Excellence, uniqueness and elites
Constructing Spain through nation branding on the website Marca España

Ana Zamora Barberá

Master thesis, 15 hp
Media and Communication Studies
International/Intercultural communication
Spring 2016

Supervisor: Ernesto Ábalo
Examiner: Anders Svensson
ABSTRACT

Writer(s): Ana Zamora Barberá
Title: Excellence, uniqueness and elites
Subtitle: Constructing Spain through nation branding on the website Marca España
Language: English

One of the most interesting approaches on how we perceive nations today is the idea of imagining nations as brands. Nation branding is used by many governments as a tool for the dissemination of a certain nation imagery. From a media approach, this thesis explores the notion of nation branding as ideologically loaded in media discourse, and the official web discourse on Spain serves as a case. Specifically, the thesis reveals the media construction of Spain on the official website marcaespaña.es, exploring its relation to national identities and the underlying ideologies behind the online self-representation. The thesis draws on the concepts of nation, national identities, ideology and discourse, relating them to nation branding from a critical perspective. To do so, the thesis employs Critical Discourse Analysis as method for analyzing national narratives, where nation branding discourse is seen as a social practice that legitimizes certain ideologies and power relations. The study concludes that the Spanish construction, portraying Spain as unique and united, reduces its national identity to an excellence and elite discourse, ignoring the complex reality of the nation. The thesis shows how this way of constructing the nation serves, through a website, to legitimize the current economical and political system, including the current government and the Spanish nationalism.

Keywords: nation branding; national identity; Marca España; Spain Brand; ideology; web representations; critical discourse analysis; media studies
# Table of contents

1. **Introduction** .......................................................................................................................... 5  
   1.1 The problem .......................................................................................................................... 6  
   1.2 Aim and research questions .................................................................................................... 8  

2. **Contextualizing the Spanish Case** ......................................................................................... 9  
   2.1 Spain in a nutshell ................................................................................................................... 9  
   2.2 Marca España: Spain Brand in brief ....................................................................................... 11  
   2.3 Behind Marca España .......................................................................................................... 12  

3. **Previous Research** ................................................................................................................ 13  
   3.1 Media construction of national identities .............................................................................. 13  
   3.2 Nation branding ................................................................................................................... 14  
      3.2.1 Media studies on nation branding .................................................................................. 16  
   3.3 Knowledge and knowledge gaps .......................................................................................... 18  

4. **Theoretical Frame and Concepts** .......................................................................................... 19  
   4.1 The concepts of nation and national identity: nation as a social construct ...................... 19  
   4.2 Nation branding and ideology ............................................................................................ 21  
   4.3 Nation branding: discourse as social practice .................................................................... 22  
   4.4 The media and nation branding .......................................................................................... 23  
   4.5 New media and the nation-state: websites in the construction of nation branding .......... 24  
      4.5.1 Internet as new media .................................................................................................... 24  
      4.5.2 Virtual nations ............................................................................................................... 25  

5. **Method and Materials** ........................................................................................................... 26  
   5.1 Critical interpretive approach to the nation .......................................................................... 26  
   5.2 Exploring discourse through CDA ....................................................................................... 28  
   5.3 Material and selection criteria ............................................................................................. 29  
   5.4 Analytical framework .......................................................................................................... 31  
      5.4.1 Toolbox ........................................................................................................................ 32  
   5.5 Quality of the research ........................................................................................................ 35  

6. **Presentation of Findings and Analysis** .................................................................................. 37  
   6.1 Analysing Marca España ...................................................................................................... 38  
   6.2 A discourse of elites .............................................................................................................. 39
6.2.1 Spanish Ambassadors ................................................................................................. 41
6.3 Spain on the top: constructing Spanish excellence .......................................................... 42
  6.3.1 Spain is unique: (positive) national uniqueness .......................................................... 42
  6.3.2 Above the national: Spain in the global arena ............................................................. 45
  6.3.3 National sameness: we are unique together .............................................................. 47
6.4 Spain “on sale” ................................................................................................................ 48
6.5 Spain as constructed in Marca España .............................................................................. 49

7. Summary and Conclusions ................................................................................................. 50
  7.1 Problematizing nation branding ...................................................................................... 50
    7.1.1 Nations as products not as people ............................................................................ 51
    7.1.2 A capitalist core ...................................................................................................... 52
    7.1.3 Nation branding as corrective: reinforcing national confidence .............................. 53
  7.2 Last words ...................................................................................................................... 54

References ............................................................................................................................. 56

Appendix ................................................................................................................................. 60
1. Introduction

Cool Britannia, Paris’s ‘City of Lights’, 100% pure New Zealand, I feel sLOVEnia… The world has become a showroom where countries have turned into the products of globalization, competing among each other as brands in the global market.

The representation of different countries and nationalities is crucial in how we experience the world around us. The stereotypes, truth or not, often define the features of a country. Thus, the image of a country is essential in the construction of the world imagery, which affects the spheres of politics, economy, tourism, and migration, among others. The fact is that a well-branded country will benefit from the positive values it represents. In response to this, the nation branding phenomenon arose in the marketing tradition in the late 1990s, seen as a tool for creation of a national brand image. Namely, nation branding is understood as “a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 118).

The practice of nation branding is a twofold endeavor. Externally, nation branding is used by national governments to project an attractive and competitive image of the nation to the world, with the ultimate goal to attract investment, tourism, talent, and other kind of resources. This is, the nation as a commercial commodity that needs to be sold to international audiences. Domestically, nation branding is seen as a tool for the reproduction and reinforcement of a convincing and certain national imagery, that will be preferably assimilated by domestic elites and citizens (Aronczyk, 2013).

Nation branding arises in a context where the concept of nation is being transformed. After the Cold War, the narratives of globalization endangered the nation-state. The economical, the political and the cultural, all became globalized and transferrable. The condition of globalization is hence determining for nation branding, since the national elites saw the necessity to reinforce the importance of the nation-state in a globalized world (Aronczyk, 2013). As Jansen (2008) states: “If globalization brands the world and explains the new cosmological order, then nation branding mythologizes the component parts of the new order” (p. 122). When globalization is tackled as an economic problem, the neoliberal order appears as a solution. Neoliberalism emerges as a second leading element on the nation branding process, which defends the cultural, social and political dimensions as a regulating environment, where the market processes are liberalized and the industries deregulated (Varga, 2013). In this sense, nation branding is seen as a public good since it is financed by public money. Therefore, the transfer of a public good, that is a nation brand, into private hands responds to neoliberal patterns. In brief, both globalization and neoliberalism are the global processes that set the context where nation branding is born.
Some studies have tackled the phenomenon of nation branding related to countries that have experienced a transition from communism to other forms of government. But, how is the phenomenon of branding a nation applied in the case of a country as Spain, immersed in an identity crisis?

Spain is one of those we can call pluri-national states, this is, countries such as Belgium, United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union, that have multiple nationalisms inside their physical borders. The strong regional nationalistic movements result in Spain being a clear example of incomplete nation-building. The heterogeneity of the country, represented in its quasi federalist character with the autonomous communities, has resulted in multiple tensions from the different regions, with some of them aiming for the independency. Besides this identity puzzle, the country is currently facing and economic and political crisis, that is affecting its image and its status domestically and abroad. All in all, and agreeing with Bollen & Medrano (1998), Spain’s regional ethnic and economic diversity make it an excellent case to assess different problems related to the nation.

This thesis is a media study that will explore the media discourse on nation branding in the case of Spain. Nation branding is a mediated practice since the different media allow national brand narratives to be spread, in both external and internal audiences. The branding campaigns expand among traditional (billboards, TV spots, radio...) and new media forms (online videos, social media, online newspapers). Internet, with its interactive component, emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity for the recreation of the nation-state. In this sense, Castells (2010) argues that the Internet offers an entirely new way for the construction of national identities as commodities. In a wired world, the nations are more than “imagined communities”, they are “virtual communities” that are partially constructed online (Everard, 2000). Thus, the postmodern neoliberal context results in governments and branding specialists creating online images and texts for the self-representation of the country on Internet. In sum, how nation branding is defined in the new media plays an important role in shaping the construction of a nation and its national identity. This study focuses specifically on an official website as a new media to transmit certain values and it will closely look at nation branding web representations, exploring the extent to which Internet helps framing national identity.

For an understanding of the nation branding phenomenon and its role in the production and reproduction of nationhood, it is necessary to problematize some aspects.

1.1 The problem

The study originates from the premise that the practice of nation branding entails some problems for society.
First of all, by selecting some values and features of a country, nation branding is a reductive form of communication, promoting a certain image of the nation that in most of the cases does not reflect the reality. Nations are complex entities, therefore the communication of a nation brand must be seen as a delicate process, that is supposed to reflect the intricacies of a country. However, instead of fighting the stereotypes, nation branding promotes them (Widler, 2007). As Jansen (2008) states: “nation branding is, however, a practice that selects, simplifies and deploys only those aspects of a nation’s identity that enhances a nation’s marketability” (p. 122).

Second of all, the nation branding process is seen as undemocratic (Aronczyk, 2013; Jansen, 2008; Widler, 2007; Varga, 2013, Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011), leaving the citizens out of its construction, which totally lies on a top-down structure, lead by private branding agencies and a group of elite institutions. Moreover, nation branding entails the transference of public funds and authority into private hands.

Thirdly, certain scholars have argued that nation branding initiatives obscure the political, ignoring the struggles and negotiations through which national identities are produced and focusing mainly on economic neoliberal interests (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). According to Varga (2013): “(nation branding) transforms questions that used to belong to the realm of the political, social, or economic, to questions that are best understood and dealt with as pertaining to the self-management of citizens”.

Moreover the study starts from the assumption that media role is crucial for the articulation of national identities and nation branding. In this sense, media entails as well some problem to society, which Thompson (1995) stresses as one of the negative effects of the development of media for the self-formation: the mediated intrusion of ideological messages. This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis as method for analyzing national narratives where, by drawing on the CDA tradition, ideology is used to describe those ideas and values implied on discourse that reflect particular interests (Machin & Mayr, 2012). According to this perspective, discourse constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs. In this sense, the media discourse of nation branding constructs a national imagery, associated to certain values or ideologies. Those interests correspond to the institutions and figures behind the branding project, who have the “power” to decide which ideology to transmit. Being the practice a mixture between the state and private companies, the project of branding a nation entails the selection of values, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs that are communicated as preferred for a country. In other words, nation branding narratives reflect the particular choices of elites as they re-imagine national identity (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011).

For this reason and drawing on a critical perspective, it is essential to study media representations in order to find the underlying ideologies on the nation branding texts. However, only few studies on nation branding are media focused. In the forthcoming “previous
research” chapter (see chapter 3), a brief overview of media studies on national identity and nation branding is presented.

This thesis will study the media discourse of Spain Brand to further explore how, through a website, some values are communicated with certain interests. In other words, the focus of this thesis is how the notion of nation branding is ideologically loaded in media discourse, and the official web discourse on Spain serves as a case. In the last years, the practice of nation branding has been used by power elites as an endeavor to build a certain national imagery of Spain, a country immersed in an identity crisis. But, how is the media construction of the country and which are the underlying messages of this endeavor?

1.2 Aim and research questions

Drawing on a critical approach to media, this thesis looks at online texts of Marca España (Spain Brand) to study how a website constructs Spain as a nation and shapes national identity.

The aim of this research is to explore nation branding in the case of Spain, in particular, to analyze how national identities and nation branding are constructed through an official website, with the ultimate goal to analyze the ideology and interests behind the Marca España discourse. To do so, the study will reveal the representations and underlying discourses behind the governmental website marcaespaña.es. Grounding on a constructivist critical approach, this research will contribute to the theorization of nation branding as a mediated practice that entails some political implications, such as power relations and exclusion.

The aforementioned aim can be divided in the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How is Spain constructed through the website Marca España?

**RQ2:** How does the Marca España discourse construct Spanish national identity?

**RQ3:** How does that Spanish media construction correspond to certain political interests and ideology?

The first and second questions aim to explore the Spanish media construction through the study of a branding website. The third question, instead, is linked to a more theoretical approach of the topic, looking at the ideologies behind the branding project found on the material that can be useful for other cases.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. The second chapter helps in the contextualization and understanding of the Spanish case and Marca España project. The third chapter elaborates on the state of literature of the fields of national identity and nation branding, positioning the research on the critical media studies. The forth chapter focuses on the theoretical approaches, drawing on the constructivist perspective to outline some main concepts such as nation, national identities, and relating nation branding to the notion to
ideology. This chapter also introduces the concept of discourse from a critical approach, and presents the role of the media on nation branding. In the fifth chapter, the qualitative approach of “Critical Discourse Analysis” is presented as the method for analyzing national narratives where nation branding discourse is seen as a vehicle that legitimizes certain ideologies and power relations. In this same chapter, the analytical procedures and framework are explained, as well as a brief discussion of the quality of the research. The sixth chapter outlines the main results of the study, focusing on the themes that emerged in the analytical process. Lastly, the seventh chapter connects the empirical results with a larger theoretical context and with the previous research, attempting to establish a relationship between the findings and the established premises of nation, national identity, and their relation to nation branding.

2. Contextualizing the Spanish Case

To provide a context for the current study, a brief outline of both the Spanish situation and Marca España project must be considered. It is necessary to understand how, despite the government efforts of unity, there has never been a consensus on the national project of Spain, with the different regions arising nationalist movements and independence aims. As will be argued in this chapter, it is through these conflicts of interests that we can understand the difficulty of the hegemonic Spanish national project. Furthermore, this chapter should not be regarded as independent of the analyses presented in the texts of this thesis but as integrated with them, in the sense that this background constitutes part of the context against which the media discourse must be assessed.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the Spanish socio-political background as a multi diverse country to provide an understanding of the weakness of its national identity. Then, it proceeds to discuss the origins and development of Marca España as a nation branding project. Finally, an overview of the different actors involved behind the branding project is presented.

