

Spring 2022

Nation Branding: The Case for Marketing Strategy in International Relations

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NATION BRANDING: THE CASE FOR MARKETING STRATEGY IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for
Graduation with Honors from the
South Carolina Honors College

May 2022

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Thesis Summary

Nation branding is the idea that country leaders can work to control the international reputation, or brand, of their country. This thesis aims to examine the overlap in international relations and marketing strategy using the concepts of soft power, public diplomacy, and cultural diffusion. Country case studies are used to study the impact of nation branding strategies and identify factors that make a country's brand successful.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to address the concept of nation branding and how states can use marketing strategies for international relations gains. Using a literature review of relevant concepts and trends in international relations, including soft power, public diplomacy, and cultural diffusion, the connection between marketing strategies and foreign policy trends become clear. An analysis of nation branding, its origins, applications, and challenges, provides insight into an up-and-coming area of international relations. Specific country case studies were chosen to examine the real-world results of nation branding including the shortcomings and future opportunities. The case of Japan shows how a country can leverage their culture to build a strong nation brand and the economic benefits of 'pop culture diplomacy.' Russia was chosen as an example of a country that has struggled to overcome a negative nation brand and how the state, prior to recent events, had attempted to rebrand. Russia can also demonstrate how quickly any progress in a nation's reputation abroad can be lost. Lastly, the case of China is used to provide an example of a country that has been very upfront in communicating plans for building soft power and public diplomacy. The Chinese government's commitment to economic development with the Belt and Road Initiative and academic partnerships through Confucius Institutes provide concrete examples of how nation branding policies can be tailored to fit a state's specific goals.

Introduction

The world we live in today is more connected than ever before. Technology makes communication, even across the world, fast and efficient. News travels quickly, propelled through witnesses sharing real time information over the internet. Economies are dependent on an intricate web of global supply chains. Social causes gain momentum as people are made aware of issues around the world.

Companies are quick to respond to this change. With more information available, they compete not only with their product offerings but with their brands. Consumers form opinions on brands that help them to make decisions. These brands are fueled by the ideas of transparency, social involvement, and company values. CEOs speaking about their goals for the company are quick to emphasize their values or make promises to promote good. Corporate social responsibility is on the rise as marketers work to appeal to socially conscious consumers (Anholt).

Marketing departments of private sector firms are working hard to build brands and adapt to this interconnected world. Marketing strategy is an integral part of business and allows for adaptation to new trends. These skills and strategies should not be limited to the private sector. When applied to governments, marketing and branding can serve as a powerful tool to strengthen diplomatic negotiations and aid in negotiations. Strong brands make connections easier and promote trust and reliability. In today's world, these traits are incredibly valuable to governments.

Simon Anholt recognized the close relationship between successful international relations and marketing strategies. He coined the term "Nation Branding" to give name to this phenomenon of states using marketing tools to build a better brand (Anholt). This concept works

closely with other international relations hot topics, including cultural diffusion, public diplomacy, and soft power.

Today a nation's brand can be leveraged to support domestic and international goals. Countries use their brand to attract FDI, gain a favorable position in negotiations, strengthen diplomatic and trade relationships, and persuade other states to support specific goals. Countries that once competed through wars and economic actions are now competing through cultural influence and public diplomacy.

In this thesis I will demonstrate the importance of marketing strategy in the context of international relations. By doing so, I hope to show the strategic importance of using marketing and branding strategies in government strategy. The report will begin with a literature review of the key terms and academic publications. From there, specific instances of nation branding will be studied in order to assess objectives and accomplishments of marketing strategies deployed by states.

Background Concepts

In order to understand the relationship between marketing and international relations, world leaders must have a strong academic background on the related concepts. This section will review relevant definitions and publications in order to better understand the case studies and practical applications. Nation branding is a multifaceted strategy, and the following sections will examine some of the most important terms for building a marketing strategy for a country.

As outlined below, there are a variety of ways that a country can choose to better market themselves to the rest of the world. Countries with successful nation brand can evaluate the current world system and their own brand. Once a strong understanding of the current system is established, political leaders can choose their strategic objectives for their nation brand and select which of the following methods will best suit the goals of their country.

International Relations

International relations can be defined as “the study of the relations of states with each other and with international organizations and certain subnational entities” (Pfalzgraff). The study of international relations allows for scholars and political strategists to look at the policies and decisions of states in the context of other states and organizations. The concept became popular in the 20th century as people sought a way to exert influence and build relationships without resorting to war and violence (Pfalzgraff). People began to believe that there was a benefit to gain from working with other groups of people and states, the study of international relations provided a guide to these new collaborations.

Woodrow Wilson is often credited with being an early influencer of international relations thinking. His Fourteen Points, used in peace negotiations following World War I,

outlined a new plan for foreign policy and international collaboration. Most notably, his first point called for “Open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view” (The Fourteen Points).

Power

Power can take on many meanings depending on the academic thought or the state’s specific needs. In a journal published in the Cambridge University Press, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall argue that power can be defined as “the production, in and through social relations of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.” The authors used this definition to identify four types of power used in international relations.

Compulsory power is described as “relations of interaction of direct control by one actor over another” (Barnett and Duvall). This type of power occurs when a state forces another to do something that the state would have not done on its own. This is commonly seen by major powers who have the resources to apply direct force on other states.

Institutional power is a way that states demonstrate control over others “indirectly through diffuse relations of interaction” (Barnett and Duvall). This power comes from both formal and informal institutions that both countries recognize as legitimate. One country can leverage the perceived power or legitimacy of the institution to influence another.

Structural power is socially based, meant to exert influence based on “direct structural relation to one another.” States have power in deciding how the actors should act together based on structures. A country with structural power can determine norms and structural relations and roles of states (Barnett and Duvall).

