

EFFECTS OF NATION BRANDING ON NATIONAL IDENTITY OF AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

This paper is aimed to examine how countries accrue global recognition through apt utilization of nation branding techniques. Strategic, conceptual and practically relevant aspects will be analyzed here in a purely academic and research based construct to establish linkage between Nation Branding and National Identity. Embedding of national identity in the brand marketing campaigns enhances consumers' understanding, both as national citizens and global subjects. Nation branding initiatives undertaken in a well thought out manner increase the obligation of citizens towards political self-determination and ideals of public communication. Employment of soft power tools in concert with lived experiences of consumers helps in projecting brands besides heightening the national identity. Smart media campaigns of branded products shape those brands into successful marketing propositions. While the use of brands in influencing the national image has become a marketing norm, products of multi-national origins still remain in great demand. An interpretive-narrative approach has been adopted to examine Azerbaijan's growing quest for global recognition and the efforts which this developing country is making in the sphere of nation branding. With occasional reference to the international brands of developed countries, focus will remain on endeavors of Azerbaijan to market its name and build own national brands.

Key words: Nation Branding, National Identity, Nationalism, Global Recognition, Brand Azerbaijan.

JEL Classification: M31

Introduction. Nation branding communicates a nation's policies and culture to an international audience, the public face of international diplomacy [Paul Jordan, "Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism?" *Journal of Baltic Studies*. Vol. 45, No. 3, (September 2014), 283–303.] In this context, nation and states are viewed as commodity or goods, which can accrue leverage from having a strong brand name attached to them. To a considerable extent, the tool of branding may influence the construction of national identity, in the spheres of diplomacy and defence, economy and trade, fashion and industry.

In an era of increased global interaction and exchanges, effective nation branding has emerged as an imperative for the nations, in order to aptly tap their economic potential. *“If you are not making a concerted effort to brand your nation, other people might do it for you - and for their own purposes.”* [Tim Lincoln, 2015. Nation Branding: Perception Can Be Reality - So Manage It <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/nation-branding-perception-can-reality-manage/> (2017)] Countries are famous globally for different reasons. USA is known for the state of art cyber technology, aircrafts, space crafts, optical, technical and medical apparatus. China is identified with low cost manufacturing capability, connectivity projects and abundant provision of Chinese products till the remotest part of the world. UK dominates Europe as the financial leader with London as the hub of commercial initiatives. Russia and Gulf countries excel in the domain of petrochemicals, often leveraging their hydrocarbon riches to derive politico-economic mileage. Japan makes its presence felt with cutting edge computer technology, automotive industry and electrical appliances. Germany is famous for its vehicles, machinery, electrical equipment, medicines and for the provision of apt business conditions to world entrepreneurs. Similarly, South Korea is known for cellular phones and electrical machinery, Switzerland for an impressive tourism industry, Pakistan for textiles, sports goods and edible items, India for cheap human resource and IT potential and South Africa for the diamond industry. Prowess of a nation in a peculiar product range leads to increased exports of the same product from that country. Suits and shoes from Italy, perfumes from France, chocolates from Switzerland and Belgium, crystal ware from Czechoslovakia, rice, mangoes and textiles from Pakistan and construction consultants from Turkey are only the few to mention.

Besides developed nations, the developing countries can also use multiple branding strategies to heighten the respective national identities. In this paper, various techniques of nation branding employed by a developing nation like Azerbaijan will be covered analytically. Azerbaijan has been selected as a preferred choice for research, due to available scope and ever growing awareness about nation branding. Azerbaijan has launched number of nation branding initiatives that have helped in promoting the correct image of Azerbaijan in the region and beyond. This includes *“Amazing Azerbaijan”*, *“Azerbaijan-The Land of Fire”* and *“Made in Azerbaijan”* campaigns.

