divisions: public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy. (Nye, 2004, 9)

Soft power is a form of power that can be described with intangible resources such as attraction and leading. It has various possible effects – reducing hostility towards the country and its citizens and increasing the exports.

1.4.1 Public diplomacy

Activities that shape other's preferences and are carried out within country's agenda characterise public diplomacy. Activities that could be considered as public diplomacy are foreign aid, promoting culture language and literature and academic exchanges. Activities carried out within the agenda of public diplomacy do not affect recipient's behaviour drastically, but they reflect the constellation of the country values and shape recipients' subconscious in such a manner that they become more attracted to the values promoted. (Wilson 2015, 1173).

Country values and culture are often communicated to publics through different layers of public diplomacy. In addition to communicating positive country image and spreading information, public diplomacy also aims to develop long-term relationships, which can develop additional environments and dimensions to be utilized when policies are executed. (Nye 2008, 101-102)

To appeal culture, political institutions, values and policies that are perceived as legitimate or having moral authority characterize the intangible assets that are often related to the ability of establishing preferences. The cost of leading is smaller when values that are accepted by others and other want to follow are represented by the leader. (Nye 2004, 11)

Public diplomacy is effective when it is not only concentrating on the outbound information but also on the inbound information. Two-way communication is crucial as understanding audiences' values and preferences helps to comprehend how to communicate and address them in an effective way. (Nye 2008, 103)

Public diplomacy is a two-way communication for governments to shape people's preferences while communicating positive country image and acquiring data how to make recipients receive the desired messages more.

1.4.2 Cultural diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy can be defined as a set of actions and institutions whose purpose is to increase the influence of the country abroad politically and commercially and can be seen as the exchange of various aspects of culture, such as ideas and values between countries and nationals of those countries to promote cultural understanding. (Cummings 2007, cited in Hurn 2016, 80)

Cultural diplomacy has a fundamental role; besides developing mutual understanding of shared culture and values also attracting foreign investments into countries and promoting sales of products and services

Cultural relationships and information can be divided into three layers. First is daily communications. Its main function is to describe the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions more deeply as the government officials and politicians have tendency to focus in their daily communication on domestic publics, which could be seen as a shortcoming as one of the cultural public diplomacy's fundamental ideas is to support all the means of soft power to gain power through attraction.

Strategic communication is the second layer. Strategic communication is about developing a variety of themes that are communicating the benefits of government policies. Analogue behaviour can be detected when evaluating marketing and political campaigns.

Third layer focuses on developing long-term relationships with people through conferences. All of these layers have an essential role assisting to develop an appealing image of a country that is capable of pursuing its goals. (Nye 2004, 107-110, Nye 2008, 101-102)

Actions and institutions whose purpose is to increase country's influence abroad are called cultural diplomacy and the objective of the latter is to promote country's culture and generate business relations between countries.

1.4.3 Incorporating third parties to soft power

However, to achieve its goals, a country must take holistic approach on soft power. Achieving the desired outcomes using soft power requires besides popularity actions. (Nye 2008,102) If the country concentrates merely on generating the popularity, but its actions differ from the brand communicated, it will not achieve the desired outcomes (Anholt 2010, 9). Cultural diplomacy should be seen as a part of holistic approach of soft power whose function is to serve as a mechanism to address important topics to audiences.

Nowadays individuals are more sceptical of governments and authority, which leads to the low level of trust to the information given by the state. Soft power does not have official affiliations to governments, which makes it more appealing for governments as information acquired from the soft power related actions is previewed less sceptically by societies. (Otsmaa 2016, 12)

Scepticism towards information provided by state has led governments to use private sector to implement soft power. Using third parties in private sector reduces the risk and offers more aspects when soft power is implemented. (Nye 2004, 1, 16-17)

When using non-governmental approach, there is a risk that message is not received as intended. However, the lack of political control can help to acquire more attention and followers to the message and approaches controlled by governments are often subject to. This points out the necessity for using private sector for soft power.

Soft power can be a fundamental element for achieving politically desired outcomes, but soft power must be executed through private sector to ensure it is received well. Spreading the culture and adjusting the message to audiences is a crucial determinant of the outcomes of establishing soft power. The level of how widespread and similar the culture and values are to the subject's

culture and values correlates with the effect of soft power. Soft power is executed through public and cultural diplomacy, but to get to the execution part of soft power one must broadcast its message. (Nye 2008:94).

Government cannot control all the resources of soft power, and the effect of soft power depends highly on the receiving audience, which will eventually lead to the situation where executing soft power takes considerably longer when compared to hard power. However, the more country has ideological influence, the more it has followers, and thus the policies and actions will appear more legitimate. The more country appears legitimate, less it has to use other persuasive methods, which makes soft power more cost-effective in the long run. (Otsmaa 2016, 12)

Despite the fact that incorporating third parties includes risk of audiences not receiving the message as intended, countries incorporate more and more third parties to achieve their objectives in soft power as the low level of political control helps to acquire more receivers for the message they wish to portray.

