

# **THE INFLUENCE OF STEREOTYPES WHEN ANOTHER COUNTRY INTENDS TO DO BUSINESS WITH COLOMBIA**

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### **Abstract**

Colombia is one of the most important countries in South America, according to the location, history, agreements with different countries, and the most relevant reason: overcoming the stereotypes which have affected its image along the history. Besides, this negative image of the country has been promoted, because since many years, Colombia has faced inner conflicts, which became into the main focus of the national and international media. Also, this document describes how the media could impact the world displaying soap operas, series, TV shows related to drug traffic, violence and guerillas in Colombian culture, as a resource to promote a negative image of the country. Finally, this research identifies which stereotypes are cultural barriers in negotiations, but the world allows to Colombia shows the potential of its market with the aim of share its culture with the world.

**Key Words;** Colombia, stereotypes, perspective, business, market, culture.

### **Resumen**

Colombia es uno de los países más importantes en Sudamérica, debido a su locación, historia, acuerdos con diferentes países y por la razón más relevante: la superación de los estereotipos, los cuales han afectado su imagen a lo largo de la historia. Además, esta mala imagen del país ha sido promovida, porque desde hace muchos años, Colombia ha sufrido problemas internos, los cuales se convirtieron en el impacto social mejor relatado por los medios de comunicación. Además, este documento, describe como los medios de comunicación pueden impactar en el mundo mostrando programas basados en la cultura colombiana y usado como un recurso para promover una imagen errónea del país. Finalmente, esta investigación identifica los estereotipos como una barrera cultural en las negociaciones y acuerdos internacionales con el país.

**Palabras clave;** Colombia, estereotipos, perspectiva, negocios, mercado, cultura.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This research identifies which can be the cultural problems between other countries with Colombia, and the influence of these at the moment of doing business. First of all, it relates the importance of stereotyping a culture, the reason and the more common examples of it, in our country.

Also, this document takes into account our point of view in the statement of the problem, and the first step to develop the main idea about how stereotypes play an important role in the creation of a good or bad image of Colombia. This research is supported by different authors and business journals which are an important basis of the development of a problematic as this one.

Besides, we discuss about what be the first tough that a country has about Colombia could, just in the moment of watching it on TV or reading something about it in the media. In fact, this is the aim of this research; identify the impact of the media in the foreign country at the moment of doing business with Colombia, in order to recognize the importance of the culture in the history in the country.

Finally, this research has some conclusion that from our perspective are the most important, and which seek to generate an argument to be in agreement or disagreement of stereotypes in Colombia and also has an appendix, what is the guideline to follow the process of investigation and recognition of the more important aspects with relation to stereotypes in the process of doing business between Colombia with another country, and it has support ideas from different authors which contribute to identify the main problem, the causes and a proposal to solve it.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nowadays, Colombia is one of the richest countries in Latin America with a huge diversity of resources, thus doing business with others countries in Colombia has been one aspect of its economy. However, we found stereotyping which can be issues when Colombia wants to do business, because it is a misleading idea about the culture of the country. The first point of doing business is the way how each country perceives the other one, in this case; which is the perception of other countries to see Colombia as a business associate. In this interaction between a foreign country and Colombia, stereotypes play an important role, because according to the history of the country or the image that world keep in mind, other country makes the decision of doing business or not.

Besides, many companies in the country have approached the different international agreements and negotiations to expand their brand and lead to new markets. But it is important to know the culture and behavior in order to not fall into stereotypes or get a skewed view of the Colombian business; through an example from the Australian business standpoint, Thompson (2010) claim “The cultural dimensions can differentiate one culture from another and these variances have important managerial implications” (p.11).

But, in Colombian context there are multiple varieties of stereotypes; as a result of the drug trafficking story lived in the 90’s, which have been generalized until today. For example: the bad usage of the language (in some parts of the world, people think that all Colombians speak as people from Antioquia; “Paisa”), the consumption of drugs (a problem which Pablo Escobar and mafia cartels created from this decade), and some others which will be developed in this research.

