

Brand USA: Democratic Propaganda in the Third Social Space

by Belinda H.Y. Chiu

Traditional approaches to foreign relations are being replaced by marketing strategies to brand nations by enhancing their image and reputation. No longer is this responsibility limited to government tourism boards. Rather, because “every nation is already a brand,”¹ the responsibility to create positive perceptions of the nation-state has fallen on the shoulders of departments of foreign affairs and diplomacy. As an increasingly important tool to promote foreign interests and to attract allies—or in marketing terms, loyal customers—branding allows nation-states to craft and influence how others perceive its political, economic, and social systems & values.

Branding is everywhere. But what is it? Brand equity of a product or service is the set of value-added assets that is communicated and strengthened by building name recognition, customer loyalty, and perceived quality. Although it had its beginnings in the consumer product industry, it is no longer restricted to the Coca-Colas and Proctor & Gambles of the world. Branding has become a tool of public diplomacy.

Citizens and leaders of foreign nations have existing ideas about other countries, be they positive or negative. In a technologically-advanced and globalized world, the branded nation has added pressure to be strongly aware of its own brand.² A nation’s brand can be strengthened by favorable policies, such as debt relief and foreign aid, or conversely, compromised by economic embargoes and declarations of war. Like consumer goods, smart brand management is essential to maintaining a positive impression and build loyal followers. However, as with consumer goods, smart brand management can only sell the product. While branding can change perceptions about the product, it cannot change the product itself.

This paper will first briefly discuss the “third social space” in a democracy, the public space for media and marketing. According to Habermas, this third social space sits between the first (the state), and the second (the market, or private sector). Second, it will explore the characteristics of nation branding and its importance to foreign relations, examining the case of Brand USA, with a particular focus on the Shared Values Initiative targeted toward the Arab and Muslim worlds. Finally, it will

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discuss whether branding has democratic appeal or propagandistic flavor. While there exists skepticism that this process has too much of a Machiavellian feel to it, branding nations is a useful public diplomacy and relations tool, as long as it does not misrepresent facts.

THE THIRD SOCIAL SPACE

Habermas presented the third social space as the forum in which citizens come together to debate issues.³ This space mediates the place between the state and the market (private sector). In a democratic context, public debate and opinion is shared in this arena. Ideally, it is not controlled by the state, but rather, managed and maintained by the people. The positive image of the third social space, therefore, is one in which well-informed citizens drive political and social change through their active participation, candid criticism, and electoral power.

However, this optimistic image is not reality. Even in the most progressive and liberal democracies, where citizens have a true voice through their electoral power and have genuine opportunities for public service and leadership, civic participation is not widely prevalent. Although this paper addresses why citizens are not always active participants (the US voting rate is one such indicator), it recognizes the fact that low participation rates enables the mass media to be so dominant; the media fills the void that is left because the citizenry is not fully engaged. As many citizens do not take the time to educate themselves about public issues and policies directly from their elected representatives, they seek quick and easily accessible information from other intermediary sources. Moreover, citizens of even the most democratic of nations with unfettered access to the public sphere are not immune to image manipulation.

Walter Lippman popularized the idea of “Public Opinion” which differs from the more common “public opinion.” While public opinion is defined as “public consensus, as with respect to an issue or situation,”⁴ For Lippman, it is not only the images that individuals have of themselves, but also the facts and ideas that become the motivation for political involvement and action. Since the power of public opinion is so expansive, having direct access to information is the ideal way for allowing individuals to interpret and make meaning of facts for themselves. However, the sheer size and complexity of nation-states makes it prohibitive for each citizen to have direct access to all available information without any representative structure to help reduce the amount of data. Simply put, there is simply too much information for the ordinary person to sift through to separate fact from fiction.

For representative democracies to work, Lippman stressed that there must be an “independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions.”⁵ The press is supposed to simply expose the truth, independent of state or private influence. Its ability to dominate the third social space is partly sanctioned by citizens who cannot access information directly or do not have the time to read and digest everything that occurs in the world on a daily basis. Therefore, the independent media’s role in this space is to facilitate and filter

information, so that the citizens can have productive debates based on the summarized facts.