2.1 Spain in a nutshell

Spain is a democratic country organized in the form of a parliamentary government under a constitutional monarchy. The country is characterized by its plurality, its different ethnicities and its cultural and identity diversity. Spain’s cultural, political and linguistic diversity is connected to the Basque and Catalan political nationalist movements which first appeared in the nineteenth century, with the beginnings of the country as a nation state (Martín & Rius,
Before the First World War, Spain had never been involved in any efforts by the government to nationalize and unify the country, as the rest of European nations did. Some attempts of nationalizing Spain were made in the twentieth century, with no success. The absence of a consistent nationalizing rhetoric, together with a cultural and ethnical plurality, strongly influenced the rise of regional nationalistic feelings (Nijhuis, 2013). The regional identities have always had a strong presence, with their own cultural and historical set of features. It is plausible to state that there has never been a consensus on the national project. In 1932, the regional nationalistic feelings were recognized by “The Statute of Autonomies”, which granted historical nationality to the autonomic regions, which divided Spain.

However, with the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the situation changed and Spain entered a dictatorial regime led by general Franco. Franco’s regime was defined by Spanish nationalism and therefore all kinds of regional cultures and languages were banned, and regional autonomies revoked. This resulted in the annihilation of the regional identities from the official discourse, censorship of expression, and prohibition of the use of any language other than Spanish (Moreno et al., 1998). Franco’s death in 1975 caused the arrival of democracy and the restoration of the autonomies, institutions and regional languages.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 embraced the Spanish linguistic and cultural diversity by recognizing both the Spanish nation-state and the self-governance of the 17 autonomous communities, as we know it nowadays. It also recognized the existence of four co-existing official languages besides from Spanish: Basque, Catalan, Galician and Occitan (Moreno et al., 1998). This model of state has been considered close to a federalist, combining a unitary state structure with a system of decentralized power among the autonomous communities (Martín & Rius, 2014).

This socio-political context, together with the cultural and ethnic plurality (language and traditions), explain the fragmented character of Spain as a nation. Spain is therefore a clear example of incomplete nation-building. This, together with its deterritorialization, has originated an identity crisis of the nation in the last decades. Although the regional nationalistic feelings have existed since long time ago, some conditions have recently accentuated them. One of these conditions is the economic crisis of 2007, a catalyst for a national identity talk and one of the reasons for which the regional nationalisms were stressed. In this sense, the regions of Basque and Catalonia are the strongest on these movements, characterized by strong regional feelings and own regional language. The nationalist parties of these regions have gained significant support over the last years, revealing the accent of the regional patriotism. Both Basque and Catalonia have implemented referendums, aiming for the full independence of their regions as a separate state from Spain. Nowadays, these nationalist tensions are in the forefront of the country’s problems.
Besides the identity crisis, Spain is immersed in a political and economic recession, characterized by big corruption scandals and a vast unemployment crisis. The instability and distrust on the government was proved in the last general elections of the 20th December 2015, resulting in the most fragmented Spanish parliament in its history. The lack of a winning majority or party-agreements has forced the country to held new elections in June 2016.

For all the reasons mentioned above, Spain is a particular and interesting case to study the phenomenon of nation branding and its construction of national identity in the media. In the next section, the origins of Marca España campaign are briefly outlined.

2.2 Marca España: Spain Brand in brief

After the restoration of democracy in 1975, Spain was associated with negative images result of the isolation of the regime, seen as a grey nation, authoritarian and tremendously religious (Gilmore, 2002). The aim to clean the negative image after Franco’s dictatorship was overriding for the country’s agenda. In 1992, this deteriorated imaged improved notably with the organization of two events, the Universal Exposition of Seville and Barcelona’s Olympic Games. These both positioned Spain as a modern and developed country in the international arena (Martín & Rius, 2014).

In 2000, the second mandate of the conservative party PP (People’s Party) started. PP’s party identified the decentralization of Spain as one of the main weaknesses for the country’s image in the international scenario (Martín & Rius, 2014). That is why in 2000 the government launched the Marca España Project, in response to the desire of building up a homogeneous nation image. The project adopted a centralist and nationalist oriented design. In 2004, the victory of the PSOE party (Socialist Workers’ Party) resulted in a moderation of the centralist practices of the Marca España project (Martín & Rius, 2014). During these years, the modernization program of Spain occurred. The government coordinated a modernisation plan that included the rebuilding of cities such as Bilbao and Barcelona, privatisation of Spanish multinationals such as Telefonica, big advertising campaigns both national and international and graphic identity efforts such as the famous Joan Miro’s sun logo. Those efforts were accompanied by the rise of Spanish talented artists and actors such as Penelope Cruz or Santiago Calatrava (Gilmore, 2002). Everything combined resulted into a Spain that was fresh, modern and vanguardist.

From a marketing point of view, the post-regime branding of Spain was a notable successful story (Gilmore, 2002), and the case is still studied and used as an example for nation brand experts around the globe. This success is due to the fact that the Spanish image was favorably revamped after the dictatorship, with the religious, traditional and underdeveloped
country becoming a fresh, free and competitive nation for foreign eyes (Gilmore, 2002). However, the economic crisis that hit Spain in 2008 had bad effects on the Spanish image, taking a step backwards. According to Crespo and Vangehuchten (2014), the economic crisis, together with the incoherent Spain brand communication strategies, resulted into the reappearance of Spain’s old stereotypes, returning to a portrait of a poor and underdeveloped country with lazy and inefficient citizens. Nowadays, the country is still fighting with that deteriorated image, linked to the economic and social decline, scandals of corruptions, identity crisis and emigration of talent.

2.3 Behind Marca España

Of high interest for this research are the actors involved behind the branding project. This section elaborates on the work of Martín and Rius (2014) and their analysis of the institutions involved in Marca España.

Marca España project started as a governmental action that soon became a public-private partnership. The project includes 75 institutions, of which the vast majority are public (41), followed by 17 semi private and other 17 private (Crespo & Vangehuchten, 2014). The main private player in the beginning was the FMRE (Forum of Leading Brands of Spain), a foundation created with the objective of promoting Spanish corporations as competitive, gaining strategic representation abroad (Martín & Rius, 2014). In 2002, more foundations joined, including the Ministries of Industry, Culture and Foreign Affairs, The Spanish Patent and Trademark Office and the ICEX (Spanish Institute of Foreign Trade). Another important player was RIEEIE (Royal Institute for International and Strategic Studies), a private foundation financed by the FMRE. The RIEEIE proposed the creation of an organism that would coordinate the activities of Marca España and the state and private companies participants. The need of including representatives of the Autonomous Communities in the organism was proposed, but after all they were not involved in any of the decisions. As Rius and Martin (2014) argue, at the end “the initiatives around the plan were established in a public-private top-down design of governance” (p. 9).

With the passing of time, other state institutions in charge of cultural issues joined the project such as the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and the Cervantes Institute. However, in general there was no participation of cultural agencies, and minor representation of the regional offices, which are actually responsible for most cultural management policies.

In summary, it is plausible to conclude that both cultural and regional agencies played a minor role in the definition of the project, only contributing as content providers but not
present in the decision/initiatives of the plan. Any multicultural approach was vanished by the insistence of control and centrality. Citing Rius and Martin (2014), “Marca España’s centre of gravity is represented by a combination of public and non-cultural agents (foreign affairs and economic promotion) and private agents (exports multinationals and creative industries with international projection)” (p.10).

This complex network of actors involved together with the socio-political context briefly tackled above, are crucial for the contextualization of this study.

3. Previous Research

This section elaborates on previous research related to two main research areas: national identities and nation branding. Firstly, different research on the media construction of nations and national identities is presented, revealing how there are few studies focused on new media and the Internet. Secondly, an overview of the different strands of studies on nation branding is outlined, highlighting the need for more media-oriented studies. Lastly, the knowledge gaps are presented, positioning the current study in the media approach, focusing on the study of online representations of a nation.

3.1 Media construction of national identities

Some scholars had tackled the concepts of nation and national identities as constructed through the media discourse. Among these authors, Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart (2009) are some of the pioneers who connected Fairclough and Van Dijk’s theories of discourse with the study of nations and national identities. Following the Critical Discourse approach founded in Vienna, they focus on Austria to study the linguistic strategies in the construction of its national identity. By collecting data from different discursive contexts, including media texts among others, they identify the state and culture as main aspects in the construction of Austrian identity, arguing cultural ideas (such as mentality, character and language) are most prevalent in semi-official and quasi-private discourse, and state ideas mostly present in official discourse.

Additionally, Koh (2005) studied how Singapore is constructed as a nation by looking at the education and the media. He calls those “ideological state apparatuses” since they construct preferred or certain national identities. For instance, his study shows how Singapore uses the media to highlight the lack of a strong national identity, while the education system is seen as a vehicle to solve the identity crisis. Another research on this perspective is Alameda’s study.
(2008) of the Gibraltar's identity using a Critical Discourse Analysis of editorial articles. By studying the printed media representations of the Gibraltar issue in the 2002 referendum, Alameda identifies the portrait of the Gibraltarians as an active and united group, with Gibraltar represented as a victim and Spain as the cause of distress. Meanwhile, Poulton (2004) looks at the construction of British national identity on TV, focusing on the coverage of a sport event, the European Football Championship. Her textual analysis shows how the patriotic feelings are accentuated on those games and how the matches are framed as nation against nation. Roy (2007) follows the same line of TV analysis by studying an American TV show called “Worlds Apart”, showing how the show reaffirms the superiority of America in the world map of nations. Combining printed media and TV analysis, Fernandes (2000) analyzes the media representations of India to explore the ways in which media images reproduce a hegemonic political culture in liberalizing India, where the state-dominated planned economy is replaced by an ideal portrait of urban middle class which implements the behaviour of the capitalism consumption.

The different studies of these scholars explore media discourse including political speeches (Wodak et al., 2009) printed media articles (Alameda, 2008; Fernandes, 2000) and TV programs and news (Fernandes, 2000; Poulton, 2004; Roy, 2007). However, minor research has been done on how nations and national identities are constructed in the new media, for instance, on the Internet.

Looking at those few studies, Mohammed (2004) looks at the self-presentation of small developing countries by analyzing their official national websites. He concludes that the nation uses the websites for self-promotion but not for attracting investment. Following the same strand, Fürsich and Robins (2004) analyze the texts included on travel websites of African countries to examine how the nations are constructed. Their findings show the countries’ desire of expressing a cohesive national identity, based on African stereotypes, that they can sell to Western tourists.

The lack of other studies exploring national identity through the new media, such as a website, it is seen here as a gap that sets room for our research.

3.2 Nation branding

Notwithstanding the novelty of the nation branding phenomenon, the importance and implications of the topic have resulted in several scholars showing their interest and studying different conditions of it. For the review of the status of the topic in the academia, this section draws on the work of Kaneva (2011) and her agenda for critical research. She analyzed the
existing academic literature on nation branding, dividing studies from different areas in three categories: technical-economic, political, and cultural approaches.

According to her, technical-economic studies are those focused on economic growth, efficiency, and capital accumulation. These include marketing, management, and tourism studies (also called by several authors place or destination branding) and it is by far the strongest approach about nation branding. Most of the studies in the technical-economic area start from the assumption that nations act as brands (Anholt, 2013; Olins 1999). Namely, nation branding is viewed as an asset to be used in strategic ways. This perspective, however, “ignores the relations of power and neglects the implications of nation branding for democracy” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 121). On the other hand, studies coming from the political approach include those related to nations in a global system of international relations. They usually tackle topics of international relations, public relations, and international communication. Most of the scholars focus on the concept of “public diplomacy”, term dated from the 1960s and that has functioned as nation branding until the latest appeared. After the Cold War, scholars in this category see nation branding as a “post-ideological form of reputation management for nations” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 126). In other words, political approaches position nation branding as a tool for propaganda necessary in a postmodern world. Lastly, cultural approaches are the smallest group of studies (8% of the total) and include studies from the fields of media and cultural studies, which focus mainly on the implications of nation branding for national and cultural identities.

Kaneva’s (2011) review of literature covers the majority of the studies of nation branding at that time, however, her classification has some shortcomings. The political approach is linked to the technical-economic one in the sense they both understand nation branding as tool for competitive advantage, this is, both perspectives sharing an instrumentalist orientation. Moreover, the cultural approach focuses on historicity, referring at the end of Cold War and pointing to nation branding as neoliberalism tool. In other words, the studies in the cultural approach understand cultural as political (Kaneva, 2011). Therefore, the term “cultural” narrows down the category, since it also contains studies which ground in theories of communication, society and culture but also related to political concepts and governance. That is why this study will develop a new and broader classification, which divides the nation branding studies among two categories: the economic-strategic approach (technical, economical and political) and the critical approach (cultural, communication & media studies).

This last critical approach is the most important one for this study, since has its roots in media and cultural studies and deals with questions such as national identity, stereotyping and cultural imperialism. The common feature is the critique of nation branding’s discourses, which result in several implications for society. Following Aronczyk (2008): “nation branding
promotes a particular organization of power, knowledge and exchange in the articulation of collective identity” (p. 46).

