Antecedents and consequences of Romania's image in the perception of the internal and external public

-ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS-

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Table of contents

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Country image, evaluation, measurement, Romania, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, research model, global image, identity, country brand, nation brand, dimensions, measurement scales, country's characteristics, information sources, haracteristics of the individual, intended behavior, cognitive evaluation, affective evaluation.

Thesis table of contents

INTRODUCTION

The importance of adequate assessment of Romania's image domestic and abroad as the first step in the process of nation branding, resides -mainly- in responsibly understanding by the management of the country and society -in general-the need to adapt to international standards by exploiting Romania's great heritage; here we include national wealth, cultural heritage and human resources. In this context, this paper presents the result of scientific concerns anchored in the interest of interdisciplinary approach to marketing, management and tourism; entitled *Antecedents and consequences of Romania's image in the perception of the internal and external public,* the paper is intended as a starting point in developing future strategies of brand development for the nation. Through it, shall review and evaluate the perceived image of the country within and outside its borders, both by the Romanians and foreign citizens. Studies undertaken focused on the interpretation of the attitudes regarding the nation, elaboration of possible solutions for the design of a positive image of Romania, assessing the country's image and testing a conceptual model to allow a contribution to the specialty literature in terms of the global image of the country.

This theme was chosen because of the context created by opposite directions of action in everyday life compared with the solutions and ideas offered in the literature (both by Romanian and foreign authors and specialists in marketing, branding and beyond). It was found, on the one hand, the desire expressed by government representatives to rally on the current of globalization by creating a country brand that promises and generates loyalty, on the other hand, chaotic and decentralized attempts to create the "Romania" brand, to promote a relevant and attractive image that did not have -even nearly - the desired effect. Rating the country's image inside and outside its borders is therefore as far as I am concerned, a first step in the efforts needed to be made so that, over time, a viable strategy can be built through which the nation can be perceived as it is : characterized by a high value, uniqueness and rich culture.

The first part of the thesis (first two chapters) allows the reader to form an overview regarding the image of a country and its evaluation. It was thus established the conceptual framework that characterizes the addressed concepts (the country image and its evaluation);

also, the differences, similarities and connections between the addressed concepts were highlighted (country's image vs. country's identity vs. country brand). More than that, characteristic elements for Romania's country brand have been approached in this respect. The second chapter provides an overview of the process of evaluating the image of a country. It offers the possibility of forming an overall image regarding both Romanian and foreign literature in terms of country image and country evaluation. Moreover, the chapter allows comparisons of different measurement scales used for evaluating a country's image.

The second part of the paper (chapter III) addresses issues regarding the methodology that was used; this is structured in two sub-chapters, based on the qualitative and quantitative methods.

The third part of the thesis (chapter IV) is divided into two distinct components: one highlights Romania's image in terms of qualitative research results -and contains the hypothesis drawn after the qualitative research has been carried out (conducted using software Tosmana), while the other one highlights the country's image in terms of quantitative research results. Each of the two approaches has been divided into chapters analysing the perception of Romania's image both inside and outside the country. Also, in this chapter the proposed conceptual model was tested - by using SmartPLS software.

The research model was developed to allow in the qualitative and quantitative analysis, the identifying of individual perceptions, psychological attributes and information sources that contribute to image formation on Romania (data gathered in the qualitative research -through interviews - was carefully analyzed by observing consciously, deliberately, objectively and systematicly, it thus was deeply understood how respondents conceive and evaluate Romania's image -by identifying language patterns and the circumstances that they associate with- and some asumptions of the present study were established). However, through the statistical analysis, the aim was identifing a viable research model to assess the overall image of the country.

In order to evaluate Romania's image, it is necessary that the ***objectives*** listed below are met:

1) evaluating existing empirical data in the literature to identify how information and other variables influence image formation -seen both as an organic / induced image and as a general image- and testing the hypotheses formulated on the basis thereof;

2) identifing the elements that contribute to the image of a country and their relevance in evaluating the image of the country concerned;

3) identifying similarities and discrepancies between Romania's image inside and outside its borders;

4) identifying a viable research conceptual model of the studied subject.

The research methods used in this work harmoniously combine qualitative and quantitative methods of research, the first study- qualitative reaserch- having an exploratory goal to help formulate the hypotheses; these were subsequently verified through the second study -quantitative analysis-, while the proposed conceptual model regarding the evaluation of the globl country image was evaluated using software that works with structural equation models. The theoretical part of the paper is circumscribed in epistemology terms, to the directed fundamental research, the research methodology comes down mainly to the set of methods and appropriate techniques for collecting and processing data and empirical information, or observing, ordering, correlating, systematization, comparison and analysis of data, so that the theoretical relevance addressed on the country image and its assessment, can be substantiated.

The information basis is represented by the results of research work and studies done nationally and internationally, as well as other editorial sources exposed in periodicals in the country and abroad. Reports from the Ministry of Tourism, barometers of opinion, data from the Romanian National Bureau of Statistics, the Statistical Commission of the European Union (EUROSTAT) and works published in national and international literature all served as sources of information.

CHAPTER 1.

COUNTRY IMAGE

It has become relatively common in the last years that the subject of the image, in general, to be addressed in specialty literature. The scientific disciplines as sociology, psychology, philosophy tackle elements regarding the image, the general study of these appearing as an interest since antiquity. Nevertheless, the study of the image takes place in an fragmented way, within several independent fields, each dealing with a specific category of the image; according to the discipline within which the notion of "image" is addressed, it has been given different definitions. In scientific practice, it has been defined in line with the views of the author.

The literature proves the existing interest to assess countries from the early decades of the last century (for example, Katz and Baley, 1933: Klingberg, 1941), but it became a subject of great interest among researchers only later, in 1960, with the advent of the concept of "country of origin". On the one hand, the large number of works dedicated to studying the effect of "country of origin" is living proof that the source of a product acts as a quality indicator; on the other hand, the smaller number of works addressing the overall image of a country have caused confusion between the definitions of the two concepts. Basically, differentiation is needed to be done between two key terms, namely the country's/ nation's image and the image of a product's the country of origin (or provenance). From a marketing perspective, the two concepts relate closely both in the theory and in the practice of the nation branding and, to some extent, influence each other. However, it is easy to see that there is, from the year 2000 until now, a trend of separation of the two concepts, research conducted in the 1990s is a real help to deepen and to know the specifics of the country image. Although the 2000's showed a relative decrease in the number of studies that examined the image of a country, now this concept has again caught the attention of researchers (Brijs at. al., 2011).

Although the country image does not have a standard definition, the authors agreed that each country has its own image (Ashworth and Voogd, 1997; Gilmore, 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006). Interpreting existing definitions in the literature on the image of a country / nation, it is easy to see that some of these terms

give a limited, custom meaning, while others cover a wider area, describing the image as an umbrella concept.

Thus, there are two common interpretation of the image of a country / nation-which, incidentally, have sparked controversy among experts (Szeles, 1998):

1) on the one hand, it is perceived as an "umbrella concept", as it concerns all products, brands and organizations in a country - therefore it represents all opinions and value judgments about the country;

2) On the other hand, the country itself is a complex product consisting of a number of elements - in this case, the image of the country is regarded and treated as a product image characterized by a high degree of diversity and complexity.