Reality, however, is a different picture. The news may report something as the truth, but the truth often conceals facts the media deems inappropriate to share with the general audience. Truth and fact are not necessarily the same thing, prompting Lippman's concern that the press "is very much more frail than the democratic theory has as yet admitted."⁶ His point was that the truths that media in democracies reveal are themselves biased in some manner; the occurrence of filtering suggests that the information has already been judged and analyzed to some degree.

With censorship comes the possibility of propaganda. As Jacobowicz articulated, "media can give the oxygen of democracy or give the poison of democracy."⁷ Facts and truths can be manipulated. In a democratic environment with a seemingly independent media, citizens are still highly vulnerable to image distortions and factual gymnastics. With modern media and technology, image-making capabilities enable the "spinning" or distortion of facts and opinions.⁸ In a space where truth and fact are to be debated, citizens rely on a media that may not be so independent after all.

Nonetheless, if media is "an organ of direct democracy," as suggested by Lippman,⁹ then the inclusion of the ideas and opinions of its audience can help to alleviate some of these biases. In the third social space, citizens can hold their media counterparts accountable. With the advent of technological communications like e-mail, internet blogging, and YouTube, there has been an explosion of information sources that enable citizens to choose, bypass, or filter their own interpretations of what they read and hear. Whether or not the third social sphere actively engages all participants, nation-states are not immune from being praised, criticized or ridiculed in this space. Presenting a consistently positive national image, therefore, becomes an attractive proposition to influence such debates.

WHAT IS NATION BRANDING AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

The concept behind branding nations is not dissimilar to traditional consumer product and service branding. Strong brand equity has brand loyalty (repeat buyers), name recognition (attracts new buyers), and perceived quality (user satisfaction and enhanced user status). Consumers feel more confident and proud of their purchase and usage of a strong brand—their own image is enhanced by using the product or service. Firms that understand this relationship and can build a strong brand around their company, can attract customers, retain old ones, and gain competitive advantage.¹⁰

Branding nations follow the same concepts, only that the consumers are a diversified set of global citizens and politicians, the company is substituted with the state, and the government acts as the management team. The target audiences of a nation branding campaign can be segmented at various levels. For example, the public citizenry of one's own state and of foreign states can be sub-divided into the mainstream group and the minority group, as well as into private citizens, journalists,

and academics. The members and politicians of foreign governments can be subdivided into authoritarian, democratic, and socialist regimes. Given the diversity of potential target audiences, one must be keen to the particular needs and concerns of each respective group.

Good brand management is critical to nation branding. Nation branding not only impacts a country's image, but it also can affect its stability, foreign investment, tourism, and the perceived value of its exports. For example, the Ivory Coast produces 40 percent of the world's cocoa market; however, because of the powerful and brilliant marketing of Colombia's coffee, Colombia has over 40 percent of the US specialty coffee market.¹¹ Ask most Americans and many of them will recognize the image of Juan Valdez. Furthermore, nations in post-conflict situations or in post-transitional states can benefit from a strategic and well-managed re-branding effort. For example, Montenegro emerged from the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War as a war-torn nation, which transitioned into an attractive locale for vacationing tourists and foreign investment. The government of Montenegro implemented policies such as increasing the responsibility and access of the Ministry of Tourism to the highest levels of government, restructuring the National Tourism Organization to encourage public-private partnerships, and privatizing state-owned tourist operations to increase competition.¹²

As an increasingly important tool to promote foreign interests and to attract allies—or in marketing terms, loyal customers—branding allows nation-states to craft and influence how others perceive its political, economic, and social systems & values.

To create a strong nation brand, governments should recognize that the process is a blend of marketing and diplomacy. In fact, this process occurs by taking “traditional public diplomacy strategies and add[ing] marketing tools designed to change national perceptions.”¹³ Just as consumer product branding requires the coordination of its management team, nation branding requires a similar concerted effort by the government. However, nation branding is also more complex in that it isn't just presenting a fixed and readily recognizable product or service. Nation branding is about presenting dynamic and diverse aspects of society, such as human behavior, culture, and religion, in a coherent manner. Packaging diverse and disputed attitudes and values is not a simple task. Thus, selling to an immensely diverse and broad audience is inherently more complicated.