To sum it up, each country has its unique country brand that can be built and maintained almost like a corporate brand. As a country brand has real impact on business, people's self-esteem, and financial markets, it is important for countries. Thus, countries are evaluating and developing their country branding strategies on a growing scale. Though, country branding is a long-term process that needs to be approached holistically with the ultimate goal to have the country brand message perceived as it is broadcasted.

The level of country's soft power has an impact on the country brand, therefore countries have strategies for that as well. Soft power refers to intangible resources that can be used to steer other countries and their nationals to act according to one's wishes. A country achieves its goals in soft power when using an holistic strategy that incorporates cultural and public diplomacy. Public diplomacy means, i.e. promoting culture and language. Its goal is to shape recipients subconsciousness so that they will become more attracted to the values promoted. Cultural diplomacy helps to develop both business relations and mutual understanding between different cultures.

Countries incorporate third parties to their branding process despite the fact that the message broadcasted could be perceived not in a desired way since people tend to be sceptical to information provided by governments.

2. COUNTRY BRAND OF ESTONIA

As the aim of this research is to map the gap between the Estonian brand message and the way it is perceived by Finnish publics, it is important to understand the message and the values that the Estonian country brand stands for. Based on that, the author will conduct the empirical part of the research and draw conclusions and generate ideas for the follow-up studies. The following chapter analyses how the country brand of Estonia is encoded.

2.1. Overview of the country brand of Estonia

2.1.1 History of the country brand of Estonia

The work on the country brand of Estonia started in the early 2000's when after winning the Eurovision song contest Estonia had a great opportunity to introduce itself to the wider public (Mändmets 2010). Mart Laar, who was the Estonian prime minister at that time, assembled a commission in August 2000 with a mission to design and develop a trademark that could be used to represent Estonia both internally and abroad (Kaunissaare 2005, 13). Laar also wrote an article on that topic that was published in *Postimees* on 12 September 2000, and discussed that in the modern world the existing reality is that brands and trademarks compete with each other instead of products; Laar called for finding the trademark from the future instead of the past (Kaunissaare 2005, 13).

In June 2001, the Estonian government approved upon the decision to design a concept for Estonian reputation building abroad; the task to develop the brand was given to the association Enterprise Estonia and their brand building project was named "Eesti tuntuks!" (Get to know Estonia). The discussion about the trademark of Estonia and what should be the Estonian brand message became very intensive in media, i.e. the public interest was strong. The brand concept "Welcome to Estonia", its theoretical part as well as the set of visual elements, such as logo, colour of the logo, the background of the logo and the font used in brochures that were based on the theoretical part of the brand concept, was then published. (Kaunissaare 2005, 13)

In 2008, Estonian country brand symbol "Welcome to Estonia" recognition and reputation was researched abroad and domestically by marketing research companies. Marketing research agency,

GfK Custom Research Baltic, conducted a research abroad and marketing research company, Turu-uuringute AS, conducted the domestic research.

The results of the research conducted abroad indicated low level of recognition of the “Welcome to Estonia” sign among the respondents; the sign did not raise interest among the respondents. The sign was seen indifferent and non-intriguing, it was not associated with quality and it was not considered innovative.

The results of the domestic research indicated that businesses did not see that “Welcome to Estonia” sign had the impact that people hoped for.

The results of these surveys indicated that there was need for transforming the concept (Same 2015, 29-30)

Since the concept was not as successful as it was hoped for, in 2008, a new brand concept was introduced. Its aim was, again, to introduce Estonia to nationals of foreign countries and to increase the number of tourists visiting Estonia, create a hospitable environment for Estonian enterprises and foreign investments (Otsmaa 2016, 42). A webpage was created with the aim to act as a tool that marketers could utilise when introducing Estonia. According to Otsmaa (2016), the webpage was rich of content and it had different approaches for four different target groups: tourism, internal tourism, education, and business (Enterprise Estonia 2015a, 2015b, 17, 30 cited in Otsmaa, 2016).

Since times had changed, there was a need for a new concept that could be utilised by businesses. In 2012, a new concept was developed. However, due to the political reasons and changes in the Enterprise Estonia’s management board, these changes were not executed. Since then, entrepreneurs in Estonia expressed their opinion about the current brand being not useful for the business purposes, and in 2014 a political decision was made to develop a new Brand Estonia Concept (Riive 2017, 117).

This resulted in developing the Estonia’s latest brand concept in 2017, and that will serve as the basis of the empirical research in this thesis.

2.1.2 Analysis of the current country brand of Estonia

The following subchapter is based on the contents of the Brand Estonia webpage (brand.estonia.ee) that represents the 2017 vision.

The brand Estonia concept webpage should be seen as a manual for anybody who wants to promote Estonia, for example people working in the tourism sector, enterprises, government institutions, universities, organizations and events. The brand Estonia webpage is funded by the Enterprise Estonia (EAS) that was founded by the Estonian government and whose goal is to promote entrepreneurship and Estonian regional policy in Estonia.

