

Varia



# Gender Gap Impact on Nation Branding, Image and Reputation Building: Case Study from the Arab World

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**Abstract:** In order to expand their economy and exports and attract foreign investments, tourists and talents, governments are increasingly adopting nation branding strategies as part of their public diplomacy to promote their image and build their reputation on the international scene. Some Arab countries, mainly countries from the Gulf region, have massively invested in branding strategies to raise their profile and build their image abroad. However, Arab countries face negative images related to, among others, gender equality and women's rights. This paper tries to highlight the impact of gender gap on nation branding, image and reputation building of three Arabic countries: United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the importance of including this dimension when nations are addressing their image and reputation.

**Keywords:** nation branding, gender gap, country image, country reputation, Arab world

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*Impact de l'écart entre les genres sur l'image de marque nationale, image et construction de la réputation. Étude de cas du monde arabe*

**Résumé:** Afin de développer leur économie et leurs exportations et d'attirer les investissements étrangers, les touristes et les talents, les gouvernements adoptent de plus en plus des stratégies d'image de marque nationale dans le cadre de leur diplomatie publique afin de promouvoir leur image et de renforcer leur réputation sur la scène internationale. Certains pays arabes, principalement des pays du Golfe, ont massivement investi dans des stratégies de marque afin de renforcer leur visibilité et leur image à l'étranger. Cependant, les pays arabes sont confrontés à des images négatives liées, entre autres, à l'égalité des sexes et aux droits des femmes. Cet article tente de mettre en évidence l'impact de l'écart entre les sexes sur l'image de marque nationale, l'image et la réputation de trois pays arabes: les Émirats arabes unis (EAU), le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite (KSA), ainsi que l'importance d'inclure cette dimension lorsque les nations abordent leur image et la réputation

**Mots-clés:** Image de marque nationale, écart entre les genres, image du pays, réputation du pays, monde arabe

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### Introduction

In an era of globalization, extended competition and mediatization, nations are looking to increase their competitiveness on the international scene by boosting their economies, attracting foreign investment, tourists and talents, and by enhancing exports and work opportunities. Countries are constantly under the eye of the international public opinion. “They are publicly rated and compared according to their economic development, their political stability, the effectiveness and morality of their national and international policies or the attractiveness of their culture” (Werron, 2014).

According to the Reputation Institute, a one-point increase in a country’s reputation leads to a 0.9% increase in the proportion of tourists per capita and 0.3% increase in export rates (Reputation Institute, 2018). Gilboa and Nye note that in our modern society, building a positive image and reputation is the key to have access to cultural, economic and political competitiveness (Gilboa, 2008; Nye, 2004). As Anholt so aptly said, “if a country has a good image, everything is easy; if it has a bad or weak image, everything is twice as hard and costs twice as much” (Anholt, 2007).

Therefore, a country’s image and reputation are gaining a lot of attention since they will highly affect the level of foreign investment, tourism, exports and attractiveness for education and labor market (Buhmann, 2016). Governments are allocating significant resources and adopting nation branding and reputation building techniques to boost their international image and competitiveness (Anholt, 2007). Regardless of the country’s size and geographical location, and from the most developed to the smallest developing country, only a few nations are turning away from nation branding techniques. The Arab world is also giving increased importance for nation branding. From the Gulf region (UAE, Qatar, Oman and recently KSA) to the Middle East (Jordan and Egypt), several Arab countries embraced nation branding to raise their country’s profile or to re-brand their weak image embedded in negative stereotyping, especially in the West. Indeed, there is a prevailing stereotype that Arab countries are religious, supportive to religious terrorism and conservatism, with little, if any, regards to women’s rights (Knowledge@Wharton, 2017).

In the 1980s, UAE was the first Arab country to understand the strategic importance of a non-oil sustainable economy, as studies predicted that oil resources in the region would last only 30 years (Reuvid, 2007). UAE adopted nation branding strategy to promote itself as an international financial platform, thus reducing its dependency on oil and diversifying its revenue sources (Zeineddine, 2017). Specifically, Dubai was able to transform its image from a city in the desert with tribes and camels to a high-tech modern cosmopolitan city reputed for its luxury shopping, skyscrapers, modern architecture, lifestyle, world gastronomy and themed parks. It became the seventh most visited city in the world with 16.7 million visitors

(O'Hare, 2018) and the twentieth strongest and most valuable nation brand (\$707 billion) among 100 leading countries (Brand Finance, 2018). Among other Arab states, KSA and Qatar rank respectively twenty first and fortieth, with nation brand valued at \$677 billion and \$256 billion (Brand Finance, 2018). However, despite the constant growth of the value of these nations as a brand, they rank poorly on the Country RepTrak index, a yearly survey conducted in the G8 countries to discover their perceptions about 55 countries with the highest GDP. UAE ranks 36<sup>th</sup> and Qatar 42<sup>nd</sup>, while KSA ranks almost at the bottom of the list at the 51<sup>st</sup> position (Reputation Institute, 2018).

This paper tries to provide an understanding of this contradictory finding by formulating the following research question: How come a nation can perform as a nation brand value but still suffer from such negative image and reputation? The answer to this question relies on the difference between three concepts: Nation branding, country image and country reputation. Three hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Gender gap does not have an impact on nation brand value

H2: Gender gap has a negative impact on country's image and reputation

H3: A successful nation branding strategy does not necessarily have a positive impact on a country's image and reputation.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. *Nation branding*

Simon Anholt introduced the concept of nation branding, arguing that branding and marketing tools related to commercial brands can be applied to brand a nation and can help in shaping a positive country image and reputation (Anholt, 2002). However, if the concept of Nation Branding (NB) as a field of study appeared at the beginning of the twenty first century, Szondi argues that place branding and place marketing are an earlier variant of NB and can be considered more of a "tactical rather than a strategically planned, holistic and coherent activity" (Szondi, 2008, p. 4). Aronczyk considers that, after World War II, states started considering the space of a nation as a valuable marketable resource in the growing competition for accessing global investment and economy and tourist growth (Aronczyk, 2013). If we put the concept in a wider historical perspective, it could be claimed that world fairs and international exhibitions are the early forms of nation branding (Mitchell, 1989), and that symbols, currency, anthems, and distinctive names demonstrate the early attempts of nations to brand themselves (Olins, 2002).

