The soft power of commercialized nationalist symbols: using media analysis to understand nation branding campaigns

Göran Bolin & Galina Miazhevich

Abstract

Since the late 1990s, nation branding has attracted a lot of attention from academics, professional consultants and government actors. The ideas and practices of nation branding are frequently presented by branding advocates as necessary and even inevitable in the light of changing dynamics of political power and influence in a globalized and media-saturated world. In this context, some have argued that nation branding is a way to reduce international conflict and supplant ethno-nationalism with a new form of market-based, national image management. However, a growing body of critical studies have documented that branding campaigns tend to produce ahistorical and exclusionary representations of the nation and advance a form of 'commercial nationalism' (Volcic and Andrejevic, 2015) that is problematic. Importantly, the critical scholarship on nation branding has relied primarily on sociological and anthropological theories of nationhood, identities, and markets. By contrast, the role of the media – as institutions, systems, and societal storytellers – has been undertheorized in relation to nation branding. The majority of the existing literature tends to treat the media as 'neutral' vehicles for the delivery of branding messages to various audiences. This special issue seeks to problematize this overly simplistic view of 'the media' and aims to articulate the various ways in which specific media are an integral part of nation branding. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach and problematizes both the enabling and the inhibiting potentialities of different types of media as they perpetuate nation branding ideas, images, ideologies, discourses, and practices.

Introduction

Nation branding, the practice of governments in conjunction with public relations consultants and corporate business to launch campaigns promoting a certain image of a nation state, is a fairly recent phenomenon dating back to the late 1990s. Despite the novelty of the phenomenon it has grown to become a widespread activity in which most nation states in the world engage, addressing both potential tourists as well as corporate finance and international business to encourage investment and business growth. Nation branding campaigns are often executed in connection to the organisation of larger events such as the Olympic Games, the Eurovision Song Contest, or similar phenomena, seeking to exploit the international attention that these events attract.

Following the rise of nation branding as a practice, the phenomenon has also become the focus of academic research interests. In an early article in the field of nation branding research, Nadia Kaneva (2011) reviewed the literature and distinguished between three main approaches to the phenomenon: a 'technical-economic', a 'political' and a 'cultural' approach. The technical-economic and the political approaches were, in her analysis, characterised as types of what

Merkelsen and Rasmussen (2016) later have come to call 'instrumental research', that were either based in branding practice and business logics (e.g., Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 2003; Szondi, 2007), or in political analysis influenced by market logic terminology. In the latter, politicians are tasked with finding 'a brand niche for their state', and engage in 'competitive marketing', to assure 'market satisfaction', and create 'brand loyalty' (van Ham, 2001: 6). As a critically oriented alternative to these two approaches, Kaneva suggested a third 'cultural' perspective, more fitting for media and cultural studies scholars, since 'efforts to rethink nations as brands relate to theoretical debates central to critical scholarship of culture and communication' (Kaneva, 2011: 118).

A few initial cases of critical nation branding research (e.g. Aronczyk, 2008; Bolin, 2002; Jansen, 2008; Marat, 2009; Volcic, 2008) were followed by growing scholarship in monograph form (Aronczyk, 2013; Jordan 2014a; Saunders, 2017; Surowiec 2016; Valaskivi, 2016), in edited collections (Kaneva, 2012a; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2015), and in numerous journal articles and book chapters (e.g. Graan, 2013; Jordan, 2014b; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Miazhevich, 2012; Panagiotopoulou, 2012; Varga, 2013). Despite an increasing presence of media researchers in the field of nation branding research an adequate theorisation of the media's role in nation branding either became side-lined or was secondary to the analysis of other issues, such as identity:

> There are analyses of media material (texts) and of the production of campaigns, but largely, 'the media' have been described as passive tools in the orchestration of nation-branding campaigns, lacking agency of their own.
>
> (Bolin & Ståhlberg. 2015: 3066)

This special issue is set to remedy this omission and to contribute to clarifying the roles media and communications play in the branding of nations; as organisations (such as CNN, Euronews, BBC, *Time, Newsweek*), and as specific technologies (television, internet, press), as well as in the generation of meaning as sign systems. This means, firstly, asking questions about the specific ways in which the organisational logics impact on which campaigns are launched, and how they are organised and orchestrated, secondly, asking questions concerning the consequences of using specific media technologies for the messages disseminated, and, thirdly, asking questions about the specific semiotic aspects or linguistic composition of messages. Such approaches will help identify how nation branding needs to be understood as wielding 'soft power', a practice that undeniably involves media.

A *media organisational perspective* on nation branding practice could, for example, adopt an institutional approach analysing the specific logics of media organisations such as news corporations and the media logics they encompass (Hjarvard, 2013). This would also include commercial logics. BBC World is a very active player in the production of advertising clips for branding campaigns, with a proactive policy where they approach potential customers and offer their help to produce video clips – which can then be combined with a special focus on the country in question through documentaries and other features. So for example, BBC World approached Ukraine, offering their help to produce video clips directed to tourists and investors, and to air these commercial clips during the period when BBC News had a special focus on Ukraine with about 80 hours of programming about the country (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2015: 3075).