Estonian country and nation brand's core brand message, the story behind it and the suggested characteristics of Estonia are presented in the concept page. From the concept page all the enthusiasts can also find the "est-concept" and a collection of "e-words," a set of visual elements to be used when promoting Estonia, and a guide about which adjectives and words should be used while promoting Estonia. There are also ready-to-be-presented presentation materials. Most of all, the webpage aims to help people promoting Estonia to understand what the main points are when marketing the country.

The core messages are divided into three groups: independent minds, clean environment, and digital environment.

The core message of independent minds tells a story of a non-hierarchical society where communication between individual and state is made easy and straightforward and everyone can apply all their potential in life. The second core message is about the pure nature, the clean environment of Estonia and that, as the webpage suggests, is not something considered self-evident in the most parts of the world. The third core message is about the Estonian digital society, and it presents Estonians as innovative people who are positively-minded enthusiasts capable of developing new and brave solutions.

Last but not least, the Estonian country brand wants to send a message of a nation that has Nordic traits and values. In the differentiation strategy, the Estonians are presented as pragmatic, honest, straightforward people living in an egalitarian society, close to nature, which supposedly makes Estonians trustworthy. However, the concept also presents Estonians as surprising, individualistic,

contrasting, different, which supposedly draws attraction to Estonians and is one of the ways how Estonians supposedly differ from other Nordic peoples and societies, where everyone tends to be seen as a part of equal society where contrasting is not seen as a good thing and individuals should be equal without any large contrasts in the society. The concept webpage also presents the Estonians as smart and innovative nation with a tendency to be tech-savvy, curious and discontented, making them into pioneers.

2.2. Previous research about the country brand of Estonia

Riive's (2017) research gives an overview about the creation of the Estonian country brand and analyses the brand refreshing process from 2014. Riive's work compares the process of developing the country brand of Estonia with the developing of country brands of Island and Finland.

Otsmaa (2016) gives an overview of the development of the Estonian country brand. He aims to present how a small country can increase its influence internationally by branding itself; therefore he brings in the concept of soft power. Otsmaa analyses Estonia country brand's reach in Germany and the UK through two large cultural events taking place in Estonia. He takes a look at how many times those festivals appeared in Google search engine results in the UK and Germany between the determined time frame.

Same (2015) gives an overview about the Estonian country brand's development and analyses the concepts.

In 2017, Kantar Ermor conducted a survey about Estonia's image and awareness. Kantar Ermor's survey addressed the following topics: familiarity with five other countries, reputation of those five countries, interest and openness towards Estonia, how well people were familiar with E-Estonia and E-residency and the spontaneous mental association with Estonia. (Estonia's image and awareness survey, 2017)

All the studies, except the awareness and reputation study by Kantar Ermor, introduce the history and development of the country brand of Estonia. Otsmaa's (2016) study differs from others by

emphasising the soft power. Riive's (2017) work analyses the process of refreshing the country brand of Estonia, Otsmaa's (2016) work studies how two big cultural events appeared in Google search results and Kantar Ermor's (2017) work concentrates on the awareness of Estonia and the comparison of Estonia with other countries.

3. RESEARCH OF THE GAP BETWEEN ENDOCED AND DECODED MESSAGES

3.1 Methodology

The aim of this research is to assess how the brand image and message that brand owners wish to portray differs from the perceived country brand image of Estonia by Finnish publics.

The empirical part of this research was divided into two phases.

The first phase consisted of careful studying of the country brand of Estonia via the webpage of EAS, the creator and owners of the brand. Then an open-ended qualitative written expert interview was sent out to the brand creators/owners of the Estonian country brand in May 2017, resulting in two respondents answering. This phase was conducted to ensure that the author perceives the information in a manner that aligns with brand owners' principles. The questions can be found in appendix 1.

The second phase of the empirical part consisted of collecting data with the help of qualitative half-structured interviews in order to map the brand-relevant aspects of the image of Estonia in Finland.

The aim of the second phase was to acquire data that can be used in comparing the perceived brand message and the brand image with the brand message and image that country brand owners wish to portray. The interview frame can be found in appendix 2. The interviews were conducted in Finnish language with 4 young Finnish men and one Finnish female residing in Finland. The recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions can be found here (with names of respondents encoded):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1kporz0CXCmLWXr6bu_cJuTrPSCjhqdiQ

The data acquired via interviews was analysed using qualitative methods, i.e. a qualitative content analysis of transcribed interview texts was carried out. Since in-depth knowledge has significantly greater usability when analysing how people perceive something, qualitative research methods

are the right choice here. In this case data quality is more important than the quantity, numerical results.

The qualitative content analysis took the Estonian country brand as the basis for emerging categories, but the author was also open to new data emerging.

3.1.1 Research methodology for encoding the brand Estonia

The expert interviews in the first phase of the study were carried out with people who managed the Estonian country brand creation (the brand owners). The manager of Estonian Country brand developing team and the Estonian country brand project manager agreed to a written qualitative semi-structured interview with open-end questions.

On 9th May EAS was visited to acquire contacts of the people responsible for the country brand of Estonia. On 10th May the people responsible were contacted several times via phone and e-mail. Due to time constraints the EAS representatives were presented a written interview instead of conducting an in-depth interview.