Lastly, productive power is “the socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification.” While structural power concerns the social structures in place, this type of power is based on the significance and meaning that arises from social settings in order to create identities and capacities (Bharati).

Each of these types of power can be combined and manipulated by states to reach their international goals. Like international relations, the idea of power and the applications of these frameworks vary and are heavily impacted by the issues seen as most pressing at the time. States are likely to adjust power displays regularly in order to meet their goals and remain competitive.

World Order

Many of the discussed topics in this thesis are closely tied to the time period and world environment they are observed in. Over time and following major events, priorities among states change. These types of shifts are not new, we have seen dramatic shifts in state relations following major events such as the World Wars which both left some states with great influence and others heavily damaged. These shifts in international trends and demands for power can be attributed to the idea of world order.

World order has become an important aspect in international relations as it attempts to explain a state’s position in the context of the rest of the world’s states. World order is “a measure of the state of the world, how violent, how organized, and tends to reflect whether there is a balance of power and how widespread acceptance of the principles and rules for how the world is to operate” (Zakaria). This concept allows for a deeper understanding of the competitive landscape between states. Countries adjust their strategies based on who has the most power and

where their state falls in the international organization. When countries feel they deserve more influence in the world, they may turn to more aggressive power and influence seeking strategies.

The claims of this thesis are built on the assumption that today's world order has changed to a point that necessitates new ways to exert power. We see this is China's rapid rise to power and the threat that another world power would pose to other actors. Today's world order has shifted to a multipolar power structure (Zakaria). This phase is noteworthy because the power has shifted in the absence of a major war, providing evidence that power and status can be gained without physical force. Instead, China and other major players are rising to power in new and indirect ways, creating demand for shifts in international relations strategy (The Strategic Challenges).

Public Diplomacy

“Public diplomacy” is a term first used by United States Foreign Service Officer Edmund Gullion (What is Public Diplomacy?). He coined the term to work in place of the word “propaganda” when describing the attempts of governments to influence individuals. Propaganda often carries a negative connotation and public diplomacy is intended to invoke images of more friendly and indirect approaches to influence.

The University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) defines public diplomacy as; P It is important to note that this definition is not intended to provide the exclusive explanation of the concept and the center studies the plethora of ways the concept can be interpreted. The U.S. The Department of State defines public diplomacy as “government sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries” (About U.S. Public Diplomacy).

Public diplomacy rests heavily on the concept of cultural relations. Cultural relations is defined as “interventions in foreign cultural arenas with the aim of enhancing intercultural dialogue and bringing about mutual benefits connected to security, stability, and prosperity” (The Value of Cultural Relations). Cultural relations include all the diplomatic actions that encourage the exchange of culture. This practice promotes understanding and empathy between states and can lead to better collaboration and diplomatic relationships.

These practices do not happen by chance. The United States uses the Public Diplomacy track of the Foreign Service to “communicate with a through a variety of media to promote U.S. interests abroad, which may include explaining to foreign audiences how American history, values and traditions shape U.S. foreign policy” (Public Diplomacy Career). These officers plan and manage events to promote cultural diffusion and educate foreigners about the United States with the goal of strengthening relationships between states. These events can include educational exchange programs, guided tours and trips, academic initiatives like the Fulbright program, and local events to learn American culture.

Soft Power

Joseph Nye Jr. defines power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants” (Nye). Using this definition, Nye went on to develop the concept of both soft and hard power to explain the ways that states compete for influence. Hard power represents the traditional methods of influence, the “carrot or stick” approach. Soft power represents the “second face of power” as it is built on indirect influence. Nye defines soft power as “the ability to obtain outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Rather than weapons or money, countries employing a soft power approach use assets that promote

attraction. Soft power is possible when countries have an attractive culture or values. Others see the assets as valuable, and are more willing to be influenced. These desirable assets can come from a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies as long as the factors are seen as legitimate (Nye).

The concept of soft power is made possible by the changing international environment we live in today. Communications technology has improved, providing additional information to individuals and limiting the ability of countries to control large groups. At the same time, trends in social movements make the use of military power more costly and can damage a country's international reputation. Additionally, there are more advanced democratic nations and groups of countries with a long history of peace, which demonstrates the importance of soft power in areas with low chances of conflict. Lastly, the world economy is more connected than ever, and war would threaten this economic stability, providing further incentives for cooperation among countries.

Public diplomacy and soft power are ineffective on their own. When a country has desirable qualities, public diplomacy programs work to make sure the audience in other countries has the opportunities to learn about the desirable assets. Public diplomacy alone would result in the promotion of desirable features and cultural education, with no plan on translating the impact into power. Countries with advanced public diplomacy programs are better suited to shift to a soft power approach to international relations. When combined, these concepts can result in a powerful and modern international relations strategy.

Nation Branding

Previous sections covered the important international relations ideas of public diplomacy, cultural diffusion, and soft power. When combined, these strategies begin to create an intangible way to identify a country. A set of values, cultural symbols, policies, and laws that come together to signify the reputation, or brand, of a country. A strong brand opens the doors to a variety of benefits for the country, including increased negotiating power, economic growth, and the ability to influence other nations through soft power attraction (Reibstein).

Nation branding is a term, first named by Simon Anholt, used to describe the occurrence of states using marketing and brand management techniques to manage or change their international reputation, with the intention of leveraging the new reputation for foreign relations gain. Anholt has described the concept as a simple observation that “a country’s reputation acts like a brand image of a company” and a good brand is “important for progress, prosperity, and good management of the places” (Anholt). The Council on Foreign Relations defines Nation Branding as “applying corporate branding techniques to countries.” Nation branding can be seen as the overarching approach to international relations, a new way that states are interacting and gaining influence. Public diplomacy and soft power serve as steps in the brand building strategy to optimize brand equity for the country.

