

National images, the international system, and territorial attractiveness: a study of endogenous and exogenous forces in the case of Mexico (2008-2018)

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Abstract

All nations possess various assets that create an image of national and cultural identity to the public abroad. This image can produce either attraction or repulsion, depending on a range of domestic and international factors. This paper aims to explore the endogenous and exogenous forces involved in the process of national image-making, which, in combination with the context of the international system, creates a specific sense of attractiveness for foreign audiences. The author uses data from the period between 2008-2018 related to Mexico to investigate and authenticate the force that has greater explanatory power in understanding the idea of territorial attractiveness embedded in soft power dynamics and public diplomacy.

Keywords: National image; international system; soft power; attractiveness; Mexico.

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1. The theory of national images under the force of the endogenous and exogenous systems

The purpose of this article is to examine the projection of Mexico's national and cultural identity through imagery, by utilizing the endogenous/exogenous model perspective. This process has been influenced by soft power, public diplomacy, and territorial attractiveness over a ten-year period between 2008 and 2018. This paper begins by defining fundamental theoretical concepts related to national images and highlighting the systemic tensions between the endogenous and exogenous forces involved. The focus then shifts to the specific case of Mexico.

This study puts forth two working hypotheses on country image with reference to the case of Mexico, in which the process of the endogenous/exogenous is interconnected and in constant flow. The article discusses how Mexico's image has been relatively stable concerning foreign policy, with a continuous narrative of a triad "emergent-dependent-exotic" seen as typologies of alterity. However, there are some notable fluctuations, mainly in news and social media, where the "barbaric enemy" typology is more prominent during the administration of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), and the "modern ally" typology was more visible during President Enrique Peña Nieto's Mexican Moment (MEMO) strategy of 2012-2014. Concerning the "macro image" of Mexico, i.e., considering all aspects, the exogenous force plays a more significant role, leading to a more stable result over time. However, concerning the "conjunctural image," mainly based on world news and social media, the endogenous force is more evident, resulting in more polarizing images that can be either negative or positive, depending on the year in question.

The subject of "national image" has been an area of interest for academics specializing in the literature of international relations and public diplomacy since the Cold War, and possibly even earlier. Over the years, this subject has also caught the attention of practitioners in the fields of international communications, political marketing, nation

branding, and tourism. A national image, viewed from a communications standpoint, is "the cognitive representation that a person holds of a given country, what a person believes to be true about a nation and its people" (Kunczik, 1997, p. 47). The link between national images and identities is through representational strategies as part of the political dynamics of the government. In most cases, foreign policy manages the exogenous image, frequently through public diplomacy, which Nicholas Cull refers to as a way to enhance the comprehension of a particular country, highlighting some of its most significant features to influence the international arena (Cull, 2009). Public diplomacy can have different styles, but it always involves the concepts of culture, identity, attractiveness, and/or soft power.

My theory proposes that the system of national images comprises of two interrelated forces -endogenous and exogenous- which explain how a nation defines and projects itself as part of its foreign policy, often in opposition to the public opinion narrative reflected in the news, locally or internationally. In the case of Mexico, the endogenous force, particularly the persistent failure to address problems such as corruption and social inequality, has had a negative impact on the country's image in the eyes of international media, but not on its multilateral diplomacy, tourism, and foreign investment. Historically, there has been a lack of a clear Mexican national image based on foreign policy principles, supported by a well-coordinated public diplomacy and territorial attractiveness strategy.

However, there have been indications of international concern due to media coverage of negative endogenous variables in Mexico, such as organized crime, drug trafficking, and the country's inability to administer justice and address social inequality and corruption. Mexican government officials, primarily diplomats, are aware of the need to address these issues and find feasible solutions within the scope of public policy spilling over into the foreign policy context. The selected study period is significant in understanding these phenomena since several negative Mexican endogenous events did not necessarily translate into a negative international image of Mexico. Still, they

produced a series of stigmas associated with "major threats," "rampant corruption," or a "failed state," which, nonetheless, did not alter the primary trajectory of the general narrative about the country abroad.

