

# Perception of the national brand in the opinion of the inhabitants of Poland and Spain – a comparative analysis

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the process of building a national brand on the example of two countries: Poland and Spain. Its main purpose is to define the image of Poland and Spain abroad, and the specific objectives are to determine the perception of Poland and Poles as well as Spain and Spanish abroad, as well as to identify the recognition of the Polish and Spanish brands abroad. Both countries were chosen due to the fact that they are members of the EU, and the images of both countries abroad seem to be not entirely clear. Both countries had to face a similarly complicated history and problems in the sphere of economic policy. The research method used in article was quantitative research, conducted using an online survey. The study was conducted in the second quarter of 2019. The study involved randomly selected people of Polish and Spanish nationality. 156 questionnaires filled out by respondents from Spain and 203 completed by respondents from Poland were collected. As a result of the conducted research, conclusions and recommendations were developed that could be used to improve the process of building a national brand of Spain and Poland.

## Keywords

national brand, national branding, country image

## **Introduction**

Country is an important element of market identity. Every company in the world is seen in the context of its country of origin. Countries that want to count and compete on an international scale must have strong brands. Through a brand, country builds its image, authority, wealth and prosperity. That is why it is so important to take care of the competitiveness of the brand and strengthen its attributes. The business world is aware of the fact that a good brand of the country is a great asset. Professional association of a product with a recognized and valued national brand of origin is a condition for using this capital. Main purpose of this article is to define image of Poland and Spain abroad. Specific purposes are: perception of Poles and Poland, Spaniards and Spain abroad; recognition of Polish and Spanish brand abroad; level of pride of homeland, which can be feedback for dissatisfaction of a country brand. Countries need brands for a number of key reasons to create a chain of events [Anholt, 2006]:

1. Some consumers in other countries may start to change their minds a little about the country that produces these brands (assuming they know where they come from). If a brand stands out and speaks to them enough to be noticed and spent money on it, they've caught a little 'personal contact' with the country and felt they knew something about it. Other people who notice the products but don't buy them at first may also start thinking a little bit differently about their country of origin.
2. When people in their home country hear from brands that their home country's products are doing well abroad, especially in richer countries, they can start to feel proud and more confident in their status in the world.
3. If the brand is also sold on the domestic market, it can become more attractive thanks to its success abroad, which will justify an increase in price.
4. Once the success of a company's products abroad is known, it will be easier for brand owners to attract highly skilled workers.
5. Home country authorities may become aware of the great economic potential of this type of activity and think about its dissemination.

The developing national branding causes an ever-increasing impact and the need to apply it in the country in order not to fall behind. Taking this into account, a significant aspect seems to be the examination of the effectiveness of the existing national branding of Poland and Spain. The research method used in article was quantitative research, conducted using an online survey. The study involved randomly selected people of Polish and Spanish nationality. 156 question-

naires filled out by respondents from Spain and 203 completed by respondents from Poland were collected. As a result of the conducted research, conclusions and recommendations were developed that could be used to improve the process of building a national brand of Spain and Poland.

## 1. Theoretical background

Creating a recognizable brand is nowadays regarded as one of the most effective tools for shaping the competitive advantage on the market. A strong brand generates value for enterprises, but also for customers [Glińska E., 2016].

The national brand and national identity have a symbiotic relationship. National identity is often reflected in a brand developed by a particular nation [Aronczyk, 2009]. At the same time, reconstruction of the image for the outside world can create new narratives for national identity and unity [Kaneva, Popescu, 2014].

For centuries, countries have been struggling – mainly in the sphere of international politics and diplomacy – for strength, influence and prestige. After careful analysis, we can see that the success and influence of the countries is a resultant of "soft" and "hard" power. There are times when the set goals can only be achieved by force – the "hard" power serves this purpose. Fortunately, in most situations, goals are achieved with "soft" power; through culture, intellectual and spiritual influences [Anholt, 2006]. According to J. Nye, "a country can achieve the political results it wants when other countries, in the name of their own interests, want to imitate it, admiring its values, aspiring to its level of development and openness" [Nye, 2002]. Today's developed countries used, consciously or not, marketing methods in the past to stimulate economic development based on an international division of labor. Products and services have found foreign buyers mainly due to their ability to attract attention or to win positive attitudes by exploiting the country-of-origin effect. The effect of the country of origin is a phenomenon known in marketing for years. Recently, however, attention has been drawn to the stereotyping mechanism of this effect and to the fact that attitudes towards the whole country, its inhabitants or the products manufactured in it may have a very strong relationship [Verlegh, Steenkamp, 1999]. The brand of a product, through its sound and image, may indicate a completely different country from what it is in reality. Such marketing strategies are often used when marketing goods the wording of which deliberately suggests another country of manufacture, associated with the good quality of the product produced in that place, such as watches in Switzerland or chocolate in Belgium [Figiel 2004]. A positive image of the state or lack thereof has a very specific dimension for the interests of a given country. It plays a final role, it is a measurable value