National Identity. National identity is the sense of belonging one has to a state or a nation, or a sense of solidarity one feels towards a particular group, disregarding one's actual citizenship status. A collective of people, united by shared cultural features, myths and values [Barrington, “Nation and Nationalism” 713]. If one views national identity positively, it is typically called "patriotism". “A well

developed and strong sense of national identity has the power to be a productive and enabling force within the society, providing positive social capital, with benefits such as improved cooperation with others, improved information flows and more effective, better functioning government and other democratic institutions” [Aldridge, Stephen (2002)]. National identity is not a trait with which people are born; rather, experiences from the common lives of people that build their identity. In the recent political philosophy, the concept of national identity has been used with increasing frequency, especially by the philosophers arguing for legitimacy of a principle of political self-determination [Omar Dahbour National Identity: An Argument for the Strict Definition Public Affairs Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), 17-37]. “National identity is a creditable form of identification. National identities are essential for maintaining self-respect, belonging, a sense of security and giving people meaning in their lives” [Nielsen, Kai, "Cultural Nationalism, Neither Ethnic nor Civic," in Theorizing Nationalism, Ronald Beiner, Ed. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, (1999) 119–30].

A nation on the other hand is a determinate thing. It is not defined by social facts (e.g., kinship) but by the beliefs about what those facts are (i.e., convictions about kinship ties). It is necessarily an ethnically self-defined and politically self-conscious group, which is usually influenced by the factors of language, national colors, symbols, history of nation, blood connections, culture, cuisine and music etc.

Conceptualizing National Identity Through Use of Media. Marketing and branding combine the scientific clarity of thought and rigorous observation of human psychology, culture and society with the most elusive factor of creativity. In fact, these two activities bring commerce and culture together, as a potent force for creating prosperity. Many researchers of cultural studies, mass communication and journalism (Askew and Wilk 2002; Frosh 2007; Millard et al. 2002;) have conducted researches and drawn conclusions that the media has been successful in constituting nations and is a powerful tool in building and bringing communities together. The imagined community concept recognizes the “nationally unifying power of communication technologies, particularly the print media, which allow geographically dispersed people to feel part of a single, united group. The media provides the means for circulating the stories those nations tell about themselves, and that distinguish one nation from another” [Anderson, Benedict 1983]. Many researchers believe that the advertising produces nationalism and informs the process of conceptualizing a nation. Cultural studies scholars have also considered the nation, with particular emphasis on television as a site of popular knowledge and the leading resource for identity projects. However, there exist doubts as to whether television can continue to be the unifier of the nation given the globalizing

influences on programming [Barker, Chris 1997]. Notwithstanding all above, brands are essentially meant to represent the nation's distinct and unique values among diverse international publics like investors, tourists, migrants, workers, scholars, arts and sports franchises.

Understanding National Image. “National image or country image has been an important subject discussed in a variety of communication disciplines.” [Luther, C.A, “2002, 57–85]. Sometimes a country's name adds credence to the value of the product. Economic turnaround of Japan is a brilliant success story of modern times. There was a time when “Made in Japan” carried a negative connotation for most of the consumers as most Western countries considered Japanese products to be cheap, worthless and second rate commodities. However, with the turn of tide, Japanese products are labeled as a consequence of most up-to-date technology, highest quality, style prowess and competitive pricing. “Images of countries only ever change for two reasons: either because the country changes or because it does something to its people.”[Anholt, Simon, Competitive Identity, (2007) 10.]. Similarly, it is also not advisable to spend efforts and money just to venture opinions as to which nation's brand image is ruling or stronger in the market. Index like National Brands Index: a financial valuation of thirty two nation brands [Ibid] is an endeavor to evaluate the relative strength of national brands.

It is therefore, established that the countries which have developed strong and recognized associations of trust, quality and integrity on the global front, the manufacturers of such countries always enjoy the perks of being associated to those. In the face of globalization, it surely gives them an added advantage. The advantage is akin to a product being tagged to its parent brand. The increased trial that it experiences just because of the parent brand name support puts it way ahead in relation to a new product with no prior associations.