For this reasons, this research is emphasized to show which are the stereotypes about Colombia and the influences of them, when others countries decide doing business with Colombia; so we propose the question:

Could stereotypes be an important matter for Colombia when the country wants to do business with another country?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Nowadays, Colombia has developed too many strategies to impulse an economy, and to achieve goals in the international market, some of them are focused in special sectors inside the country and the others received a guide from State and government organizations to promote the small business inside of itself, in order to seek new markets. But when Colombia and another country begin a negotiation, stereotypes and the culture are points of discussion, because these influence the image and the correct way of doing business.

### **Stereotypes**

A culture is identified for various factors, which are misinterpreted for others cultures, because they are influencing for the vague knowledge or a bad experience and based on their insight about a culture in this argues, this kind of perception is known as stereotype. In 1922, the work of Lippmann described the term ‘stereotype’ as the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group (as cited in Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick & Esses, n.d., p.7). This situation is very common since people inconsistently come to the wrong conclusions for this typical picture, and allows to determine, why is so important to understand other cultures and not fall into prejudices.

Cavusgil, Knight & Riesenberger (2008) affirm Stereotypes are often erroneous and lead to unjustified conclusions about others. Nevertheless, virtually all people employ stereotypes, either consciously or unconsciously, because they are an easy means to judge situations and people (p.135). This argument represent an important aspect, because stereotyping is a way to justify something that people think is true, and the human being links this term with human behavior, and hence makes a relationship with an entire group or culture which shares the same characteristics.

### **Stereotypes of Colombian culture**

Taking into account the real meaning of stereotypes, we decide develop this topic in the field of Colombian culture, because there are many stereotypes around of this country, some of these are good others not, the reason of this research is to talk about those stereotypes and clarify which are true and which not.

The first stereotype is about coffee, people think that Colombian economy is based only on this product, but it is untrue, coffee represents an important part of the economy due to the history and it is a representative image of Colombia, according to Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia (2011) coffee is one of the most important product in agricultural sector in the country due to its contribution to agricultural GDP (16%), the value of exports (para.1). According to this, coffee is an important product, but there are others with more weight in the national economy; such as oil, coal, and even manufacturing industry; and yet, the stereotype of coffee being the only product that Colombia has to offer, considering that it competes with countries as Brazil or India.

Other stereotype is the language, according to Semana (2014) the national producers of TV, have taken great acceptance around the world with stories about drug trafficking, but at the same time, this kind of stories reinforce the stereotypes about Colombia and there are even who think that the whole country speaks with “paisa” accent. (para.14), it is another false stereotype, because Colombia has a great multiculturalism and is divided in 32 regions, and in each one; everybody have a distinctive accent. Therefore, is a mistake believe that Colombian people have a “paisa” accent, considering that this accents come just from the region of Antioquia and Risaralda

Beside, we found a stereotype with Colombian woman since is normal that people from other countries have an image of the Colombian girls as: “hot”, “easy” or “prostitute”, Melendez, (n.d) cite the words said by Omar Rincon who is a TV critic: The publicity use to sell the woman’s image as a flesh in different fields, these advertisements spread the image of Colombian girls as a prostitutes and men as drug trafficker or hire killer (para.4). This kind of stereotype is one of the most offensive, because the Colombian women are not as soap operas show, in fact, in Colombia the girls are characterized for be hard-working, intelligent, beautiful and independents.

Really, there are many stereotypes about Colombia, and mostly do not represent the Colombian reality, but they are very expanded in the world perception, what are affecting the Colombian image, producing discrimination and prejudices.

**Stereotypes at the moment of doing business between Colombia with another country.**

The influence of a culture plays an important role when a country seeks another one to negotiate, but there is something more relevant; the monetary field. In the 90's decade, Colombia had internal problems which affected the national economy, and there was an increase in poverty of the country, which have gone solving through the years, but the world assume that Colombia is poor yet. It could be not true but neither false, because there are departments which their economic status are stables, for example: Bogotá, Medellin, Cali or Cartagena. In contrast of those places, we found places with economic issues, due to the low participation in economic activity, such as Choco or Guajira.

Sanders,(n.d) claim "Maybe, department of Choco is a sector with huge potential but less developed as others countries in south America, Colombia does not take advantage its Pacific coast, half of which is located in Choco" (n.p). Despite of this, the Colombian economy is good, and we consider that zones can be profitable if the government implements a strategy, in order to rescue the resources offered by Choco and others region, which could help the integration and increase the economy of the country.