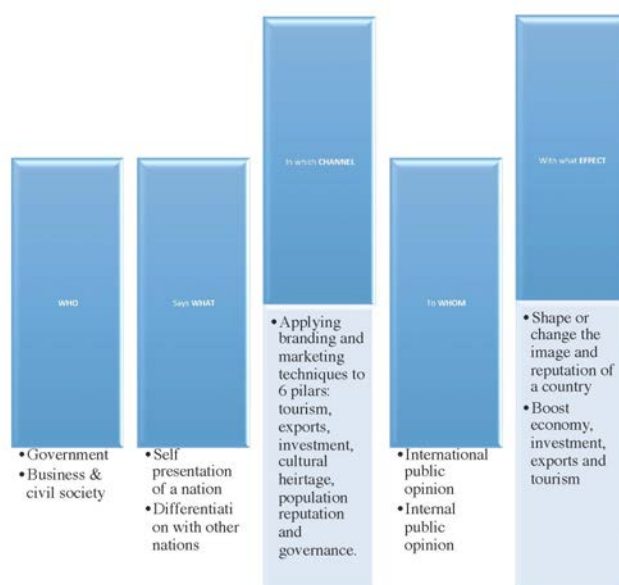
While NB is firmly established in the marketing and branding field, the growing number of literature, books, articles, conferences from experts from other disciplines, such as public diplomacy, media studies and sociology, show the importance that the concept is gaining from governments to positively change a

nation's behavior, perception and image. In the same marketing approach, Gudjonsson and Fullerton note that nation branding is the strategic act of shaping or changing the image, reputation and attitude towards a nation by using branding techniques (Gudjonsson, 2005; Fullerton & Kendricks, 2017). Anholt summarizes the concept in what he called the nation brand hexagon, explaining that NB could enhance a country's reputation through six components: tourism promotion, exports, investment and immigration, cultural heritage, population's reputation and governance (Anholt, 2007).

Szondi, in a public diplomacy approach, considers NB as "the strategic self-presentation of a country with the aim of creating reputational capital through economic, political and social interest promotion at home and abroad" (Szondi, 2008, p. 5). NB is often linked to public diplomacy and recognized as one of the most prominent soft power tool to promote national interest and value abroad. According to Bisa, whether nation branding and public diplomacy are seen as the same or different with a strong theoretical connection, they are increasingly used together by governments in a calculated manner to improve economies and international relations by using communication and marketing techniques (Bisa, 2013). For Fan, NB is considered as a "process" targeting international public opinion and carried out to create, assess or transform a country's image and reputation (Fan, 2010). Dinnie highlights the importance of perceptions, acknowledging that brand perception pre-exists in the consumer's mind and is not "a controllable creation of the marketing function" (Dinnie, 2016).

Regardless of the approach to define the concept, NB is seen as a puzzle with multiple layering, actors, stakeholders and challenges. One of the main concerns is that countries do not have tangible products or services to sell, thus increasing its complexity (Buhmann, 2016).

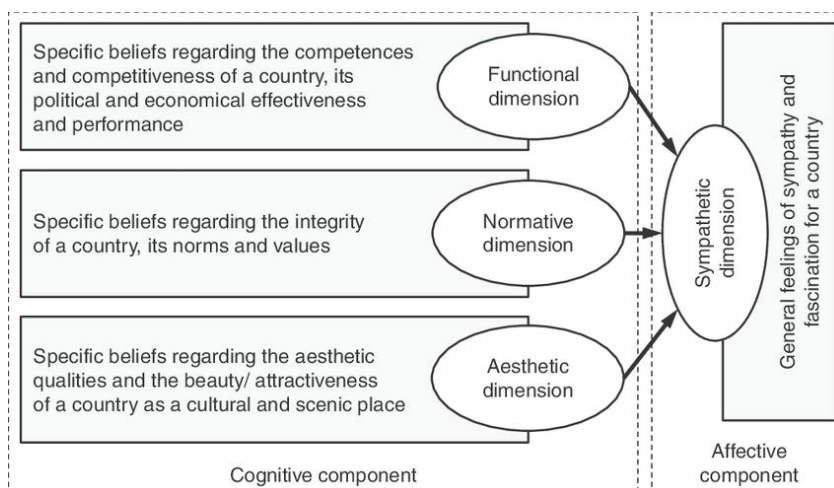
As NB is mainly a mass communication act, in this paper, we will use Lasswell's communication model as a basic framework to define NB (figure 1) and will later on add the feedback and noises. The model was developed in 1948 by Harold D. Lasswell and is considered one of the most influential communication models. It has 5 key elements to analyze and evaluate the communication process:



**Figure 1.** Lasswell's communication model applied to Nation Branding

### 1.2. Country image and reputation

From a marketing perspective, country image is the aggregate of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have towards a country (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). It is built through personal experiences, like traveling, cultural exchange and education, but mainly through the high influence of mass media (Kunczik, 1997). For Anholt (Anholt, 2011), an image is a kind of a *cliché* or a shortcut we have towards other people, nation or culture. In social psychology, this concept is related to social categorization: a psychological process in which we organize our environment in categories. With the overload of information we receive every day, we need these simplified categories in order to have quick access to the information about a certain object or subject and to guide our action in terms of attraction, rejection or insignificance (Doob, 1948). In his 4D model, Buhmann considers country image as an attitude towards a nation, its history, culture, territory and politics with two components: cognitive and affective (Buhmann, 2016).