A growing body of critical scholarship problematizes nation branding (Aronczyk, 2008; Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2012; Varga, 2013). The most comprehensive work in the critical area has been done by Melissa Aronczyk (2013) and her book about nation branding with different clients and study cases from several countries. Her work is critical with the concept of nation branding, connecting it with nation’s constructivist theories of Anderson and arguing that nation branding is different from other forms of imagined communities “qualitatively different from […] earlier forms of national imagining and need to be addressed as such” (2013, p. 4). Together with her study from 2008, she focuses on British-based brand consultants and different country cases to explore the field of practice. The second most extensive author in the subject is Nadia Kaneva (2011), and her chapter about the branding of Post-Communist nations in Eastern Europe, with individual case studies on particular campaigns. Furthermore, Varga (2013) argues nation branding is an implicit cultural policy that targets mainly citizens of the nation and not external agents. By doing so, it transforms the nation and legitimizes the neoliberal social order.

The vast majority of critical scholars in nation branding focus on study cases from Eastern European countries, interviewing branding consultants and analyzing their challenges in the redefinition of nations in a post-communist context (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2016; Jansen, 2008; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). From this group, Bolin and Ståhlberg (2016) focus on the Ukrainian case to explain the ways in which nation branding is a practice of meaning management related to economic globalization and cultural cosmopolitanism. Following this strand, Jansen (2008) argues how nation branding puts a positive face to “market fundamentalism” by privileging only market value features of the nation and studies the case of “Brand Estonia.” Similarly, Volcic & Andrejevic (2011) studied the Slovenian case by thoroughly interviewing branding consultants, with special attention to the use of nations to sell cultural products, practice called “commercial nationalism”.

Among all these studies from the critical approach, two main strands are used: the cultural tradition or the media/communication studies. This study is situated within the media and communications tradition, studying the media representations of Spain as a nation brand and critically exploring its repercussions. Despite minor media research done, the main studies in the media and communication perspective regarding nation branding have been collected and analyzed below.

### 3.2.1 Media studies on nation branding

Few scholars have studied nation branding through the media (Kaneva and Popescu, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2014; Kania-Lundholm, 2012; Nijhuis, 2013; Volcic, 2008; Widler, 2007).
Looking closely at them, Kaneva and Popescu (2011) critically analyze the TV commercials’ texts of two governamental branding campaigns in order to compare the creation and symbolic commodification in both post-communist Romania and Bulgaria. Their study highlights how national imageries use an ahistorical, decontextualized and depoliticized frame, which is appropriated for the purposes of neoliberal globalization. In their further study in 2014, they draw on the work of Fairclough and his three dimensions of critical discourse analysis to explore the case of Romanians branding campaign of 2008. By studying the sociocultural, discourse and textual practices of the campaign, their findings reveal how a nation branding campaign was used as a strategic tool to police the boundaries of national and transnational identities, using the narratives of othering to frame a racist problem and evading any responsibility of the Romanian government.

In the meantime, Kania-Lundholm (2012) problematizes nation-branding as an “updated” form of nationalism. Her study discursively analyzes the “bottom-up” processes of national reproduction and re-definition in an online, post-socialist context. She analyzes articles, letters and comments from citizen journalism portals in order to explore how the citizens play a role in the reconstruction of the Polish nation brand online. Moving to a more sociocultural perspective, Nijhuis’ (2013) research critically analyses the nation branding practices in Andalucia, revealing how they are created in an attempt to copy the other historic nationalities of Spain: Galicia, Catalonia and Basque country. Drawing on the CDA tradition, she analyses the Museum for Anadalusian Autonomy, a debate concerning the Andalusian identity, and two pieces of nation branding material: the government website for Andalusian tourism and a promotional video of the festivity “Semana Santa”. Meanwhile, the study of Yugoslav states by Volcic (2008) provides a particular approach to the media construction of the nation, seeing it as reproducing stereotypical representations for the purpose of selling them back to Western audiences. She focuses on new media and the Internet, implementing a textual analysis of governmental branding websites. Volcic’s study is the closest one to this research, since not only explores the construction of a national identity through the media discourse, but also it does it specifically studying governmental nation branding websites. Widler (2007) combines interviews with textual analysis of scientific papers and visual discourse analysis of published branding material in order to raise a critique on nation branding as an anti-democratic and stereotyped practice. He argues a brand should speak on the voice of the people, including the citizens on the process. Moreover, he distinguishes between nation-as-state and nation-as-people to stress the importance of national diversity.

Regarding the state of methodology about nation branding, methods such as interviews, content analysis, focus groups and cyber-ethnography are favored by scholars (Wodak et al., 2009; Volcic, 2008). As it has been presented above, media scholars often draw on CDA tradition, combining the analysis of the branding discourse (actors involved, production of
texts) with the study of the texts itself (news articles, advertisements, multimedia branding material, websites). All in all, the qualitative approach is by far the most represented, with Critical Discourse Analysis often use to seek the power structures and underlying messages behind the texts (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu 2014; Nijhuis, 2013; Widler, 2007).

3.3 Knowledge and knowledge gaps

The main contribution of the studies discussed in the previous section is the way they problematize nation branding from different perspectives. However, they share some common points, that can be useful as starting point for this study.

A focus on historicity is central among all these studies, referring to the end of the Cold War and the new repositioning in the world map of the studied countries. Moreover, nation branding is usually connected to economic processes on the international arena in the end of the 20th century, positioning them in post-modernism. Furthermore they all link the discourse of nation branding to constructivist approaches to nation, relating it with relations of social power.

Regarding the problematization of the practice, the above mentioned scholars also share some of the critiques. One of the commonly raised critique is that nation branding discourses are a new iteration of neoliberal ideology (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). As Kaneva and Popescu (2011) state, national identity is appropriated “for the purpose of neoliberal globalisation” (p. 191). In this sense, nation branding is close to neoliberal government due to the fact that the construction of the nation is outsourced to the private sector (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). A further common feature of a group of academic writers is their concern over the reductive and undemocratic character of branding as a strategy for public diplomacy in democratic societies (Jansen, 2008; Widler, 2007; Varga 2013; Voldic & Andrejevic, 2011). Their critique rests in the practice of nation branding as a covered transfer of public funds into private hands (Jansen, 2008; Kaneva, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013). As Kaneva and Popescu (2011) argue: nation branding transfers “the power to articulate national identity into the hands of marketing and branding experts” (p. 203). Lastly, some argue that, by trying to represent an unified idea of the citizens of a country, nation branding ignores the plurality of a nation (Aronczyk, 2008; Aronczyk, 2013; Widler, 2007). Following Aronczyk (2008): “a public good that presumes the existence of a single public ignores the infinite pluralities, conflicts and potentials for resistance that characterize the realities of public life.” In this sense, Widler (2007) highlights the stereotyped nature of nation branding as a vast problem, because “instead of fighting stereotypes [nation branding] reproduces and enhances them” (p. 148).
Although the reviewed studies are important for an understanding of media’s construction of nation branding and national identities, a review of the literature reveals several gaps. Quite some studies have covered the role of the media in the creation of national identities. However, little attention has been paid to the specific phenomenon of nation branding as constructed through media. Moreover, the studies are usually focused on traditional media modes, ignoring the new trends and habits of people on a wired world.

This shows there is a vast room for research in the area of nation branding and national identities, specifically on how those are constructed on the Internet. The above review reveals there are few studies on the analysis of online texts and websites. This study is positioned in this area, aiming to further explore how a website frames nation branding and national identities online. To do so, the study will draw on the Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the online self-representations of Spain on a governmental website. The next chapter will present the main theoretical concepts related to nations and national identities and how those are linked with the practice of nation branding on the new online media.

4. Theoretical Frame and Concepts

This section will provide a theoretical framework that serves as the lens through which the object of study is conceptualized and put into perspective. The section starts with some basic assumptions about the discursive construction of nation and national identities, as well as a brief discussion of the concept of nation branding and its relation to ideology, in order to provide working definitions, which are primarily based on the works of social constructivist theorists of Benedict Anderson (2006) and Stuart Hall (1997). Thereafter, discourse is understood as a social practice, drawing on the Critical Discourse Tradition, and on the work of Ruth Wodak (2013), Teun A. van Dijk (1998), and Norman Fairclough (1995). Finally, the role of the media on nation branding is outlined, positioning Internet and specifically websites as a new vehicle for the construction of national identities and as an emergent tool for the practice of nation branding.

4.1 The concepts of nation and national identity: nation as a social construct

The first assumption is that nations are social constructs, coming from a taken-for-granted common sense of society. They are imagined communities (Anderson, 2006), this is, a mental construction of a group of people as belonging to a particular nation. National identities are understood as the feeling of belonging to a certain imagined community (Alameda, 2008). The members of this national community do not need to meet or interact face to face. Instead, they
create a community based on a mental picture where the common history, beliefs, and similar practices coexist. That mental picture, also referred as the collective consciousness of a nation by Hobsbawn (1983, as cited in Jansen, 2008, p. 124), is produced and reproduced on a daily basis, in social practices, in institutions and in the media. The national collective consciousness is best represented in the term *nationalism*, seen as an ideological device or glue that keep the state and its citizens together.

Following Wodak et al. (2009), national identities are constructed in discourse, mainly through everyday cultural narratives. In this sense, Hall describes nations as “systems of cultural representations” (1997), understanding national culture as the umbrella that represents the nation. Consequently, national identity is a form of identification with those representations. For instance, we know we are Spanish not because we were born in Spain, but because we identify ourselves with the everyday representations of a Spanish citizen, such as the food we eat, the history they teach us in school, the way our family talks or the TV shows we watch. In that national culture, citizens play a key role, as they participate in the formation of the idea and are the main representatives of the national culture.

The second assumption is that there is no such thing as the one and only national identity (Wodak et al., 2009). According to the context, the national identity change or coexist with other identities. In the Spanish case for instance, the national identity exist side-by-side with the regional identity. Moreno et al., (1998) name this condition “dual identity”, which can be explained as the double identity or compound nationality of Spanish citizens who also identify themselves with the identity of their autonomous communities. For a national identity to survive, as any other social construct, it needs to be constantly re-constructed. Here is where nation branding (elaborated on the section below) comes to action, serving as a tool for the reproduction and legitimation of the national identity and nations as a certain social constructs in both the international and domestic arenas. In the case of Spain, nation branding could therefore be seen as a corrective measure from a nationalist government, to undermine the regional identities and elevate the national identity to an umbrella level. But, does that national imagery represent Spanish citizens? Following Widler (2007), there are certain contradictions between the representations of national identities offered by media and elites and the real everyday discourses of identity. For instance, the mediated national representation of Spain might portray Spaniards as united and homogeneous, when the real everyday discourses in several regions point to a divided and heterogeneous body of citizens.
4.2 Nation branding and ideology

One of the most interesting approaches on how we perceive nations today is the idea of imagining nations as brands. Nation branding is used by many governments as a tool for the dissemination of a certain nation imagery. When studying the process of national identity and its mediated reproduction, nation branding appears as an interesting phenomenon due to its power to reproduce certain ideologies or nation constructions.

Some authors have defined nation branding as an updated form of nationalism (Aronczyk, 2008; Kania-Lundholm, 2012). Although the phenomenon started simple from the desire of promotion of a country-brand, it entails a new form of communicating the nation and a transformation in the construction of national identities. The practice of branding a nation involves the reproduction of symbols and national narratives as brands, disseminated through the media and in everyday contexts. Through those national narratives, the idea of a nation is disseminated both internally and externally. In other words, the idea of a nation (Spain in this case) as a specific national community becomes reality in the realm of convictions and beliefs through figurative discourses (such as nation brand) launched by power groups with some underlying interests.

The relation between nation branding and ideology is crucial for this research. The notion of ideology is understood from Hall’s perspective: “mental frameworks -the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought and the systems of representation- which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (Hall, 1996, p. 26, as cited in Van Dijk, 1998, p. 9). Understanding nationalism as a form of ideology, nation branding is assumed as a tool for the reproduction of ideology, with the goal to legitimize a given status of a nation. The reproduction of a certain ideology entails the process of naturalizing socially and politically constructed patterns, identities and relations. Moreover, it is essential to understand that the practice of nation branding needs to be situated in the socio-political context of power relations. Behind those legitimate constructed identities and natural patterns rest the interests of power groups. Power is an essential concept that looks at the way discourses reproduce social domination (Wodak, 2013). The socially powerful are those who have access to privileged resources such as knowledge, education, and wealth, which provides authority and influence (Machin & Mayr, 2012). By connecting nation branding with relations of social power, “nation branding appears as an ideological practice and construct that reproduces certain images and discourse of the nation while silencing others” (Kania-Lundholm, 2012, p.65).

Drawing on the critical tradition, the analysis of a nation brand will look at that context to explore the natural, taken-for-granted assumptions of a nation imagery (the nation brand) present in the media discourse. The term critical implies here “denaturalizing” the language to reveal the implication of the nation branding discourse.
This study starts from the premise that national identities are discursively constructed. Discourse is understood here as language in real contexts of use. In this sense language is a form of “social practice”, this is, we construct the world through language, thus language is the world (Wodak, 2013). Language is therefore a social construction that constitutes us as subjects (Fairclough, 1995) for example, Spanish people with certain values. Discourse constitutes social practices, social relations and identities but at the same time is affected by them. For instance, a nationalist discourse may influence the political and social reality and the way we perceive the world as naturally divided into nation-states. But the same nationalist discourse might be affected by diverse social contexts such as globalization or new technologies (Kania-Lundholm, 2012).

In this research, the focus is on the discourses of nationalism, national identities, and nation branding. They all contribute to the reproduction of social life, creating a “picture” of a certain country in our minds. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), “it is our dominant discourses what influence our daily lives” (p.20).

When it comes to the ideas about nation brand and national identity, the knowledge provided on discourse often focuses on the idea of unity, consistency and homogeneity (Kania-Lundholm, 2012). According to Wodak et al. (2009), the discursive strategies often represent difference within other countries as unity. Consequently, meaning is not an inherent part of language, but it is constructed through the selection of language and discursive practices. The social meaning comes from a selection of systems of signs among options which are available in grammar. All of these language choices are political in that they shape how people and events are represented (Van Dijk, 1993).