It is a matter of common observation that cola remains synonymous to USA, pizza to Italy, perfumeries to France, wines to Georgia, skis from Slovenia, dairy products from Australia and New Zealand and vodka from Russia. People might buy Indian accountancy software, Pakistani fabric or Swiss watches but might not be compelled to buy Pakistani wine, Turkish mobiles or Indian cars. “Having said this, it might not always be true because if there is anything more permanent or constant in marketing, that is ‘change.’ Attitudes can and do change very quickly [Ibid]” Consumer behavior predictions have more often proved to be more wrong than right. The success of marketing efforts often occurs as a consequence of an obstinate and resilient marketer, who does not rely solely on the findings of consumer research. One needs to understand that nations have to continually strive for favorable

attention of the audience; as once this battle is won, political advantage and economic dividends are achieved by the nations.

Governments of states try to use popular brands for furthering nations' image worldwide. Leverage for a brand to evolve at its own, is somewhat limiting due to this growing influence. "It is no longer a question of 'to brand or not to brand' for a state's government, but rather a decision of doing the branding or going bust" [Van Ham, Maarten. "Job access, workplace mobility, and occupational achievement." (2002)]. It is the buyers, not the sellers' opinion which matters. In other words, a country should be selling what the 'buyers' - that is, tourists and consumers abroad - are interested in paying for, rather than what a 'seller' - that is, a country, its politicians and population at large - decides to offer or sell. "Ad hoc brand campaigns rarely if ever bring expected 'dividends'. To be effective, image-formation not only needs to be constantly managed, but also needs to rely on time-tested marketing techniques." [Ausra Park, "Selling 'a small state to the world: Lithuania's struggle in building its national image, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy" (November 2008) 67-84].

Nation Branding in Practice. Nation branding can be defined as "the phenomenon by which governments engage in self-conscious activities aimed at producing a certain image of the nation state." [Bolin, G. & P. Stahlberg. "Between Community and Commodity. Nationalism and Nation Branding." In *Communicating the Nation. National Topographies of Global Media Landscapes*, edited by Anna Roosvall and Inka Solivara Moring, (2010) 79–101]. By employing soft power tools intelligently, brands can heighten the national identity. Despite varied implications of principles and practice of nation branding, the embedding of national identity in brand campaigns enhances the consumers' understanding as national citizens and global subjects. "Nation branding is the art of applying the branding and marketing communication techniques to promote nation's image" [Ying Fan. "Branding the Nation – What is being branded? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, (2006) 12:1, 5-14.]. "Nation Branding is an issue beyond national pride. A nation's brand affects its economy - it matters what others think about us." [Tim Lincoln, 2015. "Nation Branding: Perception Can Be Reality — So Manage It"].

"Nation branding may be taken as a commercial practice, which has emerged since the end of the Cold War, as a mean for the nations to redefine and reposition themselves within the master narrative of globalization [Jansen, S. C. "Designer Nations: Neo-Liberal Nation Branding – Brand Estonia." *Social Identities* 14 (1): (2008) 121–142.]. Apposite nation branding complements the commitment of citizens to the terms of political self-determination and ideals of public communication.

Arguably, one of the main goals of public diplomacy is to cultivate and communicate a certain image or reputation of a nation state to international audience and this is true of nation branding too. Using soft power tools, nation branding communicates a nation's policies and its culture to the public face of international diplomacy. Nation branding represents the desire by concerned countries to persuade people in paying attention towards their particular nation state, its achievements and belief in its qualities. Despite the lack of a theoretical consensus on nation branding, authors such as Simon Anholt believe that "nation branding is an indispensable phenomenon in the globalized world." [Anholt, Simon "Competitive Identity" (2007) 10.] However, his critics like Aronczyk opine that "nation branding is a version of soft nationalism and remains a process, which governments continue to buy into." [Aronczyk, Melissa "How to Do Things with Brands: Uses of National Identity Canadian Journal of Communication", Vol 34 (2009) 291-296.] . Whilst nation branding is an internationally focused phenomenon, it is a practice that retains the capacity to illuminate the more salient narratives of nation building and, in some cases, reflects nationalist rhetoric of politicians [Paul Jordan, "Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism?" Journal of Baltic Studies. Vol. 45, No. 3, (September 2014) 283–303]. However, it is also essential to understand that unlike products, nations are complex entities and nation branding at times strips them down to an extremely simplified object to enhance the marketability of a state. Advocates of this concept such as Simon Anholt argue that nations must compete for visibility in an increasingly crowded and globalized environment [Anholt, S.. "Brand New Justice: How Branding Places and Products Can Help the Developing World. Amsterdam: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann." 2005]. However on the other hand, many critics put forth questions on the viability and desirability of branding something as complicated as national identity, which at the same time can be used as a tool for doctoring histories, memories and rituals that underpin and encapsulate the nation [Paul Jordan, "Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism?" Journal of Baltic Studies. Vol. 45, No. 3, (September 2014) 283–303].