According to several authors (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 1984; Han and Terpstra, 1988; Roth and Romeo, 1992; Smith, 1993),the county image can be considered as a multi-dimensional concept, while Kotler and Gertner (2002), Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002), as well as Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2006) believes that a country's image is not static, but is subject to constant evolution, and it is based, among others, on stereotypes and perceptions, although it includes -as any other brand- factual and emotional elements (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). Furthermore it consists of various factors (socio-economic characteristics of the country concerned, politics and culture, products, history and tradition etc.), it imprints itself in the consumer's mind and is activated whenever it wants to buy / consume a product or purchase a service (Cordell, 1992).

The definitions found in the revised literature, which comprise the above mentioned elements, are found in chronological order in Table 1.

Table 1 – Country image definitions

Author(s)	Definition
Bannister – Saunders (1978, p. 562)	Country image is an overall image that is constituted by variables like peculiar products, economic and political development, historical events and relationships, traditions, level of industrialization and of technological development.

Author(s)	Definition
Martin – Eroglu (1993, p. 193)	Country image is the set of normative inferred and informational beliefs of individuals on a country.
Kotler et.al. (1993, p. 141)	Country image is the sum of people's beliefs, ideas and impressions about a certain country.
Szeles (1998, p. 96)	Country image is an internal and external framework of the opinions and beliefs on a people, nation and country and the simultaneously objective and subjective psychological contents of eterogeneous and generalized value judgment thereof.
Verlegh – Steenkamp (1999, p. 525)	A mental interpretation of a country's inhabitants, products, culture and national symbols.
Brijs et.al. (2011, p. 1260)	Country image represents all that a consumer attaches to a country and its inhabitants (and not to its products).

Source: own elaboration based on the references of the present paper

Given all this, Iversen and Hem (2001) have outlined a model (Fig. 1) when an image of a country is created in the mind of the consumer, taking into account cultural and psychographic characteristics of individuals and adding to these, the products from that country; they considered the definition given above Balabanis et al. (1996), under which the country of origin image of a product are the marketing concept which includes consumer attitudes towards different nations.

Balogu and McCleary (1999) found that in the forming of an image of a country act two distinct categories of factors: stimuli-factors and personal factors. Stimuli-factors are linked to external stimuli that the individual receives in relation to the country concerned and the related physical elements but also previous trips made by the individual in the country

concerned; personal factors are related to social and psychological characteristics of the individual.
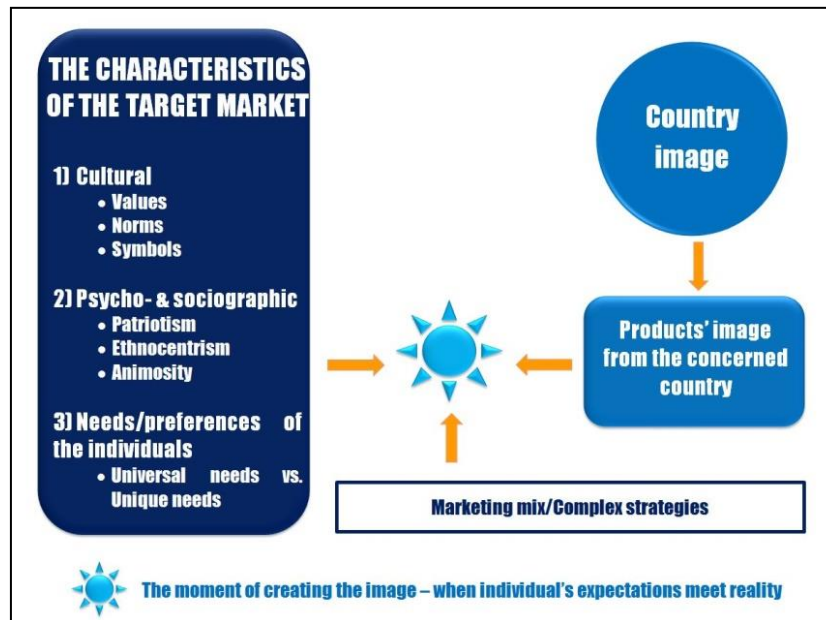
Fig. 1. The moment of image' creation

Source: adapted after Iversen et al. (2001)

In 2003, Echtner and Ritchie have conceptualized the image of a country as a complex process through which individuals develop a creative mental construction based on a few selected impressions from a sea of information and impressions available in the environment. Reynolds (1965, p. 69) describes the creative process as the moment in which impressions are selected, developed, improved and put into order by the individual. In this context, promotion plays an essential role in the induced image formation - dictated, according to the authors Ahmed et al. (2006), by marketing and country branding efforts, but the organic image is situated beyond the area of control of the destination. Beerli and Martin (2004), on the other hand, approached image forming through the country's tourists that are visiting for the first time, respectively through the tourists that perform multiple visits - Fig. 2.

Considering the fact that the image of a country is rooted in its own identity, the creation and the change of that particular country's image can be conceived only through a revision of the past, through a return to its own origins, in order to try to express who its

people really are and which are in essence, the representative elements of that specific
country's culture and civilization.
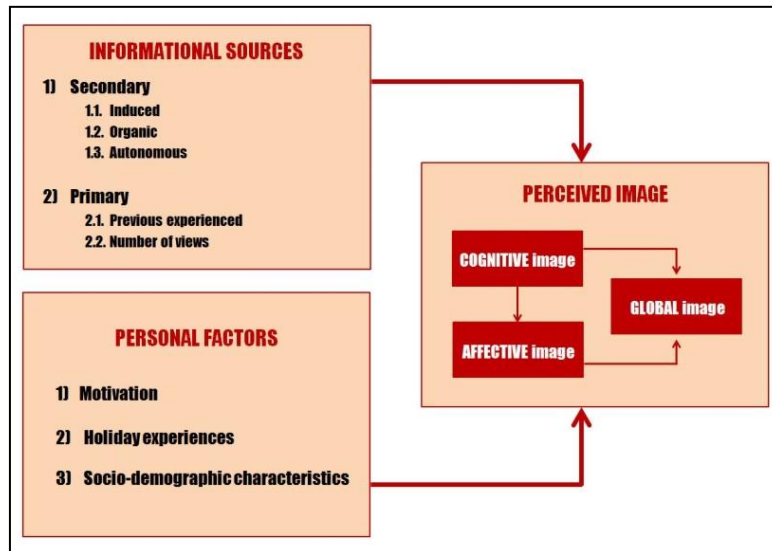
Figure 2. The model of image's formation

*Source: adapted after Beerli and Martin, 2004, Factors influencing destination image, in "Annals of Tourism
Research", vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 657–681*

CHAPTER 2.

COUNTRY IMAGE EVALUATION

Most studies addressing the evaluation of the country image consider the image of a nation as a result of numerous factors that form a hierarchical structure leading to the formed image (Elliot et al., 2011).

Given the specialty literature, there are three structural levels addressing the evaluation of the country image: 1) one addresses the country's image in the broad sense, considering the size of the country image and its composing elements, 2) a second, which takes into account strictly the factors influencing the perception of the country image and 3) a third, evaluates the effect of the country image on consumer behavior.