Such a view on discourse positions this study close to the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2013), that is interested not specifically in how meaning is created but in how discourses operate in a given context, for the further understanding of a certain social situation. Main critical discourse advocates such as Fairclough and Wodak focus on how power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse. This is supported by Van Dijk (1993), who argues, “CDA deal(s) with discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that results from it” (p. 252). In Hall’s perspective, discourse produces knowledge that shapes our perceptions of the world. Through that production of knowledge, discourse is part of the process in which power operates. Therefore, through discourse, certain kinds of practices, ideas, values and identities are promoted and naturalized. In that sense, discourse is ideological, reproduced and legitimated by social representations and everyday practices, helping in the reproduction of power relations or inequalities. In sum “texts
are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending for dominance” (Wodak, 2013, p. 307). The current thesis draws on Wodak et al.’s (2009) premise that nation discourses (in this case nation branding discourse) serve to construct national identities, as well as to perpetuate, reproduce or justify a certain social status quo or ideology linked to them.

4.4 The media and nation branding

The media are crucial to the production and reproduction of national identities and nation branding. In this sense, Orgad (2012) argues that cultural and media representations are constitutive of social imageries. In other words, how we imagine and picture ourselves as part of a nation is in a significant part result of the media, or as Orgad (2012) theorizes, the way “contemporary media representations construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the nation as a symbolic category of belonging” (p. 160). Therefore, this study will explore the media discourse, particularly media representations, as crucial for the articulation of national identities and nation brands. But why are the media essential for the understanding and formation of national imageries? Following Thompson (1995), it can be stated that we live in a mediated world where media are not only a vehicle of information or a way of communication. However, media do play an essential role in reordering social relations and shaping identities. We have entered a “new visibility” where everything, from people to political issues, is seen through the lenses of the media (Thompson, 1995). We are more and more dependent on mediation, because most of our everyday experiences are mediated. Work, social relations, entertainment, and communication; media can be considered omnipresent. Hence, the self is a construction that it is formed based on media symbols we encounter every day (Thompson, 1995). Media are also essential in the creation of a national identity since they form the base that provides cultural sameness. If we are “invented communities”, we need some similarities or bonds that connect us as a group. Traditions and festivities are, in this sense, powerful tools.

But how do we assimilate traditions as a part of a nation? As I mentioned before, media, together with other institutions, are the responsible to disseminate these historical similarities. Through implied symbols (such as the use of the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’) and iteration of traditions and festivities, media reinforce and perpetuate the nation everyday, allowing an individual to be identified with complete strangers. This is referred by Billig as banal nationalism (Orgad, 2012). Thanks in part to this banal forms of nationalism, reproduced daily, “the nation-states continue to appear as the natural form of social and political organization of the world” (Kania-Lundholm, 2012, p. 35).
In this sense, nation branding is considered a “simpler” practice of banal nationalism since its symbols do not create strong feelings of belonging but rather work as reminders, reproducing the idea of a nation in a superficial way. According to Nijhuis (2013), the invention of tradition is the main method of nation branding, while banal forms of nationalism are the primary target of such practices (p.48). As a form of banal nationalism, “nation branding is a practice that targets the nation and therefore contributes to its re-construction” (Widler, 2007, p. 145). However, some authors are critical to this idea of nation branding as a form of banal nationalism since, they argue, nation branding is rarely meant to remind “us” who we are (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2016) and does the opposite of inventing traditions, by emptying out national identity and replacing it with a flexible and capitalizable cultural logic (Varga, 2013).

It has been stated the importance of the media in the creation of national identities and the reproduction of nation brands. But how the new technologies have changed the scenario where national imageries are constructed?

4.5 New media and the nation-state: websites in the construction of nation branding

4.5.1 Internet as new media

Computer technology, interactive TVs, the development of Internet and smartphones are the main actors of the current technological revolution, representing what it has been called the “new media” (Gruber, 2008). In this scenario, Internet specifically represents all the characteristics of this new communication era: decentralization, interactivity, multimodality, transnationality and transculturality (Gruber, 2008). Moreover, Internet is nowadays one of the main sources of information, and it has become an integral part of the everyday lives of the people. Its use and availability have also exponentially increased in the last years, with currently a little over than a billion Internet users in the world (Eriksen, 2007).

Besides, one of the features of the information era is the shift from national to global media. In this sense, the Internet appears as an arena for the global media, since everyone in the world could have access to a certain website. This is really powerful for nation branding, since it targets the world, the external audiences could access to information about Spain from any part of the planet. Lastly, we follow Everard’s (2000) assumption that if power is expressed through language, information technologies and Internet are a new vehicle for the exercise of power.

For all these reasons, it becomes essential for media scholars to study the Internet implications as a new media. That is why this study focuses on the Internet, specifically on websites, as a new media to transmit certain values and national representations.

Websites are the first component we think when talking about the Internet. A website usually consists of interlinked pages with text and illustrations (Eriksen, 2007). Its informative character is similar to the traditional newspaper or the magazine. However, a website differs with
older media since it is a much more cheaper media that can be updated at any time. Also, it has the advantage of been able to include participatory systems such as comments, feedback forms or even discussion forums. Nevertheless, some of the websites are still one-way (top-bottom produced), functioning almost as mass media.

4.5.2 Virtual nations

But how are these transformations affecting the reproduction of nations and national identities? The new media have changed the discursive practices regarding the nation, with new styles and practices. For scholars interested in the study of the nation, Internet emerges as a challenge since it is a different medium to express cultural identity (Castells, 2010). Research has illustrated how digital media are new scenarios providing different forms of national re-imagination (Castells, 2010; Eriksen, 2007; Everard, 2000). Along with this strand, some academics have explored the potential of cyberspace for a more democratic construction of the nation, providing to the public sphere participatory opportunities (Kania-Lundholm, 2012).

There is no doubt the world has become more complex and more connected, and this results on important transformations for the national identities, such as the disaggregation of the nation and the alteration of the process of identity formation (Everard, 2000). However, the disaggregation of a nation does not mean its dissolution. Instead, other new forms of nationalism are appearing, such as what Eriksen (2007) calls “transnational nationalism”, or according to Benedict Anderson, “long-distance nationalism”. This is, diasporas can now use the web mechanisms to keep the sense of belonging of a country and the connections with its people, but also to circulate money and other resources. The national community becomes an abstract that is connected to its nation due to the Internet. Consequently, the nations are partially constructed online, understanding them as “virtual communities” (Everard, 2000).

It is therefore plausible to state that, although some scholars were afraid Internet would threat the national identities, it has resulted a key medium to keep the nations together (Eriksen, 2007). “In a ‘global era’ of movement and deterritorialisation, the Internet is used to strengthen, rather than weaken, national identities” (Eriksen, 2007, p.1).

In relation to the specific practice of nation branding, governments and branding specialists create their images and texts online for the self-representation of the country on Internet in a postmodern neoliberal time. With this strategy, the creators of the nation brand intend to reinforce the external and also the internal recognition of the country’s image. According to Volcic (2008), web representations, specifically governmental ones, reproduce commercial stereotypes following a neoliberal logic and ignoring historical and political aspects. This study will closely look at these web representations, exploring the extent to which nation branding discourse on the Internet helps framing national identity.
5. Method and Materials

This chapter addresses the methodological aspects of the analysis conducted for the purpose of the thesis. The analysis has been structured focusing on the discursive representations of nation and national identity. In the first section, the study is positioned on the critical interpretive approach, resting on a qualitative perspective. The second section presents critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the major reasons for choosing it as the method employed in this study. The third section explores in more detail the material and the selection criteria applied in the process. In the fourth section, the analytical procedures and framework are presented. Finally, the quality of the research is assessed, discussing issues related to trustworthiness and generalizability, as well as some of the limitations of the study.

5.1 Critical interpretive approach to the nation

The current study is based on the qualitative social approach. Qualitative knowledge does not aim to make generalizations, but to understand a phenomenon, its consequences and outcomes, and its significance in the larger world (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991). Human phenomena as language, nations and education are so embedded in our everyday lives that they are easily taken for granted. Therefore, this qualitative knowledge may not always be explicit, but implicit, thus the researcher has to critically search for it. This study draws on the qualitative approach, since we are not interested in quantifying the features of the discourse, neither the frequency of appearance of certain discursive mechanisms. The interest is, thus, far from numerical and aims to explore, in a deeper way, the media constructions on the Spanish branding discourse. The term “explore” entails here the study of the material from a critical interpretive approach. This perspective is suggested by Klein and Myers (1999, as cited in Pozzebon & HEC Montréal, 2003, p. 277), who see hermeneutics as the theoretical link between critical and interpretive research. CDA places its methodology within hermeneutics, based on the interpretation and understanding of social events through the analysis of their meanings (Wodak & Meyer, 2008).

On the one hand, critical research implies probing taken-for-granted assumptions in the status quo of the society. Therefore critical approaches focus explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround social practices. On the other hand, interpretive or constructivist approaches aim to produce in depth explorations of the way in which a particular social reality is constructed, being their studies sensitive to power.

The combination of both allows us to study phenomena with inherent meaning (Pozzebon & HEC Montréal, 2003). Social reality is indirectly observable, and it is mediated by its actors, language and understandings. The meaning of the social world is all about
perceptions and practices, norms and values, roles and institutions. By critically interpreting the world, we study data that is historically, culturally and socially, but not naturally produced.

However, critical discourse studies can be both quantitative and qualitative. As it was stated above, this thesis relies on the qualitative approach since it “focuses on the occurrence of its analytical objects in a particular context, as opposed to the recurrence of formally similar elements in different contexts”, the latter being characteristic of quantitative research (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991, p. 40).

Moreover, this thesis starts from the assumption that, for the study of any social phenomena, you always need to analyze it in a related context. If context is critical to the comprehension of any social situation, it becomes even more explicit when discursively studying the nation. It is important to remember that discourse is not only language; it is a social practice that comes from a common cultural understanding at a particular moment in history. Following Wodak and Meyer (2008), it is relevant to study the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to. In brief, a discourse-historical approach (Wodak, 2013), that accounts the ground in which the national discourses are produced, is essential to understand and analyze the empirical data. That is why the socio-political history of Spain, which is the backbone of the context chapter of this thesis (see chapter 2), has been presented. This background will be taken into account as an important factor to relate to when looking at the results.

Furthermore, it is relevant to stress that this empirical analysis is based on a circular process, as shown on the figure below (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). The analysis process has its starting point in the conceptualization of the theory and assumptions (see chapter 4), to later on operationalize those on instruments (in the below analytical framework), apply them on the texts, to finally interpret those examining the theory from where we started.

![FIGURE 1.3 Empirical research as a circular process](image-url)
Finally, it is important to account that the qualitative approach explained here affects
not only to the analysis but also to the collection of data and to the assessment of the research
quality, which will be presented later in this chapter.

5.2 Exploring discourse through CDA

As has been mentioned in the theoretical section before, this paper starts from the premise that
nations and national identities are constructed through discourse (Wodak et al, 2009). The
analysis is based on a Critical Discourse Analysis’ (CDA) critical perspective, which “allows the
researcher to examine and understand the broader social and cultural context in which
identities are constructed through language as social practice” (Alameda, 2008, p. 229). CDA
approaches are problem-oriented, what means there is the need of exploring a problem or social
phenomenon in the world. Once a problem is identified, CDA practices aim to unfold the
tensions and mechanisms underlying such a phenomenon in order to make it more transparent,
and understandable (Alameda, 2008). CDA is a multidisciplinary field, which requires an
account of the relationship between language, social cognition, power, society and culture (Van
Dijk, 1993). CDA goes beyond the description of discourse to further interpret and discuss
political issues or social problems with the ultimate goal of contributing to society. This focus
on the understanding of social problems such as dominance and inequality is in ultimate a
political project. The goal is bringing social change through critical analysis and understanding.

This research started with the desire to explore the mediated representation of Spain in
the nation branding discourse, with the goal to investigate the connection of that representation
with power groups and ideology. This means we need a methodology that helps us grasp how
ideologies are manifested in the nation branding discourses. This methodological claim leads
this research to the framework of CDA. As it was pointed out, CDA allows us to explore the
concepts of power and ideology by “the common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and
power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (Wodak &
Meyer, 2008, p. 3). Starting from the aforementioned theoretical assumption that discourse
constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs of a nation, we applied CDA in order to
reveal those ideas and values carried with meanings that are buried in the nation branding
texts. This is, CDA helps us to explore those ideas and values of Spanish nation with meanings
and interests that are buried in the nation branding materials.

All in all, CDA appears to be the best method for this research, allowing us to investigate
how nation branding discourses reproduce or legitimate some ideologies.
5.3 Material and selection criteria

Regarding the empirical material and media analyzed, most research about media representations of national identities and brands have been carried on traditional media. Notwithstanding, and as it has been pointed out in the theoretical chapter (see chapter 4), Internet presents a complex and different environment for the creation of evolving national identities as commercial entities. Hence, the interest of studying online texts in this digitalized world.

The specific empirical material of this study will be collected from an online media from the elite discourse, the official governmental website of Marca España: [www.marcaespaña.es/en](http://www.marcaespaña.es/en). The reasons to choose this specific website are several. The website is the official governmental platform that compiles all the information regarding Marca España project, such as informative information about the country, advertising campaigns regarding the nation branding, news articles, visual material, videos, useful links, etc. Thus, this website allows us to analyze the exercise of governmental power, looking at the top-down relations of dominance through the nation branding discourse.