Concept application of nation branding is not restricted to the developed nations only. Developing and under developed nations of the world are also attempting to join the bandwagon. "To prove that a country is a reliable partner, it needs to make itself known on the world stage. Nation branding is undertaken to make this happen and to stimulate inward investment, attract tourists, and boost exports." [Dinnie, K. "Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice" 1st ed. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann. (2008)].

Brand Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a fast developing, stable and safe Muslim country of South Caucasus region, which is blessed with sizeable hydrocarbon

resources and unique geostrategic location. Energy rich Azerbaijan is situated at the crossroads of Southwest Asia and Southeast Europe. With an esthetic blending of East and West and the easily found traces of Ottoman, Russian and Prussian Empires make Azerbaijan's historical and cultural heritage highly affluent. Azerbaijan is a highly secular Muslim country, characterized with a pluralistic society and exemplary spirit of tolerance. Safe and secure domestic environment coupled with the stable political dispensation shapes Azerbaijan as an "island of peace in a burning region." Primarily, Azerbaijan's economy is propelled by oil revenues; however the recent initiatives of Azeri Government to diversify the economy particularly in the non-oil sectors merit due recognition. Concurrently, efforts are being put in to project 'Brand Azerbaijan' globally through persuasive nation branding endeavours.

A fine interplay of geo-strategic location and energy riches makes Azerbaijan a key player in the regional and global matrix. While the appreciable fiscal space and peaceful domestic milieu helps in attracting foreign direct investment, mesmerizing beauty and traditional hospitality of Azerbaijan makes it an ideal destination for the tourists. Comprehensive economic reforms, economy diversification efforts, liberalization of trade regime, simplified visa procedures and state patronage of indigenous industrial production blend well with the nation branding effort.

Political Context of Brand Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan pursues a relatively independent foreign policy with no major favorites. Balancing out of regional obligations and global compulsions becomes quite challenging at times. It seems like walking a tight rope every day. However, Azerbaijan exercises a delicate balance in its relations with global, regional and Islamic powers. The country maintains good relations with Russia and USA, Iran and Israel, Turkey and Europe, China, Trans Caspian Central Asian States, Pakistan and other countries of Islamic Ummah. Unresolved conflict of Nagorno Karabakh and liberation of 20% Azeri lands from Armenian occupation governs the foreign and defence policy objectives of Azerbaijan. Year 2016 was declared as the "Year of Multi-Culturism" [<http://www.azernews.az/nation/91533.html>], and year 2017 is being celebrated as the "Year of Islamic Solidarity." ["Speech at 13th Summit of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)" <http://en.president.az/articles/23020> -]. Due to its unique geo-strategic location, Azerbaijan provides a safe conduit for transportation of Central Asian and Eurasian energy riches from Caspian Sea to Europe, without having to pass through Russia or Iran. This aspect of Azeri geography helps European Union (EU) in improving the diversity and security of Energy supply from the East. Taken into account the geographical proximity, cultural heritage, historical and ethnic

linkages, regional integration, human rights conditions, legal / administrative traditions and gender equality, Azerbaijan is far more Eurasian than its neighbors.