The experts were in managing roles within the departments in EAS-structure that control the country branding project, so it can be assumed those persons were the best candidates – experts – to represent the whole brand team.

The expert interviews

As the aim of this phase of the research is to analyse the accuracy and relevancy of the information presented in the concept page of Estonian Country brand and to compare it with how the brand owners want the information to be understood, the experts were asked questions to confirm and explain the data found on the EAS web-page.

The interview questions (appendix 1) were divided into 5 parts. In first part the experts were asked about the relevancy of Estonia being seen as one of Nordic countries and Estonia being perceived as having a clean nature. In second part the brand owners were asked about the relevancy of E-Estonia – do they see that it is important to emphasize the smart e-governance and that due to the

e-governance solutions communication between state and people is easy. Brand owners were also asked that should overall modernity of Estonia be emphasised in the brand message. The third part consisted of the questions related to emphasising entrepreneurship in Estonia. The experts were asked should it be emphasized that Estonians have entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship is made easy in Estonian society and Estonia is most entrepreneurial country in Europe. They were also asked that should IT be the first field of business that comes into mind when Estonia comes into mind. The fourth part was about the Estonian mind-set. The brand owners were asked that should Estonians be perceived as being innovative and should Estonians be seen as Tech-savvy. Finally, the experts were asked what are, in their opinion, the three words or adjectives that should come into mind when Estonia is mentioned.

3.1.2 Results of the Country brand written expert interviews

In accordance with the country brand presented on the EAS webpage, the brand owners saw that it is essential to emphasize that Estonia should be seen as a Nordic country as well as cleanness of the Estonian nature.

The brand owners also confirmed that emphasizing the smart e-governance and e-voting and emphasizing overall modernity of the Estonian society are important.

The experts also said in interviews that emphasizing the entrepreneurial spirit of Estonians and the fact that entrepreneurship is made easy in Estonian society with the fact that Estonia is amongst the most entrepreneurial countries in Europe are an important part of brand message. When it comes to entrepreneurship, the brand owners are of the opinion that IT should be the first field of business that is related with Estonia.

When it comes to the mind-set of Estonians, the interviews conformed that the brand owners want to project a message about Estonians being innovative and tech-savvy nation as part of the country brand.

Finally, the words or adjectives that the experts want to be linked to Estonia, that they see as the most suitable to project the country brand message of Estonia, are “innovative”, “E-state” and “ambitious”.

3.1.3 Face-to-face interviews with young Finns

The interviews were conducted within the time frame between November 30 and December 2 2018. The interviews were conducted in Tampere, Finland. The length of each interview varied between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviewees are between 22 and 24 years old and acquainted with the author. The respondents are Finnish citizens, who have resided their whole life in Finland. The interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the interviewees.

The interview frame (appendix 2) was related to the brand message as it is on EAS webpage, and to the specifications of the experts that were interviewed earlier. The interview questions were divided into following blocks:

1. Independent minds

Analysis of the core message of Estonian country brand shows that EAS wants Estonia to be perceived as a country where society is not hierarchical, people can live up to their full potential and communicate easily with the state.

2. Clean environment

Analysis of the concept web-page showed also that part of the core message of Estonian country brand is that Estonia has very clean nature and it is one of the important assets in Estonia. Especially, when Finland is known to have a clean nature this question is very interesting as cleanliness of nature is very subjective.

3. Digital society

Estonian country brand's message is that Estonia is modern society, a country which is a pioneer when it comes to digitalization especially on the state level. One part of the core message of Estonian country brand was about the digitalization and the ease of access and the easiness of communication between individual and state due to electronic systems that governmental structure uses.

4. A Nordic country

Analysis of country brand of Estonia showed that Estonia wishes to project itself as a country that is one of the Nordic countries. Therefore, it was important to bring this up in the interview. To measure the association, respondents were asked to tell what industry they think of first when Estonia is mentioned.

5. Smart and innovative Estonia

As the analysis of Estonian country brand showed that EAS wants Estonia to be perceived as a nation with entrepreneurial spirit and as a country that has very good environment when it comes to business. Therefore, the respondents were asked whether they consider Estonia as a good place for conducting business. The encoding of the country brand of Estonia shows that the message is that Estonia is innovative, the amount of digitalization in society is high and the tech-savvy nation of Estonia has developed many tech-start-ups that are well known worldwide and therefore they should be seen as pioneers. To measure the association, respondents were asked to tell what industry they think of first when Estonia is mentioned.

6. Entrepreneurial country

Encoding Estonian country brand shows that EAS wants to portray a message about a country where conducting business is easy and that is the most entrepreneurial country in Europe. To measure this association, the interviewees were asked questions regarding the easiness of being an entrepreneur in Estonia.

7. (Autostereotype) of Estonia(ns)

The Estonian country brand message is that Estonians are hardworking people, who are open-minded and innovative people living in modern Western society among the clean nature., However some Finnish might associate Estonians as well also with the 90's in Estonia where banal street violent criminals could operate quite freely. To measure the personality traits associated with Estonians and overall stereotypes towards Estonia and in Estonia questions about overall thoughts about Estonians were asked.