2. Mexico's negative image and the effects of soft power and territorial attractiveness

The article "National Images and International Systems" by K. E. Boulding, published in 1959, contains a fundamental assumption that has been the starting point of many debates regarding the projection of national images. The article states that in international systems, a country's image projected to the rest of the world significantly determines other nations' predisposition towards it. This assumption has been confirmed by several specialized studies that show the relationship between the perception of a country's image and its treatment in the foreign policy context by decision-makers. For instance, Larson (1997) and Vertzberger (1990) argue that a country's image that one country's leaders makes of another country on a cognitive level influences the type of predisposition and foreign policy they hold concerning that country.

Consequently, a positive country image elicits a favorable attitude from other nations, while a negative country image elicits the opposite. Studies suggest that countries act through their political elites, based on their perception of the world, whether real or not, instead of basing their actions on facts. Interestingly, international media opinion runs parallel to domestic events but reacts differently because it represents interests that differ from foreign policy. Thus, narratives follow exogenous interests, such as the creation of public opinion in relation to relevant issues, where facts are interpreted alongside the editorial line of the media in question.

The years covered in this study served as a wake-up call for Mexico, whose international image suffered a series of crises due to an extensive national and international media campaign associated with the violence unleashed by the three most recent administrations. This situation was initially an endogenous move that transformed into an exogenous force with a strong boomerang effect. The argument is that endogenous forces often intermingle with the exogenous, creating unpredictable effects. The former President Felipe Calderón's famous "war on drugs" became a fiasco and gave the government a negative reputation in foreign media. Later, the mandate of former President, Enrique Peña, increased the bloody fight between drug cartels and state military forces with little results, undermining his government's credibility on an international level. More recently, under the current government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, violent actions related to drug cartels have increased to the extent that the military has assumed domestic security in the streets.

Exogenous forces, such as international media, foreign human rights groups, diasporas, and travel advice provided by foreign governments, became very active in relation to the blatant violence during the ten-year period studied. Thousands of news, messages, photos, films, and tweets flooded the media ecosystem to highlight Mexico's failure in containing violence. In many ways, exogenous forces shaped Mexico's international perception under the labels of a "dangerous nation" with "barbaric crime," where the Narcos set the rules for all within the state.

According to Boulding's theory, a negative image of a nation can be interpreted as a warning sign for foreign policy elites. Other countries' perception of a negative image can lead to increased caution and distance, reinforced warnings to their citizens, or promotion of public diplomacy that evokes negative feelings, ultimately impacting the country's reputation. Unfortunately, as we will see later, Mexican government did not properly address the exogenous negative reactions to Mexico's social and political situation during the studied period, with strong policies and actions.

Despite media's consistent reporting of violence in Mexico and the government's failure to establish a broader foreign policy strategy to counterbalance the negative messages conveyed during the recent federal administrations, empirical data indicates that foreign policies of other nations towards Mexico have an ambivalent and polymorphic image, far from absolute extremes of friend or foe. Instead, foreign policies are adjusted in terms of their interests and agendas, resulting in a pragmatic stance.

For instance, despite the escalation of violence between 2008 and 2018, as reflected in intentional homicides per 100,000 people, which increased from 13 to 29 according to World Bank Data (2022), the tourist industry flourished in the same period. The number of visitors increased from 22.9 million to 41.4 million in the last year, as reported by the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, 2018). This data shows that while Mexico's negative image was reflected in the media, foreign policies towards the country were more influenced by pragmatic considerations than emotional responses.