- it is important for economic development and broadening of political influence. It cannot be a product of propaganda, but a result of facts and achievements. Nowadays, economic indicators, forecasts, surveys, political polemics and decisions of state bodies are quickly made public and, depending on the degree of controversy, widely commented on. Therefore, it seems important to expose those elements which are considered to be the assets of a given country, because if the actions leading to this are not taken there is a risk that the image of the country will be formed on the basis of accidental, incomplete and sometimes even false information and negative stereotypes, which contribute to the weakening of its position in the world [Maćkowska, 2012]. This acquires special significance in the context of the entity's reputation, which is the positive or negative core of associations with the brand, which is the result of the business of the company and its environment [Grześ-Bukłaho J., 2017]. Research shows that effective national branding is necessary to change the position of a country in a more positive light for its target audiences [Tal, et al., 2012]. The national brand is a great opportunity to stand out from other countries, which in case of insufficient information facilitates and significantly speeds up the decision-making process. Apart from measurable benefits in the form of e.g. new investments, revenues from tourism or jobs, a country's brand guarantees its users additional benefits such as prestige, satisfaction and pride in living in a given region. The creation of a strong country brand translates into increased trust in the authorities, which are indirectly responsible for its construction, and is a key step in building the image. A strong brand of the country is a great public relations tool – it serves as a buffer for negative processes, information or events related to the country, because such events are easier to reduce in the case of a strong brand, which is sometimes able to defend itself [Passow, 2003].

## **2. Characteristic of the research**

Research method used in this paper was quantitative research, carried out with the use of the questionnaire interview technique by means of an online questionnaire. In order to measure the image of Poland and Spain, a survey method using an online questionnaire was used. Subject of the research are the inhabitants of Poland and Spain. The survey was conducted in the second quarter of 2019. It included randomly selected persons of Polish and Spanish nationality. A total of 156 questionnaires filled in by respondents from Spain and 203 filled in by Polish respondents were collected. The questionnaire could be answered by marking the appropriate number, indicating the degree of compliance with each statement, and they meant sequentially: 1 – definitely not, 2 – no, 3 – no, I have no opinion, 4 – yes, 5 – definitely yes.

Among the respondents from Poland there were 69,2% of women and 30,8% of men. Spanish respondents were represented by 67,9% of women and 32,1% of men.

The majority of Polish respondents were aged 17-25 (67,6%) and 26-40 (31,9%). Only 0,5% of respondents were over 40 years old. In Spanish group, the largest amount of people participating in the survey were people over 40 years of age (52,3%). They were followed by people aged 26-40 (35,5%), and the least numerous group were people aged 17-25 (12,3%). The majority of Poles taking part in the survey when answering questions have already been in Spain many times (45,9%), 24,3% visited Spain only once, 23,8% of respondents never visited Spain but one would like to go there, 4,9% of Poles surveyed currently live in Spain and only 1,1% have never visited this country and there are no plans to do so. The vast majority of Spanish respondents have never been to Poland, but would like to visit this country (67,3%). 16% were in Poland once, 10,9% visited Poland many times and 5,8% of the respondents never visited Poland or had no intention to do so.

### 3. Research results

The majority of Spaniards believe that Poland has a rich tourist offer (Fig. 1). Positive answers are 56,4%, 34% did not express their opinions on the subject, and the rest evaluate the Polish tourist offer as weak.

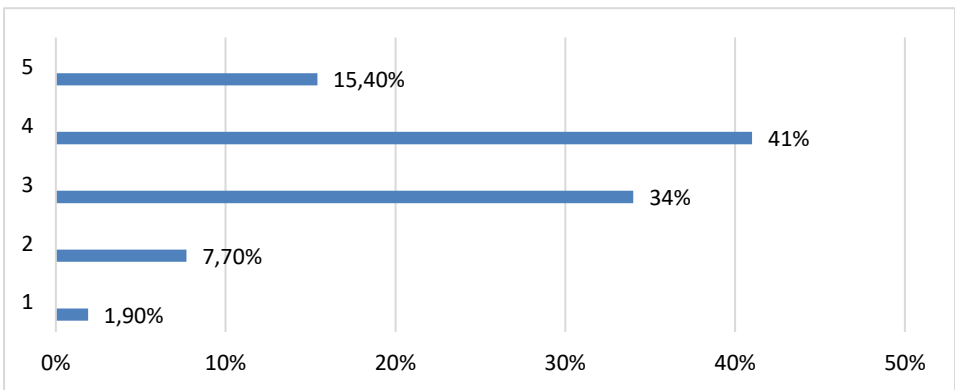


Fig. 1. Touristic offer of Poland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

As for the questionnaires filled in by respondents from Poland, the vast majority considers Spain to be a country with a rich tourist offer (Fig. 2). It considers Spain

to be a country with a very rich tourist offer, 66,5% and a good 30,8%. None of the respondents believes that Spain has a weak or very weak tourist offer.