3.2.2 Analysis of interviews

The following chapter focuses on analysing the data acquired through interviews with the help of a qualitative content analysis. The categories that the analysis delivers are almost those of the interview frame but not quite. Names of the interviewees are changed in the analysis.

1. Clean environment

The interviewees Defined the clean environment as follows: „*Clean environment? It must mean that when you leave from your home to the street and there is cleand and you do not hve to walk amogst the dirt..*“ (Juho (names changed)) Young Finns relate the following European countries with that: „*At least in Finland, Sweden and Norway.*“ (Juho1), or „*Northern Europe, when one goes enough to the North, To Finland, Sweden and Norway...*“ (Matti).

About Estonia, though, it was said that

*„One can see more dirt on the streets than in Finland“ (Kari), or „It is clean there, but ... there can be sometimes litter or something similiar on the streets ... In my mental image Finland is cleaner.“ (Juho), or „I would not say that there is so clean as in the North...“ (Matti), or „I think that people do not take care of the nature in South European countries... [Estonia] ... It is ahead of Southern Eurobe, but of course behind Finland.“ (Tero). Considering the fact that Finns have a high opinion of Finnish nature and see themselves to be caring for the nature and environment, that shows clearly that here the brand message has not quit sank in, although it was also said that the Estonian environment is *„...Pretty mutch the same as in Finland.“* (Yrjö).*

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as a country with clean environment exists. Estonia is seen as a place with relatively clean environment, but less clean than Finnish environment, *“of-course”*, as the respondents said.

2. Digital society

The interviewees did not consider Estonia as one of the digital pioneers, that relation seemed rather to exists with Germany or France or UK or the Nordic countries. : Topics like e-governance or e-residency got no resonance in interviews. Estonia was seen as reasonably good, though: *„I don't consider Estonia as one of the pioneers, but I assume Estonia is doing quite good on this matter“* (Tero) or *„Based on the image generated while visiting Estonia I do not consider that Estonia is underdeveloped. It is on a similiar level with Finland“* (Yrjö). The latter is a high praise since all the respondents saw Finland as a digital society.

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as digital society is there. Estonia is not seen as one of the digital pioneers, but rather a mediocre player where digital services work relatively well. However, the gap between encoding and decoding the Estonian country brand is even bigger when it comes to Estonian innovations like E-voting and E-residency since Estonia was not at all related to those by the interviewed young Finns.

3. A Nordic country

The mental image of Nordic countries being Scandinavia plus Finland appeared very strongly in the interviews. Like one interviewee (Pry) said: *“Well I have adopted the idea about these four countries to be the Nordic countries.”* Another, Kari, meditated: *“Is Estonia one of the Nordic countries?... No.”*

The answers, though, varied from a straight no to a straight yes. However, in most of the interviews people hesitated when they considered the possibility that Estonia is one of the Nordic countries. Considering Estonian past and the effort to make the country brand Estonia to be related to Northern Europe, it can be seen as a strategical success that the respondents think whether Estonia is a Nordic country – even without being asked: *“Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia... Does it belong... no?”* (Juho). Or when Yrjö simply said: *„Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland...”*

Within the discussion of Estonia being a Nordic country or not, the interviewees were asked to think whether a country can transform into a Nordic country or is the amount of these countries fixed to the current situation. As it was expected, the interviewees saw the Nordics as a community not as a geographical area and thus, were mostly positive: *„Of course if certain criteria are fulfilled”*(Pry). Unfortunately, this answer reaffirmed the sad truth from the point of view of brand Estonia that the respondents rather uniformly do not consider Estonia to be a Nordic country.

The criteria that Nordic youth expects from a wannabe Nordic country are certain values:

Like one interviewee (Tero) stated: *„Equality- In my opinion Nordic countries are quite pioneers on this field “*

Another interviewee,(Pry) defined the Nordic values as follows:

„The good level of education, equality and other progression “

(Juho) saw that Nordic values include society taking care of its members:

„ Everyone has some sort of wrap and woof and they do not have such a problem... There is no need to live on the streets and there is some sort of social security in all of the Nordic countries “

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as one of the Nordic countries is there, but not big. Young Finns do not see Estonia unconditionally as one of the Nordic countries. However, most of interviewees are of the opinion that it is possible that Estonia becomes one of the Nordic countries in the future. The latter is a clear sign of brand strategy having a positive effect. Now the values of Estonias have to move in the same direction.

4. Smart and innovative Estonia

When talking about innovativeness, the respondents focused on on well-known Western-European and Nordic countries: „*I guess many of the big industrial countries are innovative. One of the biggest in Europe, Germany, is innovative because they create a lot of new things... A lot of digital innovations are from Finland*“ (Juho). But also Estonia was mentioned: „*I consider Nordic countries, Estonia, and Germany innovative countries*“ (Pry). That is a very clear association in the way the brand Estonia is and wants to be perceived. Yet, when comparing Finland and Estonia, the latter loses in the eyes of young Finns: „*Finland is slightly more advanced, because it has more resources.*“ (KES?)