In the opinion of Heslop et al. (2004), when assessing a country a distingshen is made between competences and characteristics of the country, i.e. those of the individuals in the country concerned. More recent studies make a distinction between country image and the image of its inhabitants, while other authors combine the study of a country's image and the image of the people with the assessment of country competences and characteristics. Several authors (Gartner, 1993; Haubl, 1996; Nadeau et al., 2008; Elliot et al., 2011) highlights the distinction between affective and cognitive image of the country, when assessing a nation's image, while others have turned their attention towards evaluation of a country's image through the brands originating from it.

Most research that were aimed at evaluating the image of a country have been made, especially in the early stages through quantitative methods. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) proposed the study of the country image size and their evaluation through a model that could not be typically based on quantitative methods of research - given the assumption that the destination image is a specific set of attitudes, affective, cognitive and global impressions considering the analysed destination. Chon (1990) developed the theory of catalyst factors ("push factors") and those that slow down ("pull factors") the process of evaluation and analysis of organic and induced images related to a country. Even so, these methods have limitations as any other research models: sometimes the respondents may be forced to issue opinions based on certain attributes which are not part of the image that they have formed regarding a country or specific destination (Tapachai and Waryszak, 2000). From the

investigations carried out until 1993, the only author to use open questions in the study of the image of a destination was Reilly (1990). Subsequently, Echtner and Ritchie (1991 and then 1993) suggested that a destination image is composed of three dimensions: 1) attribute-holistic, 2) functional - psychological and 3) common - unique - Fig. 3.
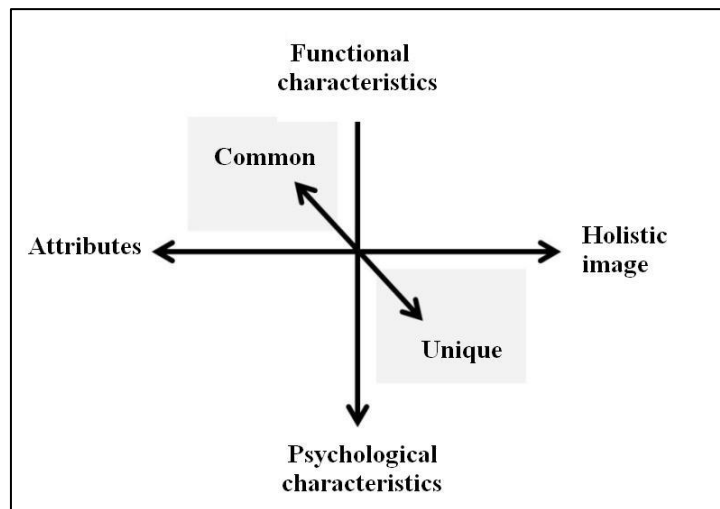
Fig. 3. Destination image components

Source: adapted after Echtner and Ritchie, The meaning and measurement of destination image, The Journal of tourism studies, vol. 14, no. 1, Mai 2003, p. 43;

A growing number of researchers have used, with time, this approach in evaluating the image of a destination, as it is considered to be helpful in identifying the real image of a place / a country etc.

The main studies identified in the literature regarding the evaluation of the country image address quantitative research methods. Bannister and Saundert (1978) and Baker (1999) demonstrated through research that product image is influenced by economic, cultural, technological factors and policies that characterize the country where they are manufactured. Akaah and Yaprak (1993), on the same guidelines, for evaluating the country image showed that the cultural, ethnic, historical events characteristic country's diplomatic and its public relations etc. should be considered. Martin and Eroglu (1993) take into account, in this respect, the degree of economic development of the evaluated country.

There are papers that have mainly used qualitative research methods for the study of country/destination image evaluation (eg. booklets content analysis) (Pike, 2002). For example, several recent studies used photos made by tourists during their trips to assess

destination image (Gartner, 2002) or the words used by respondents when filling in questionnaires (Ryan and Cave, 2005). By applying three different methods, Prebensen (2007) explored perceptions of tourists on the image of less known destinations.

That said, we believe that the complementary use of qualitative and quantitative methods to assess the country's image is the most effective way to study the image of destinations. Moreover, most experts in the field believe that they are complementary and necessary for this purpose.

Five scales of reference used to assess the country image include:

1) *The country of origin scale developed by Parameswaran and Pisharodi* (1992) - for them, the country of origin represents a structure that shows that people attach stereotypical perceptions to products based on the country where they are produced, which influences consumer behavior. Furthermore the construction itself includes perceptions relating to economic, political and cultural life in the country of origin but also perceptions of the product itself.

2) *The country image scale developed by Martin and Eroglu* (1993) - although initially conceptualized four country image dimensions (political, economic, technological and social), the final form of the scale designed by Martin and Eroglu (1993) focuses on three dimensions (economic, political, technological) composed of 5 items that analyzes the political factor, 5 items aimed at the economic factor and 4 items aimed at the technological factor - believing that the social dimension is reflected in the other three dimensions analyzed.

3) *The Nation Brand* Index (2005) - this is the first analytical tool of the world's nation brands. First created in 2005, the results obtained by applying the use of the instrument -every quarter of the year- the panel created to research the country image, perceived as brands all over the world (Fig. 4). It thus analyzed individual perceptions about the characteristics related to culture and heritage, politics and governance, tourism, exports, investment and immigration issues specific to each nation individually.

4) *The scale developed by Lala, Allred and Chakraborty* (2009) - Following a review of the interdisciplinary specialist literature, Lala et el. (2009) identified the seven most common country image dimensions, contained in the studied works. These include: 1) economic conditions, 2) conflicts, 3) political

structure, 4) vocational training, 5) work culture, 6) the environment and 7) work.
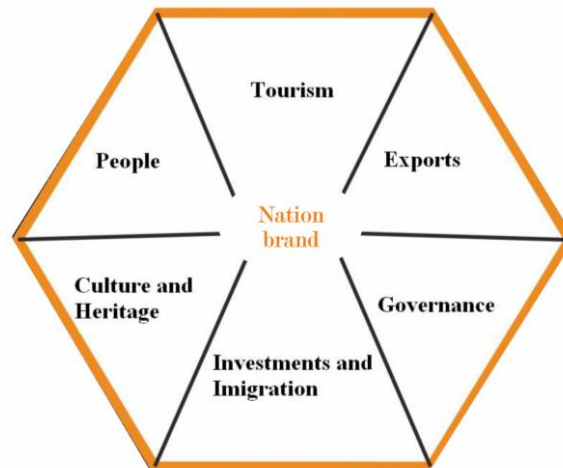
Fig. 4. The nation brand hexagon

Source: S. Anholt, What is a brand? available online at:
http://www.superbrands.com/turkeysb/trcopy/files/Anholt_3939.pdf;

5) *Good Country Index* (2014) - Simon Anholt also launched, in June 2014, the results of a study aimed at identifying countries that show increased responsibility for humanity and the planet. When drawing up the study, data sets made available by a team of specialists from the countries taken into account were analyzed; they were based on 1) science and technology, 2) culture, 3) international peace and security, 4) world order, 5) the planet and climate 6) equality and prosperity, 7) health and welfare.