**Figure 2.** *The 4D Model of country image (Buhmann, 2016)*

The cognitive component is what people know about the functional dimension (politics and economy), the normative dimension (norms and values) and aesthetic dimension (culture and scenic places). The affective component is a general feel towards and emotional appeal of a country. As presented in the model, the affective component is the result of the three cognitive components, i.e. the opinions and beliefs about a country's functional, normative and aesthetics have a direct impact on the general emotional feeling and sympathy for a country. Another interesting contribution of this definition is to consider the image as an attitude: a mental readiness to react and respond in a certain way towards individuals, objects or situations constructed through experience (Allport, 1935). Attitudes are stable and difficult to modify, which means that changing a country's mental image is extremely difficult to alter (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002; Anholt, 2007). For Fan, country image is a "nebulous concept" that is difficult to define as it results from a complex process of interactions between perceptions (Fan, 2008). He developed a conceptual framework for nation image based on six perspectives: self-perception (or identity), perception of other nations (how we see outside world), construed image (how we believe our image is for the world), actual image (nation's reputation), currently projected image (image currently created and communicated) and desired future image (future perception that a nation would like to have by other nations). He introduced the concept of gap between these perspectives and the need to identify the gaps and discrepancies between these different images when undertaking nation branding process.

If country image is understood as the aggregate of opinions, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that individuals have towards a nation, country reputation is the synthesis of them as a result of communication process (Thiessen & Ingenhoff,



2011). According to Buhmann, reputation “is not an individual’s attitude (image), but the public esteem in which a social entity — in this case a country — is held” (Buhmann, 2016, p. 39). It is a social judgement, an international public opinion on a nation and not an individual attitude meaning that a negative reputation can affect the country, leading to isolation on the international scene and social pressure on the national level. Passow et al (2005) introduced six dimensions of a country’s reputation: emotional appeal (attractiveness, respectfulness and trustworthiness), physical appeal (beauty and likeness), financial appeal (overall good economic environment), leadership appeal (charismatic leadership), cultural appeal (cultural heritage, history and entertainment) and social appeal (social responsibility as a member of the global community and the manifest support for good causes). This model served as a basis to create the Country RepTrak, a standardized reputation measurement model for companies and government developed by the Reputation Institute (2019) and will be used later in the research paper. Clearly, reputation is “one of the most valuable assets of [a country’s] people” and countries should work seriously on building a positive international reputation and finding means to influence it (Anholt, 2010, p. 8).

Despite the complexity of the concepts and the process of building and altering country image and reputation, nations are allocating substantial means to build or change their image, whether through long term nation branding strategies or through large-scale short term mass media campaigns.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.2. Research Design*

Following the above literature review, the objective of the research is to analyze the impact of gender gap on nation branding, image and reputation building of UAE, Qatar and KSA. These countries are selected for two main reasons. First, they are the only countries from the Gulf region to allocate significant budgets and government bodies to promote their image abroad. Secondly, in the Arab world, they are also the only countries with long-term, clear and coherent vision and strategy for nation branding with specific targets. For instance, Jordan and Egypt did have some nation branding activities, but they were more of short-term communication campaigns rather than a real consistent nation branding strategy.

The study will measure the correlation between gender gap index and two branding indexes: Brand Finance and Country RepTrak. It is carried out over a period of 8 years<sup>1</sup> (2011-2018) and will use the ranking to allow effective comparisons between countries. Three clusters of countries will be monitored: the

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<sup>1</sup> Qatar started to be ranked in 2011 in the Country RepTrak. It was not among the 55 countries with the highest GDP to figure in the survey.

first cluster includes UAE, Qatar and KSA, the main target of our research; the second cluster embraces the top three ranking countries in the Brand Finance index, while the third cluster consists of the top three countries from the Country RepTrak index. By doing so, we will try to study the following:

- The correlation between gender gap and nation brand value and country reputation for the selected Arab countries to see the impact, knowing that Arab countries suffer from negative image regarding the gender equality (among other negative images).
- The correlation between gender gap, country reputation and countries with a strong nation brand value ranking in the top 5 (cluster 2).
- The correlation between gender gap, nation brand value and countries with strong positive international reputation ranking in the top 5 (cluster 3).

The three clusters will be compared to the Gender Gap and Country RepTrak indexes in order to test the following hypothesis:

H1: Gender gap does not have impact on nation branding value

H2: Gender gap has an impact on country's image and reputation

H3: A successful nation branding strategy does not necessarily have a positive impact on a country's image and reputation.

### *2.3. Nation Branding Strategies of UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia*

In less than 60 years, the Gulf region has shifted from a tribal lifestyle with mainly deserts and beaches to extremely wealthy nation-states with top notch technology and infrastructure, skyscrapers and high-class hotels and shopping malls, thanks to the tremendous oil and gas reserves that have been discovered. Therefore, they needed bold nation branding strategies to tighten the gap between their international image and their fast growing economy and wealth (Zeineddine, 2017). UAE was the first to promote itself on the international scene in the 1980s, followed by Qatar in the mid-1990s, while KSA was the latest country to jump on the nation branding bandwagon.

According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2018 Global Competitiveness Report, the UAE is the 27<sup>th</sup> most competitive economy in the world and the first in the MENA region. Between the seven emirates that form the UAE, Dubai was the first to promote itself as a global financial center in the early 1980s through the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing. The UAE, and mainly Dubai, is now "recognized as a leading financial and transportation hub with world-class infrastructure" (The Global Competitiveness Report 2018 , 2018 ) and is attracting the largest amount of tourists and investors in the region. Besides investing in technology, infrastructure, e-governance, airports, airlines, several free trade zones, luxurious and expensive shopping malls and estates (i.e. Burj Khalifa, Palm Island), world-class events and exhibitions (i.e. Dubai 2020), hotels, educational institutions and museums (Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi,

Sheikh Zayed National Museum with the British Museum), the UAE government created in 2017 a “Soft Power Council” aiming to “increase the country’s global reputation abroad by highlighting its identity, heritage, culture and contributions of the UAE to the world” (The UAE Soft Power Strategy, 2019). Furthermore, in 2017, UAE allocated 1.31% of its economic output to humanitarian aid, way more than Norway and Sweden, the traditional humanitarian countries (The Global Competitiveness Report 2018 , 2018 ).