Sadly, the interviewees could not name any Estonian Tech companies: „*I dont know any Estonia Start-up company...*“ (Yrjö)

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as an innovative and tech-savvy country exists as well, even when it is smaller than the aforementioned. Estonia is considered rather advanced and innovative by young Finns, albeit behind of Finland. To emphasise the innovativeness of Estonia, But as Eenterprise Estonia wants to broadcast a message about Estonia having a lot of tech startups, we can see a total failure here: the respondents know no tech companies from Estonia.

6. Entrepreneurial Estonia

The interviewees compared their impressions on Finland and Estonia as countries where to conduct business:

Interviewee (Pry) saw that Estonia and Finland are relatively similar as places for conducting business: „*Well I guess that it is pretty much the same. I dont know where it would be easier*“

And interviewee(Yrjö) saw that Finnish entrepreneurs are always complaining, but had no impressions to share about Estonia: „*At least what I am hearing, it feels that always all the Finns complain how hard it is for the entrepreneurs and how they are persecuted and so on, but I dont know how it is in Estonia*“

Some interviewees saw Estonia as a better place to conduct business, like interviewee (Juho) stated:„It is relatively hard to be entrepreneur in Finland,, because you need to inform different instanes, for sure if you want to create an enterprise is it easier in Estonia than in Finland. I dont believe that it is so hard.“

Interviewee (Tero) saw that in a way Estonia is better place for conducting business, but however some things are better in Finnish environment for conducting business:

„... I guess that it is easier to conduct [business] in Estonia, but I think that going abroad is easier if one wants international business... I dont know “ (Tero)

Interviewee(Matti) also saw that some things are better in Estonia and some things are better in Finland:

„It is better to have enterprise in Estonia due to the taxation and other reasons, but maybe the market is different in a way[in Finland] that there is more demand and supply than in Estonia.“

The difference between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of percieving Estonia as a good place to conduct business is relatively small. None of the interviewees stricly stated that environment for conducting business in Estonia would be worse than in Finland and all the interviewees who saw the differencies in the business environments saw that at least some aspect is better in Estonian environment for conducting business.

7. (Hetero)stereotype of Estonia(ns)

Assosiation Estonia with alcohol dominated in the interviews. All the itnterviewees assosiated Estonia with alcohol. As can be seen from following answers of the interviews,„*Finnish alcohol sold in Estonia*“(Matti)

„*When you put it bluntly then I would say cheap alcohol when comparin with Finland*“(Juho)

„*Superalko*“(Pyry)

„First thing to come in my mind [When thinking of Estonia] is trip to Tallinn and cheap alcohol“ (Yrjö)

„Vodka“ (Tero)

Luckily, Besides the slightly negative association with alcohol, The Soviet Union and its legacy rose as topic only within few of the interviews: „This is because of The Soviet Union“ (Tero) or as interviewee (Juho) mentioned: „Yes definitely, because it used to be part of the Soviet Union...“

Some of the interviewees characterize Estonians as hard workers:

„. *Hard workers who work a lot.*“ (Juho)

„They are hard workers...“ (Matti)

But most of the interviewees characterised Estonians only through comparing Estonians and Finns;

The interviewees compared Finnish and Estonians as follows:

„I think that they are quite similar as in the other Nordic countries... [They have] Quite similar personal characteristics“ (Juho).

Or

„I consider them to be quite similar with Finns. Quite peaceful unlike like Southern Europeans who are loud and have culture of big gesture. Peaceful but also friendly.“ (Pyy)

Estonians were considered quite similar to Finnish. However next answer reveals very mild differences:

„They are quite similar. Some of them are hard working and some of them are „hillbilly“ and otherwise unpleasant. I don't know if there is any difference... Estonians look different“ (Matti)

„They are quite similar to Finnish, they just speak different language“ (Yrjö)

Interviewee (Tero) However, saw bigger differences between Finns and Estonians:

„Estonians are more open than Finnish. Finnish people judge more easily than Estonians“

From The country bad pespective some of these assosiations can be seen as a point for improvement, whereas some can be seen as a gret success.

Estonian countr brand owners want to project an image of and smart ad innovative nation that lives in modern society. When first thing that all of the interviewees assosiate Estonia is Alcohol, one can see that there is clearly a gap within encoding and decoding this part of the country brand message.

One of the key drivers for Estonia to start it's first country brand campain in the early 2000's was the hope to not to be assosiated with The Soviet Union in the future. The Soviet union was still mentioned by a small minotiry of interviewees. However, since Soviet legacy was present only in minority of the interviews one could see that progress has been eminent within the years.

The interviews indicated that Estonians and Finnish people were seen as very similiar to each other in personal traits. This is one of the greatest successes of the Estonian country brand since trough similiarity the openness towards the Estonian country brand message arises. Similiarity also creates readness for business and other relations within the nations.(Otsmaa vms)

The results of the interviews indicated that the gap between encoding and decoding some elements of Estonia being Nordic country is smaller. Since Finnish people see themselves as Nordic people and they see Estonians very similiar to themselves they could consider Estonians to have traits of Nordic people, which was one part of the Estonian country brand message.