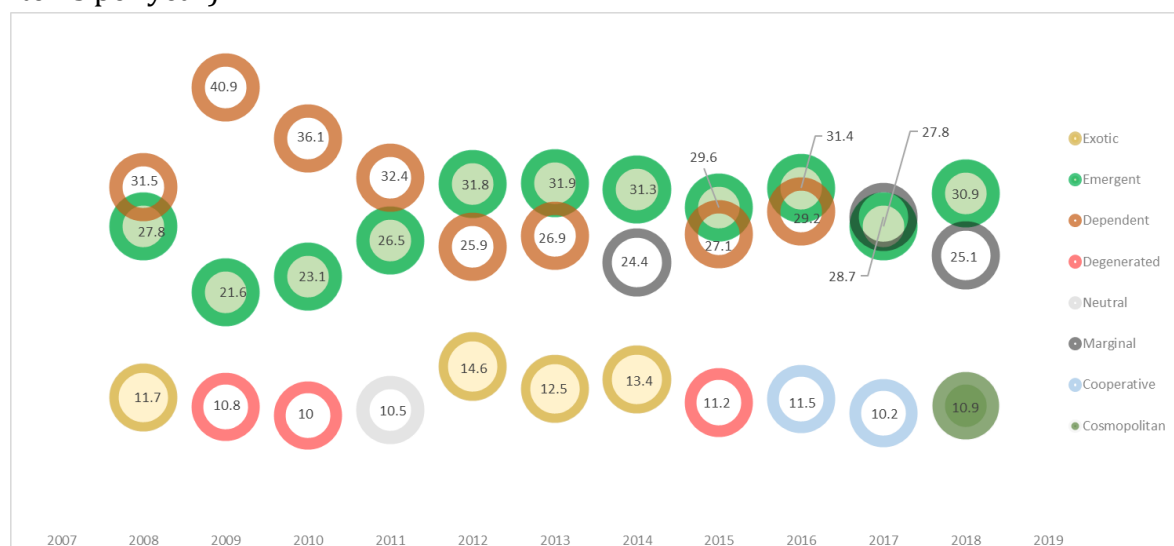
Over the last ten years, I have been working on the project "The Image of Mexico in the World" (Imagen de México en el Mundo²), which has studied 35 exogenous variables that inform how different types of national images are reflected in narratives. Chart 1 shows image data series from the years 2008 to 2018, a ten-year parenthesis in the image evolution that covers two different governments: those of Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto. This data includes all the variables and information collected in the study for the "Analytical Model on Country Image" (MACIP, in spanish). The model mainly reflects the structural trends of exogenous variables, such as official travel advice from other countries, international trade, tourism, or themes of films about Mexico/Mexicans.

The image model showcases the narrative of Mexico's country image based on the frequencies of the three main typologies identified: "dependent," "emergent," and "exotic," out of a possible nine, that shape how foreign audiences, including diplomats,

² See the webpage: Imagen de México en el Mundo <https://www.imagendemexico.org/>

perceive the nation. The final result is that the three primary images that Mexico projects abroad during the studied period are "dependent," "emergent," and "exotic," which account for approximately 60% of the information collected in any given year. This excludes the residual images that also appear but have little effect on the entire ten-year period, such as "cosmopolitan," "marginal," or "neutral." Most of these results reflect the exogenous variables mentioned earlier, which inform foreign policy perceptions of Mexico.³

Figure 1. Time series of three main typologies of images per year for Mexico (% of items per year)



Source. Author's own elaboration with data from the project Image of Mexico.

During the ten-year observation period, at least seven major image crisis events occurred that caused Mexico to project an extremely negative image abroad. These events produced an onslaught of media attacks that stigmatized Mexico in at least four ways: as an "infected place" in 2009 (due to the swine flu health alert), a "failed state" in 2010 (due to the war against the drug cartels), a "corrupted nation" (due to the

³ The present study was conducted based on a constructivist theory of country-image using a quant-qualitative methodology of information analysis based on Smart Data. The research focused on a ten-year observation period from 2008 to 2018. In the preliminary phase, we retrieved close to one million pieces of information from a wide range of sources, from which we selected approximately ten thousand statistically representative items for this study. The sources of information used in this study are diverse, including indicators from international organizations/institutions, news sources and newspapers, diplomatic reports, social networks (Twitter), Internet search engines (Google Trends), cultural industries (specifically of cinema), NGOs, independent rating agencies (Standard&Poor's), expert groups (Think Tanks), as well as public opinions from global society expressed through textual reactions on social networks or leaks (WikiLeaks, external travel advice, etc.), among others.

killings of students in Ayotzinapa, conflicts of interest involving the president's wife in 2014, and the escape of Joaquín Guzmán "El Chapo" from a high-security prison in March 2015), or a "threat country" (following Donald Trump's scornful declarations on Mexico during his bid for the US presidency in the summer of 2015). Undoubtedly, these were detrimental endogenous events that negatively affected Mexico's country image and translated into an exogenous force against the country. Despite potentially disastrous events for Mexico's image, surprisingly, its country image was a lot better than many assume.