In 2008, Qatar launched Qatar National Vision 2030, aiming to transform the nation “into an advanced country by 2030, capable of sustaining its own development and providing for a high standard of living for all of its people for generations to come,” mainly through human, social, economic and environmental development. (Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008). However, the branding process of Qatar started in fact in the mid-1990s with the launch of Al Jazeera (Zeineddine & Nicolescu, 2018) and the massive investments to transform the landscape of its capital Doha with shopping malls, skyscrapers, sport stadiums and museums. Yet the National Vision marked a bolder and comprehensive approach, thus providing a framework to achieving the goal and transforming Qatar into a knowledge-based society and into a hub for cultural and sports events. Indeed, if the UAE gained worldwide reputation as a financial and tourism center, Qatar is differentiating itself by focusing on sports and cultural events (for instance, Qatar will host the FIFA World Cup in 2022) and by aspiring to become a knowledgeable society (Gremm et al, 2018). Therefore, Qatar allocated extensive investment in the education system (free education for all) and in the Qatar Foundation’s Education City, a large campus with multiple educational and research institutes, start-up incubators, technology parks and cultural institutions (Education City, 2019). What was once “a poor British protectorate” became one of the wealthiest countries in the world, ranking 30<sup>th</sup> on the Global Competitiveness Report ahead of KSA (World Economic Forum, 2018) and 1<sup>st</sup> to start a career (Best Countries , 2018).

Launched in 2016, the KSA Vision 2030 is an ambitious agenda to modernize the country and reduce its dependence on oil and to diversify its economy in order to become “the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, a global investment powerhouse and a global hub connecting three continents” (Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, 2016 , p. 6). Unlike UAE and Qatar, which were able to reduce their dependency on oil, KSA’s numerous diversification attempts failed and around 87% of the country’s revenues are still oil-based (Amon & Parasie, 2019). Large funds are allocated by the government and fast-paced ambitious investments are undertaken, such as King Abdullah Economic City or the Neom Project, a 500-billion-dollar mega city, including luxurious hotels, villas and homes, along with media, technology and innovation centers (Pukas & Flanagan, 2019). On the societal level, the road map has also an ambitious social contract aiming to increase social spending and giving access to education and employment to youth, who represent around 50% of the population (World Economic Forum, 2018). Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman established the MisK Foundation, a non-profit organization aiming at developing

programs and partnership with local and international organizations in order to encourage learning and leadership of Saudi youth through education, media, culture and technology (MisK Foundation, 2016). KSA is also introducing significant changes to liberalize the country and go off the conservatism by loosening regulations and taking several measures, like allowing women to drive, to travel without a male guardian and to attend sports events in stadium or by allowing movie theatres and live music festivals featuring international celebrities. Despite the massive investments and fast-paced reforms, Vision 2030 is facing significant barriers (economic deflation, international censure, foreign workers exodus, ultraconservatism rejecting liberalization) and skepticism with regards to reaching the ambitious targets in such a short term (14 years).

#### *2.4. Gender Equality in the Arab World*

Women in the Arab world have been marginalized for centuries. However, significant progress in women and girls rights is being made since 1995 when new constitutions and legislations have started to appear, ensuring less discrimination and better protection for women (ESCWA, 2016). All Arab states have now ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and most of the Arab states have created specific governmental bodies to address the issue. Significant improvements have been especially made in girls' access to education, women's health and participation to political life. Since 1995, indicators have showed a notable effort in access to primary and higher education, school enrolment and literacy to the extent that universities' female enrolment has surpassed male enrolment in several Arab countries (including UAE, KSA and Qatar). Since 1995, the Arab region has made tremendous effort on expectancy and maternal mortality, with female life expectancy climbing from 68 years in 1998 to 72.5 years in 2015 (ESCWA, 2016). In 2006, UAE women were granted the right to vote and, in 2015, it was the first Arab country to appoint a woman as speaker of parliament. In 2011, a royal decree by King Abdullah gave women access to vote and to stand for municipal elections and, in 2013, another degree guaranteed 30 seats over 150 in the parliamentary Shura Council (The Guardian, 2013). Despite noticeable progress in Qatar for women's access to healthcare and education, the country did not adopt any specific measures related to political participation and there is no women representation in the single/lower chamber of national parliaments or equivalent bodies (ESCWA, 2016).

Despite these meaningful achievements, women in the Arab world still face discriminations at all level that are reinforced by local laws. This makes it difficult for them to integrate the labor market and participate in decision-making, with a global gender gap ranking last behind South Asia (World Economic Forum, 2018). The increasing number of women participation in decision making and in public life was not followed by gender-sensitive laws and policies. On the other hand, the progress in education did not develop along with increased access to employment. Indeed, women participation in the labor market in the Arab world remains the lowest in the world (23% on average), in addition to the fact that women are still

confined in traditional gender role jobs (education and care sectors) or lower status jobs (ESCWA, 2016). Public perception and stereotyping remain significant and persistent barriers to gender equality in the Arab world. This shows the limitation of approaches focusing on tangible indexes, like poverty, health, economy, power and decision making that do not take into consideration intangible scores, such as social stereotyping and media stereotyped portrayal of women for instance (UNECE, 2015).

### *2.5. Selected Indexes*

To measure country reputation, this research will resort to the Country RepTrak Index developed by Reputation Institute, a US firm that has refined its Index based on the Passow study (Passow et al, 2005). The model includes 11 attributes divided into three dimensions: effective government, advanced economy and appealing environment (Reputation Institute, 2017). The index publishes annually a report on the reputation of the 55 countries<sup>2</sup> with the highest GDP. The study is conducted with a sample of approximately 60,000 people from G8<sup>3</sup> countries. The model states that a country's reputation corresponds to the country's overall appeal corresponding to the 11 attributes that can be used as a road map by a country to build or change its reputation (Berens et al, 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> At the beginning, the study was done on 50 countries but since 2014, it has included 55 countries, with the exception of 2016 when the sample was 70 countries.