Reported to Romania, earlier campaigns of image and perception of the country as a brand, we can only agree with the fact that "Romania is not the most successful brand of the Romanians" (Ştefan Liuţe in Cimpoca et al., 2008, p. 72). The country's tumultuous past, the socialist regime which promoted a fictitious identity to the detriment of the real one, disparities between the projected image and the real image - discovered after the fall of communism by the vast majority of members of the public Internally - led to an image crisis that characterized post-revolutionary Romania. How Romanians perceive themselves and also how they are perceived -to most - abroad, political and economic instability that

characterizes the country, lack of cohesion and mainly negative advertising - performed both domestically and abroad- are elements that led to the worsening image problems that Romania is facing.

While it is widely accepted that the process of "building" the image of a nation involves numerous and systematic efforts in this regard, it should be understood that "[...] the image of a country cannot be changed by a slogan and a logo" (Dolea and Ţăruş 2009, p. 10). Because "[...] the image of the country is a puzzle that can be shaped only by sustained and congruent efforts" (Dolea and Ţăruş, 2009, p. 10) in order to promote it, a long-term strategy is necessary and an objective analysis on the previously performed aproaches taken with the same objective - to promote Romania's image and identity. Only then the country will have "[...] the fund needed to make an insight that generates a nucleus to create an authentic country image" (Dolea and Ţăruş, 2009, p. 13).

CHAPTER 3.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research theme is the appropriate operationalization of the global country image based on a comparative evaluation of the attitudes, beliefs, opinions and associations on Romania, inside and outside its borders; the target was to obtain data allowing a comparative approach of the research results. This study contains a wide range of aspects regarding respondents' views on the evaluation of the separate dimensions that characterize the image of Romania (we refer in this study, to the items related to public diplomacy, tourism, Romanian brand products etc.) and their beliefs about the country (respondents' beliefs regarding the natural and anthropogenic/artificial environment, people's character and skills , country competences and traits and also travel intentions were considered).

In this context, the main question that this paper seeks to answer is "What are the factors that affect the assessment of a country's global image?".

The secondary questions formulated in close connection with the main question of the research, include:

1) In assessing the global image of the country, is the same research model viable for internal audiences and external audiences?

2) What factors determine the most influence on the global image of a country in the case of the internal public? What about the external public?

3) How can these factors be organized according to their degree of influence on the perception of the country's the global image??

Regarding the **research methods**, both qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods are used for country image analysis. Moreover, the mixed research methods used in the same study are considered to be complementary, a significant number of authors using qualitative and quantitative research methods to study destination image.

The objectives of the present paper are developed in line with its purpose, namely to develop a conceptual model of antecedents and consequences of the country's global image, that is going to be valid for both internal and external audiences (created on the basis of benchmarking Romania's image inside and outside its borders). In the context of the

undertaken empirical analysis, the purpose is analysing –taking into account the designed conceptual model- the relations and the validity of the assumptions based on exploratory research conducted on the literature.

Developed in close agreement with the theoretical structure addressing the country image, with the research methodology used in this paper and the bibliographic resources used, the **main objectives** of this thesis is summarized by:

1) building a viable research model of the global country image;

2) identifying relations between the influence of country image and its determinants;

3) analysis of respondents' perception regarding Romania's image;

In an exploratory purpose, the **qualitative research** was conducted to contribute to the establishment of plausible assumptions, respectively of the relations postulates between variables; by its terms, has given access to the attitudes, motivations and aspirations of interviewees. The study was conducted to identify respondents' opinions regarding Romania's image and the factors influencing the country's image inside and outside its borders; these being collected by using specific qualitative research tools (semi-structured interviews) and were interpretive analyzed, suggesting the presence of subjectivity in this part of the study.

The **quantitative research**, in which the research instrument was developed taking into account the results of the first exploratory study, was aimed to collect data on Romania's image inside and outside its borders and testing the proposed conceptual model.

According to McGivern (2009, cited in Radomir, 2013, p. 193) the singular transverse research - although it doesn't have the benefits of the repeated transverse or longitudinal research, so it cannot predict tendencies - is common in marketing research because it ensures the information necessary for exploratory / descriptive and the explanatory investigations.

Data sources used for the completion of this work are divided into:

1) primary data sources - obtained from conducted surveys and interviews ; the data was transformed into empirical representations to allow easier identification of correlations, comparisons and measurement of items in the developed conceptual model respectively an easier testing / verifying of hypotheses;

2) secondary data sources - achieved through the exploration of existing literature, of reports of various foundations, organizations and associations, and monitoring press released data.

Research methods used in the present paper include:

1) qualitative research, characterized by an inductive research strategy, in which the interview was used as a research tool (semi-structured, applied directly by phone and / or Skype)

2) quantitative research, characterized by a deductive research strategy, in which the questionnaire was used as a research tool (survey - direct and / or trough the Internet)

As **research tools**, depending on the type of research used at a given time, the following have been used:

1) interview guide - for qualitative research

2) questionnaire (applied directly and via the Internet) - for quantitative research.

Related to **data analysis**, specific software was used for qualitative, respectively quantitative research, as follows:

1) for the qualitative research Tosmana software version 1.312 was used;

2) for the quantitative research IBM SPSS Statistics software and SmartPLS were used.

CHAPTER 4.

THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Qualitative research

Following interviews held between March and May this year, they interviewed 24 Romanian (of which 12 are within the defined borders of Romania and 12 outside of them) and 24 foreigners (half of them living in the country at the time of the interview, and half in the EU, outside Romania). To finalize the analysis of the data content a thematic analysis was used, as follows:

1) The image of Romania: associations, perceptions, influence factors, *evolution*
2) *Romania: strenghts, weaknesses*
3) Recommendations for improving the image of the country: measures and policies
4) Intended behaviour
5) Demographics

With the commencement of the data analysis mentioned regularities regarding the factors influencing Romania's image and strengths or weaknesses of the country were identified. The responses were grouped into categories - which, incidentally, have associated new concepts, compared to broader topics of discussion that were addressed. A narrative analysis was chosen in the first stage of analysis because I felt that the answers received from the majority of respondents are relevant and useful in developing future strategies to strengthen Romania's image internally and externally. Afterwards, the data was coded and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software (Tosmana 1302), it offers several solutions on the interaction of the factors taken into account in forming positive image about Romania. After analyzing the content of the data, the analysis below resulted.

The interviewed respondents, of Romanian origin, are divided into 50% of female respondents and respectively 50% male respondents (Romanians inside the borders) and 33% female respondents, ie 67% of male respondents (Romanian in outside borders). Regarding the Romanian interviewees residing in Romania, most of them (7 of 12) believe that a country's image is very important for its prosperity - in general, there are "there are numerous connections between associations with the country, how the citizens of the country are

perceived, existing investment opportunities nationally, etc. "(AS, 27, Iasi, marketing specialist).

Relating to Romania's image in general, Romanians interviewed (residing in the country) believe in the vast majority, that it is negatively perceived abroad or vaguely and incorrect, having the foundation on generalizations and associations with behavior of Romanians abroad, respectively generalized confusion about the differences between the Romanian and Roma community.