To further explore Mexico's national image, it is important to consider the role of soft power and territorial attractiveness. Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye (2004), is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or force. For Mexico, soft power has traditionally been achieved through cultural diplomacy, tourism, and international cooperation for development (RMPE, 2017). These efforts have helped to position Mexico as a diverse and original country, with a rich cultural heritage. Territorial attractiveness, on the other hand, encompasses a variety of factors that contribute to a positive perception of a country or region. This can include things such as economic opportunities, cultural heritage, and infrastructure. For Mexico, the country's film industry, traditional cultural expressions, pre-Hispanic cultures, mariachi music, tequila, and artists such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, all contribute to its territorial attractiveness.

Mexico has traditionally relied on a combination of cultural diplomacy, vibrant tourism, multilateral diplomacy, and government-led cooperation for development to assert its soft power capacity. These tools allow Mexico to position itself as a rich, diverse, and original country with a unique cultural heritage, while also emphasizing its commitment to international cooperation and development. Through cultural diplomacy, Mexico seeks to promote its artistic, literary, and cultural expressions, highlighting the richness and diversity of its people and traditions. Its vibrant tourism industry also plays a key role, showcasing Mexico's stunning natural beauty, cultural

attractions, and high-quality services. Mexico's multilateral diplomacy and cooperation for development efforts, meanwhile, allow the country to engage with other nations and international organizations, and to help promote global economic growth and social progress. Together, these elements help create a positive perception of Mexico's national image, and project a powerful and influential soft power capacity to the world.

While some may not agree with these definitions, they do hold significant appeal for foreign audiences and have helped to shape a positive perception of Mexico's national image. This can also extend to subnational levels, including regional or city images. The importance of territorial attractiveness is further highlighted by experts in the field (Van Ham, 2001; Lara *et al.*, 2021) and has been developed to conform a field of scholarly research for Mexico (Lara, 2015). Overall, soft power and territorial attractiveness have played an important role in shaping Mexico's national image and should be considered when assessing its standing on the world stage. Below, three basic arguments in relation to the previous ideas will be developed.

To begin with, Mexico's unfavorable international image has not significantly impacted the country's foreign relations. Chart 1 shows that Mexico's overall national image has remained stable over the ten-year period studied, with little variation. Additionally, territorial attractiveness, tourism, and direct foreign investment did not experience significant declines, despite endogenous factors such as corruption and social inequality. However, exogenous factors, including the H1N1 pandemic and communication campaigns against Mexico, such as those led by Donald Trump, have contributed to the stigmatization of Mexico. Nonetheless, these negative exogenous factors have not seriously impacted Mexico's ability to interact with other countries.