<sup>3</sup> Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United States and the United Kingdom



**Figure 3.** *Country RepTrak 3 dimensions and 11 attributes* (Reputation Institute, 2018).

The second index used, the Country Brand Finance Index, was developed by Brand Finance. It aims at calculating the strength and value of the “Brand” of 100 countries. The Nation Brand Strength Index (BSI) is calculated from a position ranking between 100 countries pays and “is determined by reference to performance on dozens of data<sup>4</sup> points across three key ‘pillars’; Goods & Services, Investment and Society. These are divided into sub-pillars; Tourism, Market, Governance and People & Skills” (Brand Finance, 2018, p. 16).

The Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) will be used to measure the impact of gender gap on NB and countries’ image and reputation. Developed in 2006 by the World Economic Forum, a nonprofit foundation in Geneva, GGGI measures gender-based disparities related to economic, education, health and political dimensions over time. The index provides a general ranking over roughly 150 countries<sup>5</sup> allowing effective comparison between countries. The effectiveness of this index relies on the fact that it “rewards countries for smaller gaps in access to these resources, regardless of the overall level of resources and ranks countries according to their proximity to gender equality rather than to women’s empowerment” (World Economic Forum, 2018, p. 4).

<sup>4</sup> Data sources: World Economic Forum, World Economic Outlook, IMD and DI Intelligence

<sup>5</sup> The measured countries vary between 135 and 149.

2.6. Results and Discussions

Due to the large amount of data, we selected Table 1 which shows the evolution and ranking of the three indexes for the selected Arab countries: Qatar, KSA and UAE. The results for cluster 2 and 3 are summarized in Tables 2 and 3 in the appendix of the research which present the evolution of the 3 indexes related to the first three countries on the RepTrak Index and Brand Finance Index.<sup>6</sup> The different rankings were transformed into a common scale over 100 for comparison purposes.

**Table 1.** Country RepTrak, Gender Gap and Brand Value of Qatar, KSA and UAE from 2011 till 2018

Year	Country RepTrak: Ranking	Country RepTrak: Ranking/100	Brand Finance: Value Bn \$	Brand Finance: Ranking/100	Gender Gap Index: Ranking	Gender Gap Index: Ranking/100
<b>QATAR</b>						
2011			98	47	111/135	82.22
2012			135	49	112/135	82.96
2013			184	39	115/142	80.99
2014	34/55	61.82	256	37	116/142	81.69
2015	43/55	78.18	235	36	122/145	84.14
2016	53/70	75.71	238	36	119/144	82.64
2017	41/55	74.55	223	42	130/144	90.28
2018	42/55	76.36	256	40	127/149	85.23
<b>SAUDI ARABIA</b>						
2011	44/50	88.00	363	21	131/135	97.037
2012	46/50	92.00	364	25	131/135	97.037
2013	43/50	86.00	420	22	127/142	89.437
2014	48/55	87.27	463	23	130/142	91.549
2015	48/55	87.27	506	22	134/145	92.414
2016	67/70	95.71	482	23	141/144	97.917
2017	50/55	90.91	575	22	138/144	95.833
2018	51/55	92.73	677	21	141/149	94.631
<b>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</b>						
2011	29/50	58.00	140	34	103/135	76.30
2012	29/50	58.00	193	35	107/135	79.26
2013	31/50	62.00	249	34	109/142	76.76
2014	35/55	63.64	293	30	115/142	80.99
2015	34/55	61.82	403	29	119/145	82.07
2016	46/70	65.71	478	25	124/144	86.11
2017	27/55	49.09	594	21	120/144	83.33
2018	36/55	65.45	707	20	121/144	81.21

<sup>6</sup> We selected the first five as rated in 2018.

According to the Country RepTrak, the overall ranking of the three Arab countries has regressed, passing from the 62<sup>nd</sup> place in 2014 to 76<sup>th</sup> in 2018 for Qatar, from the 88<sup>th</sup> place to 92<sup>nd</sup> for KSA and from the 58<sup>th</sup> place to the 65<sup>th</sup> for UAE. The ranking between 2011 and 2018 for the three countries shows minimal variations, revealing that their global reputation is almost stable over the 8 measured years. As for the Brand Finance, two figures are being compared, the monetary value of the country as a brand and the global ranking over 100 countries. The strongest Brand Value ranking goes for UAE, which passes from the 34<sup>th</sup> most valuable brand to the 20<sup>th</sup>, while KSA is still stable at the 21<sup>st</sup> position, despite minor changes in the ranking across the eight years. Qatar's ranking moves up from the 47<sup>th</sup> to the 40<sup>th</sup> strongest value brand over 100 countries. The increase in the countries' brand value corroborates the ranking figures, with UAE having the most significant value rise, passing from 140 to 707 billion dollars in 8 years (an increase by more than 5 folds), while the value of Qatar as a brand increased by more than 2.5 folds, which explains its rise from the 47<sup>th</sup> to the 40<sup>th</sup> position. As for KSA, it "just" had a 1.8-fold increase, with the most significant increase being in 2017 (+19.3% in 2017 compared to 2016) and in 2018 (+17.7% compared to 2017), thus clearly showing the effect of Saudi Vision 2030 on the country's Brand Value. As for the Gender Gap index, we can note a slight decrease for the three countries, with Qatar passing from the 82<sup>nd</sup> position to the 85<sup>th</sup>, KSA from the 97<sup>th</sup> to the 94<sup>th</sup> and UAE from the 76<sup>th</sup> to the 81<sup>st</sup>.