Economic Perspective of Brand Azerbaijan. On the economic front, the country has made larger strides from signing the ‘Contract of the Century’ [“Contract of the Century” <http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/contract> -] in 1994 to the inauguration of ‘Southern Gas Corridor’ [http://www.bp.com/en_az/caspian/operationsprojects/Shahdeniz/SouthernCorridor.html] project in 2014. Being largely an oil propelled economy; Azerbaijan remains vulnerable to oil glut or consequent slump in oil prices. The negative impact of ‘Oil Curse or Dutch Disease’ [Dutch disease is the apparent causal relationship between the increase in the economic development of a specific sector (for example natural resources) and a decline in other sectors (like the manufacturing sector or agriculture)]. further accentuates the problem by not letting other industries grow in tandem with the overwhelming petrochemical industry thus resulting in incompatible growth of non-oil sector. Of late, a growing realization at the end of Azeri Government has resulted in coherent efforts for the diversification of economy particularly in non-oil sectors. Initiation of broad based economic reforms, abolition of monopolized trade regime and enhanced focus on socio economic development are some of the areas being focused upon. By fostering a business friendly environment for local and foreign businessmen, expanding an export base, attracting tourism and inviting foreign direct investment, Azerbaijan is attempting to mitigate the negative impacts of low oil prices. According to President Ilham Aliyev’s speech at Davos during World Economic Forum-2016, “Azeri economy is maintaining healthy growth rate. Over the past 10 years, country’s economy has grown by 300%. Poverty and unemployment have reduced sharply, currently staying at 5% each. Growth of non-oil industry sector is at 8.4%. Azerbaijan has been ranked as 40th in the world for competitiveness and the first in the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] region during 2016 by the World Economic Forum” [<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/azerbaijan>]. Government of Azerbaijan is seen committed to ensure the macroeconomic stability and normal rate of inflation. An export-oriented economic model equipped with modernization of oil and gas industry, diversification of non-oil sectors, expanded use of renewable energy resources, development of agrarian sector, strengthening of food security, boosting up of trade and services and composite measures to enhance foreign direct investment can be identified as the priority areas of current regime.

Nation Branding For Azerbaijan. It is commonly observed that the perception of Azerbaijan weakens relatively as someone traverses geographically away from it. Western Europe and USA have the least understanding of Azerbaijan

as compared to Russia, Turkey, Iran or Georgia. In its quest for global recognition, Azerbaijan has embarked upon an ambitious journey to prove international credentials and improve its global acceptability. This is being done by projecting Azerbaijan's image as an economic trailblazer in CIS / Eurasian region. György Szondi [György Szondi, November 2008. *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences*, pp. 42.] argues that “nation branding can help transitional states to distance themselves from the previous political system (Communist Rule in the Azerbaijani context), as well as help to portray the country as a modern state and eligible member of a new world system, positioning the country as a central rather than peripheral state”.

Due to available scope and ever growing awareness about the nation branding, Azerbaijan offers the best model in the form of a secular, tolerant, forward looking and progressive Muslim nation that possesses strong military muscle, economic stamina and regional / global aspirations. To keep Azerbaijan perpetually blinking on the foreign policy radars of regional, European and Islamic world, mega events of international stature are hosted at Baku with periodic intervals. The frequency has particularly increased during last five years. Eurovision International Song Contest-2012, 1st & 2nd Azerbaijan Defence Exhibitions (ADEX) in 2014 & 2016 respectively; Inaugural European Games-2015, International Chess Olympiad-2016, European Grand Prix Formula One Racing Round-2016, and 7th Forum of United Nations Alliance of Civilization Forum (UNAOC) - 2016 can be cited as examples. In 2017, Azerbaijan plans to host 2nd Round of European Grand Prix Formula One Racing & 4th Islamic Solidarity Games. Surge in tourism experienced during 2016 and 2017 can partly be attributed to the befitting conduct of above mentioned mega events. In pursuance of its nation branding objective, Government of Azerbaijan has launched number of initiatives like “Amazing Azerbaijan”, “Azerbaijan-The Land of Fire” and “Made in Azerbaijan” etc. Endowed with mesmerizing natural beauty, blessed with a vibrant economy and supported by coherent Governmental efforts, Azerbaijan is being successfully promoted as a brand across the globe. Government seems committed to support the ‘Brand Azerbaijan’ initiatives through generous funding and state patronage.