Besides, there are stereotypes about the Colombian geography, some people describe Colombia as a rural country, according to Chicangana & Barreiro (2013)

In the case of Colombia, Hollywood has made a representation about this country what revolves around themes of the exotic and the violent, take for granted that issues of the country are because their tangled geographies, climate and uncivilized people, make an ideal place to reign the disorder and violence and also make it a primitive country, which needs the help of more countries developed to solve their problems. (p.138)

This point of view is outrageous, because it degrades the Colombian people, with an unjustified argument, because Colombia is in the top 5 of the best Latin American economies, since Colombia have a substantial wrought in theme of exports, according to (IMF) International Monetary Fund (2014)

Uruguay growth is moderate, countries like Brazil and Argentina have presented a slowing down as business partners, while Colombia was highlighted by remain firm in front of the economic downturn in the region during the first half of 2014 and is expected to a substantial growth driven by strong domestic demand and a rebound in exports. (p.9).



Based on this argument, we can infer that Colombia despite of its internal problems, has taken a meaningful increase, positioning itself as strong market in Latin America with great opportunities to reach other markets in different countries, for that reason, is important that other countries put aside the speculation, prejudices or stereotypes, and try to change the image about Colombia with an extreme poverty, because the wealth of the country is huge and always seeks economic alliance with other countries.

In otherwise, Colombia in the moment of negotiate with some country, establishes and promotes all the cultural, social and economic aspects of it, in order to avoid the stereotypes about the country. Therefore, the main objective of this agreement between countries is try to change the bad image in how the world perceives Colombia. According to this, Procolombia (2015), a company designed to research and share the information of negotiation inside the country, suggested that:

Colombia is a democratic country, with a privileged and strategic location in Latin America and rich in natural resources. It is at present one of the main investment destinations in the region mainly because of its commercial opportunities and legal stability. It has been ranked by the World Bank as the top Latin American country in investment protection. In the last decade, Colombia's GDP growth rate has been significantly higher than the world average, and in recent years the country has shown great economic stability and adequately controlled its inflation rate. Recently, the principal risk rating agencies have given Colombia higher confidence indices. (p.7)

Those are the typical aspects (Cultural, commercial and historical) that a foreign country finds in Colombia, because are the basis of the economy in the country. Besides, it is important to clarify that Colombia has many resources to export; as well as the coffee, cotton, rice, sugar, bananas, textiles, clothing and flowers, which are exported to USA and a huge part of Europe.

### **Stereotypes base on violence, drug trafficking and guerrillas**

The issue of the violence in Colombia has been distort and generalized, it is very common that foreigners feel fair to come, Chomsky (1995). Suggest:

This stereotype linking violence in the country to drugs that the international media have created has served the Colombian government well. On the one hand, it has enabled it to present itself in international forums as a "victim" of violence outside its

control by drug traffickers and the guerrillas, and, on the other, permitted it to neatly conceal crimes of the state which exceed these others many times over but which are so rarely mentioned in the international media. (p.2)

Unfortunately, Colombia has social and cultural problems, which have not been solved at all. For example, a big problematic in the country since many years ago is the way how the guerrilla, FARC and other paramilitary groups have used to remove people of their home. Forced displacement, as a problem who affects the life of many poor people, plays a crucial role in the country, where the actual president; Juan Manuel Santos and the government need to accomplish an effective action plan; as Ince & Gomez 2013) suggest “the government may be able to ensure that there is clearer recognition of the gravity of the human rights abuses committed by these groups (including forced displacements and mass killings), and that their victims are granted access to mechanisms of justice” (p.7).

### **Stereotypes in media**

Currently, stereotypes have been divided in different characteristics as the ethnicity, social class, age, religion and gender, because of the TV, radio and different media have the potential of creating social values and persuade the viewers to think the stereotypes are true, and are the aspects to recognize a country or a society.

One of the main problems when we are talking about the media, movies, soap opera, TV shows and other, is the way how they are manipulating the information in order to get more rating. Porras (2009) suggest, “Communication is not needed to make the country known, but to correct a distorted image through an information campaign that is deliberate, planned and sustained, putting forward the positive elements that lead to a change of image”. (p. 13). According to Porras; is important take into account the content of such program of entertainment is projecting, because the image of one culture can be harmed.