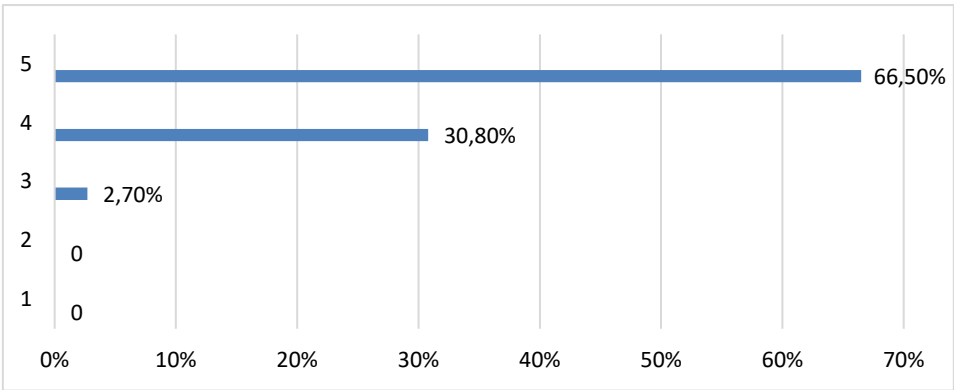


Fig. 1. Touristic offer of Spain

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

The question whether travelling in Poland is interesting and the prices are attractive was answered positively by the majority of Spaniards surveyed. 32,7/5 respondents definitely indicated yes, definitely did not choose only 0,6% of people participating in the survey. 26,3% of the respondents remained without a sentence.

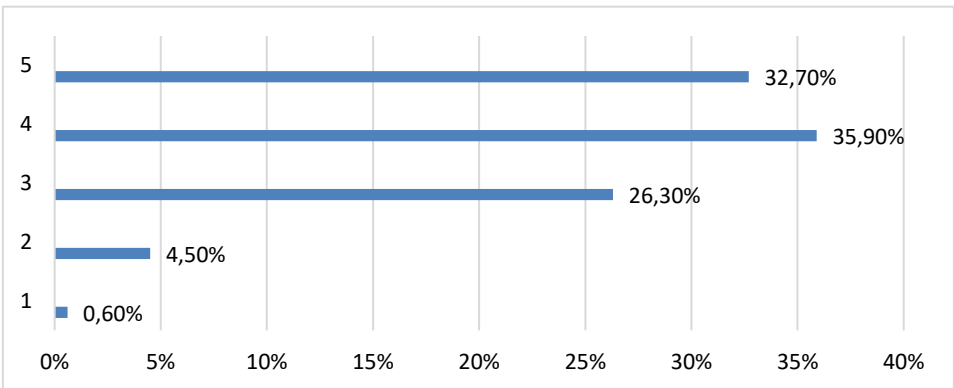
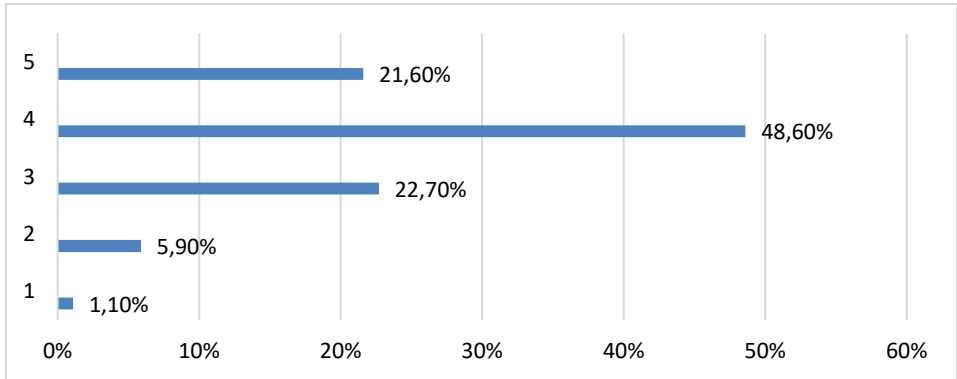


Fig. 2. Tourist attractions and price ratio in Poland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

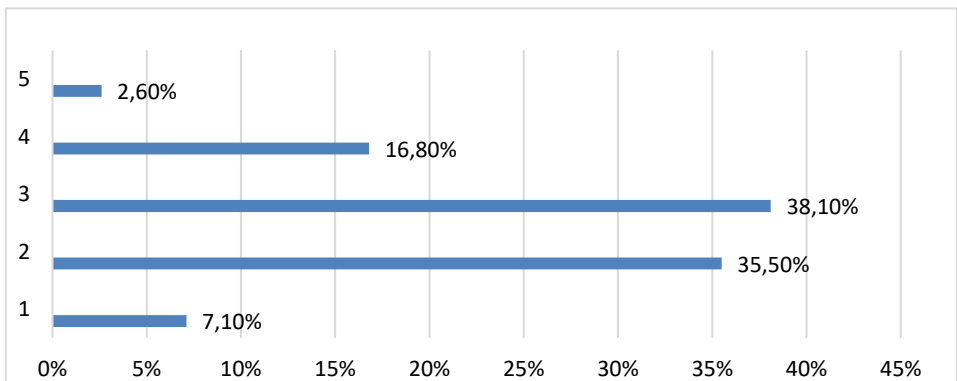
Further, the opinion of Poles on the attractiveness of prices and whether traveling in Spain is interesting is very positive, at least a little less so (Fig. 4). Most respondents believe that traveling in Spain is interesting and affordable (48,6%), considers traveling in Spain very interesting and affordable (21,6%). Only 1,1% consider travelling in Spain to be expensive and uninteresting.