‘Made in Azerbaijan’ Campaign. The recently initiated “Made in Azerbaijan” [<https://madeinazerbaijan.com/>] campaign is a Government-backed project, which ushers an expedition towards indigenization and self-reliance. It is a conscious attempt to convey a certain narrative of Azerbaijan to international community and ensure good perception management. In a way, nation branding is being used as a tool for projecting soft nationalism. As the nation's hierarchy realizes the significance of soft image projection, its earnest urge to promote national brands, gaining global recognition and

attracting foreign direct investment remains evident. Projecting Azerbaijan's business interests internationally, the initiative is aimed to achieve greater direct foreign investment, expand the tourist base and broaden the scope of Azerbaijan's exports to the world markets. Such initiatives reflect a kindlier face of Azerbaijan's nationalism to a global audience. Posters featuring the "Welcome to Azerbaijan - The Land of Fire" logo and "Discover Azerbaijan", "Lights out, Formula One Finally Races in Baku", "Made in Azerbaijan" appear on billboards abroad and at the national airports, quite often.

National Brands of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan does not have high international visibility, despite the advantages of geography, economy, political stability and safe / secure domestic milieu. Government of Azerbaijan has therefore, embarked upon a well meditated nation branding campaign, which is aimed to create a distinct image of post-Soviet state and signify its unique history, culture, folklore, traditions, social / moral values, natural beauty and human capital to the remaining world.

To overcome the negative impacts of petro-economic meltdown, the current regime is attempting to resuscitate the economy by improving the indigenous industrial wherewithal, expanding the export base, promoting tourism initiatives and introducing the economic reforms. Nurturing of human capital also remains a priority area.

If the local industry is developed futuristically, it will enable Azerbaijan to produce the items that have a competitive edge in quality over the rivals. Apt nation branding efforts will project this qualitative edge in the regional or global markets to heighten Azerbaijani identity. Paradoxically however, Azerbaijan has very little brands of its own at the moment. Nevertheless, it is hoped that with ongoing economic reforms and diversification of economy, lot many things will change quite soon. Currently, Azerbaijan is famous for its pomegranates, apples, wine, carpets, tea, silk scarfs, Mugam music, traditional dresses and customary jewelry. Moreover, orderly conduct of mega events of international stature has also become the trade mark of Azerbaijan. This capability has given sort of boost to the tourism industry. Picturesque landscapes of north eastern regions of Azerbaijan and beautiful City of Winds-Baku make Azerbaijan a preferred tourist destination. With simplification of visa regime, tourism industry has generated sizeable revenues in the recent years.

State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) is the top Azeri brand, whose expertise in the petrochemical domain is praiseworthy. SOCAR is carrying Azerbaijani flag to the region and beyond with pride. The state oil giant is attempting to promote Azerbaijani image in Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Central Asia and even UK in a commendable manner. Another example can be cited of Hyder Aliyev Foundation, which holds cultural events internationally to promote Azeri image abroad. Its contributions in philanthropist and social welfare spheres help generating a noble image of Azerbaijan beyond its frontiers. Asan Khidmet (ASAN) is yet another signature

product of the Azerbaijan, established to provide quality and uniform communal services to all its citizens. Nine ministries simultaneously work under the same roof to afford this one window facility to the people. National flag carrier Azerbaijan Airlines (AZAL) is another proud brand of Azerbaijan. In the private sector, mega entrepreneurs like the Pasha Group, Gilan Group and Azersun are contributing positively for promotion of Azerbaijani brands both inland and abroad.