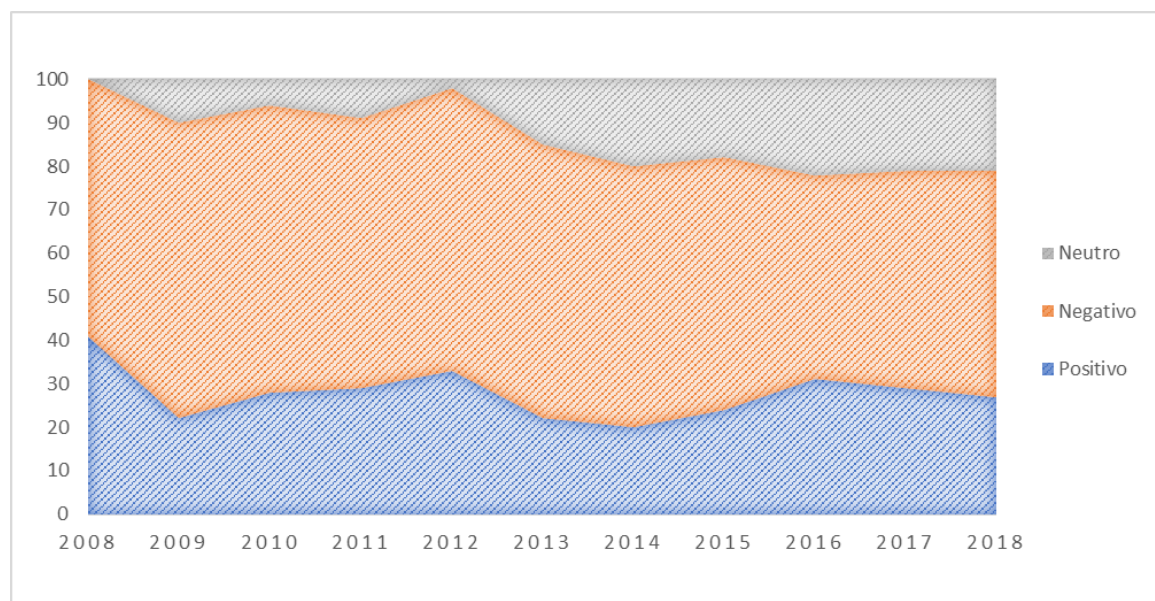
Secondly, Mexico has made a significant contribution to multilateral diplomacy, assuming a respectable role in at least two complex international missions: the COP-16 (2011) and the G-20 Summit (2012). These missions required other participants to

have faith in Mexico's diplomatic abilities and image, and the country performed successfully.

Thirdly, Mexico has a highly positive variable associated with its cultural traditions, including its cuisine, ethnic diversity, natural beauty, and historical heritage. These factors have a powerful impact on the country's cultural attractiveness and identity, working consistently in Mexico's favor.

The correlation between a country's internal reality and its external image is well-established (Jervis, 1970), and in the case of Mexico, the negative aspects of its internal reality have been reported extensively by the international media. This has revealed structural weaknesses in the country, as demonstrated by the trend of world news about Mexico shown in Chart 2. The sentiment analysis, based on data from the main global media agencies and taken from the Image of Mexico Project Database 2020, indicates that the perception of Mexico has been predominantly negative, with 2009 being the worst year and 2017 the most favorable. However, it is important to note that world news tends to favor short-term conjunctural analysis, and events that happen at the moment are reported without necessarily being connected to other factors or contexts. Despite this, it is clear that from this particular point of view, the variable associated with world news is predominantly negative towards Mexico.

Figure 2. Sentiment analysis about MEXICO in world news, 2008-2018



Source. Author's own elaboration with data from the project Image of Mexico.

According to widely accepted theories on international communications, the image a country projects to the world is often shaped by interests beyond its control. Manuel Castells has emphasized that global public opinion is largely influenced by the private media, which, due to its vast technological capacity, reduces nations to passive observers of themselves, or merely a node in a network, with the ability to exercise only institutional and military power (Castells, 2012, pp. 33-50). In other words, a country's image is increasingly subject to the symbolic representation chosen by the private media, and interests removed from foreign policy calculations, serving as a powerful exogenous force in shaping a country's image.

It is possible that some top officials in the Mexican government lacked a full understanding on how media works. As previously noted, the Foreign Affairs Ministry (SRE) recognizes that negative global media coverage of a country's image can lead to a foreign policy problem related to national security, which requires effective public diplomacy, media strategies, and symbolic actions. Despite the numerous negative

reports on Mexico in the international media, particularly in 2009, at the end of 2014, and throughout 2015, the results from a foreign policy perspective have been subpar. The government was unable to reverse international perceptions of Mexico as a violent country, and media focused on violence incidents, which have a powerful emotional impact, over other news. Furthermore, Mexico has not been able to create a powerful discourse based on soft power and public diplomacy strategies that emphasize territorial and cultural attractiveness. In critical moments, Mexico has been unable to present a balanced and rational discourse that incorporates positive aspects of its politics, society, and culture. Additionally, it is important to note that country brand actions were not introduced until the second half of Calderón's administration when no reliable country image diagnosis was available.