**Fig. 3.** Tourist attractions and price ratio in Spain

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

As far as the assessment of the quality of life is concerned, Poland performs much worse (Fig. 5). Most respondents have no opinion on this matter (38,1%) and the least consider Poland as a country with a high standard of living (2,6%).



**Fig. 4.** Level of living in Poland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

As far as the standard of living in Spain is concerned (Fig. 6), the majority of respondents have no opinion (37,8%). More votes indicate a high (35,7%) or very high (10,3%) standard of living than low (15,1%) or very low (1,1%).

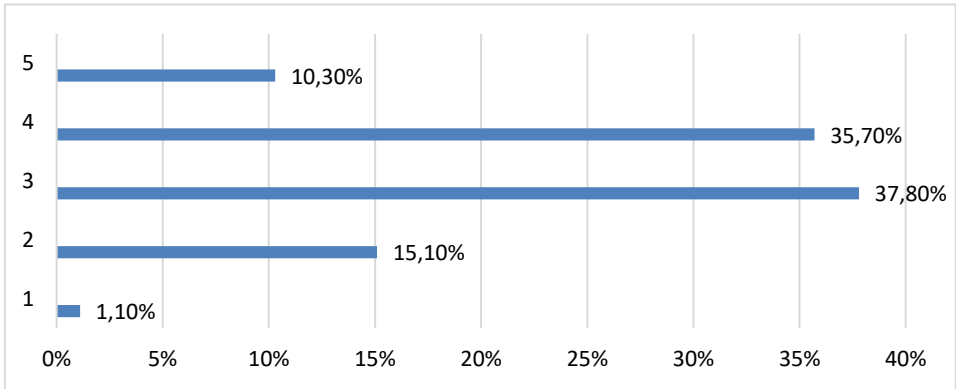


Fig. 5. Level of living in Spain

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Poland, on the other hand, is poor at assessing its position on the international arena (Fig. 7). The majority of respondents believe that Poland has a weak position (40,4%). Only 1,9% of respondents consider Poland to be a strong country.

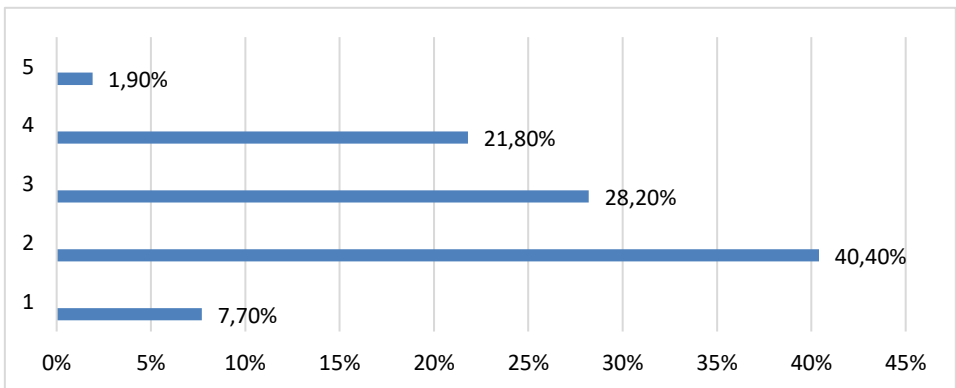
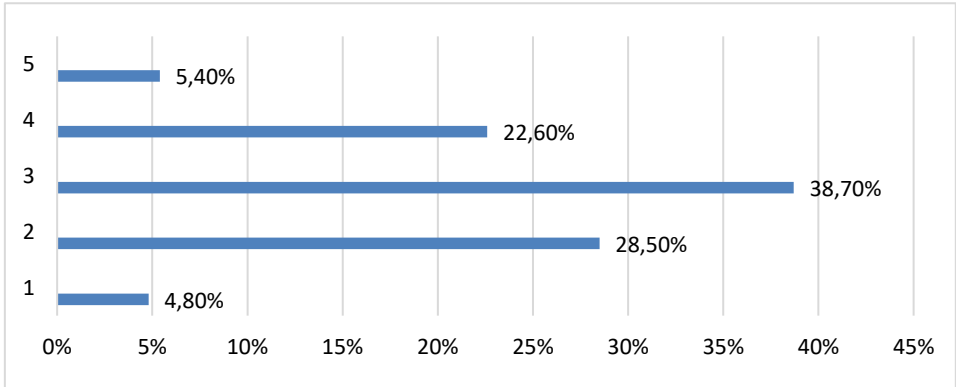


Fig. 6. Poland position worldwide

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.