Regarding the factors that could affect Romania's image change for the better, they include, among others:

- strengthening the Romanian communities abroad for constant interaction with the citizens of the countries in which they have immigrated;

- organizing educational activities that aim to overcome discriminatory behaviors, prejudices and misconceptions from an early age, so that children of other nationalities interact with Romanian children;

- the improvement of the legal system, given that existing legislation still favors certain representatives of Romania - which generates inequality of opportunity, lack of equity and/or correctness;

- improveing relations between men in general, and improving connections between policy makers and citizens, for better collaboration between policy makers and the public

- legislative regulations in host countries, on the publication of false information without a viable foundation, in international media;

The focus fell mainly on changing the behavior and attitude in all spheres, starting with the high political level.

Choosing for the reduction of contradictions in the responses received, the report indicates that the positive image generated of the country is influenced by images of people and by sources of information used – Fig. 5.

Fig. 5. Tosmana raport – qualitative analisys among Romanian respondents

The analysis highlighted some measures and recommendations that, if implemented, could lead to the improvement of Romania's image both inside and outside borders.

Foreign-born respondents were aged between 22 and 66 years; respondents interviewed domestically, were 33% male and 67% female, while this ratio was reversed among respondents outside the borders.

Reported to the associations with the country it was relatively clear to see that foreigners who did not visit Romania were -mainly- reporting relative to the people of Romanian origin with which they interacted, to the knowledge regarding the positioning of the country and also to the information acquired over time from the media. On the other hand, those respondents that had visited Romania to date have shown that the positive associations reporting to the country are predominant, compared with negative ones. Among the foreigners interviewed, the sources of information deemed most influential on the perception of Romania's image are the articles in the press and information provided in news programs. At the opposite end are books or documentaries and the Internet and social networks.

Reported to the elements that could influence the improvement of Romania's image, in addition to image campaigns that should be well structured and promoted in the world, 18 of the 24 interviewed reported the facts, attitude, fairness and sincerity of Romanians, respectively the interactions that they have abroad with foreign citizens.

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Data:

     Column1      C_tara  I_oameni  S_Info  Asocieri  IMG   Int_Viz.Reviz
R1,R9,R24          1       1         1       1         1     C
R2                 0       1         1       1         0     1
R3,R4,R21          1       1         0       0         1     1
R5,R20             1       0         1       1         1     1
R6                 0       0         0       1         0     1
R7,R11,R14,R22     0       1         1       0         0     0
R8                 1       1         0       1         0     0
R10,R19            0       1         0       1         1     1
R12,R18,R23        0       1         0       1         0     C
R13                1       1         1       1         0     0
R15                1       1         1       0         0     0
R16                1       1         1       0         1     1
R17                0       1         1       0         1     1

Results:

Results: (all)
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C_TARA * S_INFO * ASOCIERI * IMG +	c_tara * I_OAMENI * ASOCIERI * img +	C_TARA * I_OAMENI * asocieri * IMG +	c_tara * s_info * ASOCIERI * img +	c_tara * I_OAMENI * s_info * ASOCIERI +	I_OAMENI * S_INFO * asocieri * IMG
(R5,R20)	(R2)	(R3,R4,R21+R16)	(R6)	(R10,R19)	(R16+R17)

Simplifying Assumptions C_tara{0}I_oameni{1}S_Info{0}Asocieri{1}IMG{0} +
C_tara{1}I_oameni{1}S_Info{1}Asocieri{1}IMG{1}
Number of Simplifying Assumptions: 2

Fig. 6. Tosmana report – qualitative analisys among foreign respondents (taking into account the influence of the information sources)

Given that the literature supports the flexible nature of the image that people have reported to a place, a destination or a country, we recognize that the analysis on a data panel set would be more relevant in the context of this study. For financial and time considerations, the study was directed strictly towards 24 respondents selected non probabilistic. Thus, if we take into account the sources of information (ie the credibility attributed to them) and their influence on the intention of visiting and/or revisiting, they appear to be relevant for those respondents who attach increasing importance to the characteristics of the country, not just the image of the people and the general image of the country considered. – Fig. 6.

Assuming the image of people, associations with the contry, sources of information and features of the country -exclusively- form the image and country excluding the latter, the result (Fig. 7) demonstrates the importance of the presence of credible sources of information simultaneously with the characteristics of the country, respectively the image of the people - which means that they are influenced by the information appearing in the media.

Fig. 7. Tosmana report – qualitative analisys among foreign respondents (by eliminating the IMG variable)

Following the analysis and consistent with the literature, there were severalassumptions made (whose validity will be checked through the quantitative research). These are:

1) The perception of the image of the people has a positive effect on the global image of the country (H2A);

2) The type of the information sources influences (in a different manner, depending on their type) the global country image (H17);

3) The sex of the respondents influences the relations between the variables (H8);

4) There is correlation between the perception of a country's global image and the intention of (re)visiting the country concerned (H7.2)

Quantitative research

Relating to the structure of the sample composed of 397 Romanian respondents whose answers were validated, it was composed of 167 men and 230 women. The average age of the respondents is between 25-35 years, a percentage of 44.6% of respondents falling within this category – Figure 8.
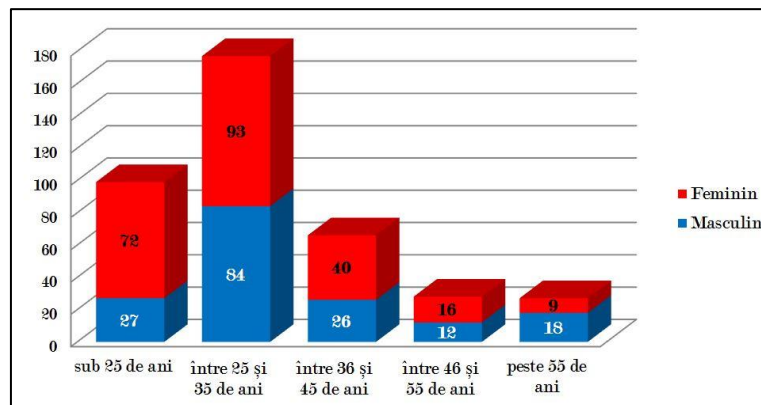
Fig. 8. The structure of Romanian respondents by sex and age