Nation branding is a combination of tourism, investment, trade, and public & cultural diplomacy,¹⁴ and as such, should involve all stakeholders. These stakeholders represent not only the public sector, but the private sector as well. Before it is promoted globally, a nation's brand image should first be accepted by its own stakeholders—its citizenry. Without buy-in from this group, trying to convince those

on the “outside” is a much more difficult task. As Kyriacou and Cromwell argued, a strong national brand should “engage citizens and national organizations at home while winning recognition and respect abroad.”¹⁵ Incorporating the opinions of the citizens in the formulation of the brand allows those who live in the society to feel as if they are “living the brand”—a popular marketing term for what occurs when consumers understand and accept a brand to the point that they themselves become an active reinforcement for it.

Nation brands are more than “an image.” It also includes perceptions of residents and foreigners, level of economic development, and quality of its products.¹⁶ The interplay of economic, political, and cultural systems, therefore, affects the national image that governments then have to fine-tune, highlighting some aspects and downplaying others. Larger and more diverse nations have a more difficult task in building a consistent and agreed-upon brand because they are less flexible and homogenous. Moreover, consistency of brands should transcend leadership or regime change to maintain brand loyalty. Strategies must be carefully devised in order to survive election cycles so that nations do not undergo a crisis each time there is a new president or prime minister.

Another important component of strong nation brand management includes the use of logos and the consistency of the products available. Consumer products such as Coca-Cola use logos, product placements, and other advertisements that are consistent with their image to promote their brand. Nations often use flags and anthems to reflect their value system and character. Consistent logos that project a positive image can also help. For example, prior to the 1992 Olympics, Barcelona was often overlooked in deference to its more well-known sister city, Madrid. However, hosting the Olympics offered Barcelona the opportunity to re-brand itself. Sleek logos, sophisticated marketing campaigns, and subsequent advertisements consistent with the branding effort helped to position Barcelona as a must-see location and tourism spot for trendsetters.¹⁷

Understanding the products a nation offers is also an important step in building a strong brand. The US, for example, is in the market to sell democracy and capitalism. Its products to promote these offerings include: visas, foreign direct investments, exchange programs such as the Fulbright program, information exchange, security guarantees, and the export of cultural products like movies and music. Packaging these products in a manner consistent with its service offerings is also critically important in the process. Honesty is also vital. A strong brand will not mislead; it will acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses of the nation.¹⁸

A positive image can enhance the nation’s diplomatic currency and help facilitate economic negotiations. The potential to enhance the position of the nation on an international scale has tremendous long-term benefits. Perceived stability can lead to global leadership and new allies, perceived quality of natural resources can enhance economic position and investment opportunities, and perceived social and cultural strengths can establish moral leadership and the power of influence. Therefore, to ensure a strong brand, governments must understand the mechanisms behind brand

asset management to build brands around positive reputations and attitudes.¹⁹ Governments have begun to recognize and value this approach, as is evidenced by the increased attention and occurrence of nation branding, as evidenced by cities such as Dubai, Barcelona, Auckland, and Shanghai.²⁰

BUILDING BRAND USA

The Buy USA campaign has long been a popular strategy of the United States. The use of such a marketing tool was motivated by a desire to protect US economic interests. As the international climate has grown more complex, so has the pressure on nations to respond and position themselves as economically strong and politically stable. During the Cold War, the US depended on public diplomacy to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information about American culture to other nations. Public diplomacy is “a government’s effort to inform and influence the attitudes of the general public in a foreign country.”²¹ In efforts to win the hearts and minds of the world away from the threat of communism, the US government used public diplomacy to spread its brand value of democracy and the free market, which were sold through products such as Voice of America and the US Peace Corps.²² The US Information Agency (USIA), the nation’s chief international communication department, which had been in charge of public diplomacy, ran a number of programs such as exchange opportunities for US and foreign leaders to interact on an individual basis as a way to address misperceptions and misunderstandings for more productive and peaceful partnerships. However, funds to support such programs to promote the US as a strong beacon of democratic ideals were pulled back. From the 1980s to 2001, government spending on public diplomacy programs declined 50 percent. In late 1999, USIA was dissolved, and the US State Department absorbed many of its functions, including that of public diplomacy.