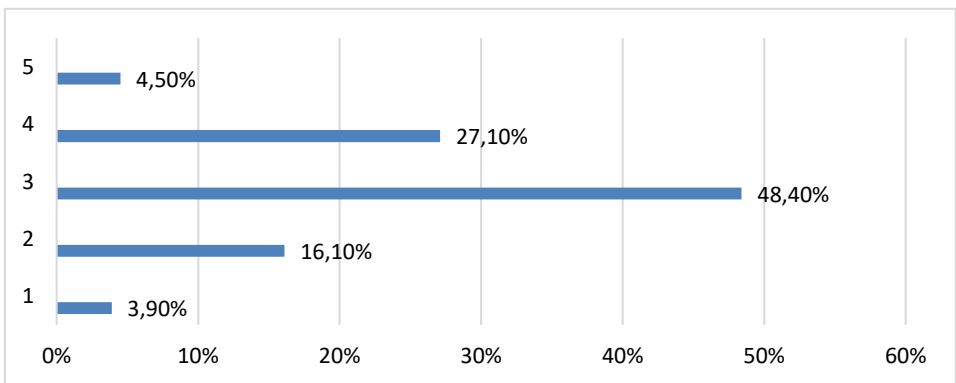
Also when it comes to the importance of Spain in the international arena, the voices point to its rather low position (Fig. 8). Although the majority of respondents do not have an opinion (38,7%), those who do have one believe that Spain's foreign policy is ineffective (28,5%) or very ineffective (4,8%).



**Fig. 8.** Spain position worldwide

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Almost half of the respondents have no opinion whether Poland is a good country to run a business (Fig. 9) (48,4%). Minority have extreme opinions: 3,9% consider Poland as a country definitely bad for running a business, and 4,5% as definitely good.



**Fig. 7.** Facility for running business in Poland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

On the business side, the largest number of respondents have no opinion about the ease of doing business in Spain (Fig. 10) (45,9%). Among those who have such an opinion, it is more often negative (28,6%) or very negative (5,4%) than positive (16,2%) or very positive (3,8%).

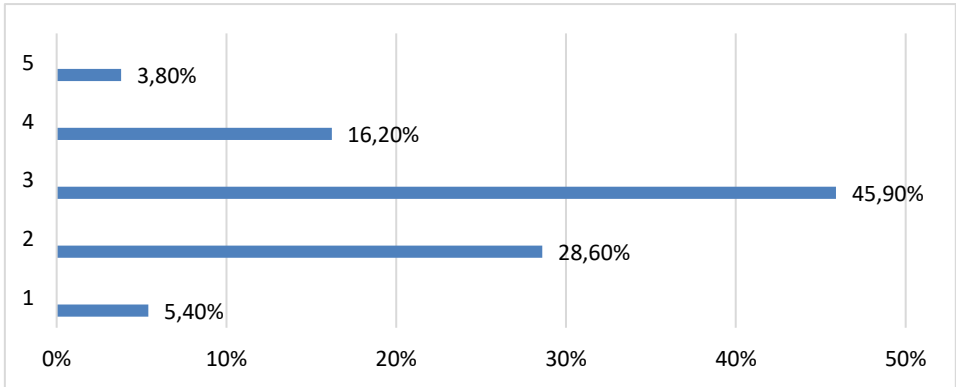


Fig. 8. Facility for running a business in Spain

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

The majority of respondents, when asked to express their opinion on Poles (Fig. 11), described it as good (40,3%), or definitely good (36,4%). For comparison, a bad opinion about Poles is 0,6%, and a very bad opinion about Poles is 5,8%.