Source: elaborated by the author on the basis of SPSS processed data

Reported to the Romanian respondents structure depending on the country in which they live in, data processing showed that the vast majority of people who answered this questionnaire live in Romania (71%), followed by the United Kingdom (7.8%) and Spain (4.3%); at the opposite pole respondents living in Turkey (0.3%), Portugal, Belgium and Austria (0.5% each) - Figure 9.
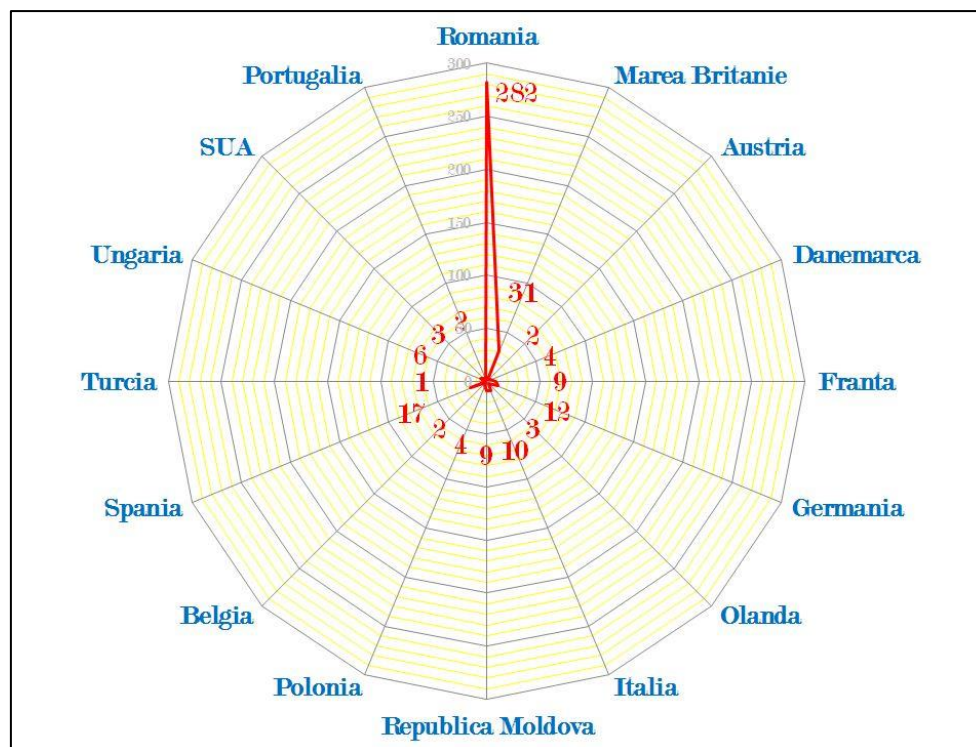
Fig. 9. The structure of Romanian respondents by country

Source: elaborated by the author on the basis of SPSS processed data

27

Reported to the structure of foreign respondents by age and sex, it is shown in Figure 10. Thus, the sample was composed of 176 men and 190 women, most of them aged under 25 years.
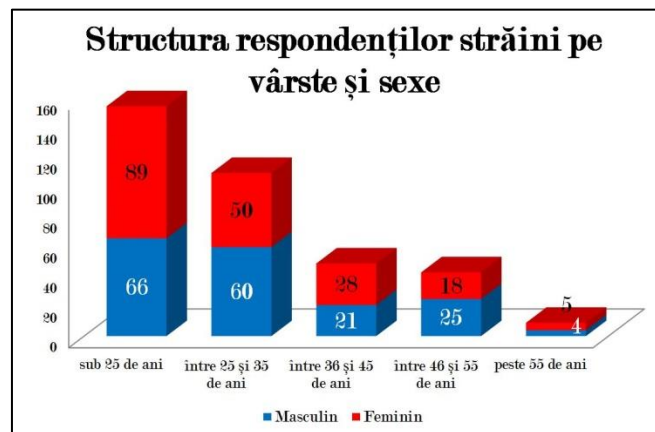
Fig. 10. The structure of foreign respondents by sex and age

Source: elaborated by the author on the basis of SPSS processed data

Reported to the foreign respondents structure depending on the country in which they live in, data processing showed that the vast majority of people who answered this questionnaire live in Great Britain (25,4%), followed by France (11.2%) and Germany (7.9%) – Fig. 11.
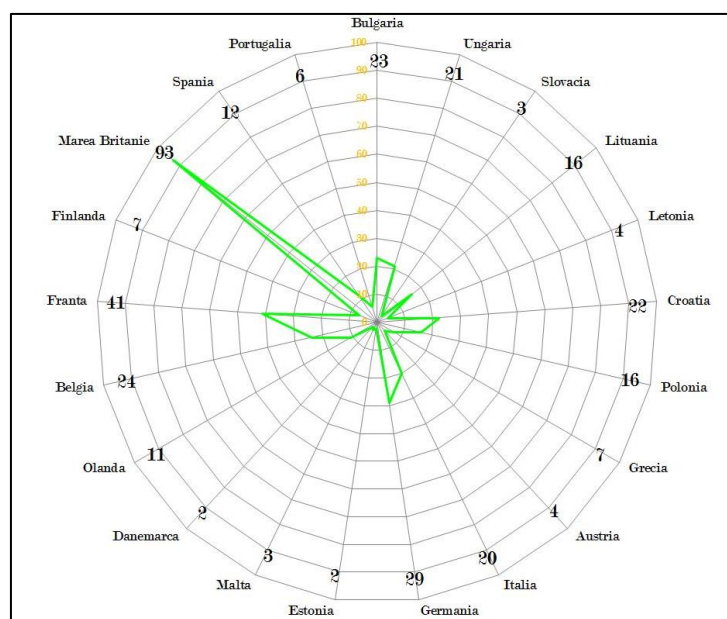
Fig. 11. . The structure of foreign respondents by country currently residing in

Source: elaborated by the author on the basis of SPSS processed data

In order to evaluate the proposed conceptual model, the aime was to check (Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2011; Radomir, 2013, Morar, 2015):

1) *Composite reliability* – that needs to exceed the value of 0.708 and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient;

2) **Convergent validity** – which means that each indicator must be correlated significantly with the theoretical measured construct;

3) **Discriminant validity** – which requires each indicator to be correlated with the contruct determined more powerful than any other construct; this is verified by Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the correlations between indicators and constructs involved and using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio criterion (HTMT);

For external formative model assessment, the aim was to test (Hair et al., 2011; Radomir, 2013, Morar, 2015):

1) **Content validity -** by deleting some of the indicators after principal component analysis and verification conducted in SPSS and by checking the remaining variables;

2) **2) Testing multicolinearity between formative variables** – using VIF (inflation factor), which must be less than 5.

To assess internal reflexive model, the aim was to test (Radomir, 2013, Morar, 2015):

1) **The values that R^2 takes - (the determination coefficient)** – the higher its value it indicates a higher level of predictive accuracy. The values of R^2 may be between 0 and 1;

2) **2) Testing predictive relevance** –using the Stone Geisser test (Q^2), by the *blindfolding* procedure, setting omission distance (D) to 7, according to the literature.

Following the operations carried out through SPSS and SmartPLS it was proven that the same conceptual model is not valid for both categories. The relationship between the latent variables of the conceptual model for the Romanian respondents is found in Figure 12, while Figure 13 highlights the conceptual model and the established relationships between its variables - for foreign respondents.

Fig. 12. Relations between the latent variables of the conceptual model (Romanians)