After the election of Institutional Revolutionary Party's candidate Enrique Peña Nieto to the presidency in 2012, the negative international trend was partially alleviated through a media strategy known as the Mexican Moment (MEMO). Additionally, his administration established several offices abroad to propel public diplomacy, including ProMexico, The Coordination of Nation Brand and International Media, The Council for the Promotion of Tourism, the Office for the International Promotion of Culture at the Ministry of Culture, and the great Mexican Editorial Fund for Economic Culture (FCE). However, the focus on short-term political marketing strategy and the promotion of only the economy and tourism led to a lack of comprehensive international public diplomacy strategy based on attractiveness, combined with a well-thought-out cultural policy to promote broader foreign policy interests, and depict the new government as one willing to address the country's internal problems. Additionally, extensive corruption within these offices hindered their success and effectiveness.

According to the "inherent bad faith model" proposed by Ole Holsti (1967), negative country images perceived by other nations tend to elicit hostile actions in return, which further reinforce a negative stereotype that is difficult to reverse, even when irrefutable proof to the contrary is available. In the case of Mexico, this model led to the troubling

logic of stigma: once the "failed-country," "country-corrupted," or "country-violent" image was confirmed by the media, other actors expected to receive negative images, which turned into self-fulfilling prophecies and hence reinforced a negative mindset every time another unfavorable event occurred. From a cognitive perspective, negative images have a pernicious effect, and it is very difficult to turn a negative perception into a neutral or positive one, as this requires concerted, long-term efforts by a country's institutions (Chen & Bargh, 1997). From this perspective, Ayotzinapa case (2014), Donald Trump's negative remarks on Mexico (2016), and the massive migration caravans framed as a threat to the United States (2017), were a few of the events that fueled critical moments in Mexico's imagery abroad.

3. Two working hypotheses on Mexico: Attractiveness or Repulsion

Two hypotheses have been put forward to explain Mexico's country image problems during the studied period. The first is an exogenous explanation, which highlights Mexico's proximity to the United States and its regional and cultural competition with Brazil, Argentina, and Spain. It is argued that in an anarchic and competitive international system, dominant powers and ambitious competitors tend to impose stereotypical country images on other nations to assert their dominion, control, and hegemony. In this context, countries are typically classified into three categories: allies, subordinates, or enemies. Accordingly, Mexico's negative image in the international system can be attributed to how it is depicted by the foreign policy of the United States, particularly its media, which caters to its material, political, and economic interests. The United States has a personal stake in classifying Mexico as a subordinate nation and assigning it stereotypes of an uncivilized, exotic, and violent country. This symbolic strategy creates a division of identity between the two countries and allows the United States to scapegoat Mexico for issues such as drug consumption, delinquency, and unemployment. Mexican politicians are forced to comply with this negative image,

which they bear the burden of. On the other hand, Brazil, Argentina, and to a lesser extent, Spain, may benefit from creating a negative image of Mexico to win foreign investment and tourism markets and to gain regional or global leadership as emerging powers.

The second hypothesis for explaining Mexico's negative international image is endogenous and focuses on internal factors related to decision-making at an institutional level, private sector actors, and civil society, in addition to the lack of a targeted foreign policy strategy. The failure to anticipate the negative impact of military and internal security actions against organized crime and drug cartels on the country's international image and the lack of a comprehensive and ambitious foreign policy strategy contributed to the persistence of Mexico's negative image in the short term. Furthermore, a lack of cooperation between the actors involved, particularly among media in the private sector, was also evident. The national media sensationalized the violence, thereby perpetuating a negative image of the country. The third factor contributing to Mexico's negative image was the public's fear and concern over the country's increasingly violent and unsafe cities. The need for a better country-image strategy is linked to social and political transformation within Mexico, as demanded by Javier Sicilia and his Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity in 2011, and recent events such as Ayotzinapa case (2014) and conflicts of interests among the government's upper echelons.