With regard to the branding discourse, this website is the reference of the Marca España campaign on the Internet, being the ultimate self-representation of the country online. Following Volcic (2008): “The governmental representations in particular are the space where the desired self-images are open to the world” (p. 399). Carrying out an analysis of internet-based texts collected from the website marcaespaña, this thesis explores how nation branding constructs national identity and which values can be found in these representations.

Due to the dual target of nation branding, both domestic and international, the website is presented in different languages, including the five official languages of Spain (Spanish, Catalan, Valencian, Galician, Basque) and English. The analysis is based on the English site in order to open the scope of the study to the global scenario of Internet, which has English as its more extended and common language. The English website is supposed to be the benchmark of the country for anybody around the world who looks for information about Spain online.

The selected data corpus has been studied by drawing inspiration and tools from CDA, with a focus on the strategies and resources where national identity is constructed. Most of the approaches to CDA do not explicitly explain or recommend a specific data-gathering procedure. Resting on a qualitative perspective, the collection of data here follows a strategic purpose related to the aim of the study, this is, collecting materials that can provide information on how Spain brand is constructed on the Internet. In other words, it has been collected based on theoretical relevance rather than aiming at representativeness of data, what is usually called theoretical sampling (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991).
At this point, it is convenient to get an overview of the structural organization of the website, in order to identify the sections on which the analysis has focused. The website is structured as follows. The first menu, on the top, is divided in six sections: Marca España, ME projects, Communication, News, Calendar and Participation. Marca España offers an overview about who is behind the website and what they do in the project; ME projects lists the projects in which the branding is immerse: such as CSR, healthy eating, sports model, etc; Communication includes the press room, foreign news about Spain, multimedia, sign up form to the newsletter and logo request. News includes news pieces related to Spain and divided in different categories, namely: about us, economy, business, culture, sports, society, Marca España and Spain in the media. Calendar collects the events agenda. Lastly, Participation allows citizens to send ideas of products and services. The second part of the website is the core menu, that tells the reader general information about Spain. It is divided in three sections: we are, talent and innovation and culture and singularity, and they all include informative information about the country.

The sampling is focused on one specific section, namely “news”, which became central to the aim from a preliminary inspection of the site. Since the study is intended to focus on the media discourse, this is, the website as a new media to construct national identities, the section “news” appeared as the most relevant for this analysis. The “news” section is, as it has been mentioned above, divided in different categories. Two categories were selected for the actual sampling: About us, and Society. On the one hand, About us was specially interesting in the sense it collects news from all the other categories that aim to represent Spain. In other words, it is the ultimate self representation of the country by selecting certain news about Spain. It also
includes interviews to important or successful Spanish characters. In total, 19 articles were analyzed belonging to this section. On the other hand, *Society* was, among all the categories, the one that is suppose to picture the social aspect of the country and its people. The national identity is formed by its society, and the nation is a social construction. Therefore, the named interest of this section for the analysis. On the *Society* section, 22 articles were analyzed. Some other sections (such as *Spain in the World*) are a compilation of news from other sources. Since we are interested in the language use of those in power, it is relevant to point out that, in the two selected sections, all texts have been written by Marca España. This is, Marca España (understanding it as the government plus some elites outlined in chapter 2) is the author of the pieces. Moreover, in order to give the study a present-day character, all the selected articles were published during 2015 and 2016. The amount of articles selected follows the process of theoretical “saturation or redundancy”, this is, the article collection stopped where the findings were recurrent and did not contribute to more relevant insights (Mautner, 2008).

All in all, the corpus of text that constitutes the sample are the sections “news: about us” and “news: society”, with a total of 41 texts been analyzed (see the appendix to find the list of analized articles and links). It is important to stress that not all the texts have been treated the same way, but the analysis has been divided in the two sections, treating them as separate.

5.4 Analytical framework

This section includes the analytical guidelines that have been used for processing the empirical material. Delimiting the set of tools applied in the study allow us to produce a more systematic and transparent analysis. Within CDA, there are different approaches that include different levels or dimensions of study of the texts, some of them closer to linguistics and others more close to the structure. It is important to remember that we are not concerned with the study of linguistic structures, but only insofar as their analysis helps in the understanding of a certain social situation (Wodak, 2013). The linguistic analysis is, therefore, just a tool in the endeavor.

The selection of the analytical devices has been developed in accordance with the research questions. Of extreme importance is, therefore, the exploration of the discursive strategies used for the reproduction of Spanish national identity. In order to create an analytical framework, or toolkit, that was pragmatic and tailored to this study, we have combined suggestion of categories from the work of Carvalho (2008), Machin and Mayr (2012) and Van Dijk (1988). Their contributions to this framework are important from different perspectives. Carvalho’s (2008) suggestion for an analytical framework for media discourse allows us to look at the texts from an overall perspective, that takes into account a textual analysis focused on the discursive construction of events, problems and social actors. Machin and Mayr (2012) shed light on the specific features (words connotations, rhetorical tropes, presupposition) to look at
when putting on practice the CDA analysis. Finally, Van Dijk’s discourse approach to media analysis (1988) focuses on the news analysis, allowing us to better classify the different dimensions (macrostructures and microstructures) of the news pieces.

The overall purpose of our method is to seek for discursive patterns focused on uniqueness and sameness as strategies of creation and reproduction of national identities (Wodak et al., 2009). To make a clear difference with the often confusing terms discourse and text, we refer here to “discourses” in a more abstract level, as patterns and commonalities of knowledge found on the material (Wodak, 2013). “Texts” are understood as the specific and unique realization of a discourse. To identify those discourses, the texts were analyzed both at the macro- and micro-level. Macro-analysis identifies the structure, schematic forms and main topics of the texts. However, as Van Dijk (1988) points, the meaning of an entire text is derived from the meanings of the words, and sentences in which the texts are formed. This is, the analysis of macropropositions involves the analysis of micro elements. For the above-mentioned seeking of uniqueness and sameness in the national branding discourse, the following toolbox has been designed.

5.4.1 Toolbox

The categories of analysis chosen for this study are:

1. Objects
2. Social Actors
3. Style and Rhetoric

1. Objects

The objects of the text are the topics or themes, understanding them as constitutive of the reality (Carvalho, 2008). The understanding of objects here intersects with Van Dijk’s (1988) understanding of topics, which belong to the macrolevel of discourse description. The themes used in the news discourse are a highly relevant insight for the understanding of the national identity narratives (Wodak et al, 2009) and therefore useful for this analysis. An important way to identify the topics is looking at the headlines of the news piece, since they have the summary function. After looking at the headline, special attention is paid to the lead paragraph, which usually includes the event, the agents or actors and most important information. Once we have identified them, we also need to account that they form the overall thematic structure. Following Carvalho (2008), identifying the objects of the text is an important step that allows us to deconstruct the role of discourses. The following questions have been posed to the texts:
- Which objects are constructed and which ones are absent? How are those topics constructed?
  It is important to stress the relevance of what is omitted in the text. Do they explain the causes of the events? Do they mention the consequences? Are some themes ignored? In analysing news pieces, “Silence can be as performative as discourse” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 171).
- What events are mentioned and associated to broader issues?
- What discussions, statements are present and how do they relate to each other?
  For instance, how the crisis impact the agriculture. Do they offer solutions? Do they blame it to the global crisis? In this sense, different aspects can be inferred from the texts, such as authority and responsibility of the actors and actions.

2. Social Actors

The media’s representations of situations, problems and information depend on how social actors construct the issues. By social actors, we understand both individuals and institutions, who are social agents (do something) or main characters in the story (Carvalho, 2008). The linguistic representation of these social actors is relevant since they are perceived as members of a national collectivity (Wodak et al., 2009). Thus, which social actors are represented, how, and their standings tell us a lot about the media construction of national identity. In this study, Spain is considered as an actor as well. We will specifically look at:
- Who are the actors mentioned in the text? What is their role?
  The agents of the actions are relevant for the understanding of the overall discourse. Also, the roles, positions or personalization of the actors give important insight, since they might work as legitimators or authorities on the text.
- Is the agent missing?
  The absence of actors tells a lot about the meaning of the overall texts and its implications. This is close to the practice of nominalization, the use of passive voices to extent responsibility of the act or event, as though events just happen themselves.
- How are they represented? How is their relation to the objects identified above? Which values are associated to them?
  This implies a lexical analysis of the words connotations associated to the actors. Looking at the words linked to the actors and analysing their connotations. Do they express...
  · Uniqueness: an important quality for the national identity formation, understanding uniqueness as “difference” between the national country and the rest (Wodak et al., 2009).
  · Heteronomy: lack of responsibility, when something is “out of your hands”.

33
- Are they quoted or referenced? With which implications?

It is important to look at the “framing power” of these actors. This is understood according to Carvalho (2008) as “the capacity of one actor to convey her/his views and positions through the media” (p. 168). Knowing who has the predominant framing power on the meaning of the story allows us to understand better the social processes.

- Is the deictic “we” used?

The pronoun “we”, together with the possessive “our”, is often used to construct a sense of belonging to a national community by the authors. When “we-group” refers to the Spanish, for instance, it is a strategy for the perpetuation of national identity, by emphasizing national sameness (Wodak et al., 2009).

3. Style and Rhetoric

The analysis draws on the work of Machin and Mayr (2012) and their suggestions for CDA tools. We focused on the following three categories:

- **Writing Style**

  The style in which the text is written is an important dimension in the creation of meaning and in the construction of a nation in a certain way. Which kind of style is predominant?

  - Technical-scientific: these types of texts are based on objective information, usually drawing on reports, facts and statistics. They serve as legitimators of the information.
  
  - Informative: the informative texts are usually the predominant on the news discourse. Their aim is to inform the reader about a specific issue in the most objective and neutral way.
  
  - Persuasive: These types of texts are used to convince the reader to agree with the author about a specific issue. To do so, adjectives and rhetorical figures are usually employed. They are predominant on branding and advertising materials and they are usually covered with what seems objective information.
  
  - Storytelling: the storytelling style is used to create a story around an argument or an actor. This style makes the text more appealing and emotional to the reader and it can be useful for the creation of national identities.

- **Rhetorical tropes**

  The employment of rhetorical figures in the text is an essential part of the semantic analysis (Van Dijk, 1988). These devices are usually used to appeal to the emotions of the audience or to make the entire news discourse more attractive. They also carry ideological significance, since they are a way to grasp reality (Machin & Mayr, 2012). With the historical approach of CDA, rhetorical analysis appears as essential for the understanding of how different tropes are used to construct meaning around a situation (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). In this sense, I am focused on metaphors and hyperboles as the ones most relevant for the study:
· Hyperbole: where there is exaggeration. It is often used to conceal attributes and position the stands of the text. It is a resource to look at when evaluating actors and events. Hyperboles are also used to stress values such as uniqueness, which is relevant for the formation of a nation identity.

· Metaphor: where we find objects, people and events described by reference to other things. They also function as a persuasive element that makes the discourse more appealing. In shaping national identities, metaphors can entail sameness, uniqueness or difference (important values for this study), as well as they can obscure the events and processes, dramatically simplifying what actually happened (Wodak et. al, 2009).

- Presupposition
Sometimes the author relies on shared presuppositions from the readers. It is important to identify what kinds of meanings are assumed as given in a text. What is presupposed? Which concepts are taken for granted? These assumptions can be used to advance particular interests and ideologies (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

It is important to stress that the elements mentioned above are not analyzed in separated levels of the texts or in a specific order. For instance, rhetoric elements can be tied to the actors’ role, and presupposition can be linked to a specific event or object. The elements are therefore analytically distinguishable from one another, but they might appear simultaneously in the different levels of the text, interwoven in the discourses.

5.5 Quality of the research

After outlining the analytical procedures implemented for this research, it is important to discuss the quality of the study.

The employment of positivistic criteria for assessing qualitative research reflects the existence of a quantitative logic in certain disciplines (Pozzebon & HEC Montréal, 2003). However, it is clear that the quantitative criteria, such as validity, reliability and objectivity, cannot be applied the same way in a qualitative research (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). Barker (2008) argues that the equivalent to those criteria in the qualitative field is the question of trustworthiness.

A reliable sample and transparency in the process are key concepts here to reach trust. In this case, a relatively small sample has been selected, which in discourse analysis has the advantage to allow a deeper analysis of the material (Barker, 2008). The assessment of the conclusions should account that the analysis is embedded in the interpretation of the analyst,
thus to assess it is essential to take into account the author’s reasonings and be aware that severe 'objectivity' cannot be reached by means of discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2008).

The reliability of this study rests on the relation between the outlined theoretical assumptions, the methodological tools and the empirical data. The data collection and selection of toolbox comes from a reasoned aim and it is based on nation and discourse scholars. Moreover, the interpretation of the empirical data is an open process of reasoning (shown in the next chapter), a consequence of the theoretical concepts and context explained in the chapters 2 and 4. All these clear steps contribute to the transparency of the research process and the reliability of this study.

Additionally, to ensure higher transparency, excerpts and quotations from the materials analyzed have been provided, so the reader can test the arguments’ reliability (Lidskog & Olausson, 2013, p. 125). Furthermore, the URL’s of the articles analyzed are provided in the appendix section, and all the material has been collected and saved in docs to ensure offline access whenever necessary to verify the results.

The term “theoretical transparency” is used by some scholars (Kania-Lundholm, 2012), referring to the need of making the theoretical stance explicit from which the interpretation of data takes place. This study started from a constructionist perspective of the nation, contrary to the essentialist view (check chapter 4). Also, both the discursive and critical approach have been discussed in order to clarify the process of analysis. As explained in the first section of this chapter, the context and the theory are essential parts of the study, since discourse work implies continuously oscillating from text to context and concepts and back. In sum, it is essential to keep in mind those chapters for the proper understanding of the process, ensuring that theoretical transparency.

