5 The constitution and effects of country image and identity

5.1 Research gaps and research questions

In the recent *Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles*, scholars have underlined the current need for advancing concepts and measures for the evaluation of outcomes in public relations (AMEC 2010). Empirically measuring and evaluating outcomes such as reputation or image is a demanding task since these target constructs are no manifest phenomena, but rather complex intangibles that have to be defined, specified and operationalized carefully in order to produce meaningful results. If conceptualized with multiple dimensions, the constitution of these constructs yet involves various interrelated latent/emergent variables. Furthermore, from an evaluation standpoint, these constructs are not self-evident, meaning that merely descriptive analyses of some organization’s image or reputation cannot explain what public relations scholars ultimately want to know, which is: how exactly these constructs contribute to the building of trust-based relations, the facilitation of favorable behavior, or even the creation of economic value added for an economic organization. Without taking into consideration this wider network of causal relationships, it is not possible to evaluate the importance of an organization’s image and reputation.

In the fields of international public relations and public diplomacy, the country image—as “the cognitive representation that a person holds about a given country” (Kunczik 2003: 412)—has become an increasingly researched target construct. In times of globalization and mediatization, countries are observed by global media and publics: They are rated and compared according to their economic development, political stability, effectiveness and morality of their national and international policies or the attractiveness of their culture (Werron 2012). Research suggests that the country image has manifest effects on the success of a country’s businesses, trade, tourism and diplomatic relations because it affects the behavior of central publics abroad (Jaffe, Nebenzahl 2001; Kotler, Gertner 2002; Sun 2008; Tapachi, Waryszak 2000).

Under these conditions a country’s “favorable image and reputation around the world […] have become more important than territory, access, and raw mate-
The constitution and effects of country image and identity materials“ (Gilboa 2008: 56). As a consequence, practices of communication management are increasingly applied on the level of the nation-state system in international public relations and public diplomacy (Dinnie 2008; Dyke, Vercic 2009; Kunczik 1997; Snow, Taylor 2009). These “communication experts need to have knowledge of their target groups” (Vos 2006: 256), which, in an international public relations context involves knowledge of how publics in a given country perceive a foreign entity (organization or country) and how they behave towards it (Sriramesh, Vercic 2009). So far, most studies in international public relations and public diplomacy give more or less descriptive analysis of country images, showing whether a given country has a positive or negative image regarding certain dimensions like the economy or international relations. But sound conceptual models and appropriate measurement instruments to analyze the constitution and effects of country images are rare. Many existing models lack theoretical foundation, cannot be applied to different countries or the comparative analysis of country images in various foreign or domestic publics, often fail to measure comprehensively all relevant dimensions and largely refrain from clarifying the internal structure of the construct (Roth, Diamantopoulos 2009; Papadopoulos 2004; Magnusson, Westjohn 2011).

For current research in international public relations and public diplomacy this raises questions such as: How can we combine available concepts to derive a comprehensive model of country image and identity for comparative research designs? How can we specify and measure these constructs and their individual dimensions? How do different country image and identity dimensions interrelate and affect each other? How do both country image and identity affect the facilitation of behavioral intentions of foreign and domestic publics?

In the following, these questions are approached both conceptually and empirically: First, we argue for a new integrative framework that combines concepts from attitude theory, national identity theory, and reputation management in order to analyze the constitution and effects of both country image and identity. Second, we demonstrate how this model can be operationalized and applied for empirical evaluation of the constitution and effects of the country images and identity of Switzerland.

5.2 Towards an integrative framework of country image and identity

We argue that both country image and identity: a) can be conceptualized as (aggregated) attitudes; b) focus on the ‘target object’ of the country; and c) can be differentiated on the basis of general forms of judgment. From this perspective, the essential difference between both constructs is marked merely by the distinc-