



# Creating the Future of Country Branding

How research and insight creates a platform for storytelling and engaging conversation  
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Session: Compelling Stories or Authentic Conversations?  
Ideas for Building Better Relationships with Consumers

This presentation shares with you our experience of how research and insight is helping to create, shape and deliver the future of country branding via stories and engaging conversations.

Our story is about Costa Rica the country, as a brand.





Let's first define what we mean by BRAND. And, this is where understanding that the term brand originally meant to burn an impression on a product or goods, but today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is about burning an impression in people's minds. Both tangibly and intangibly. If done well, to reflect ownership and authenticity, it creates more than a physical mark, but an emotive or intangible one as well.

A great definition of a brand is that of Jeff Bezo's and what this quote identifies is the power of a brand to precede and follow the actual experience, which translates into image and reputation.

***"Branding is what people think about you before you enter the room, how they interact with you in the room, and what they say about you after you leave the room"***

Jeff Bezos, CEO, Amazon

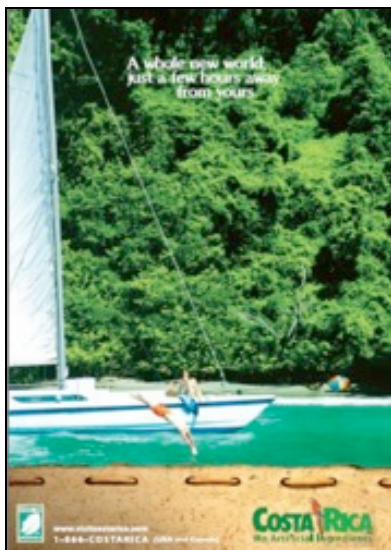
We all understand branding in a commercial context, because we think of brands as packaged goods that we buy in a store, in an aisle on a shelf. And our perceptions are influenced by how the brand is presented and marketed or sold. And the most effective brands are successful because they know how to tell a good story. They know how to position themselves in the minds of their audiences. They know how to grab attention, engage in words and pictures and be relevant to their audience.



All well and good for a company or a product, but what if the brand or the product is a Country? Where the only experience is from tourism, or from the evening news or a history lesson. And the visual representation is of a flag, or of cultural associations of language?



In the case of our example here\* - the nation of Costa Rica - this is best represented below, which is the most recent, and successful Tourism campaign, the strapline of which is 'NO ARTIFICIAL INGREDIENTS' with a parrot in between the words Costa and Rica, and on the right – the nation's flag.



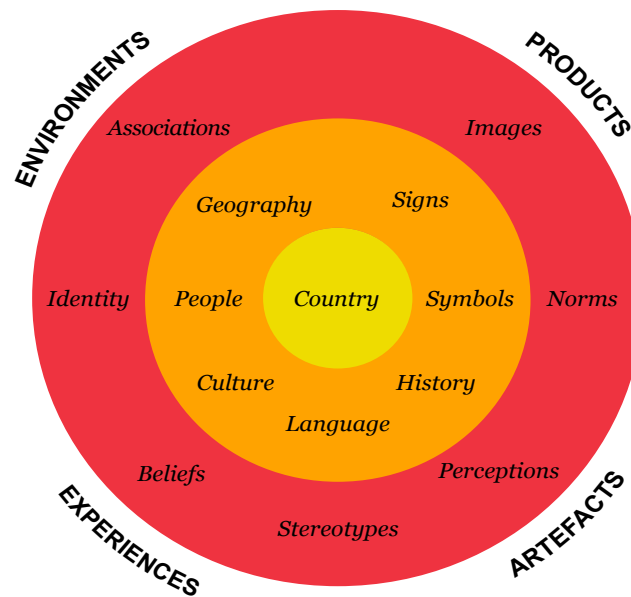
These are two examples of different but equally important audiences. Tourists and citizens – and, there are other audiences for a country - Investors, Business partners, Immigrants & Educators/opinion formers. And, therefore – the challenge is in order to 'brand' a Country; one must truly uncover different levels of association across different audiences.

\* In this particular case we were working closely with Jorge Sequeira Picado & Carolina Lenero of PROCOMER, Costa Rica's Export Agency, and Gustavo Koniszczewski of FutureBrand Latin America.

This is where QRI's in-depth approach was invaluable – where we 'peel back' the layers of association both from the inside of a country out, and from the outside in.