Another touchstone important to discuss is the question of representativeness. The current study looks at theoretically and empirically interesting phenomena, the Spanish case, seeking an understanding and explanation of the process of branding a nation in terms of political implications of the media discourse. Consequently, it is important to state that all the results come from the specific case and do not necessarily apply to other cases. However, one must bear in mind that to do science entails the objective of transcend the particular dimension of a reality and look for general patterns, applied to bigger structures (Berglez, 2006). Consequently, the study does aim to make theoretical generalizations, in the sense of contributing theoretically to the knowledge of the related concepts of nation branding, national identity and ideologies.

Exploring the Spanish branding case allow us to test some assumptions made by other scholars regarding the implications of the branding discourse, as well as finding commonalities or differences. Especially important is the use of Spain as a case because the Spanish model challenges many aspects of the nation building. Therefore, the case gives insights that can be
useful for other cases or pluri-state countries that share similar features with Spain. The hope is that the current research triggers further analysis based on a larger or different data corpus.

For a proper assessment of the quality of the research, it is important as well to mention the limitations of the study. The first limitation entails the awareness of the author as a researcher. Being myself Spanish, perhaps I am more critical and sensitive towards the topics and ideologies tackled in the study. Since it draws on the hermeneutics, and on a critical interpretive approach to the nation branding materials, the strong implication of the author in the research as a Spanish citizen could result in a bias that is worth mentioning as a limitation. Regarding the CDA as a methodology, its strongest limitation is the lack of a concrete and systematic approach or tools, in the sense that there is no accepted canon of data collection. Another concern relates to the method being too linguistic or not linguistic enough. In my view, the degree of linguistic proximity is not a problem as long as it is justified from the research. Furthermore, it maintains the field alive, since the researcher has to auto reflect and critically think what suits the ongoing study better.

However, CDA’s most serious criticism relates to its assertions about ideology based only on texts. Widdowson (1998, as cited in Hansen & Machin, 2012, p. 148) argues there is a strong need to look at the production factors. For instance, asking the authors of the pieces. Moreover, some scholars are critical of the lack of engagement with the audience of those texts. Following Van Dijk (1993): “in order to relate discourse and society, (...) we need to examine in detail the role of social representations in the minds of social actors” (p. 251). This criticism could be applied to any interpretative research. However, we should not undervalue the importance of the textual analysis for making inferences of the discourses. To the question: do the media representations correspond with what the audience understands? We follow Fürsich (2009) who argues that “The question is not how accurately does the text reflect reality but what version of reality is normalized and as a consequence, how emancipatory or hegemonic is the text.” According to him, media texts should be interpreted because of their narrative character, their function of mediator of “reality” and their ideological power, what he calls: the ideological potential of the text.

This critique relates mainly to the analysis of the texts as in isolation, decontextualized from any situation. The analysis of the background (chapter 2) arises as a way to address such criticism, being able to provide arguments of the discourse based in the granted context.

6. Presentation of findings and analysis

This chapter includes the insights obtained from the empirical analysis. The analysis explored how Spanish powerful institutions use the Internet to create online self-
representations of Spain for the world and for their citizens. The analysis focused on the website marcaespaña.es/en, specifically on two sections, namely About us and Society. The findings are mainly common to both sections, being distinguished among the different results and themes.

The analysis that is presented in this chapter focuses on the themes that emerged during the analytical process. The first section presents the general topics and shows a branding discourse dominated by elites, which leaves the citizens out. The second section focuses on the construction of Spain as outstanding, construction that rules the overall analyzed material. This excellence discourse is exposed by the use of different themes, such as the emphasis on Spain national uniqueness, the Spain supranational role and strategies of national sameness. Lastly, some findings show us a dominance of an economic orientation when tackling non economic subjects.

It is necessary to stress that the extracts from the empirical material do not reflect the order in which the material has been analyzed, but are presented in a way that facilitates the presentation of the findings. Each time an extract is introduced, a reference is provided, corresponding to the section in where it appeared and the number of the article, which can be found in the appendix section.

6.1 Analysing Marca España

From the analysis, I have identified some macro themes employed in the construction of a common nation through the branding materials. The discourse tackles the general topics of language (the importance of the Spanish language around the world), literature (in form of talented writers), Europe (anniversaries and conflicts), science (discoveries, awards), technology (forums and other events); and some others related to the everyday culture, such as fashion (events, famous designers), sports (talented players), drinks and food (Spanish products).

In this sense, it is relevant to highlight the absence of any specific social problem or political measures. One must bear in mind the Spanish context outlined in the chapter 2, where some questions such as the independentist movements were explained. The political crisis Spain is facing entails not only the desire of some regions of independence, but also the economic situation with high unemployment rates and the the uncertainty regarding the change of government the country is going through. The Spanish general elections took place in December 20, 2015, within the time frame analyzed. However, no reference to them or to the ongoing negotiations is given.

The political themes are tackled superficially and the branding discourse is centered on other topics which relate mainly to attributions given to Spain. All in all, the overall
discourse is dominated by elite groups, characteristic that will be elaborated on in the next section.

6.2 A discourse of elites

When talking about Spain, there is no presence of Spaniards on the different themes tackled. Spanish citizens only appear in form of succesful or well-known actors, but in no case as everyday people. One example of this construction of “Spain without the Spaniards”, is the article of the section Society, titled “Spain celebrates National Day”. The article is focused on the celebration of the Spanish national day on the country and abroad, however, no mention of actual citizens is made. The participants are the Royal Palace (King Felipe, Queen Leticia, Princess Leonor and Infanta Sofia) and different military groups (armed forces, Spanish soldiers and civil guards, the Spanish blue helmets). Here is one excerpt from the mentioned article: “In addition to the celebrations in Madrid and other Spanish cities, the almost 3000 Spanish soldiers and civil guards deployed in missions around the world got in the festive spirit” (Society, nº13). When stressing the celebration beyond Spanish borders, the actors are again military (“3000 Spanish soldiers and civil guards”). The festive spirit is not shown among the everyday people, who are actually the ones that “are the country” and should be celebrating the national day.

One of the main characteristics that has been identified is therefore the elitism on the discourse. For elites, I understand people who have some kind power, being this political, economical, knowledge or mediatic (politicians, business leaders, scientists, famous characters).

Depending on its role, the elites have two main functions on the branding discourse: legitimators and ambassadors. The first function is the one of legitimating the events and the information. Often the elites appeal to authority to rise the importance of an event or statement:

Mr Ban also attended the high-level meeting under the title ‘Madrid +10: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism’, held at the Madrid Conference Centre and opened by King Felipe VI. (...) Madrid +10 was attended by Habib Essid (Prime Minister of Tunisia), José Manuel García-Margallo (Spanish Foreign Minister), Jorge Fernández Díaz (Spanish Interior Minister), Manuela Carmena (Mayor of Madrid), Vaira Vīķe Freiberga (former President of Latvia), John Bruton (former Prime Minister of Ireland), Andrés Pastrana (former President of Colombia), and several other political leaders. (About us, nº14)
In the excerpt we can see how different political leaders are outlined as the participants of the event. Their function is to show the relevance of the event, since it was attended by important elites. The elite discourse is even more stressed with the adjective “high-level”. Besides from simply rise the discourse to elite, they often act as legitimators. These are usually people or institutions that have the power or right (most of the times because of the role or position they hold) to make statements, opinions and critiques. These are the ones holding the framed power (Carvalho, 2008), which usually appears in form of quotations. The framed power allows them to stand on one position of the discourse and share their particular view of a topic. Among the recurrent actors with framing power, I have identified national political elites (the President of the Spanish Government, Mariano Rajoy; the former president José María Aznar; the former Prime Minister, Felipe González; different ministries), international political elites (such as the US President Barack Obama and the UN Secretary general, Ban ki-moon), the members of the Royal family (King Felipe VI and Queen Leticia), and business leaders (for instance, the president of Telefónica Españã). One of the several examples where we see this framed power is one of the articles of the section About us, titled “Ban Ki-moon applauds Spain’s refugee crisis response”:

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated Spain on its ‘deep involvement’ in giving solutions and aiding refugees upon arrival in Madrid, in an event at the Carlos III University (UC3M) to grant him the Medal of Honour for his relevant role at the head of the United Nations. Mr Ban explained that, while most countries are ‘trying to cope’ with the issue of Syrian migrants and refugees, the Government of Spain took the lead in dealing with it. (About us, nº14)

The title of the article (“Ban Ki-moon applauds Spain’s refugee crisis response”) already shows the power the UN secretary general posseses to evaluate the Spanish reaction to the Syria crisis. Moreover, the excerpt highlights how his reference power serves to praise Spain and its role in the conflict. This praise is expressed from verbs such as “congratulated”, adjectives as “deep involvement”, “relevant role” and the use of the metaphor “took the lead”, which connotes the proactive response and action from Spain on the Syria conflict. Moreover, the comparision with other countries (“while most countries are ‘trying to cope’ with the issue of Syrian migrants”) shows Spain as outstanding, for having reacted to the issue fastest than other countries. This excellence discourse will be further discuss below.

All in all, the function of these authority-elites is the one of give legitimacy to the topics that are addressed in the articles.
6.2.1 Spanish Ambassadors

The second function of the elites is acting as representatives of Spain. These are usually different types of elites from the ones mentioned above, now coming from different spheres and seldom related to politics or economy. The “ambassadors” of Spain are chosen mainly related to two values, namely talent and success.

The talent and success of these actors are the main feature that allows them to represent Spain in the domestic and international arena. Spain is “talented” because of them. Some of the identified ambassadors are linked to their success in a specific field, which can be in the sphere of science (such as the world health expert Cesar Velasco or the succesful engineer Pablo Rodríguez Rodríguez), literature (the Nobel prize-winning author Vargas llosa), cuisine (the three internationally acclaimed master chefs the Roca brothers), among other. (the world tennis player Rafa Nadal, the famous basketball player Pau Gasol, or the promising basketball player Angela Salvadores), among other.

When telling the story of these actors, the dominant way was the use of the storytelling. This type of style is characterized by the use of several metaphors and the past tense, to create an appealing text for the reader. This excerpt, from the article “Ángela Salvadores, bright present and future of Spanish basketball”, is one of the clearest examples of storytelling style:

Ángela was born in Oviedo, but she grew up in León. Basketball runs in her blood: her father, Jorge Salvadores, played for Baloncesto León, while her mother, Ángela Álvarez, was a second division player for several seasons. (...) Little Ángela first showed she had a knack for basketball at local clubs (...) Ángela is now working to make her dream come true: making a living out of basketball. And so her eyes are set on a new court... (About us, nº19)

We can observe how the text starts from the past tense (“was born”, “grew up”, “first showed”), in order to explain the beginning of the story to later move to present tense, outlining the moment where the actor is now (“is now working”). The story is presented using different metaphors, which add beauty to the language: “Basketball runs in her blood”, “she had a knack for basketball” refer to the talent of the actor within the sport. “Make her dream come true”, “her eyes are set on a new court” are used to outline the promising future of the player, which is already ongoing.

All in all, the use of this style serves to represent social actors as people with life stories, which the reader can identify to. Consequently, by telling a story which ended up in success, the reader might feel that normal everyday people actually can have the chance to reach that kind of success. It is a way to personalize the discourse, making it more humanized and closer to the reader.
6.3 Spain on the top: constructing Spanish excellence

After having analysed the general themes, and the role of the different elite actors, we can observe how the texts entail certain discourses or constructions of Spain as a nation, emphasizing an excellence discourse of Spain in the global arena. This construction of the actor Spain as outstanding is recurrent in most of the articles, and it is expressed through different aspects: the emphasis of positive uniqueness (Spain is unique), the supranational role (Spain on the global arena) and the use of national sameness (we are unique together).

6.3.1 Spain is unique: (positive) national uniqueness

The process of creation and recreation of a national identity is promoted by the emphasis on what Wodak et al. (2009) call “national uniqueness”. Individuality is a prized value in the modern era. The concept of national uniqueness elevates the individuality of the citizen to a country, this is, to the national level. As Wodak et al. (2009) state, “national uniqueness, which is assigned entirely positive attributes, compensates for the unfulfilled need for individual uniqueness” (2009, p. 27). This uniqueness or positive self-representation is dominant in the texts, presenting Spain as an idyllic country. The concept of uniqueness could relate also to negative or rare features. However, the website marcaespaña constructs uniqueness here in an outstanding point of view, entailing excellence and some kind of superiority from other countries. This is, Spain is unique because it is outstanding. The construction of uniqueness as excellence is presented through different tools.

First of all, one of the tools are “rankings” or “statements” which are used to construct Spain as a leading nation regarding different things. To do so, words such as **pioneer, best, reference**, serve to legitimate the excellence of Spain abroad. In the table below, I have collected some of the constructions of Spain, literally quoted as they appear on the texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>About us</strong></th>
<th><strong>Society</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- “Best connected country in Europe”</td>
<td>- “Pioneer in cancer research”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Pioneer in the aeronautical sector”</td>
<td>- “In the forefront of global technology”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Pioneer in the use of desalination techniques”</td>
<td>- “Pioneer in the use and development of renewable energy sources”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Global reference in smart cities”</td>
<td>- “Leader in ecological agriculture within the EU”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can look closer at one of the examples, for instance, the construction of Spain as “pioneer in the aeronautical sector”, from the About us section:

The efficiency of Spanish air transport and its decisive contribution to the growth of the Spanish economy (which represents close to 15% of the GDP) was even used as an example at the 1st World Aviation Forum, recently held in Montreal (Canada). Furthermore, Spain has a significant aeronautical manufacturing industry, the fifth largest in Europe in terms of turnover, and it is one of the few countries worldwide to have full aircraft cycle capacity. (About us, nº3)

Here we can observe how terms such as “efficiency” “decisive” and “significant” give weight to the excellence argument. Moreover, the mention of the World aviation Forum serves here as legitimator, praising the Spanish air transport as a reference in the sector. Thereafter, other strategies support the construction, such as the positioning or ranking of fifth in Europe, and the uniqueness showed by Spain being “one of the few countries worldwide” in something. By these positionings, one can note that, although Spain is not number 1, it is still on top of something, this is, among a few top countries.