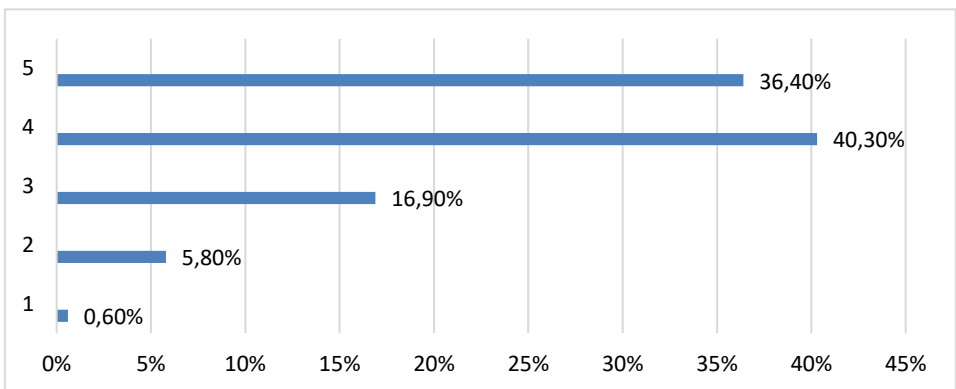
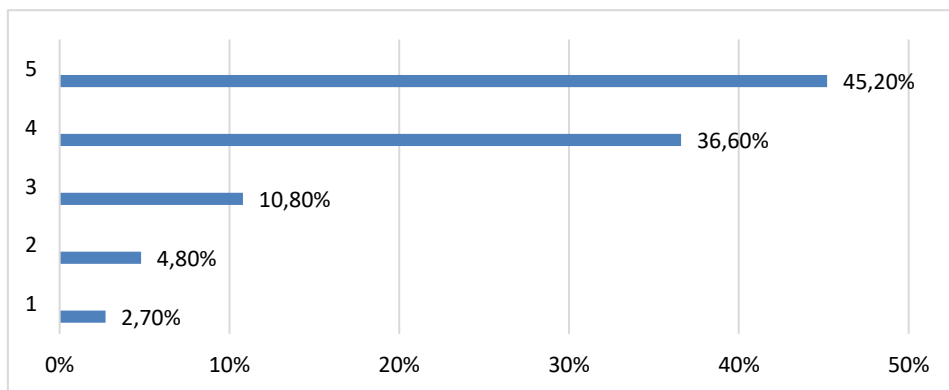


Fig. 9. Opinion about Poles

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Poles have a very good opinion of the Spanish people (Fig. 12). Most respondents have a very good opinion (45,2%), less good opinion (36,6%). Only 2,7% of people participating in the survey have a very bad opinion about Spaniards.



**Fig. 10.** Opinion about Spaniards

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Also, the majority of Spaniards participating in the survey believe that Poles are friendly (Fig. 13). Positive opinion has 42,9% of Spaniards, and very positive 26,3%. Only 0,6% of the respondents consider Poles to be very unpleasant.

As for the Polish brand, it is rather unknown (34,2%) or definitely unknown (11,6%) abroad. The largest number of respondents have no opinion about the recognition of the Polish brand abroad (38,7%), and only 3,9% consider the Polish brand as definitely known.

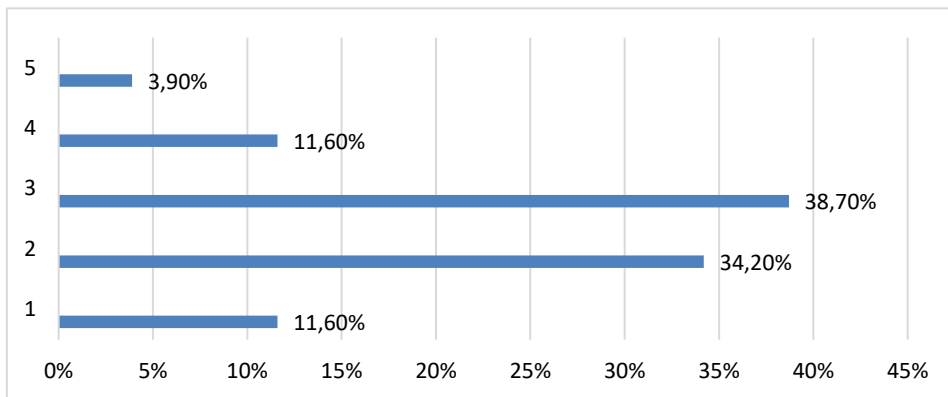


Fig. 11. Awareness of brand Poland abroad

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Opinions about the popularity of the Espania brand are quite divided (Fig. 14). The majority of respondents have no opinion on the subject (34,1%), 22,2% think it is known and 11,4% think it is very well known. 17,8% of those surveyed consider the Espania brand as poorly known and 14,6% as very poorly known.

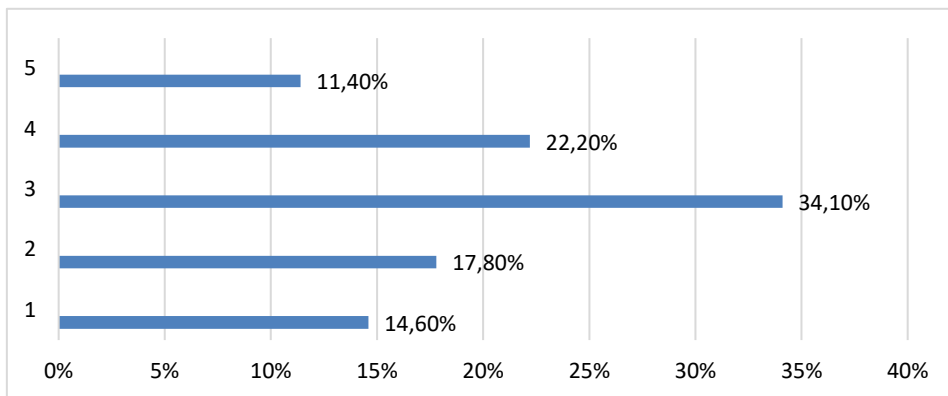


Fig. 12. Awareness of Marca Espania abroad

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

The majority of respondents consider Poland to be a modern country (37,4%). The lowest number of respondents (3,9%) rated Poland as a definitely backward country (Fig. 15).