The television shows, series, news and many others shows are seen for millions of people every day, some of those series are sold to different countries, which obtain enormous rating due to its content, the problem is; people generalize this series and establish stereotypes base on it and believe that Colombian people is how series are showing. Arango, (2014) claims:

The television producers have emphasized their content to present a negative image of the Colombian society, showing the country as a nation full of violence with soap operas like "el capo", "Rosario Tijeras", "Escobar, el Patron del mal" and others, these serials are exported to various countries, cultivating a stereotypical image of Colombia marked by mob and drug trafficking. (para.7)

But is really important that people take into account: the content showed in this TV series does not reflect the real life of Colombian people. In fact, in Colombia there are armed groups, but it does not mean the whole Colombian people are like them, in fact; most of Colombian people are against of the violence and drug trafficking, and, as we were mention before the Colombian do not speak with "paisa" accent, but the stereotype about the language is promoted by media.

### **ACTUAL NEGOTIATION AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS BETWEEN COLOMBIA WITH OTHER COUNTRIES**

As we have seen a long of the research the stereotypes can harm the image of a country, and also becoming in commercial barriers, but some countries have set aside this perceptions and have seen Colombia as potential market, because the country has been emphasized to establish relationship to promote its products around the world, seeking alliances and agreements to increase the GDP of the country with low tariff rates, this agreement allow the both parts interchange merchandise with preferential rates. Colombia look for encourage this kind of association to increase the productivity and improve its opportunities in the market.

One of the most beneficial agreement to Colombia, is the commercial agreement between Colombia and European Union, based on the claim by Martinez & Tremolada (2012):

The agreements between both parts, have agreed a preferential dealing so that different products and services enter with tariff advantages, depositing products and services with major facility than other countries, also the procedures will be more agile in commercial matters, this type of agreements are to indefinite term and for what one looks is an exportation benefit between the involved countries (p.18)

It shows how the world powers are paying attention to Colombian economy, for its natural resources and cultural diversity, despite of the stereotypes, which leads us to believe

the enterprises are changing the vision of Colombian market and try to generated agreements in order to improve their economy take Colombia as a platform economic growth.

European Union is not the only one in interested to invest in the Colombian market, to them have joined different countries as Chile, Mexico and one of the most renowned has been United States, which was agreed in 2012, Villarreal (2014) claims:

The major expectation about the free trade agreement between Colombia and EE.UU, is what profits it will provide of both countries, as the level of trade between them. Another expectation is how this agreement will improve the investor confidence and increase foreign direct investment in Colombia which may bring more economic stability and promote of economic growth between Colombia and United States (p.1)

Since the moment when this agreement was agreed, Colombia has generated great incomes in the field of the exports. And from our point of view, these agreements present huge business opportunities because are a good platform to show the Colombian products to world, increase the profits of Colombia and start a change in the Colombian image and overturn the stereotypes of the country.

## CONCLUSIONS

Stereotyping in Colombia has been an important predicament in the last years, due to the influence of the media and different informative resources which show a bad image of the country, this kind of entertainment programs have based their content in themes related to drugs, violence and problems of armed warfare, but there are countries which have left aside the stereotypes and agreed agreements because they have seen the economic growth of the country.

The perception of foreign people about Colombia is based on different aspects such as: how people perceive Colombia at the moment to visit the country, beliefs about the development of the country, and the most important symbols of their culture. According to this research and supported by different authors, we conclude; the first point of view about Colombia is linked to violence, drug trafficking and guerrillas, and the media do not make any strategy to change this bad image, but this kind of entertainment continues creating a stereotyped image of Colombia, with the purpose of receive many profits. The process to improve the image of the country consists of how can we give a positive projection to the world, and the best way is try to find the best sources to reconstruct a cultural identity of the country.

As a conclusion, this document has many support ideas to answer the research question. Taking into account this research, the international market is a competitive way to develop the economy of a country, because the economy must be based on the financial and social process, such as the use and care of natural resources, preserving customs, overcoming difficulties, achieving new goals, economic impact the market, and feel very proud of all the wealth of the country. For this reason, many companies in the world decide to leave aside the bad image of Colombia, and they allow to Colombia shows the potential of its market with the aim of share its culture with the world.

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## APPENDIXES

No 1: Mind map