During the 1990s, when the economy was strong and international cooperation seemed to be at an all-time high, the US seemed to be immune to criticism. These positive images started to change as previously positive perceptions of US products—democracy and the free market—began to shift to one of hegemonic arrogance. Existing public diplomacy tools were proving insufficient in stemming the change of tides.

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center Towers collapsed. The need for public diplomacy was critical. Not only was anti-Americanism spreading rapidly, particularly in the Arab and Muslim worlds, but the changes within the US administration proved a challenge to sending out any sort of consistent diplomatic message. During the Clinton years, Brand USA was “all about multilateral humanitarian intervention abroad and Third Way liberalism at home; Brand America under Bush [was] the opposite.”²³ To address the critical need to project a consistent and strong message, Secretary of State Colin Powell realized that one of his key strategies had to be selling Brand America to the world.

In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed Charlotte Beers as the US Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. Her primary charge was to counteract the

growing anti-American sentiment in Arab countries and to rebuild America's image. Beers was an unusual appointment in that she was neither a bureaucrat nor a political appointee. Beers was a marketer. In fact, she had been called the most powerful woman in advertising. As the former CEO of the advertising giant Ogilvy & Mather, she seemed to be primed for the position to build a strong brand for the US. At her disposal were the tools of the Bureau of Public Affairs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, as well as the Office of International Information Programs.

Beers was known for her approach to "brand stewardship," that is, the art of creating, building, and energizing profitable brands.²⁴ Although her audience was broad-based, her high-priority target audience was the international audience in the Arab and Muslim worlds. With a budget of \$15 million, she stated at the beginning of her term that she hoped to "communicate the intangible assets of the United States—things like [its] belief system and [its] values."²⁵ As a first step, she appointed a senior advisor fluent in Arabic. She also conducted market research by meeting with prominent Muslim Americans of all ages to understand what messages would best enhance the US image abroad.

Following the procedural steps of building a brand, Beers took steps to expand the message of a friendly United States in which Muslim Americans were good citizens living happy lives. One of her first products was a booklet describing in detail the full impact of September 11, which was distributed throughout the Middle East. She also launched a monthly pro-American, Arabic-language news magazine.

From a marketing standpoint, no matter how sleek and sophisticated the packaging, if the product is bad or broken, the brand will not be successful.

The cornerstone of Beers' branding strategy was the Shared Values Initiative (SVI), which was known internally as "Charlotte's project." Run by the US Department of State, SVI was essentially a public relations campaign that took advantage of a multitude of channels to carry the message, including: television advertising, town-hall meetings, speaking tours, and print & radio broadcasts. Its goal was to "improve America's image, convincing the Arab and Muslim world that America wasn't waging war on Islam."²⁶ It targeted countries in the Middle East, Asia, as well as a few in Africa and Central Asia.²⁷

The largest project SVI managed was with the television campaigns. Beers and the State Department purchased \$5 million in commercial airtime on television stations throughout the Middle East and Asia. The target audience was clear. The messages were designed for the people, rather than the governments. The objective was to convince them that America's war on terrorism was not a war on Islam. After all, how could it be so when the ad campaigns featured vignettes of ordinary, happy Muslim Americans?

Beers herself believed that the campaign was effective in accomplishing its main purpose: starting "a dialogue with audiences in the Arab and Muslim world."²⁸ While

she conceded that the ads were propaganda, they nonetheless got people to start talking to one another. She worked for the US government; she did not take the role of an independent media, but that of a government official. As such, her role was to “communicate the policy in the most favorable light possible.”²⁹ Policymaking would be left to the politicians.