Attempts to build a brand for a state can produce a wide range of results. Most obvious is an improved perception of the state by foreigners. A country perceived to be glamorous or exciting is likely to experience an increase in tourism and more interest in cultural symbols such as pop culture. A nation’s brand can also be effective in larger and more formal objectives. A favorable brand can help a state attract foreign direct investment, facilitate trade relationships, compete in the private sector, and even to gain a better negotiation stance in geopolitics (Teslik).

Nation branding works when states think like marketers, using these practices to influence their “customers.” In the case of a nation brand, the audience or customers can vary. The quantity and type of influence a state gain from its brand is dependent on who their audience is, and which countries have become fans of the brand. A state looking to join an NGO may fit its nation brand to appeal to existing members. Other states may cater their brand to gain economic and trade relationships. In any case, the customers of a nation brand can include both the citizens of the country as well as government leaders. Government leaders become customers of a nation brand because their perceptions of the state can influence international relations. Their perceptions can be influenced by the citizens in their country as they vote to elect representatives based on their world view and ideas.

Like the previously mentioned concepts, nation branding represents a new phase in the way countries interact, fueled by improved communication and technology that allows for more connections and a greater world audience. Today, nation branding is more than a trend. Public relations and brand management firms are now employed by governments, proving that nation branding is here to stay.

Nation Brands Index

In addition to creating the idea of the nation brand, Anholt has become well known in both marketing and international relations circles for his work comparing countries. He is a published author and public speaker, often discussing the ways that countries contribute to the overall well-being of the world and measuring the impact individual countries have on the international community (What is Public Diplomacy?). His books, Ted Talks, and publications look at things like how “good” a country is or how reputations compare. He advocates for

countries taking an international approach to domestic problems in order to have the strongest results. Anholt is passionate about country reputations saying that nation branding is “the electorate's most valuable asset.” His work has revolutionized the way states are approaching policy, introducing strategies that were previously exclusive to corporations to government boardrooms (Anholt).

Perhaps his most well-known publication is the Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brands Index (NBI). Created in 2008, the index is meant to compare the reputations of countries based on six dimensions of national competence: exports, governance, culture, people, tourism, immigration, and investment (Nation Brand Index 2021).

The exports dimension measures the way the public sees products and services that are exported from the country in question. If consumers seek out exports from a particular country, that country will score well on the index.

Governance is meant to reflect the reputation of the state’s government. Results indicate perceptions of competence, fairness, and the level of action on important issues.

Culture measures the reputational impact of the country's cultural symbols. Scores come from appreciation for art, film, sports, literature, music, and other visible aspects of culture and art.

The people dimension reflects on the reputation of attitudes and personalities of the people who live in the country. Countries with people who are known to have good qualities, such as being friendly or helpful will score well in this dimension.

Tourism reflects how foreigners feel about visiting the country and its attractions. This dimension helps to explain how countries known for being vacation destinations can build strong reputations.

The last dimension, investment and immigration, is focused on the attractiveness of the country and its quality of life. If people want to move to the country for work or school, the country has a better score in this dimension.

The Nation Brands Index provides a powerful tool for governments around the world. When applied to international relations strategy, policy makers can identify places where the country's reputation is suffering and deploy strategies to make changes. The government can use the data to see what foreigners know about the country and which areas are their best qualities.

Implementing Nation Brand Strategy

In order to develop a nation brand, countries must develop a consistent and well thought out strategy with the goal of gradually improving brand image over time. This process has three main components; strategy, substance, and symbolic actions.

The first component, strategy, is defined as “knowing who a nation is and where it stands today, knowing where it wants to get to and how to get it there” (Anholt). This step requires in depth study and understanding of that state. This is where publications such as Anholt's Nation Brand Index may help a country to assess their current reputation. Additionally, countries must consider the diverse set of needs and goals held by the country and its people and find a way to consolidate these into one direction. While the goal must be feasible for the government to carry out, it must also have high enough aspirations that government leaders and their constituents are motivated and inspired to make a change.

The second component is substance. Substance is “the effective execution of that strategy in the form of new economic, legal, political, social, cultural, and educational activity” (Anholt). The key to this component comes from implementing policies and investments that will drive

real and measurable change. Anholt is quick to point out the danger of thinking nation branding is a quick fix. He reiterates that the process is dependent on consistency and high-level changes to make progress towards an improved reputation.

The final component comes from symbolic actions. These are “particular types of substance that have an intrinsic communicative power” (Anholt). Like any great marketer, governments must focus on telling the story of their country. This story must be seen as genuine and long term. To portray this, the state must take actions that are symbolic of their new brand. This may come in the form of changing social policies, defending human rights interests, or allocating funds to cultural values. Policies should be concrete in that they are legally upheld and formally introduced while representing an abstract concept such as modernity or compassion. These actions must be things the country needs and will benefit from, as changes made purely for the sake of the nation brand come off as ingenuine and a waste of taxpayer funds.

These three components make the connection between nation branding and corporate brand management clear. Replace “state” or “country” with “company” and the components sound like a modern corporation's brand management plan. In both cases, the subject must start with an internal and external analysis to understand their perception in the eyes of their audience. Both countries and companies are most effective at influencing their brand when the changes come from real substantial changes. Both groups must identify what it is they want their stakeholders to associate with their products and which symbolic actions will most effectively lead their viewers to that conclusion.

As much as Anholt believes in the power of the nation brand, he recommends countries approach the strategy with caution. In a journal titled *Beyond the Nation Brand: The Role of Image and Identity in International Relations*, Anholt defines the meaning of brand and how it

can be applied to countries. He lists three types of brands; the designed identity of a product, the culture of an organization behind a product, and the product or corporation's reputation in the minds of its target audience. It is this third definition that the concept of nation branding rests on. Anholt points out that countries striving for simple shortcuts to a nation brand often end up with one of the first two definitions of a brand. This is ineffective as it fails to recognize the massive differences between a country and a consumer good.