Source: elaborated by the author in SmartPLS

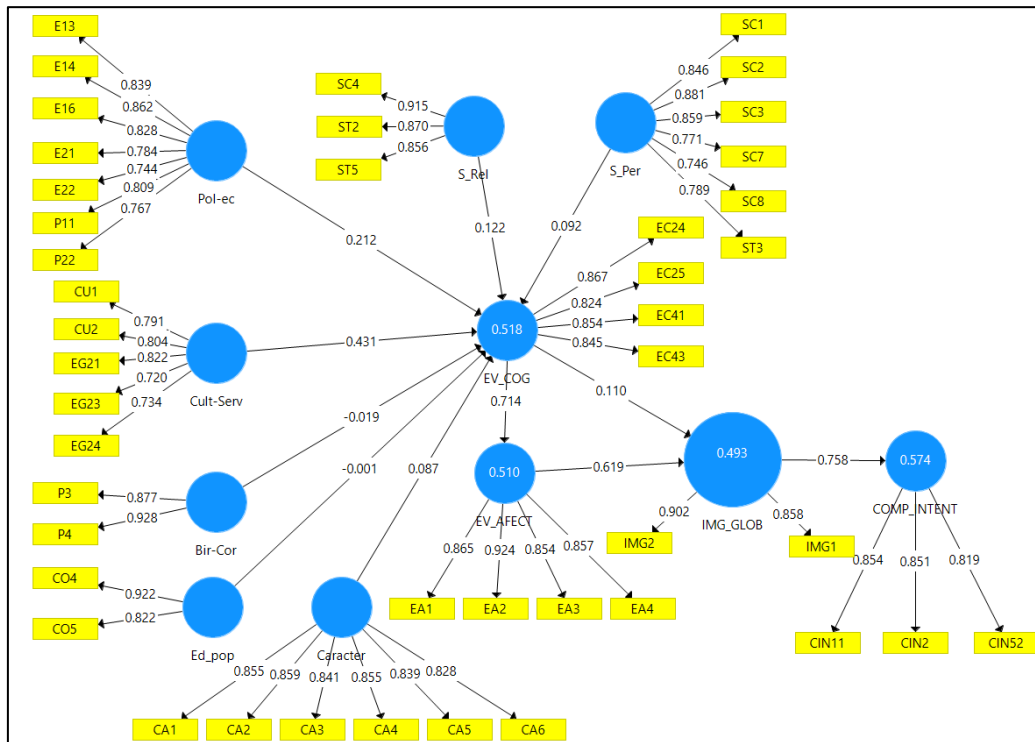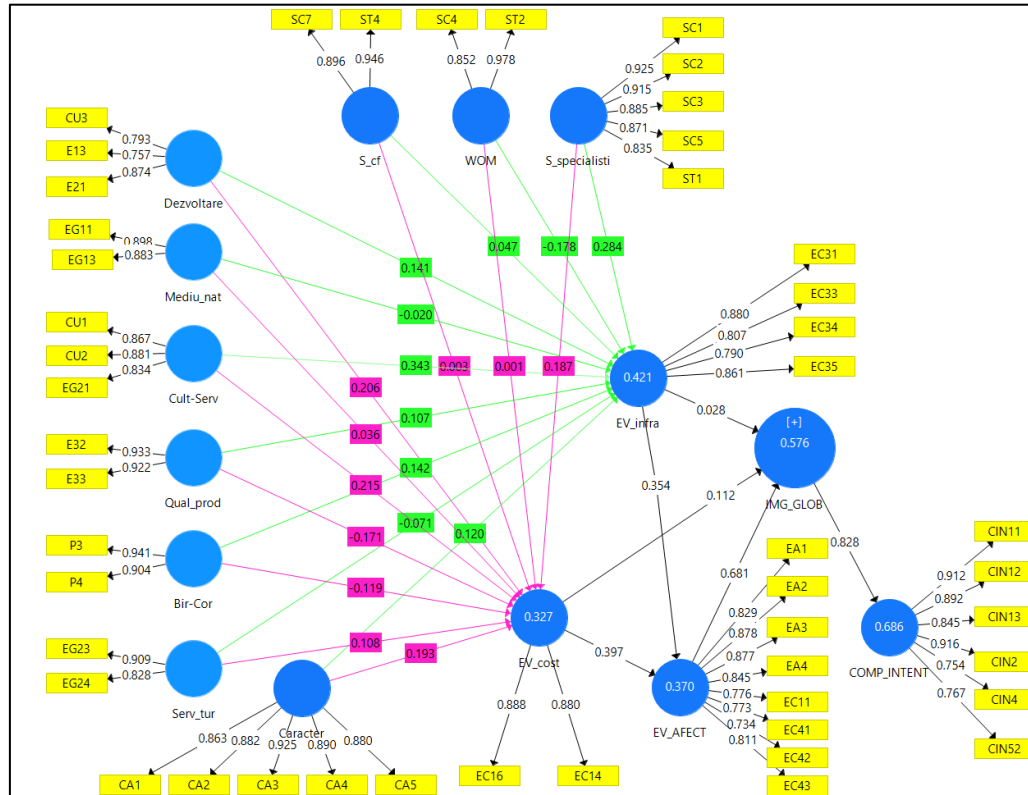**Fig. 13. Relations between the latent variables of the conceptual model (foreigners)**

Source: elaborated by the author in SmartPLS

CONCLUSIONS

Following the undertaken research has allowed for response to the three research questions to be found:

1) *In assessing the overall image of the country, is the same research model viable for Romanian respondents and foreign respondents?*

As demonstrated by the analysis performed in this case, the same conceptual model to assess Romania's image among Romanian respondents, respectively foreign respondents is not valid.

2) *What are the factors that determine the greatest influence on the global image of a country in the case of Romanian respondents? What about the foreign respondents?*

In the case of foreign respondents, the factors that determine the greatest influence on global image (both direct and indirect) include the development of the country, culture and services, information sources that consist of specialists, brochures, etc., infrastructure and costs. In the case of Romanian respondents, the factors that determine the greatest influence on global image (both direct and indirect) include culture and services, politics and economics, characteristics of people etc.

3) *3) How can these factors be organized according to their degree of influence expressed on the perception the country's global image?*

The factors can be organized into variables with direct influence (characteristics of the country, image of people, information sources) and variables with indirect influence (their individual components) on the evaluation process of the country's image. This process leads, in fact, to the formation of a cognitive and affective image in relation to the country. The variables that are given the highest degree of importance in the case of the Romanians include: 1) culture and services (included here are the number of tourist attractions, cultural experiences, traditional, availability of accommodation and variety of gastronomic services), 2) character of the people (the degree of agreeability, friendlyness, politeness, selflessness, trust and honesty) and 3) sources of information considered relevant (travel agencies, brochures and travel guides, books / movies, direct marketing and news). To these we add 4) entertainment possibilities (most items that make up cognitive assessment) and 5) emotional

perception of the country as a relaxing one, enjoyable, alive. The most significant variables considered by foreigners include 1) culture and services (composed of Romania's attractiveness in terms of culture, cultural-traditional experiences offered and the number of tourist attractions) along with 2) the development of the country (in composition of wich comprises the quality of life, the level of technology and skill level of workers in Romania), 3) people's character and 4) information sources comprised of specialistsMoreover, they attach increasing importance to the assessment of costs and the evaluation of the country's infrastructure , but "weighs" in forming a global image and emotional perception of the country, as in the case of the Romanian respondents.

Table 5 contains the synthesis of the results regarding the confirmation or rejection of the assumptions of the undertaken study. As can be seen, most research hypotheses were confirmed, both for Romanian respondents, and in the case of foreign respondents. There are also partially confirmed hypotheses (most of which relate to the moderating variables and their effect on relationships between variables). Two hypotheses were tested in the case of Romanian respondents (testing the moderating effect of perception on the size of the country and testing the moderating effect of the distance to which the evaluator lies compared to the country evaluated) because they know the size of the country and are spread both in Romania and abroad. In table 5 there were highlighted including assumptions renounced this during the analysis, due to the results obtained from analysis of principal components; they are marked with an "*".