However, difficulties arose from the start. Al Jazeera, as well as various state media outlets, refused to run the spots. By 2003, the ad campaigns were pulled, and shortly thereafter, Beers resigned due to medical reasons.

WAS THE SHARED VALUES INITIATIVE A SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

The answer to this question depends on the perspective taken. While it was not successful to change the minds of the target audience completely, it initiated much-needed dialogue.

The US government quickly distanced itself from the campaign. Beers’ critics argued that the US was not Uncle Ben’s Rice, and that “you can’t boil down America into a slogan.”³⁰ *The Wall Street Journal* argued that the “US can’t be sold as a brand, like Cheerios.”³¹ Beers may have been a successful brand manager, but she clearly lacked experience as a diplomat, critics proclaimed. Her research was criticized for not being thorough because the messages and images projected in the advertisements “failed to register with Muslim audiences.”³² Many felt that the majority who saw the campaigns, both domestically and abroad, felt that it was merely propaganda, distorting the truth about the motivations behind the war and the way Muslim were really treated in the US.

Many of these criticisms came from the State Department itself. However, many of those within denounced the SVI without evidence to back up their criticisms. Kendrick and Fullerton found that many of these individuals “undermined SVI through off-the-record and background interviews with journalists, whose stories often failed to accurately portray the goals of the campaign.”³³ It was evident that the government’s own staff was not convinced about the direction or effectiveness of the branding campaign. Although the State Department has the official responsibility of marketing and communicating the US message, the majority of its staff has little knowledge or background in media strategies, tactics, and campaigns. A brand manager recognizes that, for the brand to be effectively pulled together, it requires the coordinated and consistent support, and technical knowledge, of a strong management team. However, those charged with one of the most important and powerful branding jobs lacked experience. Beers was only one individual. Ironically, the State Department has denied the failure of the SVI.

Moreover, Aaker argued that Beer’s task was doomed from the beginning because of the “underlying product.” From a marketing standpoint, no matter how sleek and sophisticated the packaging, if the product is bad or broken, the brand will not be successful. In this case, Beers was working with what she was given. She did not create US policy, but had to “package” it and put it in its best possible light. In reality, US policy has never been pro-Middle East. The US relationship with Israel,

the Gulf War, its support of regimes in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as well as its neo-liberal economic policies have led to policies, or a product, that are not favorable to changing deeply embedded distrust and skepticism about US goodwill. Furthermore, even with a senior adviser who spoke Arabic, if the State Department did not have a deep or genuine understanding of both the media and Muslim culture, selling a disliked—even hated—product to a hostile target audience was swimming against the tide. Beers tried to do the impossible, “to change people’s minds without changing ‘the product.’”³⁴

Additionally, in many of these nations, she was battling over fifty years of state-controlled media, which had “inundat[ing] young people with virulent anti-American messages for more than half a century.”³⁵ Al Jazeera was not favorable to pro-US images and, despite a fancy new name, it was not about to begin with the Shared Values Initiative.

Since Beers left office, Brand USA has come under further criticism. According to a recent survey, respondents felt that the US has an inconsistent brand. The confusion arises from the perception that the US government “promotes freedom, yet simultaneously supports torture and illegal wiretapping.”³⁶ The current Undersecretary, Karen Hughes, has acknowledged the growing anti-Americanism in the Arab world. Brand USA continues its attempt to re-brand and re-position itself. For example, in 2005, the images of first-time voters in Iraq holding up purple-stained fingers surfaced as a hope to position the US as the supporters of “purple power”—the freedom to vote. The hope is that this positive image of the US as liberator will overpower the daily images of American occupiers destroying a country.

NATION BRANDING: DEMOCRATIC OR PROPAGANDISTIC?