Why Nation Branding?

Anholt describes the concept of “competitive identity.” This is the idea that a country's image or brand is most closely related to the national identity, politics, and economics that make it competitive (Anholt). This reiterates the idea that policy and measurable change are the most important factors for a nation brand. Brand decisions must be made in alignment with making the country competitive and working to implement real changes. Once the new policies start to have an impact on the country's ability to compete, the nation's brand can start to change.

Opponents of the use of these new international relations practices and tools likely fail to understand the recent changes to the global environment that make these new strategies effective. Nation branding often falls under scrutiny because it can be very hard to quantify the result of these strategies. Developing a new campaign can be expensive and time consuming and results may be largely qualitative. Additionally, nation brand strategies cannot stand alone and therefore it is hard to attribute wins to the nation brand strategies specifically. While these challenges persist, many countries will find that there is risk in not managing their nation brand strategy and the benefits of implementing marketing strategies at the nation level outweigh the costs.

Public diplomacy, soft power, cultural diffusion, and nation branding were all developed in response to existing shortcomings within the international relations system. Globalization and technology have changed the way we interact with other countries and pursue international relations strategies. Each of the outlined strategies have powerful potential for the countries that are willing and able to execute them.

Changing Role of the Military and Warfare

The role of the military and traditional coercive power demonstrations has changed. Governments understand the implications of starting a major war or using a nuclear weapon in a world where the United States have become the world's hegemony. Additionally, globalization means that violence, instability, and war all threaten a country's ability to survive in the global economy, further discouraging violence and shows of hard power (Nye).

Joseph Nye's publication on soft power addresses this change in the way countries compete and interact. While the threat of hard power retaliation certainly persists, countries compete in other ways as well. The Cold War provides an example of the need for soft power. For decades, conflict and tension persisted without direct fighting. Battles were won in symbolic ways. Some battles were traditional hard power demonstrations of military strength and wealth. Other battles were played out using soft power concepts. While violence and war persist today, the cost of fighting a war has increased as countries seek to protect their own reputation and avoid intervention from multinational organizations.

Changing role of communications

Improved communication technology makes cultural diffusion much easier. Information is exchanged quickly and effectively as more of the world becomes connected via the internet. Pop culture often spreads rapidly between countries and provides the opportunity for cultural exchanges to happen organically and at the level of the individual, with minimal government involvement. This creates a world where individuals and leaders are more educated and better understand the cultural nuances of other countries. Individuals have access to more information than ever before and are therefore much more tuned in to the specific actions of domestic and foreign governments.

One change in communication that impacts foreign affairs is known as the CNN Effect. This phenomenon addresses the idea that 24/7 TV reporting changes the way the public reacts to events. Instant and detailed media reports could “stir publics to demand sudden humanitarian or military interventions before policy markets had a chance to formulate an official position” (Roselle). It is important for countries looking to improve their nation brand to understand this shift. Any action that is perceived to be negative by people around the world will reach them quickly and is likely to be met with demands for action. This theory was tested and proven accurate when Russia declared war on Ukraine, almost instantly leading to demonstrations of support for Ukraine and anti-Russia protests around the world.

Internet communications also play an important part in international relations strategy. The internet acts as a catalyst for world events as it provides a platform for collaboration and sharing of ideas. This technology has “increased the transparency of governmental actions and events around the world” (Roselle). Increased calls for transparency in communication can be both an opportunity and a threat. Governments taking actions to improve their reputation can

share their successes quickly, earning them additional attention and favorable views of the country. New technology also means that countries are under additional scrutiny and stakeholders around the world will be made aware of unpopular actions or policies.

Today many countries have strong symbolic ties to some of their most well-known brands. McDonalds is considered a symbol of the United States' efficiency while Nintendo represents Japan's innovation. These iconic brands can impact the nation brand and provide a better sense of appreciation from foreign citizens (Ham). Consumers around the world begin to associate the state with the same traits and characteristics of these "superbrands", providing opportunities for the public and private sector to work together to shape the brand concept.

The connection between a country's well-known brands and the national reputation is often made clear by purposely executed campaigns. One of the most well-known examples of commercial brands working alongside government organizations comes from Spain. The country created a public-private strategic alliance, known as the Leading Brands of Spain, to work with brands to create a cohesive direction for the nation brand and the famous commercial brands (Dinnie). The organization demonstrates the influence of strong brands on a country's reputation and economy and rewards the brands that are supportive of government goals. Each of the member brands must be considered a recognized prestigious Spanish brand, leader in its sector, and have identification or management of Spanish origin. One of the main association activities includes "joint projects for the promotion of Spanish brands and country image, both in Spain and abroad" (Leading Brands of Spain).

Case Studies

The following section provides an analysis of three case studies to demonstrate the impact of marketing strategies applied to assist in international relations goals.

Japan

Japan provides an example of the impact of cultural diffusion on building a strong nation brand and the economic impact of soft power. The country consistently ranks highly on the Anholt Nation Brands Index, due in part to the country's ability to export culture and build soft power. This case provides insight on how Japan has been able to climb the nation brand ladder and create positive brand associations through culture.

In the 1980s, Japan enjoyed one of the strongest economies in the world, with a greater per capita income than the United States and a gross national product equal to 10% of the total world output. The economic "bubble" expanded quickly, driving up real estate prices until it burst in 1991 (Notehelfer). The burst ushered in a period of deep recession and economic downturn.

Without the status of economic wealth, the country became known for being "insular and closed" (Dinnie). Rejections of FDI offers and complicated financial systems made the country undesirable for business and investment. The country was left with a severely damaged nation brand and neither hard power nor soft power. Having sworn off war following World War II, the country turned to soft power to restore their place in international relations (Oi).

