

## Sevin, E., Jiménez-Martínez, C., & Miño, P. *Nation Branding in the Americas: Contested Politics and Identities*. Routledge Focus. 2025, 114 pp.

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Crafting the brand of a nation requires a storytelling exercise on identity, belonging, history, and aspiration. What began as a strategic communication practice, heavily rooted in marketing and public relations scholarship, has evolved into an established field of scholarly inquiry and foreign policy tool through which states seek to manage reputation, project power, and negotiate their place in the international arena. While scholarship on this topic has significantly increased in the past quarter century, a key question remains: whose identity are nations putting at the forefront of their narrative and to what ends? In branding a nation, the narrative is never neutral, nor does it come without reflecting deeper struggles over national history, legitimacy, and economic dynamics. The American continent (or the Americas, as the authors cleverly point out, depending on your understanding of the geographical division) is no stranger to those afflictions. Particularly in contexts marked by colonial legacies and economic inequality, nation branding becomes not only a promotional policy but a site of negotiation, where confronting visions of who a nation is, who it seeks to be, and who it represents are contested, and hopefully, reimagined. As scholarship on nation branding continues to expand, there remains a pressing need to examine how these practices operate outside of Eurocentric frameworks. *Nation Branding in the Americas: Contested Politics and Identities* fills this gap by situating nation branding within the social, political, and historical

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context of the Americas.

The book begins by outlining the conceptual and empirical terrain of nation branding. In this sense, while the authors provide an overview of the concept, they also acknowledge the multidisciplinary nature of the field, as related disciplines such as public diplomacy and soft power blur conceptual boundaries and often overlap in research and practice. This is a testament to the disciplinary evolution of social sciences and humanities as more integrated approaches are recognized. The study of nation branding thrives on multidisciplinary, as it draws from history, international relations, economics, cultural studies, and marketing. It enables scholars and practitioners to establish connections between symbolic representations and material power, and to trace how the images of a nation are disseminated across media, markets, and borders.

Yet, this diversity of perspectives also poses challenges. Like public diplomacy, which has been criticized for lacking conceptual precision, nation branding struggles to establish consensus on its definition and disciplinary foundations to strengthen its conceptual boundaries. As the field matures, the need for analytical precision becomes increasingly pressing. Hence, nation branding, like public diplomacy, must balance disciplinary openness with rigor on what makes it a distinct object of study. The authors engage with this tension, illustrating the discrepancies between theory and practice. The case studies spanning multiple countries demonstrate the variety of variables that shape nation branding strategies in the region.

In this line, the authors constantly remind the reader that nation branding efforts do not happen in a vacuum. Particularly in the Latin American region, as seen in cases from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, or Peru, national narratives are constantly shaped by actors beyond government institutions. In some instances, global media portrayals become the primary reference points for a country's image, as was the case with Mexico. Although the concept *intermestic* is not explicitly referenced in the book, all chapters stress the importance of considering both internal and external audiences in understanding the complexities of building and sustaining a cohesive national narrative, emphasizing the interdependence between image management and engagement with foreign and domestic publics.

By highlighting the layered nature of nation branding, this book reveals the complex dynamics of Latin American identity. We see a region that still struggles between presenting itself more palatable to the Global North with a Westernized image and embracing its internal diversity including indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Paradoxically, nation branding efforts often perpetuate the oppression of these groups, even when they are presented as symbols of authenticity or cultural richness.

Ultimately, this book is a valuable guide to situate nation branding within the broader

context of scholarship and policy-making in the Americas. It highlights how branding initiatives intersect with foreign policy goals, cultural promotion, citizen participation, and public diplomacy, revealing the extent to which image-making is as much about governance and identity management as it is about persuasion.

While many countries in the Americas continue to direct their branding and diplomatic efforts towards the United States and Europe, the question of how these policies are shifting to appeal to Asia, particularly China, remains an important and evolving issue. In advancing the scholarship on nation branding from the Americas, there will be a need to address emerging geopolitical and economic relationships beyond the traditional transatlantic sphere. Understanding how the Americas, particularly Latin America, will recalibrate their narratives, symbols, and strategic partnerships becomes essential. Future research could build on this volume by examining how these changing dynamics reshape national representations, not only for external communication purposes, but also in domestic debates about identity, sovereignty, economic growth, and development.

*Nation Branding in the Americas: Contested Politics and Identities* stands as a significant and timely contribution to the study of nation branding and diplomacy. By situating nation branding within the political, economic, and social complexities of the Americas, the volume broadens the analytical lens through which such practices are understood. Taken together, these chapters make an essential reference for scholars and practitioners in the intersections of soft power, public diplomacy, nation branding, and global representation, and invites continued reflection on how nations in the Americas imagine, negotiate, and project their place in the world.

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Dr. Amanda Rodríguez Espínola holds a PhD in Media Studies from the University of Colorado Boulder. She earned a Master's degree in Public Diplomacy from the University of Southern California and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Universidad Iberoamericana. She teaches in the School of Communication at Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City and is a researcher for the North American Cultural Diplomacy Initiative (NACDI). She worked as a researcher at the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture at the University of Colorado Boulder, where she focused on the religious diplomacy of the Vatican, Tibet, and Pentecostal groups in Brazil. Her research focuses on the intersection of public diplomacy, media, and religion, with a particular interest in how video games and digital technologies can be tools for public diplomacy.