Table 2 (Appendix) shows the evolution of ranking and brand value of the first three countries on the Brand Finance index. US, China and Germany showed steady ranking through the eight years with US ranking first, China second and Germany third. If we look at the reputation index, China has the weakest reputation, climbing from the 86<sup>th</sup> position in 2011 to the 82<sup>nd</sup>, while Germany has the strongest reputation, although it dropped from the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 35<sup>th</sup> position in 2018. As for the US, its reputation dropped from the 46<sup>th</sup> position to the 62<sup>nd</sup> with a significant drop in 2017 from 40<sup>th</sup> to 69<sup>th</sup> position (the highest reputation drop in 2017 and 2018, according to Country RepTrak reports). Since the election of Donald Trump, the US reputation is declining despite excellent economic figures due to a significant drop of the effective government dimension (Reputation Institute, 2018). As for the Gender Gap, both US and China face significant decrease in their gender gap ranking dropping from 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> place for the US and from 45<sup>th</sup> to the 69<sup>th</sup> for China, while Germany has a steady position over the years, ranking 9<sup>th</sup>.

Table 3 (Appendix) shows the evolution of rankings and brand value of the first three countries on the RepTrak index. Here also, the figures show a more or less steady reputation, with Sweden raking 1<sup>st</sup> in 2011 and in 2018. Finland (2<sup>nd</sup>) and Switzerland (3<sup>rd</sup>) on the other hand had small variations throughout the years, but still rank below the 15<sup>th</sup> position on the country RepTrak. For 2018, Switzerland had stronger value brand than Qatar, UAE and KSA (973 billion dollars) while Sweden had almost the same brand value as UAE (749 billion dollars for Sweden and 707 billion dollars for UAE) and ranked 19<sup>th</sup> on the Brand Finance ranking index just



before UAE (20<sup>th</sup>). On the Gender Gap index, Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, along with Iceland and Norway) ranked in the top 4 during the eight years, with Switzerland moving from 7<sup>th</sup> position in 2011 to 13<sup>th</sup> in 2018.

The below charts outline the position of the nine countries on the three selected indexes for 2011 and 2018, giving a clear view of the correlations between indexes (ranking are reversed, i.e. columns closer to 100 rank best on the chart).

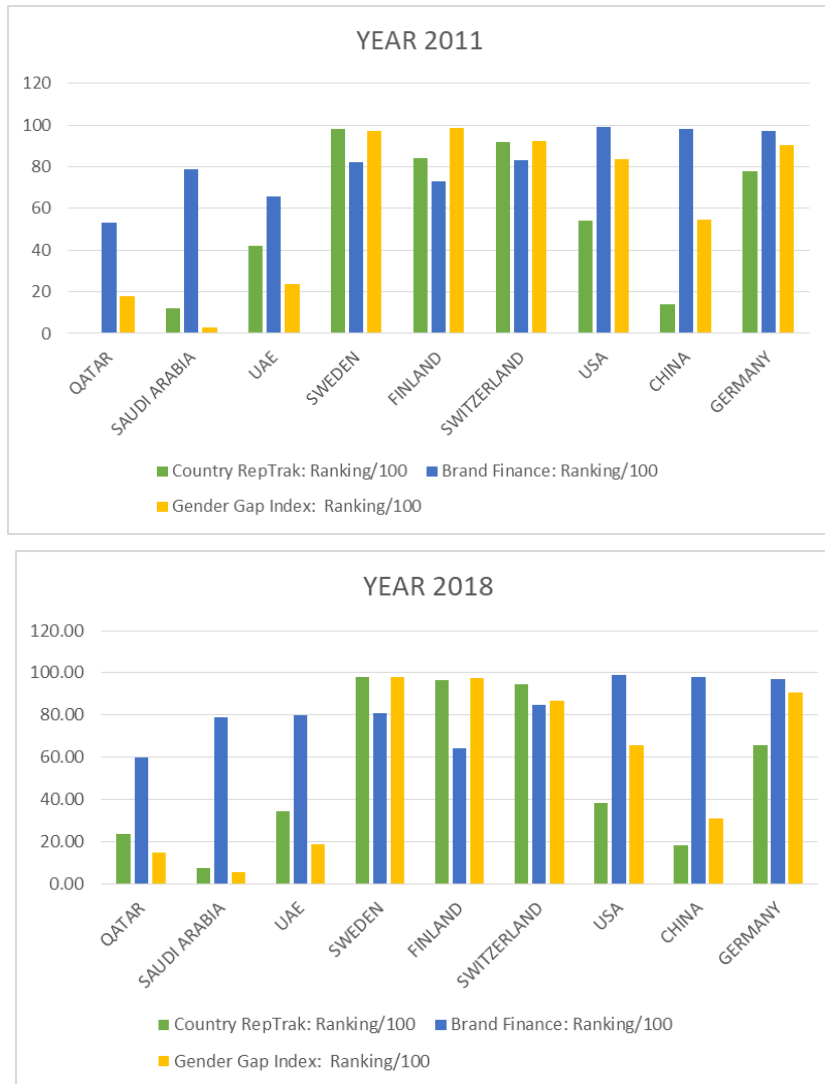


Figure 4. Rankings of the three clusters for 2018 and 2011

The Gender Gap and Brand Finance variables' analysis shows that their correlation coefficient varies between 0.1 and 0.3 throughout the years, pointing out that there is a weak relationship between the two variables. The coefficient reaches -0.2 in 2018 for Arab countries, showing that the variables can even move in opposite directions. The coefficient is too weak to say that there is correlation, but the trend shows clearly that there is no relationship between gender gap and country brand value. This confirms the first hypothesis that the gender gap does not have an impact on a country's brand value. Countries can have a very strong brand value, like US, China or even Japan (5<sup>th</sup> in the Brand Finance index) and score high on the gender gap index.

The charts demonstrate a significant correlation between Gender Gap and Country Reputation for the three clusters: for 2011, there is a 0.85 correlation between Gender Gap and Country RepTrak. This correlation goes up to 0.92 for 2018 and varies between 0.85 and 0.95 for 2012-2017. This clearly shows that the two variables (gender gap and country reputation) decrease in parallel. The correlation between the two variable goes up to 0.99 for Arab countries in 2018, thus revealing an almost perfect positive (close to 1) and strong relationship between gender gap and reputation and confirming the second hypothesis of the current study which states that the gender gap has a negative impact on a country's image and reputation.