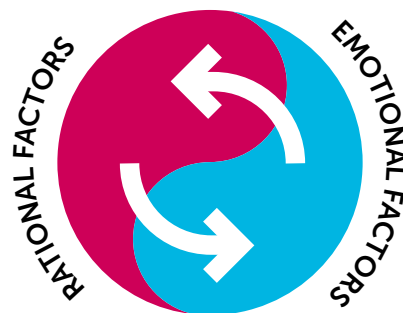
We had to uncover - amongst many audiences and stakeholders – what elements influence their Perceptions, Myths, Stereotypes, Rumours, or Beliefs.

We ascertain what the TANGIBLE & INTANGIBLES are, for those both familiar and unfamiliar, with a country, in this case 'Costa Rica'.



QRI's approach is anchored in Consumer Psychology. And here, identifying and understanding the SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP between the RATIONAL & EMOTIONAL FACTORS that make up a Country Brand, and how they work together to form the Total Impression – was our challenge.

### The Psychology of Country Branding



**"The Whole is Greater Than  
The Sum of the Parts"**

We found that for a country – these two elements are like the **HARDWARE** and the **SOFTWARE** of a Country Brand:

- THE **HARDWARE** is easier to measure and manage - being elements that can be altered or built upon: Laws, Taxes, Physical Experiences & Infrastructure – as well as the Country's perceived Ethics, Values and Philosophy.

The Rational factors are  
like the Hardware



The Emotional factors  
are like the Software

- THE **SOFTWARE** is more complex - they are beliefs, and intuitive feelings that people have about a Country at a more subconscious level. These are also the more Dynamic & Contextual aspects of a Nation and its People: How they Behave, How they Think, Live, Socialise & Communicate. Their Beliefs & their Personality.

TOGETHER these are the elements which form the basis of Conversations, Stories & Engagement.

The research consisted of a local and international forensic investigation – to analyse and understand different audiences, and their associations/perceptions.

Here you can see the International Qualitative fieldwork QRi completed – covering many different Markets and Target Audiences:

Location	Tourists	International Commerce	Investors	TOTAL
USA (SF/NYC)	4 ECGs	12 IDIs	7 IDIs	4 ECGs / 19 IDIs
Canada (Toronto)	2 ECGs	4 IDIs	2 IDIs	2 ECGs / 6 IDIs
Spain (Madrid)	2 ECGs	4 IDIs	2 IDIs	2 ECGs / 6 IDIs
Chile (Santiago)	-	4 IDIs	2 IDIs	6 IDIs
TOTAL	8 ECGs	24 IDIs	13 IDIs	8 ECGs / 37 IDIs

Location	25-44 years	45-64 years	TOTAL
UK (London)	1 ECG	1 ECG	2 ECGs
France (Paris)	1 ECG	1 ECG	2 ECGs
Germany (Berlin)	1 ECG	1 ECG	2 ECGs
Italy (Rome)	1 ECG	1 ECG	2 ECGs
TOTAL	4 ECGs	4 ECGs	8 ECGs

We conducted a total of 16 ECGs® (Extended Creativity Groups) with Tourists in US, Canada, Chile, Spain, UK, France, Germany and Italy, and 37 Individual In-Depth Interviews amongst Investors and International Commerce Buyers in US, Canada, Chile and Spain.

We use projective techniques to get to the 'Heart and Soul' of a Country and its brand image/reputation.

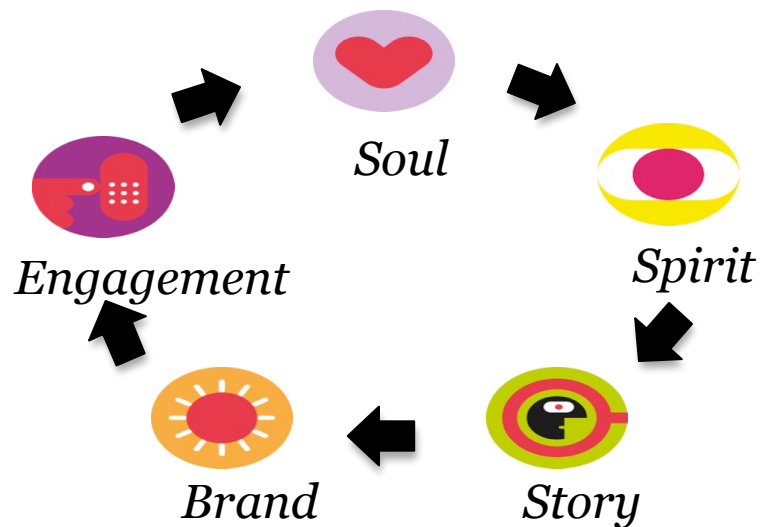
Amongst our overall approach we found 4 particular techniques particularly effective:

- *Guided Dream* – going to the Country in your Mind.
- *BrandWorld™ Projection* - Visualising being inside the Brand & telling Stories
- *Synesthetic Associations* – Vision, Taste, Smell, Sound, Texture
- *Metamorphic Projection* - Transforming the Country into a Person, as in personification

This was not only to understand the PAST and PRESENT, but to also project into the FUTURE of the country, and its audience's expectations.

From these techniques we were able to then truly understand and co-create a BRAND SPIRIT based on the SOUL of the nation (the emotional and rational attributes/associations), to then begin to craft an authentic and relevant STORY, a STORY that had a visual and verbal experience, and when translated into experiences that could create the BRAND.

When done well, this creates engagement, which is the key objective for any brand.



Here is the Costa Rica "Brand Spirit", in English though it was created by FutureBrand in Spanish – to use the vocabulary and imagery, to capture the sentiment and aspirations of what the nation represents:

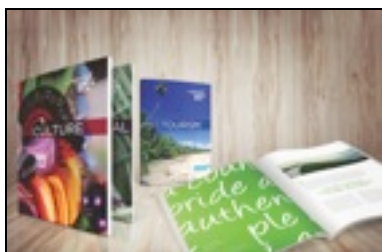
#### COUNTRY BRAND COSTA RICA – BRAND SPIRIT

*Costa Rica is dazzling, intense and  
sophisticated like a pearl  
It holds a diversity of treasures  
concentrated and preserved between two seas,  
bursting with life in all its forms  
A genuine, warm, proud and peaceful nation  
that has found in unity  
the path that best realises its true strength  
A land teeming with human talent,  
with an innovative, enterprising, clever, courageous, and cheerful spirit that  
enthral those  
who know what they want*



In combination, we were able to distil the key 'story' of the spirit to one word – Essential (or Essencial in Spanish) and this combined with a powerful image of an open hand (reaching for opportunity, and human) with the colour green and hand written text juxtaposed with Costa Rica in the centre – allowed for a powerful representation of the nation to all audiences, and by translating this to a single story.

We applied this to various materials, and aspects of the nation's story for tourism, for economic development, across channels and platforms that allowed different audiences to interact and engage with the story on their own terms. And, importantly – to allow the nation to advertise itself to any audience with consistency about what makes COSTA RICA essential...



After co-creating this, we then stepped back in to the frame to VALIDATE this work, and this is where the benefit of the depth of the study, at the start, paid off.

The results and feedback across international audiences, in particular, were overwhelmingly positive... as they played back key features, advantages and benefits that had been highlighted to contribute to a positive brand STORY and ENGAGEMENT level.

Further it was the poetic tone of the BRAND SPIRIT that really had hooked-in the Target Audiences, as it evoked the "Soul" of Country Brand Costa Rica....

The Rational factors include:

- *Commitment to Environment*
- *Responsible Sustainability*
- *Unique, Natural Beauty*

But it is the Brand Spirits' Emotional Engagement which really pulls us into the Brand:

It's: Welcoming, Proud, Sophisticated, Authentic, Active and Vibrant.



***"Between two seas, bursting with life"***

And, the lesson from this approach – for a Brand, whether a COUNTRY or Other – is the same:

To create a compelling brand position:

1. A brand must have at its CORE a STORY and in that STORY – a single compelling thought or lesson (e.g. ESSENTIAL for Costa RICA)
2. To engage, and create a relevant story - you must bring it to life through all senses – Vision, Sound, Taste, Smell, Texture, as well as Feelings
3. You must communicate to all stakeholders – through all the different Touch Points
4. And the STORY must enable them to define the experience and the engagement on their terms, interpretation and interests.

SO with that, we hope you enjoyed our STORY of how we helped to re-position and re-tell the STORY of Country Brand COSTA RICA.