In 2002, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi recognized the country's struggles and began to devise a plan to build a new brand for Japan (Guajardo). The goal of the initial project was to use intellectual property to "improve the image and reputation of Japan and turn it into a nation

that is loved and respected by people throughout the world, with the focus on the lifestyle and the overall power of Japan's cultural assets” (Akutsu). A group of Japanese government leaders were chosen for a task force. This group created formal nation branding initiatives at the national and regional level to address the damaged Japanese reputation. The task force “examined policy issues for strengthening Japan’s brand, discussing food culture, local brands, and fashion [. . .] to develop a strong Japan brand linked to cultural diplomacy versus military or economic power” (Guajardo).

In 2004, the task force created the Japan Brand Working Group. The group published a report titled *Promotion of Japan Brand Strategy* (Dinnie). The report outlined steps for the country to “foster a rich food culture, establish diverse and reliable local brands, and to establish Japanese fashion as a global brand.” In the same year, the country created the Japan Brand Assistance Program. The organization was intended to promote high quality brand development at the regional level and was a segment of the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (Dinnie). At the same time, Japan’s government leaders shifted focus to improve public diplomacy work and leveraged the Japan External Trade Organization to promote economic interests.

Just as important for the Japanese nation brand as government incentives and programs comes from the soft power attraction of Japanese culture. Literature on the subject refers to this phenomenon as ‘pop culture diplomacy’ (Iwabuchi). Japan’s natural ability to export culture has been a hot topic in foreign policy publications. A 2009 copy of the *Foreign Policy* magazine featured the headline: Japan’s Gross National Cool (McGray). Following the article, the movement became known as “Cool Japan” and scholars have studied its impact on Japanese international relations around the world (The cool japan craze). This movement serves as the

basis for the academic claims that Japan is a cultural superpower (Nation Branding and Success of Japan). Japan's government worked to turn pop culture content into an export amidst falling economic measures and to promote domestic job creation.

Examples of cultural exports from Japan are abundant. Quintessentially Japanese entertainment forms, such as manga and anime, have grown in popularity across international borders. Mandarake Incorporated, a Japanese resale shop offering manga and anime collectibles, has established an ecommerce site in English to cater to overseas manga fans. The brand also serves as a tourist destination, offering foreign travelers a glimpse into Japanese culture. Pokémon, Superflat art, anime, Hello Kitty, and J-Pop all represent avenues for Japan to flex cultural diplomacy skills.

Many of the nation branding campaigns focused primarily on the success of Japanese super brands. When Japanese companies succeed around the world, their brands become closely associated with Japan's nation brand. Some of the most famous brands to be associated with Japan include Nintendo, Sony, Toshiba, Toyota, Honda, Hitachi, and Panasonic (Nation Branding and Success of Japan). These brands are known for being technologically advanced and successful, implying to consumers that Japan and its people have great technological know-how. By using marketing to imply that these companies are representative of the business environment in Japan, the association helps to break down the stigma that Japan is hard to do business in and encourages FDI.

As Japan's economy grew, Japanese companies began to gain attention for business management strategies. Concepts such as Kaizen and lean production were used in Japan and began to gain popularity around the world. These soft power concepts were a result of the economic growth and Japan's brand as an innovative country. Japan had stuck to their promise to

avoid future wars following the end of WWII, turning to business as their new battleground, a place to compete and gain power.

Each of these factors helps to support Japan's nation brand around the world. The best ways to evaluate the success of these programs comes from publications of nation brand ranking systems. The most well-known, Anholt's Nation Brand Index, ranked Japan as the 3rd most desirable nation brand in 2021. Japan was ranked very highly in the dimensions of exports, tourism, culture, and people (Nation Brand Index 2021). Similar publications consistently rank Japan's nation brand as one of the best in the world. Japan secured the number one spot on FutureBrand's 2020 Country Index for the 6th consecutive year (Japan Remains). In soft power rankings Japan ranked second in Brandfinance's 2021 Global Soft Power index and fourth on Monocle's 2020 Soft Power Survey. Each of these publications provide evidence that Japan's nation brand has value and is working to influence the perceptions of people around the world.

Russia

Russia provides an example of the impact of a country's history on their brand reputation, the challenge of drastically altering a state's brand, and the instant impact of unpopular choices on international reputation. The country has struggled to improve the nation brand and faces developmental hurdles due to the negative brand associations. This case illustrates the importance of nation brands and how countries adapt their policy and strategy to rebrand.

Countries are often first motivated to pursue nation brand strategies to address some kind of reputational issue or public relations scandal. Russia is certainly no exception to this trend. The country's long history of political instability and economic change give the country plenty of bad press while frequent change in size and political powers hinder a cohesive national identity.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was left to deal with the reputational damage (Simmons).

In 2013, the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation was implemented in order to “fulfill politically determined and directed national ambitions” (Simmons). While this was not the first purposeful step to improve the foreign policy strategy, this version represents a shift to increased focus on the nation brand. In a speech at the time of the concept's approval, Putin stated; “Russia will continue to pursue an active and constructive line in international affairs. Its weight and influence in the world will increase. [...] The basic principles of Russian foreign policy remain the same. [...] That means, above all, openness, predictability, pragmatism, and the pursuit of national interests without any confrontations in accordance with the role of the United Nations and the rule of international law. [...] The concept focuses on modern foreign policy tools, including economic diplomacy, elements of so-called soft power, and careful integration into the global informational space.” (Simmons)

This new policy was meant to focus more on the realistic and pragmatic considerations of foreign policy, rather than relying on powerful and controversial ideology, as was common during the Soviet era. The new plan was to ensure Russia was more involved in the world, used soft power forces in pursuit of national interest, promoted transparency and stability, and became a helpful force in the international community (Simmons).