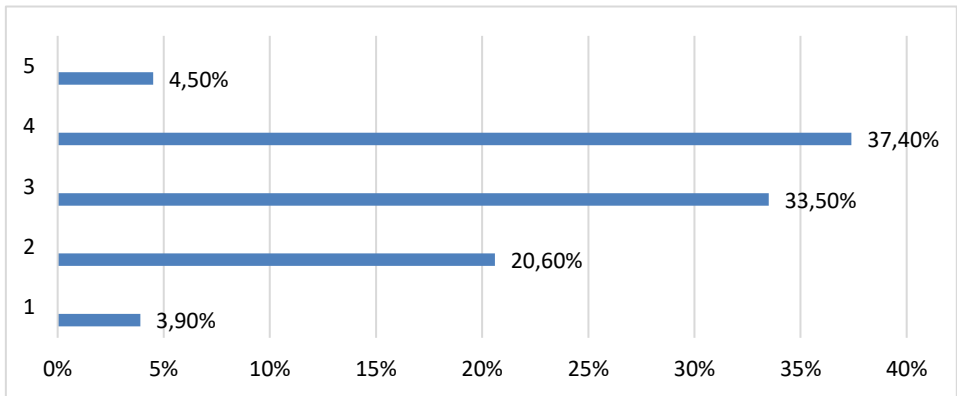


Fig. 13. Modernity of Poland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

The majority of respondents consider Spain a modern country (45,7%) and 14,5% even a very modern country. Only 1,1% of respondents think of Spain as a backward country (Fig. 16).

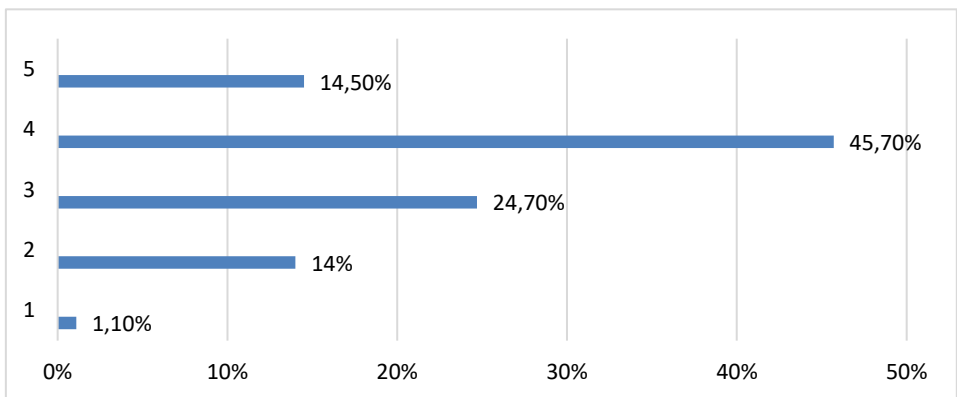


Fig. 16. Modernity of Spain

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

In a question about pride in their origin (Fig. 17), the largest part (41,2%) of Poles answered that they were very proud of their origin (26,2%). Only 7,5% of the respondents were dissatisfied with their origin, while 4,8% were very dissatisfied with their origin.

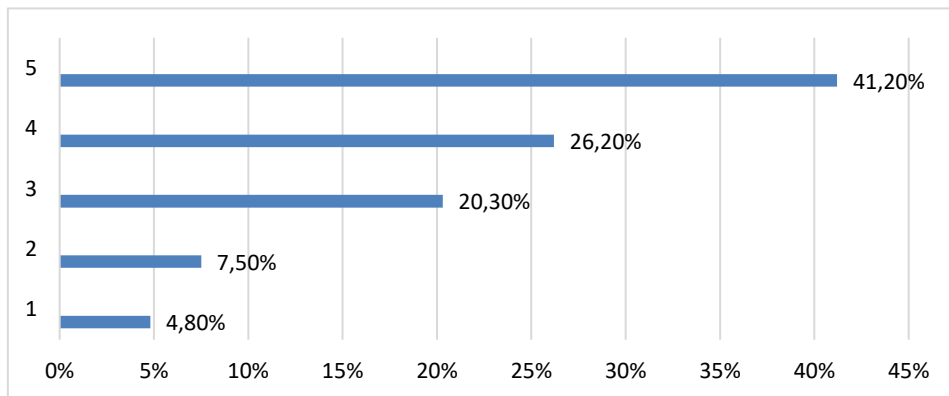


Fig. 14. Pride of homeland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

Most Spaniards claim that their origin is a source of pride for them (Fig. 18): 31,8% agree with this statement and 29,9% strongly agree. Definitely reliable respondents are only 7,8%.