It is difficult to fully confirm one hypothesis over the other regarding Mexico's negative international image. However, it is possible that the explanation lies somewhere in between. On the one hand, external motivations may have led other nations to shape Mexico's image to suit their interests and gain benefits such as leadership, foreign investment, or even scapegoating. In addition, it is important to recognize that international prestige and honor are built through consistent, strategic short-term actions that incorporate soft power, territorial attractiveness, and diplomatic cooperation. In other words, a country's image is the result of both internal and external

factors, and a positive country image requires a long-term, concerted effort by institutions to create a comprehensive and effective public diplomacy strategy.

4. A Theory of National Images for Mexico

In terms of foreign policy, a nation's symbols are used to advance its goals and interests, and the image projected to the world is a representation of all of these. It is essential for Mexico to recognize that a favorable country image is essential for domestic governance and international reputation. Thomas Hobbes (1987), in laying the legal and political foundations of the Leviathan, emphasized that peace is secured by a strong, undivided government to which society has ceded the use of common power. In this context, the use of images, or imagination, is crucial in legitimizing and obeying the common power, as Hobbes highlighted in the importance of country images for consolidating power and order. Images facilitate social understanding and the building of political interest. Hobbes emphasized the importance of understanding the state as an image or the result of a cognitive experience or act of imagining. A positive image projected from the inside creates a sensation of security that predisposes other nations to assume a positive attitude. In essence, a positive image creates a good reputation. The significance of these ideas is evident in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger's work, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which describes how European powers of the nineteenth century created a sense of individual belonging and identity through symbols, public ceremonies, institutions, and discursive practices that not only facilitated governance but also conveyed a concise country image to other nations.

In the context of Mexico's foreign policy, it is crucial to recognize the importance of properly understanding and managing the country's image. The responsibility for Mexico's international reputation and image falls under the purview of the SRE and its officials, as stated in the Mexican Foreign Service Law (Article 2, paragraphs VI, VIII, and IX), where these issues should be discussed, instituted, and implemented.

Historically, Mexico projected an image based on a principled policy of self-determination and non-intervention, selective opposition to North American postures, and a persistent exportation of a cultural discourse based on Pre-Columbian and indigenous cultures, as well as key contemporary thinkers and artists. This approach resulted in "relative gains" from the diffusion of a more exotic, traditional Mexico. However, in the Peña Nieto administration, Mexico's foreign policy shifted toward a "post-modernization" of its country image, with a focus on promoting the economy, trade, investment, tourism, and, to a lesser extent, multilateral diplomacy, cooperation, and cultural promotion. This approach lacked a well-coordinated inter-institutional communications strategy, exacerbating the country's international image "crisis". The current approach may be seen as an "absolute gains" approach, based on fragmented, uncoordinated zero-sum strategies. Therefore, the crux of the matter may lie in the lack of a coordinated approach to managing the country's image.

From an international communications perspective, Mexico's country-image crises were addressed belatedly and without adequate resources, often through public relations and marketing strategies that failed to recognize them as crises of international political perception. Specialized literature in international relations establishes a causal link between national images and systemic processes, which are particularly evident in times of crises such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, or serious domestic disputes (Jervis, 1970, 1976, and 1997). Similarly, Ole R. Holsti reminds us that "belief systems" play a crucial role in cognitive processes at the international level, allowing us to understand and interpret images (Holsti, 1962, p. 247). Based on this reasoning, it is up to the nation in question to determine how it wants its images to be perceived by the outside world. Foreign services act based on their definition of the situation and the country images of the nations involved, which largely depend on the meaning-making processes embedded in the belief systems of decision-makers, regardless of whether these images accurately reflect reality. In fact,

as Quincy Wright notes (1955, p. 11), conflicts often arise not from objective realities, but from distorted images.