Besides the use of Spain as leader on its own, I have also identified direct comparison among countries in some of the texts: “Compared to other countries with a large agricultural sector, Spain stands out for its efficiency” (About us, nº 11). This example shows explicitly how Spain is seen as a player in the global arena, in this case regarding one specific sector, where Spain “stands out”. Texts such as this are employed to show difference as uniqueness (Kania-Lundholm, 2012). In other words, we are unique because we are outstanding.

Secondly, another strategy or tool to present the excellence of Spain is the use of the rhetoric figures of metaphor and hyperbole. On the one hand, metaphors present one thing described as another, and they are commonly used in the text to persuade by describing. On the other hand, hyperboles are used to conceal attributes by exaggeration. Thus, they help in the creation of uniqueness. To mention one of the hyperboles: “Spain is a world reference in terms of biodiversity” (Society, nº 19). This example, taken from an article with the title:
“Spain, outstanding in environment”, shows one of the multiple hyperboles used to express the uniqueness of the country through being excellent. Here Spain is defined as world reference in the biodiversity area, emphasizing the attribute of innovative by putting it in a global context. Both rhetorical tropes are characterized by the persuasive type of text, which I primarily found on the texts. The persuasive style is generally covered in what may seem an informative text, but that is in fact full of opinions and adjectives:

News is that CCTV aired a talent show about Spanish, which could mean that our language - currently spoken by about 560 million people worldwide- has a bright future. (About us, nº 9)

In the quote above we see how one specific event (the new talent show in China) is related to the “bright future” to the Spanish language. This kind of assumption is not neutral or objective, as the news pieces are supposed to be, but it is a form of rhetoric language (“which could mean”) that makes the reader stand on one specific opinion. Moreover, the reference of a Chinese program focused on Spanish language serves as the argument for why Spanish is to be considered to have a “bright future”, bearing in mind China’s growing importance in the global economy.

It is relevant to mention that the texts also include additional constructions of sub-national identities, referring to specific cities or provinces. This is, when emphasizing subnational uniqueness, the character or feature of the province or region is transferred to the national level, as part of the whole nation (Wodak et al., 2009, p.78).

For instance, we see one example of this attribution of subnational uniqueness in the section Society, when Spain is associated to Barcelona, for being host to the Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2016:

Barcelona is back at the forefront of global technology. Once again, it is playing host to the Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2016, to be held from 22 to 25 February this year. All new mobile tech in a single place – in Spain. (Society, nº7)

Here, Barcelona appears as the hub for global and mobile technology due to the MWC congress. The use of the metaphor “at the forefront of global technology” entails the privilege position of the city in the field. The next sentence is the one that links Barcelona as a hub with Spain “All new mobile tech in a single place – in Spain”, stressing the fact that Barcelona (through the organization of the event) represents the Spain’s leader position in the tech sector. Another example where we can clearly see this process of subnational attribution is one article of the section About us, where Spain is attributed the sustainable success of the island “El Hierro” in one of the articles: “El Hierro, the Canary Islands and
Spain have earned their place on the global map of sustainability, innovation and cutting-edge technology” (About us, nº 17). By outlining the different territorial levels, first the city, then the province and later the country, it seems like they all have earned the sustainable success of the “El Hierro” island.

In brief, the regional character of Spain is suddenly a plus when big events, awards or successful happenings are linked to a city or region. Spain then attributes that excellence or success as national.

6.3.2 Above the national: Spain in the global arena

The actor European Union plays an important role in the identification of Spain as a nation. Spain’s EU membership is understood as a sign of progress and democracy. This is, Spain is linked to Europe through the values of democracy and unity. This can be seen in an article from the section Society, that best exemplifies it:

Likewise, King Felipe maintained that Europe is the ‘best option for successfully tackling the challenges of our time’ and he urged those present to make Europe ‘the homeland of our choosing’. (Society, nº 18)

Here, the King acts as the framed power, who connects Spain to the talks on Europe. The European Union is seen as the best choice for overcoming the current challenges, this is, Europe is a key contributor to the Spanish goals. Moreover, the house metaphor “the homeland of our choosing” is used here to show how Europe should be seen as our home, which we all have chosen. The emphasis on this European supranational identity is present in different texts from both sections. Furthermore, some organisms and actors from the EU, such as the European Commission, are main legitimators when presenting information.

It is important to notice that the European Union is not seen in the texts as a threat to the national identity but more like a privilege. Conversely, one of the actors, openly expressed the fear that nationalisms might threaten european identity in certain ways.

Felipe González called for difficulties to be overcome with a sense of solidarity, and warned against an “extraordinarily dangerous” phenomenon: the reappearance of nationalism that “attacks the values of solidarity and European integration. (Society, 18)

The former Spanish Prime Minister’s call is based on solidarity as unity, and sees the rise of nationalisms as a threat to the European integration. From this sentence, however, the reader does not know which type of nationalism he is talking about. Besides from national movements it could also be referred to catalan and other regional nationalisms that might
“attack” Europe by aiming the independence. The absence of context leaves the discourse unclear, and only contributes as an argument to the sense of unification of the europeans.

Additionally, the special aurea of political anniversaries tends to legitimate ways of dealing with the past, by selecting affirmative past elements which help justifying the present (Wodak et al., 2009). The UN and EU anniversaries are, in this sense, representations of the democratic and global character of Spain. For instance, the joining of Spain in the UN is defined as the moment when “our country thus became a major player in global politics” (About us, nº15).

Besides the articles focused on the European Union as an institution, some international conflicts are used as arguments to legitimate once again the role of Spain as outstanding in the global scenario. In this sense, the Syria crisis is the main political object used, and it is tackled in different articles, namely: “Spanish heroes welcome refugees on the Greek coast” (About us, nº12), “Ban Ki-moon applauds Spain’s refugee crisis response” (About us, nº14), “Syria, one of Spain’s top priorities for UN Security Council presidency” (About us, nº16), “Spain, mediator in Syrian crisis” (Society, nº5) and “Spanish society gets ready to welcome Syrian refugees” (Society, nº15). All of the articles share the same outcome, stressing the role of Spain as helper in the conflict, positioning the country as leader in the world politics. The term tragedy is used among the different news to refer to the Syrian crisis. One of the articles starts like this:

On 1 October, the news that Spanish rescue workers had rescued three refugees off the coast of Lesbos in Greece hit the headlines, drawing attention to the tragedy of thousands of people fleeing their homes and crossing the Mediterranean to come to Europe. (About us, nº12)

Which tragedy is the text referring to? The Syrian conflict is given as granted and the causes of the migration (“thousands of people fleeing their homes”) are obscure. The discourse is depoliticized. Why are they leaving their homes? We don’t know where do they come from and why are they escaping. In the article, the refugees are seen as the victims (“The trip is harsh and dangerous”), while the “Spanish heroes” are there to help them (About us, nº12). With the metaphor “hit the deadlines” the texts gives the importance to the rescuing of three refugees as the main event and everything else is not news. The discourse is entirely focused on the Spanish cooperation and solidarity to the refugees, from a crisis we don’t know the causes of. The recurrent use of terms such as “tragedy”, “terrible situation” to define the refugee crisis is an strategy of heteronomisation. According to Wodak et al. (2009), the use of such terms connote an extent of responsibility of the situation, when it is out of our hands or is referred as an extra-national responsibility. It is often used when topics relating the EU.
The construction of Spain as helper in the world problems (such as the Syria conflict) is present in several articles. In the following example, we can see that Spanish construction explicitly:

According to the High Commissioner of the Spanish Government for Marca España, Mr Carlos Espinosa de los Monteros, ‘despite our difficult situation in the department of unemployment,’ the housing of Syrian refugees will contribute to the perception of Spain as ‘a country that supports those in need’. (Society, nº15)

In this quote, the High Commissioner of Marca España, openly announces the construction of Spain that Marca España aims to spread. The text mentions “our difficult situation” related to the high unemployment rates that Spain is suffering. However, the important aspect here is the construction of Spain as “a country that supports those in need”. Those in need are in this case the refugees, who serve as excuse for the country to show its values of solidarity and support. The solidarity value is one of the dominants in the news branding discourse, stressed in several other articles, and employing different rhetoric strategies that bring a personal character to the news (“Tokens of solidarity and commitment can be seen (…), Society, nº 15; “Spanish solidarity knows no borders”, Society, nº 16). Here there is another example of the representation of Spain towards the international conflicts:

Being invited to become a member of the group of countries and international organisations seeking the end of the crisis in Syria adds one more milestone to the list of Spain’s diplomatic achievements and translates into a bigger role for our country. (Society, nº5)

Once again, what matters is the construction of Spain, both in terms of solidarity and global positioning. In the article, the joining of Spain to the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) is represented as “one more milestone to the list”, this is, one more thing to add to the arguments of Spanish achievements. It also entails “a bigger role for our country”, which shows again the emphasis on the position of Spain in the international politics as a country that matters.

6.3.3 National sameness: we are unique together

Another strategy or tool that has been identified for the construction of Spanish identity as outstanding is the emphasis on intra-national sameness. The value of sameness is closely tied to the one of difference and both together constitute the main characteristics of identity formation (Wodak et al., 2009). This strategy of unification refers here to the Spanish conceived as the “we-group”, this is the national body. The main indicator of sameness is the
use of the deictic “we”, referring to the national body: “In 2014, our country exported more than 80,000 tons, worth €384.4 million. As a matter of fact, we are virtually the only exporter of Ibérico ham at the global level” (Society, n° 20). In this example, we can see how they mention “our country” to express the success of internationalization of Spanish products. The next “we” is therefore referring to Spain as the only exporter of Ibérico ham, this is showing the excellence again, but this time relating it to all of the Spaniards. Besides the deictic “we”, there is a recurrent use of the first person plural of the possessive “our”, or the explicit mention to “our country”, present in both sections. The use of “our” is related to commons aspects of the nation, such as the uniqueness of the Spanish language: “The total number of speakers (470 million) and potential users (559 million), makes our language the world’s second language in terms of speakers overall” (Society, n° 8). Here we can see how Spanish language is referred as “our language”, as a way to show how the nation share attributes that are important for the identification with the country. Moreover, the use of “our” is usually related to excellence attributes (“world’s second language”), reflecting sameness as a positive thing to be proud of.

6.4 Spain “on sale”

Although not present in the majority of the texts, I identified the prevalence of an economic orientation in some of the discourses. One must bear in mind that the sections studied do not correspond with economy. Therefore, the economic orientation was significant since it was observable when referring to culture, science, leadership and other subjects. We can see one example here: “State-of-the-art watering methods ‘made-in-Spain’ are being successfully sold abroad. Tragsa, TYPsa, ACS, Agbar, AZUD and Aqualogy are some of the leading exporting companies” (About us, n° 11). In this quote we can see how the science (the article highlights the Spanish research on irrigation methods for efficient water use techniques) is converted into a product (“are being successfully sold abroad”). This stresses the character of Spain as profitable, in an economic perspective. Additionally, Spain is associated to companies that are world leaders in the water management industry. In the excerpt below, we see how the leadership of an industry, in this case fashion, is measured by economic terms and figures:

The fashion industry is one of the strongest and most dynamic business sectors in Spain. In 2014, its turnover amounted to €16,473 million, 3.93% higher than the previous year (source: Accessory and Textile Trade Association, ACOTEX). What is more, exports grew by 7.8% in 2014, totalling €12,621 million (source: Textile and Clothing Industry Information Centre, CITYC). (Society, n° 14)
The article features one specific event, the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, held in Madrid. The strength and dynamism of Spain in the industry is shown by the turnover earnt, and by the number of millions brought by the exports. The figures are not clear to the average reader, who does not know the criteria to measure the relevance by millions and export millions. To mention another example: “MWC has become a most important event to Barcelona. Its economic impact has been estimated at over €460 million” (Society, n°7). When talking about the Mobile World Congress held in Barcelona, the article ends with the above sentence. The congress is seen as “a most important event” to the city. One can think is due to the prestige of the congress, the knowledge shared, the importance for being present on the latest tech trends... However, they latest argument they give is its economic impact, followed by a figure of millions (“estimated at over €460 million”). Once again, the importance of the event is measure on strictly economic terms.

This obsession with the economic criteria as an indicator of the progress and success of a country relate, according to Aronczyzk (2013), to a capitalism discourse. This is, for a nation to endure in the new global order, it needs according to the capitalism principles to be economically competitive and profitable.

6.5 Spain as constructed in Marca España

In the introduction of the thesis (chapter 1), the first and second research questions aimed to explore how Spain is constructed through the website Marca España and how the discourse constructs Spanish national identity. After outlining the main findings, the analysis of the Marca España news have shown the main strategies in the construction of Spanish national identity.

The overall discourse is focused on excellence, using different strategies to emphasize Spain as outstanding in the global arena. On the one hand, the stress on Spain’s national uniqueness highlights the main values of sustainability, innovation and solidarity, which position Spain on the top on different areas such as environment, research and technology. On the other hand, Spain’s supranational role, including its link with the European Union and its participation in different global conflicts, is used to portray Spain as a successful player in the international scenario. The identification with the supranational community of Europe serves as well to associate Spain with the values of cohesion and democracy.