These goals represent an early step in the process to become a strong nation brand. However, it is important to contextualize the state of Russia’s nation brand. People around the world are unlikely to forget the negative things they associate with Russia. The instability of the Yeltsin years, combined with dramatic pop culture depictions of soviet leaders, has made Russia synonymous with corruption. An analysis of the Russian economy revealed commercial brands

with negative brands themselves, especially in Russia's gas industry and the infamous gas disputes with neighboring countries. In order to rebrand, Russia must overcome decades of negative brand associations.

One way Russia worked to offset its negative reputation has been by joining international organizations. This represents an attempt to be more involved in world issues and break down barriers to working with Russia. The country has been a member in the BRIC countries, World Trade Organization, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and more (state department). The country has been rebuilding connections and trust through cooperation with the NATO-Russia Council (Relations with Russia). These organizations represent ways for Russia to participate in world events and work to reshare its reputation.

The country has also worked to build soft power to advance foreign policy objectives and be seen as a more friendly force in geopolitics. In a 2013 speech, Putin stated, "The correct use of soft force mechanisms is a priority, such as a stronger position for the Russian language, promotion of Russia's positive image abroad and the ability of organic integration into global information flows" (Simmons). Each of these factors, if addressed well, would allow Russia to better integrate into the world arena and help to shift the perceptions of global citizens.

All of these complications make Russia a hot topic in nation branding studies. Anholt's assessment of Russia can be summarized with the following statement: "So Russia's task over the next decades is identical to the task facing most other countries. It doesn't need to find ways of making people around the world feel in awe of Russia, impressed by Russia, or even envious of Russia: quite simply, it needs to find ways of making people feel glad that Russia exists." (Simmons). Anholt's statement represents the core need for Russia to be considered a positive force in the world, not negative or simply neutral. President Putin has often attempted to prove

Russia's positive impact on the world through direct examples. He mentions agreements and projects that Russia has participated in that have been good for the world.

Speeches from high-ranking leaders and powerful policy changes are helpful in preparing the framework for a nation brand but do not extend far enough to impact individuals' perceptions of a country. People tend to form closer brand associations if they connect with the individuals who live in the country. For countries like Russia, with an extremely limited tourism industry, this can become a big challenge. With fewer visitors coming in than many European neighbors, Russia has fewer opportunities to prove itself to outsiders.

Despite Russia's rocky start to establishing a new brand, there are some examples of successful rebranding happening in Russia. One example goes back to 1703, when Peter the Great established St. Peterburg (History of St. Petersburg Russia). The czar wanted to prove Russia was more progressive and could connect with Europe, using the city as a "Window to the West." The development of the city was part of Peter the Great's plan to modernize Russia and came alongside social reforms and mandated changes in people's appearance (The Modernization of Russia). Today, the city continues to serve as a source of soft power and cultural diffusion, welcoming five million foreign tourists in 2019 (Tourist Count).

Another example is the Skolkovo Innovation Center. Developed to be the "Silicon Valley of Russia," the program represents "an attempt to tangibly brand the policy of modernization" (Simmons). A key aspect of the success of this kind of innovation comes from transparency. Because most of the science done in the Soviet era was kept controlled and secretive, providing transparency and public information helps to rebuild trust. The whole project is run by a nonprofit, the Skolkovo Foundation, which is meant to "create a sustainable ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation, engendering a startup culture and encouraging venture

capitalism (About Skolkovo).” If successful, Skolkovo would bring multifaceted benefits including a more diverse economy and an international reputation for producing attractive investment opportunities for foreigners. It is difficult to assess the success of this project. FDI peaked in 2013, a few years after Skolkovo first opened and in the same year that the foundation was chosen for the “economic development and innovation economy program (About Skolkovo).”

Skolkovo projects have been successful, with foundation startups three times more likely to attract investors compared to non-Skolkovo projects. Additionally, Skolkovo sponsored, projects, such as VIST Robots, 3D Smile Lab, and TRY.FIT have attracted attention for their innovation and become successful around the world (Zubacheva). Providing up and coming products and services around the world helps Russia to build a more modern and technologically advanced reputation and attract business opportunities.

Russia provides a case study of the impact that a negative brand can have on economic and diplomatic development. Despite new programs and developments, it is hard for the country to truly rebrand without changing the perceptions of individuals.

Russia also provides an example of how quickly a nation brand can be damaged. By declaring war on Ukraine, Russia has quickly become a focus of international news and the subject of protests around the world. Any progress made by previous nation branding actions is lost among the masses of information coming from Ukraine.

China

Perhaps no country in the world is pursuing soft power and nation branding as intentionally as China. Current president Xi Jinping stated; “We should increase China’s soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China’s message to the world” (Albert). Chinese policies and government communications draw a clear connection between culture and foreign perspectives and international influence. The importance of a soft power strategy was discussed at length during the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Hu Jintao, president at the time of the 2007 meeting stated; “The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture. We will give full scope to the principal position of the people in cultural development, arouse the enthusiasm of cultural workers, promote vigorous development and prosperity of culture more conscientiously and actively, and create cultural works in the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, so that the people will share in the benefits of cultural development.” (Hu Jintao’s)

This focus on development and culture are not new to China. Culture has always played an important role in China’s rapid rise in power. Much of China’s development can be attributed to the “Peaceful Rise” policy. This policy pursued growth and development with the promise to other countries that China’s rise would not create a threat to the international community (Bijan). This policy addresses other countries’ concerns and attempts to create supporters of China around the world. Following the developmental success of this plan, China was positioned to be a strong global force with an established nation brand.