Finally, the figures do not show any correlation between Brand Finance and Country RepTrak with a correlation coefficient of -0.1 for 2018 and a variation between -0.1 and -0.4 for the remaining years, revealing clearly that countries with strong brand value can have poor reputation and, inversely, countries with very strong reputation can have low brand value. For Arab countries, the correlation is -0.07 (in 2018), showing clearly that an improvement in brand value has no impact on a country's image and reputation and confirming the third hypothesis that a successful nation branding does not necessarily have a positive impact on a country's image and reputation.

Based on the 4D model of country image (Buhmann, 2016) discussed in the literature review, Arab countries' bold investments in nation branding strategies addressed mainly the functional dimensions (political and economic effectiveness and performance) and the aesthetic dimensions (cultural and scenic places), while the normative dimensions (integrity of the nations, norms and values) were either not tackled or did not get the same amount of efforts. This negatively impacted the affective component, which directly influences feelings and emotions towards a country. As studies show, the image of countries suffering from negative perceptions is mainly composed of the affective image (emotions and feelings) rather than the cognitive image (Alvarez & Campo, 2014). Therefore, Arab countries, grounded with negative images, will face major difficulties to change the affective component of their image – or their image overall. If we apply Fan's conceptual framework for nation image (Fan, 2008), we can identify a gap between the actual image and the projected and desired future images. Indeed, the image that

Qatar, KSA and UAE are actually communicating and the image they would like to have are quite different from the actual perceived image. In order to fill this gap, they have to take into account what is the most accountable for their image: the affective and the normative components.

The same gap analysis can be used for reputation analysis. According to Passow's six dimensions of a country's reputation (Passow et al, 2005), which served as a basis for the country RepTrak model, the emotional appeal (attractiveness, respectfulness and trustworthiness) and social appeal (social responsibility) are two main pillars. Qatar, KSA and UAE are placing substantial means to work on the financial appeal (which explains the high ranking in nation brand value) and cultural and physical appeal (explained by the rising number of tourists mainly for UAE, followed by Qatar and recently KSA). According to Country RepTrak 2018 Report, the intangibles of reputation are gaining increased importance for the reputation, with the appealing environment dimension climbing from 35.4% in 2014 to 39.1% in 2018 and advance economy dimension dropping from 27.4% to 24.8% (Reputation Institute, 2018). Scores also reveal that country reputation is relatively stable over the years and does not change dramatically like the Brand Value figures, thus showing no evidence that NB can alter public opinion and behavior towards a country in a quick fix. It is a long term building process that requires extended commitments because "national images are not created through communications, and cannot be altered by communications" (Anholt, 2010, p. 5). Gulf and Middle-Eastern countries are rooted in negative images and, consequently, cannot use the "top-down" approach in NB. They should focus more on a soft power transformation (Cooper & Momani, 2009) to project an "emotionally appealing image" in order to fill their reputation gap (Go & Robert, 2011, p. xxxvi).

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper analyses the impact of gender gap on nation branding, image and reputation building of three Arab countries: Qatar, KSA and UAE. For this purpose, we compared indexes related to gender gap, country reputation and nation brand value over a period of eight years (2011-2018). We compared gender gap results of three clusters: the three selected Gulf countries, the first three countries on the reputation index and the first three countries on the nation brand value index. The analysis confirmed the hypothesis that gender gap has a negative impact on a country's reputation and image, while it does not impact the nation brand value. Indeed, countries can score high as a nation brand value but rank poorly on the gender gap index, while the high reputation ranking goes in parallel with a low gender impact with correlations as high as 0.9. Furthermore and crucially, a successful branding strategy does not necessarily have a positive impact on a country's image and reputation. Qatar, UAE and KSA, which adopted bold measures and allocated substantial budgets to promote their image abroad with a clear vision and road map, succeeded in increasing their nation brand value and

failed to gain improvements in reputation despite meaningful achievements related to gender equality.

The study provides an important contribution to the literature related to the impact of gender gap on nation branding, image and reputation building by supplying quantified correlations between variables and supporting previous studies conducted on the importance of affective and emotional dimension in shaping a country's international image and of the emotional and social appeal in reputation building. It demonstrated the need to address and integrate human rights in general and gender equality in particular, along with corporate social responsibility when conducting nation branding strategies for countries known for their conservatism and traditionalism in order to change or build their image and reputation. However, despite the quantified figures, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of the study. First of all, the sampling size is too small to generalize and second, correlation does not mean causation. There are other factors than gender gap that influence both variables. In this study, we do not aim to generalize but rather to gain an understanding of the increased importance of social and emotional appeal in nation branding strategies.

We can observe nowadays that governments all over the world have been pulling significant efforts to improve women's rights. However, studies show that their real motivation behind these efforts is to enhance their reputation instead of empowering women, especially countries that rely on international aid and cooperation (Alaimo, 2016). Recently, UAE orchestrated a large media campaign showing images of Mariam Al Mansouri (the first female fighter pilot) participating in the bombing of ISIS. The purpose of this campaign is to counter negative images in Western countries, to display an image of modernity and, above all, to address internal public opinion by communicating messages of modernity related to women's traditional roles in Arab societies (Allagui & Al-Najjar, 2018). Using women empowerment as part of the strategies and tools for nation branding purposes the same way they use cultural and sports events and exhibitions or touristic campaigns is becoming frequent for nations trying to change their reputation on the international scene, especially in the Western world. However, this strategy can backfire because of internal social resistance and perceptions or simply because there is no a real change regarding legislation to protect women or to give them full access to their rights. For instance, the numerous fleeing and escape attempts by women from the Gulf region, along with the recent case of Princess Haya, the wife of Dubai's ruling sheikh asking UK court for forced marriage protection and non-molestation, have "cast uncomfortable glare on women's rights in the Gulf Arab monarchies even if they seek to project a modern image to the Western world" (Asia Times, 2019).