3.2 Discussion and suggestions

Heterostereotyping and autostereotyping have effect on the encoding and decoding process. As way how information is decoded is affected by individual perceptions and previous experiences.

Autostereotypes are prejudices formed about the group that one belongs to and heterostereotypes are prejudices about other groups. Finnish interviewees have very strong autostereotypes about their own country. Finland is seen innovative and one of the pioneers in many fields. Whereas they have very strong heterostereotypes about Estonians.

The effect of both heterostereotypes and autostereotypes is present in the interviews as even though answers indicate that outcomes are positive, Finland is nearly always seen first or best amongst the Nordic countries.

The gap in encoding the Estonian country brand was assessed by analysing the Estonian country brand webpage and comparing the findings with the results of expert interviews conducted with the creators of the webpage.

The results of the expert interviews with country brand owners indicated that gap in encoding the Country brand message is relatively small.

The gap in decoding the Estonian country brand was assessed through comparing the findings from the country brand concept webpage with the results of the interviews conducted with young Finns.

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as a country of clean environment exists, but it is small.

The gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as one Nordic country is relatively small. Young Finns do not consider Estonia as a Nordic country yet, but most of the interviewees saw that it could be possible in the near future. This is clear sign of brand strategy having a positive effect.

The smaller gap between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as an innovative and tech-savvy country exists as well.

Estonia is seen innovative and advanced, but behind Finland.

The difference between encoding and decoding the country brand in respect of perceiving Estonia as a good place to conduct business is smaller since the interviewees either saw that Estonia is a better place to conduct business than Finland, some parts of the business environment of Estonia are better than in Finland or that Estonia and Finland are equal places for conducting business.

The results of the interviews indicate also that Estonia is associated unanimately with alcohol, the Soviet Union is present in some interviews and Finnish and Estonian people are seen to be relatively alike. Since country brand message is that Estonia is innovative tech savvy country, and all of the interviewees associate Estonia is Alcohol, one could see that there is room for improvement in this part of country brand message.

Since Soviet Union was present only in a minority of answers one could see that there has been improvements in the long run.

The results of the interviews indicated that Estonians and Finnish people were seen as very similar to each other in personal traits. This is one of the greatest successes of Estonian country brand and smallest gaps between encoding and decoding the message.

CONCLUSION

The topic of this research was chosen for many reasons, but most important reason was that the importance of assessing the new country brand more than one year later is assisting as one could expect to see some results after one year after publishing the new brand.

The aim of this research was to assess the country brand webpage confirm the findings with expert interviews and then compare the image that country brand owners and brand webpage are trying to broadcast to the world with the results how it is actually perceived

Results of the literature review indicated that country branding is a long -term process with different layers and therefore needs rather holistic approach. Research also shows that Country brand needs to be analysed and needs constant development as one needs to be aware as well changing the country brand image can have very negative effect on the country brand legitimacy.

When country branding is done right, it can increase the foreign investment flow to country, creates more hospitable environment for the local enterprises when they go abroad, exports raise, amount of tourists raise, amount of foreign immigrants rises and country might gain some followers to it's values and trough the followers gain some international legitimacy. Trough country branding, depending on the desires country, can achieve both financial and influential gains. However, one must consider, that developing country brand is a process that takes a lot of time and county's actions must also fit to the brand message and values.

Empirical part of this research was divided into two parts. First part consisted of analysing the Brand Estonia webpage.

The results of the analysis were confirmed by conducting an expert interview with the people in charge of the process of creating the Country brand concept webpage.

Second part of the empirical research consisted of face-to face interviews conducted with young Finns. This method was chosen due to the fact that when analysing how something is perceived quality of the information is more relevant than the quantity

Results of the empirical part indicate that the gap within the encoding process of country brand of Estonia is relatively small.

However, Encoding and decoding the brand message show that projecting some part of the message has been a great success as some parts of the message have not performed so well.

Results of empirical part of this research indicate that there is a gap between how Estonian country brand is perceived by The Finnish audiences and the way how the people in charge of the country branding process in Estonia wish the country brand to be perceived.

Some of the gaps in the decoding of the Estonian are smaller and some are larger.

Estonia is not seen as one of the Nordic countries, however the responders saw that Estonia is moving towards being a Nordic country since certain criterias are fully met.

Besides this, the results indicated that environment of Estonia was seen relatively clean and Estonia was considered one of the digital societies.

Also, Estonia was seen as a relatively good place to conduct business and Finnish people consider Estonians open-minded, innovative,tech-savvy and hardworking.

Last but not least, the results of the interviews indicated that Finnish people consider themselves relatively similar to Estonians, which can be seen as a major sign of acceptance and one of the greatest achievements of the Estonian country brand concept.

However, the results indicated also that Estonians were not seen as pioneers, Finnish people were not aware of how easy it is to access services provided by government due the digitalization and how Estonia is a pioneer in E-voting, and in E-residency. Also, no interviewee could name an Estonian tech companies. Estonia was also associated unanimously with alcohol and the Soviet Union was mentioned in some of the interviewees.