China has deployed a number of tools to market the country to the rest of the world. Unlike other countries who may pursue soft power as a side project or small sector of policy,

China has built a well-rounded collection of soft power and nation branding tools, able to influence large groups and build strong relationships.

One of the most relevant examples today comes from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI gives China a tangible method of spreading soft power by promoting economic collaboration by building infrastructure networks connecting China to countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Not only does China gain access to new markets, the process of implementing infrastructure provides an opportunity for Chinese officials to enter a country, make connections, and show off Chinese products, methods, and efficiency (Albert).

Another important aspect of China's international relations strategy comes in the form of education. China aims to encourage cross cultural diplomacy through educational programs. The Chinese Ministry of Education flexes its influence through a network of more than 500 Confucius Institutes. These organizations operate in countries around the world, often in partnership with universities, to provide classes on Mandarin, calligraphy, Chinese holidays, cooking, and other Chinese culture topics. In addition, China has become a hot spot for international students, ranked as the third most popular study abroad locations in 2017, despite questions of educational quality (Albert). Scholarships, sponsored trips, international organizations and more provide China with a direct channel of communication to its "customers," emerging world leaders in countries around the world.

While other countries utilize similar programs for education abroad, the case of Confucius Institutes is unique because of the widespread popularity in the United States despite the lack of a strong alliance. For years, Americans could choose to take classes directly from Chinese sponsored educators. The centers enjoyed minimal pushback from the United States until 2009, when the 2019 National Defense Act mandated that American universities choose

between having a Confucius Institute or receiving language program funding from the Department of Defense (Legerwood). Institutes around the country were closed due to fears that the centers were enforcing censorship, surveilling students, and pushing Chinese political agendas.

One of the country's closest links to a marketing style strategy is seen in the state's aggressive media initiatives. Chinese leaders have created a number of foreign language news outlets in order to maintain control over media coverage of China and promote the country's national interests. Xinhua, the country's primary news agency, operates through 200 foreign bureaus while the China Daily and Global Times focus on English speakers around the world (Albert). While this approach is not unique to China, it provides a blatant example of ways that the Chinese government is working to control media perceptions of China around the world.

Like companies, countries often have objects that serve as brand symbols. When these symbols are considered to be rare or exclusive to that country or company, they become valuable or desirable to outsiders. In China, the panda functions as one of these symbols. The panda's scarcity around the world creates great demand and a point of leverage for China. Thus, the concept of "panda diplomacy" was created (Panda Diplomacy and Business). In 2005, China and Taiwan were in long standing economic negotiations. Eventually, the Taiwanese government accepted China's offer to provide a pair of pandas. The event was very exciting, well documented, and served as a concrete example of countries using brand symbols to gain leverage in negotiations.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, China has leveraged its marketing and international relations skills in order to mitigate the negative associations the country faced as the original source of the virus. The country was quick to export medical supplies and doctors

around the world, each emblazoned with symbols of Chinese culture. Medical supplies arrived in boxes covered in Chinese poetry while news outlets showed Chinese doctors exiting planes in large quantities (Sylvers). This situation represents an often-overlooked aspect of soft power, countries who are well versed in soft power and nation branding can leverage the skills in the event of a negative event or bad press.

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to quantify the results of public diplomacy style efforts. China's lack of transparency prevents financial or economic analysis of the strategies. The main goals of these policies are to build relationships and strengthen the brand, both concepts that are difficult to measure. To try and understand the extent and results of this kind of strategy, we can look to one of China's greatest places of influence: Africa.

In the last two decades, the Chinese Communist Party, under the Belt and Road Initiative, has invested billions of dollars into infrastructure development projects across Africa. While world leaders have focused their attention on the impact of Chinese development and economic influence in the region, China's focus is equally applied to social and human capital-based developments (Benabdallah). The state has taken steps to build on existing diplomatic relationships across Africa, working to spread Chinese development principles and form connections with political leaders.

China regularly hosts leaders, sponsors training, and funds projects to help African countries begin to implement Chinese style policies. Often these meetings occur as trips to China, where African leaders are shown all of China's recent growth and accomplishments. These trips allow the Chinese government to strategically advertise all of their recent wins and build relationships and trust with leaders.

Despite the challenges to quantifying results, some examples of Chinese influence in Africa suggest that this strategy has had a powerful impact. In a 2021 study done by *Foreign Affairs*, 63% of Africans surveyed responded that China's influence in Africa was either "somewhat positive" or "very positive" (Benabdallah). The Chinese Communist Party's development model has become a popular development tool for African countries, with Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, and Mali all making the Chinese model their preferred model (Behabdallah). African students who study in China regularly return with a desire to help strengthen their home countries' relationships with China.

China provides an example of a country that has prioritized nation branding as a part of its international relations strategy. Despite the success of this strategy around the world, it is also important to consider places where China's nation brand is not as favorable. American perceptions of China have suffered in recent years, with scholars citing Beijing's increase in assertiveness and authoritarian policy in 2018 as a turning point in US-China relations (Kim). Negative associations, political skepticism, and mistrust have all cumulated into a tense and competitive relationship.

The COVID-19 pandemic only heightened this tension. A research study in 2020 reported that American negative perceptions of China had hit a record high with 73% of respondents reporting an unfavorable view of China (Silver). This came as a huge increase from the 2018 report of 47%. This reflects the acceleration of mistrust and disapproval that results from the COVID-19 pandemic. These tensions were further heightened by fears that the Chinese government was not transparent in the investigations of the virus origin and disagreements over how to contain the virus.

Despite China's effort to strengthen its brand around the world, the policies cannot overcome intense tension and competition emerging from the changing world order. If successful, China's purposeful and structured approach to brand management could accelerate the worldwide adoption of nation branding strategies.