The question of whether branding nations promotes democratic ideals or reflects propagandistic virtues is complex. Kyriacou and Cromwell emphasize that “the branding process strengthens democracy and helps both internal development and successful integration into the world community, on all levels.”³⁷ Typically, the marketplace is perceived to be more democratic than formal institutions because consumers have direct purchasing power.³⁸ If consumers don’t like something, they will make it known by not purchasing it. From this perspective, if consumers (citizens or governments) do not like the branded image of a state, they will make it known by protesting, not investing, not supporting, and dissuading others from believing it. In the case of the Shared Values Initiative, many countries in the Arab world made it known they did not like the product—US foreign policy—and rejected its message. Television stations refused to run the spots. Rather than improving the image of the US, the US actually lost credibility among the Muslim world, increasing Anti-American sentiment.³⁹

Moreover, like consumer products, branded nations want to differentiate themselves from others. Just as Coca-Cola wants to make itself distinct from Pepsi, differentiation enables the state to increase market share, create a niche in a

competitive economy or strengthen its political position (i.e. Colombia coffee) within a global environment. Furthermore, greater worldwide attention on the nation can lead to “improving democratic processes, strengthening the rule of law and increasing transparency.”⁴⁰ As Anholt argued, well-branded countries actually tend to be countries with liberal democratic traditions.⁴¹ Democratic traditions tend to allow the private sector and public citizenry greater ownership and responsibility, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and buy-in. With greater transparency to its consumer-base (its citizens), nation branding can weaken the power of special interest and lobbying groups, thereby making the government more accountable and responsive to a wider and more direct audience.

Whether nation branding is democratic or propagandistic also depends on who is doing the branding. If the branded message is imposed only from the government, with little consultation from other segments of society, seeing it as a democratic process is doubtful. If, however, the process ensures that the spokespeople, represented products, and featured events incorporate public opinion, it will be more democratic, as it ensures a greater voice for those affected.

Lippman said, public opinion “is supposed to be the prime mover in democracies.”⁴² He stresses that it is a critical and necessary component of modern, democratic societies. Thus, encouraging openness in media encourages the transformation of non-democracies to democracies. However, since no one, particularly the masses, is immune from suggestion and manipulated influences, public opinion is not always independent of governmental influence. Democratic theory only works with the “omnicompetent citizen.”⁴³ Yet the omnicompetent citizen does not exist in reality. Everyone has preconceptions. Those in power, such as the media, control the images and have strong influence over the ordinary citizen. As propaganda is defined as the misrepresentation of the truth, coerced upon the listener, is presenting this information propaganda if only a few control the images, or is it merely another perspective?

Nation branding is an integral part of foreign relations. Perhaps then, it has less to do with marketing than with realpolitik and warfare. In fact, John Stauber, executive director of the Centre for Media and Democracy, argued that nation branding is a “type of propaganda designed to manage and manipulate the perception of in-country citizens or foreigners toward a government.”⁴⁴ The word “branding,” however, certainly sounds more palatable.

CONCLUSIONS

Kendrick and Fullerton criticized the Bush Administration for missing “an opportunity to improve America’s image in the Arab and Muslim worlds because they acted upon ideological and parochial prejudices, rather than upon scientific evidence,”⁴⁵ with the Shared Values Initiative. Charlotte Beers, the steward of the SVI received much criticism for her ignorance of Muslim culture, her support of propaganda, and her misstep in thinking the US can be branded like a consumer product.

However, such criticisms are often misplaced or exaggerated. First, many of the critics did not have a full understanding of the campaign nor the background and experience of brand management. Second, Beers' charge was to take a highly unfavorable product, US foreign policy towards Arab countries, and place a pretty ribbon on it. No matter how fancy the wrapping would be, this task was near impossible. Indeed, even with an elaborate product design, the most sophisticated branding strategy will fail to sell a broken product. In this case, US foreign policy is despised in many parts of the world. Re-packaging does not change it. Third, her program was in effect for only one year, in which time it was to put to rest decades of negative and deteriorating images of the US. Branding products or, in this case, policies is a long-term strategy that requires time and commitment to persuade its target audience of its positive aspects. Finally, Beers was facing particularly difficult target audiences, who were highly skeptical and quick to reject any media messages. The receptivity of her audience was not only low, but in many cases, outright hostile.