If we look again at the definition of NB based on Lasswel's Communication Model (figure 1) , the act of applying branding and marketing techniques in order to shape or change the image and reputation of a country and boost its economy should take into consideration two factors: noises and feedback. Noises can disrupt the communication process and affect our perceptions and interpretations. The case of

Princess Haya or Jamal Khashoggi is noises that affect the top-down approach of nation branding. In today's ultra-connected world, countries do not have control over what is said in the Media or total control over the country's image. It will be difficult to manipulate the perceptions of a deeply-rooted international public opinion. While the feedback from the receiver to the sender is important to adjust the communication process, Arab countries should monitor their international image and reputation and tackle what matters most to the international public opinion and what nowadays affects a country's image and reputation. They should double their efforts not on building skyscrapers, extravagant cities, outstanding museums and shopping malls, but on acting responsibly as members of a global community (Anholt, 2010) in order to perform better on the normative and affective dimensions of the image and on the emotional and social appeal of the reputation.

Arab countries in general and Qatar, KSA and the UAE in particular should double their efforts and means to close the gap between the traditional and conservative real identity and the modern progressive and cosmopolitan projected image. For instance, UAE was the first to adopt nation branding strategies in the 1980s to modernize the image of the country. However, it did not tackle the modernization of their norms and values related to gender gap until the late 1990s (ESCWA, 2016). They only recently started to show progressive image of women's role in their society (Allagui & Al-Najjar, 2018). Although Qatar made major progress in access to education for women,<sup>7</sup> they are still a traditional Muslim society where almost everything takes place separately for male and female (Gremm et al, 2018).

Today, international public opinion admires and respects countries that actively participate in improving the global society and that tackle issues related to sustainable development, climate change, human rights, women's rights, peace and religious tolerance. These topics are becoming increasingly important to the public opinion and Arab countries should demonstrate significant improvements to show more real engagement and not only more communication. As Anholt said, "National reputation cannot be constructed, it can only be earned" by becoming the projected image (Anholt, 2010, p. 6).

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<sup>7</sup> For 2014-2016, 66% of university students were female (Gremm, Barth, Fietkiewicz, & Stock, 2018)

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**Appendix:**

**Table 2.** Country RepTrak, Gender Gap and Brand Value of the top three countries on the Brand Finance index from 2011 till 2018

Year	Country RepTrak: Ranking	Country RepTrak: Ranking/100	Brand Finance: Value Bn \$	Brand Finance: Ranking/100	Gender Gap Index: Ranking	Gender Gap Index: Ranking/100
<b>UNITED STATES</b>						
2011	23/50	46.00	12.351	1	22/135	16.30
2012	23/50	46.00	14.641	1	22/135	16.30
2013	22/50	44.00	17.99	1	20/142	14.08
2014	21/55	38.18	19.261	1	20/142	14.08
2015	22/55	40.00	19.703	1	28/145	19.31
2016	28/70	40.00	20.574	1	45/144	31.25
2017	38/55	69.09	21.055	1	49/144	34.03
2018	34/55	61.82	25.899	1	51/149	34.23
<b>CHINA</b>						
2011	43/50	86.00	3.081	2	61/135	45.19
2012	44/50	88.00	4.847	2	69/135	51.11
2013	44/50	88.00	6.109	2	87/142	61.27
2014	50/55	90.91	6.352	2	87/142	61.27
2015	46/55	83.64	6.314	2	91/145	62.76
2016	57/70	81.43	7.087	2	99/144	68.75
2017	47/55	85.45	10.209	2	100/144	69.44
2018	45/55	81.82	12.779	2	103/149	69.13
<b>GERMANY</b>						
2011	11/50	22.00	3.091	3	13/135	9.63
2012	11/50	22.00	3.903	3	13/135	9.63
2013	11/50	22.00	4.002	3	12/142	8.45
2014	10/55	18.18	4.357	3	12/142	8.45
2015	15/55	27.27	4.166	3	11/145	7.59
2016	18/70	25.71	3.882	3	13/144	9.03
2017	16/55	29.09	4.021	3	12/144	8.33
2018	19/55	34.55	5.147	3	14/149	9.40

**Table 3.** Country RepTrak, Gender Gap and Brand Value of the top three countries on the Country RepTrak index from 2011 till 2018

Year	Country RepTrak: Ranking	Country RepTrak: Ranking/100	Brand Finance: Value Bn \$	Brand Finance: Ranking/100	Gender Gap Index: Ranking	Gender Gap Index: Ranking/100
<b>SWEDEN</b>						
2011	2/50	2.00	471	18.00	4/135	2.96
2012	3/50	6.00	666	18.00	4/135	2.96
2013	2/50	4.00	752	17.00	4/142	2.82
2014	3/55	5.45	802	17.00	4/142	2.82
2015	3/55	5.45	814	17.00	4/145	2.76
2016	1/70	1.43	742	17.00	4/144	2.78
2017	3/55	5.45	703	19.00	5/144	3.47
2018	1/55	1.82	749	19.00	3/149	2.01
<b>FINLAND</b>						
2011	8/50	16.00	222	27.00	2/135	1.48
2012	7/50	14.00	278	27.00	2/135	1.48
2013	8/50	16.00	287	31.00	2/142	1.41
2014	4/55	7.27	307	31.00	2/142	1.41
2015	6/55	10.91	289	33.00	3/145	2.07
2016	6/70	8.57	267	35.00	2/144	1.39
2017	7/55	12.73	322	35.00	3/144	2.08
2018	2/55	3.64	352	36.00	4/149	2.68
<b>SWITZERLAND</b>						
2011	4/50	8.00	551	17.00	10/135	7.41
2012	4/50	8.00	885	14.00	10/135	7.41
2013	3/50	6.00	965	14.00	9/142	6.34
2014	1/55	1.82	1.151	13.00	11/142	7.75
2015	4/55	7.27	1.024	14.00	8/145	5.52
2016	3/70	4.29	998	13.00	11/144	7.64
2017	2/55	3.64	1.014	14.00	21/144	14.58
2018	3/55	5.45	973	15.00	20/149	13.42