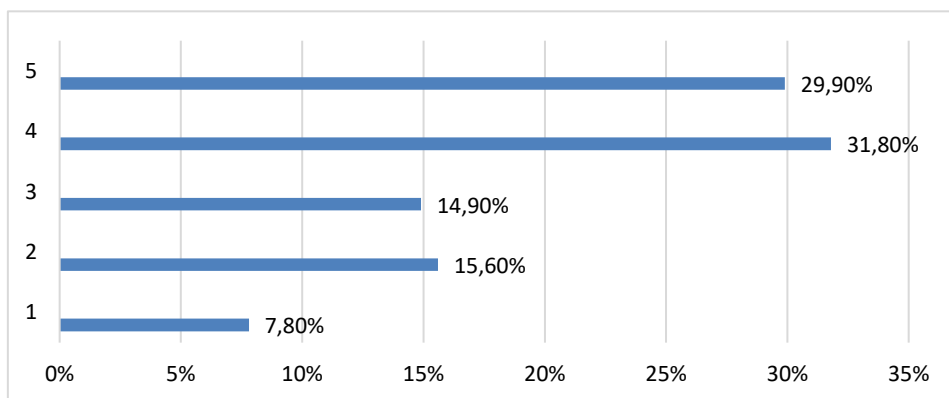


Fig. 15. Pride of homeland

Source: own study based on the results of conducted research.

## Conclusions and limitations

The image of Poland in the eyes of Spaniards that results from the survey should be determined in several planes: opinions about the country, opinions about its inhabitants and its brand. Poland is perceived from the perspective of tourism as a good country to travel (with a wide range of tourist offer and attractive prices) and a wide cultural offer. In the business sphere, Poland performs much worse, because the surveys show that it is considered a country with a low standard of living, unclear government effectiveness and quality of foreign policy. It is considered a country with a weak position on the international arena. The majority of respondents have no opinion about the lack of barriers to doing business in Poland or about bureaucracy. Also, the direction in which Poland is developing abroad seems to be unclear. It may be a consolation that the largest number of respondents consider Poland to be a modernising country.

As shown, Poland and Spain are perceived as a friendly, modern country which good touristic offer. Both of countries aren't perceived as a good place to run a business: position abroad is weak, facility of running a business, development, efficiency of politics and exterior policy are ambiguous. As can be seen, both countries already have base to work on and should develop their national branding to attract foreign investments – they could follow Germany, which mostly of associations with strong economy is world leader in country brand.

The above research has shown that Poland has effective branding in the field of tourism, and Poles are perceived positively. Unfortunately, Poland does not have a good reputation in terms of foreign investments. The national brand is also hardly recognizable abroad. Poland should focus on these two aspects in the process of national branding: making the country attractive for foreign investors and promoting the national brand.

The image of Spain in the eyes of Poles is quite positive. Spain presents itself to Poles as a friendly, tolerant, safe and modern country. The Spaniards are perceived as open-minded, very friendly, enjoying a very good reputation, but also confirming stereotypes.

Those statements are presenting actual condition of image of Poland and Spain. They show which are strong points and which are weaknesses of national branding for both countries. Process of building national brand is very complex, so after situating areas which require more focus, institutions which are responsible for building national brand can take data above into consideration while planning next steps in process of building national brand of Poland and Spain.

The limitation of the conducted research is certainly a small sample of respondents and limiting the research to the perception of the country's brand only by one, different nationality. In the future, research should therefore deepen and assess the perception of the country's brand, e.g. among EU or non-EU citizens.

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# Postrzeganie marki krajowej w opinii mieszkańców Polski i Hiszpanii – analiza porównawcza

## Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na procesie budowania marki krajowej na przykładzie dwóch krajów: Polski i Hiszpanii. Jego głównym celem jest określenie wizerunku Polski i Hiszpanii za granicą, a szczegółowymi celami jest określenie postrzegania Polski i Polaków oraz Hiszpanii i Hiszpanów za granicą, a także ocena rozpoznawalności polskiej i hiszpańskiej marki narodowej. Oba kraje zostały wybrane ze względu na fakt, że są członkami UE, a wizerunki obu krajów za granicą wydają się nie do końca jasne. Oba kraje musiały zmierzyć się z podobnie skomplikowaną historią i problemami w sferze polityki gospodarczej.

Metodą badawczą zastosowaną w artykule były badania ilościowe, przeprowadzone za pomocą ankiety internetowej. Badanie przeprowadzono w drugim kwartale 2019 r. Wzięły w nim udział losowo wybrane osoby narodowości polskiej i hiszpańskiej. Zebrano 156 kwestionariuszy wypełnionych przez respondentów z Hiszpanii i 203 wypełnionych przez respondentów z Polski. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań opracowano wnioski i rekomendacje, które można wykorzystać do usprawnienia procesu budowania krajowej marki Hiszpanii i Polski.

## Keywords

marka narodowa, branding narodowy, wizerunek kraju