Table 5 – Summary of results from testing research hypotheses

No. Hyp.	Hypothesis		Result[1]	
			Ro.	Frn.
H1A	The respondents' perception about the **characteristics of the country** have an indirect positive effect on the **overall image of the country**.		1	1
	H1A1	The perception about the country's *political and economic characteristics* assessed **indirectly and positively** influence the *overall country image perception*.	1	*
	H1A2	Perception about the *culture and specific services* of the country assessed **indirectly and positively** influences *overall country image perception..*	1	1

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[1] After testing the hypotheses, they were either confirmed, refuted or partly confirmed. Related notations are "1" for confirmed hypothesis. "0" for the disproven hypothesis and "01" for the partially confirmed hypothesis. "Ro." Assumptions include test results for Romanian respondents, while "Frn." includes the results of the testing of hypôtheses for foreign respondents. "*" is the hypothesis given up because of principal component analysis (PCA). "-" Means that the assumptions have not been tested by the particular characteristics of the population studied.

No. Hyp.		Hypothesis	Result[1]	
			Ro.	Frn.
	H1A3	The perception about *bureaucracy and corruption* characteristic of assessed countries **indirectly and negatively** influences *overall image perception of the country*.	1	1
H1B		The respondents' perception about the **characteristics of the country** have a positive effect on the country's image resulting from **cognitive assessment**.	1	1
	H1B1	The perception about the assessed country's *political and economic* characteristics influence **directly and positively** the *perception of the characteristics of the country*.	1	*
	H1B2	The perception about the *culture and specific services* of the evaluated country **directly and positively** influence the *perception of the characteristics of the country*.	1	1
	H1B3	The perception about *bureaucracy and corruption* that characterize the evaluated country, **directly and negatively** affects *the perception of the characteristics of the country*.	1	0
H2A		The respondents' perception about **the image of the people** has an indirect and positive effect on the **overall image of the country**.	1	1
	H2A1	The perception about the *character of the people* **indirectly and positively** influence *overall country image perception*.	1	1
	H2A2	The perception regarding the *education of the people* (seen trough the level of education and knowledge of speech in a foreign language) **indirectly and positively** influences *overall image perception of the country*.	1	*
H2B		The respondents' perception about **the image of the people** has a positive effect on the country's image resulting from **the cognitive assessment**.	1	1
	H2B1	The perception about *people's character* **directly and positively** influence *people's image perception.*	1	1
	H2B2	The perception of *the level of education of people* **directly and positively** influence *their image perception*.	1	*
H3A		The respondents' perception about **the sources of information** have an indirect and positive effect on the **overall image of the country**.	1	1
	H3A1	The perception of *the relevance of information sources* has an **indirect and positive** influence on the *global image perception of the country.*	1	*
	H3A2	The perception about the *pertinence of information sources* has an **indirect and positive** influence on *global image perception of the country.*	1	*
H3B		The respondents' perceptions about the **sources of information** have a positive effect on the country's image resulting from the **cognitive assessment.**	1	1
	H3B1	The perception of *the relevance of information sources* has a **direct and positive** influence on the *perception of information sources used.*	1	*
	H3B2	The perception about *the pertinence of information sources* has a **direct and positive** influence *the perception of information sources used*.	1	*
H4		The respondents' perceptions about the **image resulting from the cognitive assessment of the elements considered**, has a positive effect on the country's image resulting from **the emotional evaluation**.	1	1

No. Hyp.	Hypothesis		Result[1]	
			Ro.	Frn.
H5	The perceptions of the respondents about the **image resulting from the cognitive assessment of the elements considered** have a positive effect on the **overall image of the country**.		1	1
H6	The perceptions of the respondents about the **image resulting from the emotional evaluation** have a positive effect on **the overall image of the country**.		1	1
H7	**The overall image of a country has a direct and positive effect on intended behavior.**		1	1
	H7.1	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention to travel to Romania**	1	1
	H7.2	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention to (re)visit Romania**	*	1
	H7.3	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention to extendthe stay in Romania**	*	1
	H7.4	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention to recommend the country as a tourist destination**	1	1
	H7.5	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **associations with the people from Romania**	1	1
	H7.6	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention to choose products from the country concerned.**	*	*
	H7.7	**The global image of the** country has a positive, indirect effect on the **intention of individuals to invest in the country concerned.**	*	1
H8	*The gendre* of the respondents moderates the relationships established between constructs.		0	0
H9	*The education level* of the respondents moderates the relationships established between costructs.		0	01[2]
H10	*The declared income* of the respondents moderates the relationships established between constructs.		01[3]	0
H11	*The stated level of self-esteem* moderates the relationships established between variables.		01[4]	0
H12	*The age* of the respondents moderates the relationships established between variables.		01[5]	01[6]
H13	The declared *environment of origin* of the respondents moderates the		01[7]	0

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[2] *The level of education*, of the foreign respondents moderates the relationship between 1) the characteristics of the country and the cognitive assessment and 2)the cognitive assessment and emotional assessment.

[3] *The declared income,* of the Romanian respondents, strictly moderates the relationship between country characteristics and cognitive assessment.

[4] *The declared level of self-esteem* strictly moderates the relationship between the image of people and the cognitive assessment.

[5] *The age*, of the Romanian respondents, strictly moderates the relationship between country characteristics and cognitive assessment.

[6] *The age*, of the foreign respondents moderates the relationship between 1) the characteristics of the country and cognitive assessment, 2) cognitive assessment of the country's image and global image and 3) between the global image and intended behavior.

[7] The declared *environment of origin* of the Romanian respondents strictly moderates the relationship between the sources of information and cognitive assessment**.**

No. Hyp.	Hypothesis	Result[1]	
		Ro.	Frn.
	relationships established between variables.		
H14	*The emotional assessment* mediates the relationship between and cognitive assessment of the country's global image perceived by the respondents.	1	1
H15	The perception about the *size of the evaluated country* moderates relations established between variables.	-	01[8]
H16	*The distance* between Romania and the country of residence of the respondent moderates the relationships established between variables.	-	01[9]
H17	*The type of information* sources used influences differentially the overall image of the country.	1	1

The PhD thesis emphasizes an integrated approach to the country's image by taking into account the many dimensions that influence it. Thus, the contributions include:

- *conceptual specifications* covering a gap in the literature about the country image and nation image;

- *the resulting research tools* - 1) interview guide is differentiated by category of respondents to who it is addressed being comprehensive and detailed; 2) the questionnaire is complex, structured and aims to capture all relevant elements of Romania's overall image study;

- *descriptive comparative analysis* (of Romanian and foreign respondents' opinions on the country) provides an overview of how Romania is perceived within and outside it's borders;

- *general added value knowledge in the field* because of 1) the conceptual model whose validity was assessed by 2) it's construct components and 3) identifying the relationships established between the country's image and influence factors taken into account.

The PhD thesis emphasizes *an integrated approach to the country's image* by taking into account the many dimensions that it influences. Reporting to the *results of research*, they can serve as a *foundation in the development, strengthening and implementation of future strategies to promote Romania* - as evidenced in the research implications.

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[8] *Perception of the size of the country* has a moderating effect on assessed relations between 1) the image of the people and cognitive assessment and 2) the sources of information and the cognitive assessment.
[9] *The distance* at which Romania is situated to the country of residence of the respondent has a strictly moderating effect on the relationship among the country's and cognitive assessment..

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