Discussion

Each of the previous case studies were chosen with the intent of showcasing the wide range of applications of nation branding seen in the world today. Each example implements policies with the goal of strengthening its nation brand. This upholds Anholt's argument that nation branding must be conducted through legitimate policies. They each focus on their own country's strengths, finding ways to share their skills and culture with others in exchange for reputational gains.

While each strategy is connected through shared goals and nation branding theories, each case is different to show the range of applications. One major difference comes in the reasoning for pursuing a nation brand strategy. Both Russia and Japan are choosing to improve their brand to combat a shortcoming. In the case of Russia, the historical associations leftover from the Soviet Union limits the country's ability to integrate with the rest of the world. Japan uses a nation brand strategy to combat economic failures and to build international business credibility. On the other hand, China's pursuit of these strategies comes from wanting to gain power in the geopolitical sphere.

Each case study differs in the way it approaches nation branding and the results. First, Japan takes a culture-centric approach. Japan's strategy is dependent on cultural diffusion, sometimes called "pop culture diplomacy," and it relies heavily on the attractiveness of Japanese culture abroad. (Ang) Using culture as an export, Japan can combat the lack of natural resources and make an economic comeback. Japan is also an example of a country using well-known brands from the country to build its own reputation as a technologically advanced society.

Second, Russia provides an example of how the strategies described in this thesis may be applied to a country with a nation brand that is often viewed negatively by other countries.

Rather than trying to attract attention, the country must apply rebranding strategies to change the minds of foreign citizens and organizations. The Russian case started with a careful study of existing brand identities and associations, allowing them to address the ideas that Russia was not an active participant in world affairs and to demonstrate a more progressive side.

The case of Russia also provides an example of a country who chooses hard power displays over soft power strategies, undoing years of progress for the nation brand. Throughout the timeline of this thesis, Russia has declared war on Ukraine, losing any sense of credibility the country had been building in the eyes of the West. Russia shows that nation branding, and soft power are dependent on the assumption of peace and can quickly be lost in the face of war or aggression. The recent events in Ukraine prove that policies implemented to support a nation brand cannot stand on their own and must be accompanied by policies seen as favorable to citizens of other countries.

Going forward, the case of Russia will offer an interesting perspective on how much reputational damage a country can withstand and how that negative brand will impact Russia. The state's poor nation brand had previously limited growth potential and prevented collaboration among other countries. As footage of bombs hitting Kiev covers news stations everywhere, it is worth considering that Russia has given up on rebranding and reintegrating into world organizations.

The third case, China, is a valuable example in the study of nation branding and soft power because of how straightforward the policies related to this strategy are. Speeches from Chinese Communist Party members contain calls for cultural diffusion and leveraging soft power. The party's directed investments into projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative make it clear to project stakeholders as well as outsiders that the country is making soft power investments and

working to build a strong nation brand. Like Japan, China has found value in cultural diffusion. While Japan's approach to cultural diffusion has focused on the private sector and pop culture, China has taken a hands-on approach, deploying trained Chinese educators to spread information and cultural ties around the world.

The Belt and Road Initiative draws a connection between economic policy and soft power initiatives. The BRI is first and foremost an economic strategy, meant to improve economic relations and promote trade within Asia and Africa. At the same time, the project allows China to expand its soft power influence and nation brand. People around the world see China working to improve infrastructure in less developed countries. Citizens of the partner countries receive tangible sources of influence, opening a direct line of communication between China and countries of significance.

China has also leveraged soft power to gain influence in the development of other countries. The CCP leaders have built strategic relationships in countries of importance, using infrastructure development to open the door and maintain close contact. This represents the evolving nature of international relations strategies and has the potential to become extremely valuable to China.

Following the examination of each of these examples of nation branding, it is important to draw the distinction of what is and isn't nation branding. Recent marketing buzzwords like 'place branding' and 'corporate social responsibility' may have similar connotations to nation branding jargon. While these concepts may have similar strategies and objectives, both terms differ from nation branding as they are exclusive to the private sector. While favorable social policies are likely to benefit a country's reputation, it would not be an example of CSR. Countries, unlike corporations, have an indisputable right to take a social stance. Regardless of

opinions on CSR, social policies are created at the government level and cannot be separated from the political parties that act on them.

Place branding refers to the practice of promoting some location to make it more appealing to visitors. While this may sound like nation branding, place branding is rooted in travel and tourism, working to brand a place as a destination or gaining attention for other business ventures. A desirable travel destination can certainly support a positive nation brand, so long as people think more positively of the country because of their knowledge or experience. Despite the potential overlap in the minds of travelers, place branding is focused on business and not on geopolitical influence. Place branding can help to encourage tourism and create “fans” of a country, but the focus is not on strengthening relationships or building influence at the global level.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explained the academic origins and political applications of nation branding, soft power, and public diplomacy to draw connections between marketing strategies applied to a company and the international relations policies used by governments. These policies represent a new way of interaction between countries that will have major implications for world power and politics.

Marketing and international relations are not often thought of as a team. Traditional foreign policy for dominant countries has focused on hard power and building strength through money, weapons, and political dominance. Today this strategy feels archaic and irrelevant. Thanks to technology and communication advancements, people are more aware of government actions than ever before, creating demands for a focus on other factors. Increased access to media platforms means that people around the world are forming individual opinions about the actions of other countries. Social activism and human rights issues demand greater attention and people are willing to denounce governments that are acting in ways they deem unethical.

This new world system opens the doors for a new way of competition and influence. Governments can now benefit from being likable or impressive. Culture becomes a valuable export for companies looking to build relationships and encourage admirers. Government officials learn from more powerful countries and implement policies accordingly.

Today's governments will benefit from taking the lead of corporate marketers. By developing a strong brand, countries can build better diplomatic relationships, enjoy favorable economic agreements, and encourage appreciation and respect for their culture around the world.

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