All this clearly indicates that there is room for improvement. In the future the Estonian country brand concept should concentrate more on following elements of the concept: Working towards fulfilling the criterias that are required for a country to become one of the Nordic countries, emphasising the part of country brand message about the tech start-ups by bringing up more concrete examples for example mentioning some of the prominent Estonian tech- start-ups and promoting more the Estonian innovations such as E-voting and E-residency.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Expert interview frame

Estonian country brand message.

Trough an analysis of the Estonian country brand webpage, the author has detected several different messages. In this questionnaire, the author collects data about how brand owners would like their message to be interpreted.

* Required

1. Estonia is to be presented as a Nordic country/ Eestit tuleks välja tuua ühena Põhjamaadest *

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

2. Cleanness of Estonian nature/Eesti looduse puhtus

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

E-Estonia

3. Emphasizing on smart e-governance (e-voting and communication with government trough e-services)/E-eesti aspekti väljatoomine(e-hääletamine ja e-teenused)

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

4. Emphasizing on the overall modernity of Estonian society/Eesti modernsuse väljatoomine

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

Entrepreneurship in Estonia

5. **Emphasizing that Estonians have entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship is made easy in Estonian society and Estonia is most entrepreneurial country in Europe/Eestlaste ettevõtliku vaimu ja selle, et ettevõtlus on Eesti ühiskonnas lihtne ja et Eesti on kõige ettevõtlikum riik Euroopas**

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

6. **IT should be the first field of business that comes in mind when Estonia is mentioned/IT peaks olema esimene äriala mis meenub Eestit mainides**

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

Estonian mindset

7. **Estonians should be seen innovative/ Eestlasi tuleks näha innovatiivseina**

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

8. **Estonians should be seen tech savvy/ Eestlasi tuleks näha tehnoloogia-teadlikena**

Mark only one oval.

- Emphasizing this is essential/Selle väljatoomine on tähtis
- Emphasizing this is not essential/Selle väljatoomine pole tähtis
- Other: _____

Open ended questions

9. **What Should be the three words or adjectives that should come into mind when Estonia or Estonians are mentioned/Mis peaksid olema need kolm sõna või adjektiivi mis meenuksid Eestit või eestlasi mainides?**

Appendix 2. The face-to face interview frame

I will use your answers in my research in a way that your anonymity remains. Thank you for contributing.

INDEPENDENT MINDS

In which European countries society is hierarchical in your opinion?

And where it is not? Why do you think so?

Are some states limiting the potential of people or rather not in your opinion? Explain

[Where in the Europe... Why..]

How communication between people and the state goes in Finland?

Is it smoother somewhere else or not?

How would you position Estonian society on this matter?

CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

What clean environment means to you?

In which European countries, the environment is clean?

Why do you consider the environment clean in those countries?

In which European countries the environment is not clean in your opinion?

Why you don't consider the environment clean in those countries?

What do you know about Estonian environment?

Could you compare Estonian and Finnish environment?

DIGITAL SOCIETY

What digital society means to you?

What countries are digital societies in your opinion?

Could you explain why do you consider those countries to be digital societies?

What countries are pioneers in digitalisation? Explain

Explain why these countries are pioneers in digitalisation?

Do you consider Estonia to be digital society?

Do you know anything else about Estonia regarding this topic?

Have you heard about E residency or not?
In which countries one can become E-resident?
In which countries one can vote online?
In which countries one can fill tax report online?

Nordic

Voisitko luetella Pohjoismaat?
Could you list all the Nordic countries for me?
What the Nordic countries have in common?
What are Nordic values?
How would you describe people living in the Nordic countries?
DO you believe that the amount of Nordic countries will increase or rather not? Why do you believe so?.

SURPRISING

How Estonians are considered in Finland?
How you consider Estonians?

SMART

What countries you consider innovative.?
Why do you consider those countries to be innovative?
What countries are known for their technology?
Do you know any Estonian tech companies?
Could you name a few?
Could you compare Finnish and Estonian tech companies?
Could you compare the level of technology in Estonia and Finland?

COMMON

When thinking about Estonia, what is the first thing that comes into your mind?
Why
What is the first word that comes into your mind?

Could you compare Estonia and Finland?

Could you compare Estonians and Finnish?

Could you compare life in Finland and Estonia?

What is the reputation of Estonia in Finland?

Why do you think so?

What is the reputation that Estonians hold in Finland

Why do you think so?

Has Estonian reputation changed during the time Estonia has been a member of the European Union?

How?

Onko Viron maine muuttunut sinä aikana kun Virossa on ollut euro käytössä?

Has Estonian reputation changed during the time Estonia has been a member of the Euro zone?

How would you see Estonia as an environment for conducting business compared to Finland?

What are the first fields of business that you associate Estonia with?

Mikä on ensimmäinen tuote tai palvelu mikä tulee mieleesi Virosta?

What is the first service or product that comes into your mind when thinking of Estonia?