Though the SVI was short-lived and did not meet the expectations of building a Brand USA that convinced the Arab and Muslim world of its benevolence, the fact that the US recognized that its image needed to be improved in order to improve its relations with many countries and their members was a step in the right direction. One unsuccessful initiative does not necessarily mean that branding is not an important part of public diplomacy. Rather, in this case, the product research method and development was flawed. A lack of genuine understanding of Muslim culture, buy-in from the government's own staff, and misunderstanding of the target audience's receptivity exacerbated the fact that the product itself was hard to sell. Nation branding can still be useful to public diplomacy.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, nation brand strategists must avoid the dilemma of whether strong policies or strong marketing should come first. Without favorable policies, nation branding simply becomes a euphemism for lies and propaganda, thereby rendering the entire exercise futile. Thus, without policy adjustments, more favorable relations and perceptions in target countries will be harder to achieve.

Beers may not have changed the hearts and minds of millions, but if she provoked the third social space to bustle with activity and debate, then perhaps, the "queen of advertising" was marginally successful. Indeed, the fact that there was much debate and criticism from domestic and international arenas, perhaps the idea of a democratic public sphere is not an anachronistic one after all. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of programs such as the Shared Values Initiative, the exercise of nation-branding is still a worthwhile endeavor because it can encourage greater discussion among the public.

Machiavelli understood that positive public perception is essential to ensuring the strength of a nation-state. It is, therefore, critically important to dismantle the misperception that nation branding is merely a propaganda tool. Nation branding can encourage greater participation from an active and engaged citizenry. The third social space is indeed alive and well.

AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Questions remain. If branding is indeed an appropriate and effective mechanism, how do governments ensure that there is consistency across all its “teams” to ensure a coordinated effort? With highly decentralized governments such as the US, is such coordination even possible?

Moreover, what is the best approach to brand a nation? Is a nation restricted to only one brand? Is that brand consistently delivered across all segments, or is it tailored to fit particular audiences (i.e. Arab nations versus Asian nations)? Do generalizations then become susceptible to stereotyping? Finally, public diplomacy itself should be re-examined. Are the employees of the US State Department equipped with the right experience and training to do their job? Should employees be trained differently, that is, trained as brand strategists and managers? If their job is to communicate and market, why is their understanding and skills in this area so minimal?

These questions, among many others, raise the need for further investigation into public diplomacy, its role and its effectiveness. Given the increasing popularity and potential impact of nation-branding, governments should consider policies that prepare its representatives with the appropriate tools to be effective brand managers. It is also necessary to ensure thorough and investigative research to understand not only the target audience, but its receptivity to messages. Finally, governments should carefully consider its brand managerial approach, and to develop well-coordinated efforts among its various departments. In an age of electronic media and borderless communities, a better understanding of nation branding is urgently required.

Notes

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⁷ Karol Jacobowicz, “Class Lecture” (lecture presented to Diversity and Democracy Institute, Cape Town, South Africa, January 8, 2007).

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⁹ Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 229.

¹⁰ David Aaker, *Managing Brand Equity* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

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- ²¹ Alice Kendrick and Jami Fullerton, *Advertising's War on Terrorism: The Story of the US State Department's Shared Values Initiative* (Spokane, WA: Marquette Books, 2006), 19–20.
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- ²³ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁷ Countries where Shared Values Initiative messages and speaker tours have occurred: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates. (US Department of State, "Shared Values Initiative," January 16, 2003 *Daily Press Briefing*. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/t/pa/prs/ps/2003/16720.htm> (accessed March 26, 2007).
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- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ³⁰ Kendrick and Fullerton, *Advertising's War on Terrorism*, 24.
- ³¹ Risen, "Re-Branding America."
- ³² Kendrick and Fullerton, *Advertising's War on Terrorism*, 10.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 7.
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- ³⁵ Alexandra Starr, "Charlotte Beers' Toughest Sell."
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- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 180.
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- ⁴⁵ Kendrick and Fullerton *Advertising's War on Terrorism*, 17.
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