The creation and projection of a country's image from a foreign policy perspective can be viewed through the lens of social constructivism (Jackson, 2006), which emphasizes the role of ideas in international relations. It involves creating a coherent ideational apparatus through strategic public and cultural diplomacy discourses to change the understanding of nations inter-subjectively, consisting of social representations, identity constructs, political and economic interests, and cultural contexts. As Frédéric Martel puts it:

On a desperate search for its identity, Brazil has headed, along with India, the battle for cultural diversity in the name of the “southern” countries. It is eager to defend its interests vis-à-vis the United States, but also to take a stand against the cultural arrogance of Old Europe, particularly Lisbon and Madrid. This is why Brazil wants to revive economic and cultural relations with its neighbors, including Chávez's Venezuela, China, and India, as much as it does with the United States and Europe. (2011, p. 424)

This process requires structured relational communication processes through narratives capable of creating legitimacy, moral authority, and diplomatic leadership. The goal is to influence mainstream media, popular culture, celebrities, and diplomatic agendas that reflect a rhetoric and poetics that garner global public opinion's approval. Examples of this relational effect include Brazil and India, which combine epic personal narratives, justice efforts, diplomatic leadership, cultural representation, worthy causes, and economic strength to project an attractive, well-rounded image that is almost impervious to criticism. The Mexican diplomatic elite could learn from these observations to construct and project an appealing country image.

5. Final Observations

Mexico's foreign policy faces the challenging task of projecting a positive image to the outside world. The country's image has undergone a drastic change in recent years, and a new strategy is required. To start, there must be an acceptance that the current situation falls short of expectations, and the international perception of Mexico's image is not in line with its interests. According to Mauricio Tenorio, an expert on the history of the country's international image, Mexico's modernization in the late 19th century led to the development and problems of the modern world (Tenorio, 1998, p. 28). As a result, it is crucial to reflect on what Mexico is, what it wants to be, what it aims to preserve, and what it needs to change. To achieve this, there needs to be a revision of continuities and discontinuities. One issue is that the international projection of a unique identity is exclusionary as it requires the negation of other identities. To address this, Mexico needs to adopt a myriad of relative, temporal discourses that allow for the constant renewal of the national narrative and poetics that it wishes to convey to other nations.

To develop a new strategy for projecting a positive image to the outside world, Mexico must engage in a critical examination of its past and present. This involves deconstructing the notion of Mexican modernity that has been rooted in the post-revolutionary concept of progress and nationalism and recognizing the flaws in the State's portrayal of itself as a philanthropic ogre, as Octavio Paz observed. In terms of discontinuities, Mexico's image must draw from nations that exemplify democratic practices free of corruption and reflect a free, well-informed, and healthy society. It should portray a country that is integrated into the global economy and acknowledges its impact, as well as a diverse, cosmopolitan nation with a dynamic, pluralistic, and receptive culture.

From a scientific standpoint, our approach to projecting a positive country image should be grounded in a well-defined foreign policy framework, one that outlines

specific objectives and utilizes public and cultural diplomacy to achieve those aims. Furthermore, our theoretical underpinnings should focus on constructing a dynamic country image that reflects a living cultural representation, rather than relying on static, outdated notions of the past. To bring about this change, it is imperative that we reevaluate our current approach to country image and prioritize it within Mexico's foreign policy, dedicating the necessary resources to a long-term, comprehensive campaign.

In my opinion, crafting Mexico's international image is too crucial to be entrusted solely to advertising experts, and must be recognized as a matter of national security. This is a subject that demands serious consideration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) should integrate it into its institutional DNA, dedicating time and resources for conducting studies and establishing a diplomatic style in this area that includes territorial attractiveness and a tailored approach to soft power. To achieve this, a great deal of coordination between inter-institutional actors, the public and private sectors, academics, and civil society is required. The amount of investment that Mexico is willing to make will depend on its aspirations in world affairs, but modern technologies can make the process more manageable. To build a more effective soft power, Mexico must modernize its country image in line with current attraction centers, such as social media, tablet and smartphone apps, a sophisticated internet, television and radio presence, and, particularly, the creation of linked content.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates the challenges involved in managing a national image for any country, given the various internal and external factors that often influence their capabilities. This is certainly a complex issue for most states and their foreign policies. Despite this, Mexico possesses the resources and potential to project a much more favorable and significant image, both in terms of its territory and culture. Based on the lessons learned from the 2008-2018 period examined in this study, it is imperative for Mexico to take these experiences seriously and leverage its

strengths to avoid being perceived negatively and lacking the ability to attract and influence important decisions in global affairs.

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