Trajectory of Pakistan and Azerbaijan's Relations. Pakistan and Azerbaijan enjoy excellent political relations. Pakistan was amongst the first countries to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan. Pakistan is the only country that has not established diplomatic relations with Armenia, due to illegal occupation of 20 percent of Azeri lands, in Nagorno Karabakh. Pakistan's Senate was the first to condemn and term Khojalay Massacre as 'Genocide' in 2012. In February 2017, foreign relations committee of Pakistan's National Assembly passed a resolution, demanding unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from Azeri lands. Pakistan provides unflinching support to Azerbaijan and believes that the issue of Nagorno Karabakh should be resolved within territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and as per available UN resolutions. Azerbaijan on the other hand supports Pakistan on Kashmir Issue, at all regional and international forums. During last few years, intense exchange of high level delegations has cemented the bonds further. President and PM of Pakistan visited Azerbaijan in March 2015 and November 2016 respectively. Azerbaijan 1st Deputy PM visited Pakistan in November 2016 and in February 2017 President of Azerbaijan visited Islamabad for 13th ECO Summit.

Pakistan and Azerbaijan share historical bonds, cultural affinities and social likenesses. Coming from the same religion and value system, people of two countries are closely attached to each other. Goodwill, mutual support and confidence are the attributes of this all-weather relationship, which marks its Silver Jubilee in 2017. Geo-strategic locations of Pakistan and Azerbaijan make these countries essentially important in their respective geographical contexts. Pakistan is gateway to South Asia and Azerbaijan to Europe. Pakistan is grappling with the "Kashmir Issue" for the last seventy years; Azerbaijan is confronted with "Nagorno Karabakh Issue" since independence in 1991 [Sana Imran: Azerbaijan – a fast developing, very safe Muslim country of South Caucasus <http://en.apa.az/azerbaijan-politics/foreign-news/sana-imran-azerbaijan-a-fast-developing-very-safe-muslim-country-of-south-caucasus-interview.html> (2017)]. Four UN resolutions each passed in favour of Kashmiris right of self-determination and liberation of Azeri lands from Armenian control in Nagorno Karabakh are available. Those UN resolutions remain un-implemented, due to inaction and lukewarm response of mediators or international community. Both Kashmir and Nagorno Karabakh are the most serious security concerns facing Pakistan and

Azerbaijan. Both the Muslim states are progressive, forward looking and peace loving nations, which have a bright future waiting.

While the political relations between the two countries are of exemplary nature, the economic cooperation and trade remains far below the potential. In March 2017, it has been agreed to raise the exiting volume of bilateral trade by ten times. Linking of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is the flagship project of Pakistan with the North South Transport Corridor (NSTC) that passes through Azerbaijan can help improving the connectivity, boosting the trade and increasing the acceptability of brotherly nations. Trilateral framework of Pakistan-Iran and Azerbaijan is also being pondered seriously.

Conclusion. Gleaning from above, it is established that nation branding can be employed as soft power tool to project the desired image of a state. Nation branding endeavors not only project a country's soft image internationally but also foster a deeper sense of nationalism amongst its masses both inland and abroad. Such initiatives also help in achieving greater direct foreign investment, expanding tourist base and broadening the scope of exports to world markets. Nation branding in practice is no more the exclusivity of developed nations alone as the developing and under developed nations are equally trying to build and manage their desired soft images. Azerbaijan is a fast developing Muslim nation of South Caucasus region, which has joined the bandwagon and embarked upon a journey to improve its international credentials. Cogent efforts are being put in to project soft image of Azerbaijan as a tolerant and multicultural society, which is an economic trailblazer in Eurasian region. The recently initiated "Made in Azerbaijan" campaign manifest the same desire of global recognition. 'Made in Azerbaijan' manifests that nation branding can be used as a tool for projecting soft nationalism. It is a conscious attempt towards industrial indigenization and self-reliance. Such initiatives reflect a kindlier face of Azeri nationalism to a global audience. Linking of CPEC with NSTC will be an economically rewarding proposition for Pakistan and Azerbaijan and will take existing bilateral relations to newer heights.

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Dutch disease is the apparent causal relationship between the increase in the economic development of a specific sector (for example natural resources) and a decline in other sectors (like the manufacturing sector or agriculture).

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