Moreover, the emphasis on unity as a feature of Spain’s identity discourse is shown by the different tools of creation of Spanish national sameness, reinforcing at the same time the excellence discourse. In this excellence construction, the different elites play a key role, in both representing Spain (through talented and successful actors) and legitimazing the
information by the use of their authority. Furthermore, a subtle dominance of an economic orientation when tackling non-economic subjects points to the commodification of Spain, constructed as a brand to be sold to the international audiences.

7. Summary and conclusions

The previous chapter has elaborated on the first and second research questions, exploring how Spain is constructed as outstanding through the website Marca España. We have seen how this excellence discourse is exposed by the emphasis on Spain national uniqueness, the Spain supranational role and strategies of national sameness. Furthermore, the branding discourse has resulted as dominated by elites, ignoring the citizens, and characterized by a dominance of an economic orientation when tackling non-economic subjects.

This last chapter links the presented empirical results with a larger theoretical context (chapter 4) and with previous research (chapter 3), attempting to establish a relationship between the findings of the study and the theoretical assumptions on nation, national identity, and nation branding. This chapter elaborates, thus, on the third research question of this study, which aimed to explore how the Spain's media construction corresponds to certain political interests and ideology.

The relevance of the findings of the study rests on its power to demonstrate tendencies in national processes of identification, which can be observable across Europe (Wodak et al. 2009). This is, the Spanish case contributes theoretically to the exploration of the link between nation branding and the concepts of nation and national identity, allowing us to better understand processes of national construction in a global context.

7.1 Problematizing nation branding

The critical approach of this thesis has focused on the elites (through the study of a governmental website) and their discursive strategies for the maintenance of dominance.

Seeking to explore how Spain brand is constructed in the media discourse and relying on online news articles as empirical materials, this study has demonstrated how the media discourse, by associating the country with values of uniqueness and sameness, constructs Spain as outstanding. Furthermore, the study has proved how ideologies are related to the constructions offered by the media, which allow us to account the crucial function of reproduction of the media (Van Dijk, 1988). In this section, I will further discuss the
relationship between the results and nation branding, and evaluate the implications of such discourse in reproducing national identities.

In chapter 1, this research started from the assumption that nation branding discourse entails some problems for society. After exploring the empirical material, the analysis has highlighted some of those problematic themes, which result from the close relation of nation branding to national identities.

7.1.1 Nations as products not as people

On a general level, the results of this study support the claim that nation branding adopts economic models for the governance of nations (Volcic, 2008). In the context of globalization, countries are treated as brands for consumption in the global market. By the nation branding discourse, nations are trying to differentiate themselves from their neighbors by highlighting unity and uniqueness values, which can be sold to internal and external audiences. This process changes the social imagery of a nation, which is imagined as a commodity, rather than as a community (Bolin & Stahlberg, 2016).

In the analyzed news discourse, the nation becomes an entity detached from the social and political aspects, highlighting a commercially driven logic. By using national identity in a discourse of consumption, the practice of nation branding severely limits national imageries (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). The case of Marca España demonstrates that nation branding narratives aim to identify essential and unique characteristics of a nation that can differentiates it to others. Far from unique, the construction of uniqueness and excellence we have seen in the Spanish case is, I suggest, closer to a reductive expression of Spanish national identity.

Although the study starts from the premise that any marketing discourse is reductive, it is still interesting to know in which ways the branding discourse reduces the complex narratives of the nation. This thesis agrees with the claim that nation branding, due to its reductive character, obscures the differences, diversity and problems inside the nation, reducing national identities to a simply commercial logic (Aronczyzk, 2008; Aronczyzk, 2013; Kaneva, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011 Widler, 2007, Wodak et al. 2009). This commercial logic redefines the imagery of a nation, which is transformed from the political entity that used to be, comprising the social and cultural aspects, to a simply brand, a product compatible with the new global order. This research therefore confirms the premise of Wodak et al. (2009) that “discursive constructs of nations and national identities (...) primarily emphasize national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity but largely ignore intra-national differences” (p.4). In other words, by aiming for a homogeneous and united image, nation branding misrepresents the plurality inside the nation (Kaneva, 2011). In this sense, the discourse reinforces a national “coherence” that does not represent the country’s
situation. Spain is portrayed as one entity, a united country where there is no room for the different languages, the regional differences and the independentist tensions, that in reality coexist among its borders.

Furthermore, one must bear in mind that national diversity does not only involve the different spheres of a nation, it also means diversity in terms of people (Widler, 2007). In the analyzed media discourse, the power of the elites is constantly legitimized, but there is no representation of the different ethnic or minority groups, neither any appearance of the people from different races, groups, and social class that constitute a nation.

The analysis has shown how a country as Spain, with a rich ethnic diversity and in the middle of an identity crisis, is instead illustrated by a group of elites and portrayed as a united country, far from being representative of the real nation.

7.1.2 A capitalist core

In the material analyzed, we have seen a relationship between nation branding (which is it seen as an updated form of nationalism) and economic growth. The use of economic figures and rankings to portrait Spain in terms of economic growth and success relates to capitalist premises. According to Aronczyk (2013), “In order for nations to survive and thrive, in order for them to maintain the fertile social consciousness that gives rise to conditions of belief and belonging, the presumption is that they must embrace capitalism principles of competitiveness, growth and profit” (p.128).

According to Wodak (2013), texts serve as sites of social struggle where ideological traces of dominance and hegemony are manifested. In this sense, the online construction of Spain follows a capitalist logic in different senses. On the one hand, it highlights the excellence of the country by its growth on different sectors. This kind of orientation is problematic, since it adopts economic models for the portrait and evaluation of success of a nation (Volcic, 2008), instead of focusing on social and political issues. The cultural and social bases are reoriented to fit the premises of the global demand and the economy becomes the organizing principle of government and society. On the other hand, the Marca España discourse only represents some aspects of the capitalist logic, such as the leadership of the sectors and the excellence on different areas, but it ignores the “other side” of the capitalist system. There is no reference to the problems that Spain is suffering, such as the vast economic crisis, the massive unemployment rates and the corruption in some political sectors. In other words, by only representing some aspects of the capitalist logic, portraying a utopic Spain (outstanding and with no conflicts), the discourse of Marca España legitimates the capitalism system.

The above mentioned detachment from politics and from the social context of a country is critical for the reproduction of national identities, since by obscuring many
aspects of a nation, ultimately contributes to the legitimation of the capitalism (as it has been just pointed) but also of the government and the nationalist discourse. This will be further discussed on the next section.

7.1.3 Nation branding as corrective: reinforcing national confidence

From the presented findings, and as a part of the reductive and commercial character of Spanish brand, it is plausible to state that the discourse on the marcaespaña website does not reflect the ambivalent situation of the nation.

One must bear in mind that the Marca España project and governmental efforts to enhance an outstanding national image do not take place in a vacuum. They are part of an international social imagery that occurs in conjunction with an identity and political crisis. Through the spread of Marca España texts, there is an attempt from the government elites to create a sense of shared values that conceal these adverse circumstances. As Aronczyk (2013) states, “nation branding is a form of storytelling that can highlight certain meanings and endings while eluding others” (p. 162). In this sense, when obscuring the social and political problems of the country, the media discourse becomes depoliticized, contributing to the legitimacy of the given status quo, linked to the actual government and the Spanish nationalism, but also, to the fundamentals of the current economic and political system. Consequently, we could state that the branding process, through the website, has the recursive function of convincing the citizens and foreign elites that the government is acting in the best interests for the country (Aronczyk, 2013).

In other words, the discursive national construction offered by these political elites is ruled by an ambition to reinforce the national confidence. This comes down to another claim that the analysis has supported, the one that sees nation branding as a corrective measure or quick fix for the identity problems some countries are facing, such as Spain regional nationalisms in our case. Following Aronczyk (2013) “Nation branding is justified among state actors and national elites as a necessary corrective to the threatened erosion of national structures” (p. 31). Moreover, by the combination of the strategies of uniqueness and sameness, nation branding transforms nationalism in something popular, “we, the Spanish people, are unique and outstanding”, helping to construct a feeling of belonging and patriotism (in the sense of feeling proud of being Spanish).

Additionally, the link between sub-, supra-, and national levels might be used as a contributing to further undermine claims of independence by the territorial state. This is, the legitimacy of the elite discourse on the different levels works as a “bodyguard” of the nationhood. In that way, the government and national leaders reinforce their importance and their national consciousness in global spheres (Aronczyk, 2013).
All in all, the discourse of political elites, as exemplified on the Marca España news online, is seen as a mechanism that tries to articulate a more cohesive national identity, as well as reinforce the citizens’ loyalty to the territory and the image of prosperity for the international audiences. I suggest nation branding aims at unifying the nation-state in a country immerse on an identity crisis. To do so, it uses the online texts as a vehicle for the legitimation of the Spanish nationalism.

However, in its effort to reanimate the Spanish nationalism, the discourse remains among the elite and forgets the citizens and their daily lives, obscuring the diversity and the different regional identities and tensions. In this sense, the analysis has shown how, as Widler (2007) pointed out, there is a gap between the national identity represented in the media, elite discourse and the real experience and social life of the citizens.

7.2 Last words

In this last chapter we have outlined the main conclusions of the research. This thesis has contributed to the previous research in the sense it has confirmed some of the claims different authors raised.

To offer an overview of this contribution, the analysis has shown how nation branding adopts economic models for the governance of nations (Volcic, 2008), reducing national identities to a simply commercial logic (Aronczyk, 2008; Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011 Widler, 2007, Wodak et al. 2009). The branding discourse appears as depoliticized, detached from the social and political aspects (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). This thesis has also stressed the reductive character of nation branding, which emphasizes national uniqueness and sameness but ignores national differences and conflicts (Wodak et al., 2009). Moreover, this simplified representation of the reality of a country has demonstrated the lack of fit between the national identity represented in the media, elite discourse and the everyday discourses of identity (Widler, 2007). Lastly, the analysis has supported the premise that nation branding acts as a corrective measure, reinforcing national identities when these are threatened (Aronczyk, 2013).

The analyzed Spanish case, however, has not been able to clarify other premises from previous scholars, such as the link between nation branding and neoliberal ideology (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011), or its critique as an undemocratic practice, which transfers public funds into private hands (Jansen, 2008; Kaneva, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013).

Therefore, it is important to stress that the critique of nation branding presented in this study on media discourse is in several ways incomplete and requires further
development. The website as a new media for the reproduction of national identities is an extensive topic far from being covered. Moreover, and as pointed above, this study has not covered some of the critiques on nation branding, for instance, its relation to neoliberalism. I therefore encourage further research in this area, perhaps studying other sections from the website rather than the chosen ones for this thesis.

Another suggestion to further complete the current study and get a bigger picture of the phenomenon could point to the analysis of the production and reception of the nation branding materials. On the one hand, more insights about the aims and objectives of the branding discourse will be needed, thus a suggestion would be to look at the production factors, interviewing the branding experts and authors behind the texts. On the other hand, further research could look at how the different audiences of the nation branding understand the messages. This is, although the study of media texts is highly relevant, the research would be more complete looking at the reception of those representations in a context as conflictive as the Spanish, with an extremely heterogeneous public.

Furthermore, this analysis has focused on the discourse of elites in the online construction of a nation brand. The study of other perspectives besides the elite discourse, such as the study of different ways of online citizen participation in the country brand (social media, forums, website comments), may be an interesting point of departure for future studies about media and nation branding.

In summary, this thesis has explored the mediatic self-construction of a country brand from a critical perspective. The particular way of representing Spanish order, reducing its national identity to an excellence and elite discourse, and obscuring the complex reality (economic, political, social and cultural) of a nation, serves here to legitimize the given status quo (Wodak, 2013). In the Spanish case, we have seen how the nation branding discourse, through a website, legitimizes the current economical and political system, including the current government and the Spanish nationalism.

I finish wishing that the critiques and ideas in this thesis would serve as a useful foundation for other scholars and trigger the study of media discourse and nation branding, encouraging further research on the extensive and challenging field that is nation-building.

“Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation”

Oscar Wilde
References


introduction.


### Appendix

- **Analyzed website:**

- **Section About us: analized articles**

<p>| Article 15: Spain celebrates its 60 years at UN | <a href="http://marcaespana.es/en/news/we-are/spain-celebrates-its-60-years-un">http://marcaespana.es/en/news/we-are/spain-celebrates-its-60-years-un</a> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 16: Syria, one of Spain’s top priorities for UN Security Council presidency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 17: El Hierro Island: A global reference in sustainability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 18: A social network for solidarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://marcaespana.es/en/news/we-are/social-network-solidarity">http://marcaespana.es/en/news/we-are/social-network-solidarity</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 19: Ángela Salvadores, bright present and future of Spanish basketball</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

⇒ Section Society: analized articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 1: Salamanca morphs into Romeo and Juliet’s Verona</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 2: Spanish diplomacy 2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 3: Vargas Llosa: 80 years polishing the Spanish language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 4: A pioneering sensor helps to detect cancer using saliva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 5: Spain, mediator in Syrian crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 6: Young students get involved in the resolution of world conflicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 7: Barcelona, in the forefront of global technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 8: Spanish: the second-most-used language on Facebook and Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 9: The first solar car to be launched is Spanish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 10: Joint action on climate change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 11: Jihad in Spain, core of a recent report by Elcano Royal Institute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 12: Spain, on the front line against migratory mafias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 13: Spain celebrates National Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 14: Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week: Showing Spanish fashion to the world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 15:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 16:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 17:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 18:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 19:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 20:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>