A *media technological perspective* would focus on questions of how the specific technology of the medium impacts upon the ways in which messages are formulated and which audiences are addressed. A printed brand book, or the PowerPoint slides used in the initial stages of branding campaigns, have quite different possibilities for reaching specific audiences compared to mass media such as television or the press. A message distributed via an in-flight magazine, for example, will reach different readers than a video clip on CNN.

Both the technological and the organizational approach to nation branding deal with symbolic power, that is, the power to produce and *communicate* certain accounts of social reality, rather than others (Bolin, 2011; Bourdieu, 1991; Couldry, 2000, 2012). This power to produce images of social reality has been taken advantage of for constructing the social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002) of nations, both by nationalist movements leading up to the formation of the modern nation-states over the past couple of centuries, and more lately by PR consultants and marketing agents in nation branding projects (cf. Valaskivi 2016). This deserves a critical understanding for which the apparatus of critical media and cultural studies might provide important openings. Rather than treating nation-building projects as manipulative corporate exercises, they can also be seen as reflecting and refracting the state of nation building in a global age. Nation building and nation branding projects have the social imaginary of 'the nation' as their focus at a time when the meaning of nation, nationhood and nationality have become hotly contested within states while, in a politico-economic sense nation-states continue to lose ground against global corporate capitalism. We might well be looking at increasingly desperate attempts to build nations by branding them. It is interesting therefore that the two activities of nation building and nation branding have frequently been confused with one another – not only in the technical-economic, and in the political approach referred to above, but also in some of the critical literature. Nation branding in

this special issue can be defined as 'a historically specific form of producing images of the nation' (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010: 79; cf. Aronczyk 2013: 4), offering a media focus which will help to articulate the confusing dialectic between 'building' and 'branding' the nation.

In this introduction we will, firstly, try to explain the nature and character of nation branding as a practice, and how it differs from processes of nation building. We will then, secondly, discuss more thoroughly the concept of 'nation branding' and its relation to representational practices in the media. Thirdly, we will give an overview of the way in which the papers in this special issue relate to the broader frameworks of nation branding and information management, and how the media are situated within these processes. This will make clear that a media and cultural studies perspective on nation branding shows how the media are both the canvas for, and instruments of, media branding across the institutional, commercial, technological and symbolic logics that are involved. Neglecting to understand nation branding as a media production and reception practice will result in an overemphasis of some of the actors involved (e.g. the political or commercial agency), at the expense of the communicative agency of media organizations, but also how they, like all actors involved, are constrained by technology and prevailing narrative and symbolic conventions.

Creating communities or commodities? Nation building vs nation branding

Nation branding can be described as a practice used by governments in conjunction with public relations consultants and corporate businesses to launch campaigns promoting a certain image of a nation-state. In previous research it is commonly agreed that this practice occurs alongside and in conjunction with the historical moment of *neoliberalism*. As Kaneva explains:

> [I]t is hardly surprising that, as the 21st century rolled in, branding became increasingly popular with national governments around the world. This was especially so in countries where there was a pressing need – often externally mandated by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – to show compliance with the principles of market economy and liberal democracy in order to receive foreign aid.
>
> (Kaneva, 2017: 119)

The coupling of nation branding as a practice with the rise of the neoliberal state seems to be uncontroversial and commonly agreed upon by scholars – more a point of departure than an area of debate. Many have also pointed to the historical rise and establishment of branding as a general practice, and its development over the 20th century (Moor, 2007; Aronczyk, 2013; Kaneva, 2017). Brands have

over this period moved from a practice of marking ownership, to product differentiation, to becoming the very sign commodity itself – a non-tangible commercial product that is the very source of (economic) value production (Bolin, 2011: 122ff).

In the context of infrequent critical analysis of neoliberalism, some scholars (e.g. Harvey, 2005) focus on the market as the dominant model for all social and societal activity. The branding logic of neoliberalism is seen as a sign of the commodification of the very process of *nation building* and national identity, leading to the understanding of nation branding as a form of 'commercial nationalism' (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2015). Nation branding is described as a way to 'offload the process of national identity-building onto the private sector' (Volcic and Andrejevic, 2011: 600), and produces national identity in an 'undemocratic' way (Jansen, 2008).

Whilst nationalism as theorised by, amongst others Benedict Anderson (1991/2006), was an inner-directed project seeking to foster social solidarity among citizens, nation branding as an activity is first and foremost about product differentiation, where nation states compete for attention within the global markets of tourism and economic investment. There is no denying that nation branding campaigns at times will touch upon sentiments among citizens who identify with a specific nation state and may, at times, have consequences for the cultural figuration that is the nation. Overall though, the primary intentions behind the campaigns usually are more prosaic. In fact, one could argue that the framework of nationalism has been of hindrance for the understanding of nation branding as a practice, since it has produced more confusion than clarification. As James Pamment (2014a: 1805) argues, the fact that nation branders make use of the rhetoric of nationhood and make claims about the significance of the practice for national identity, does not mean that researchers need to uncritically echo this rhetoric.

The confusion between, and conflation of, nation branding and building also extends to the very concept of 'the nation' in nation branding research. 'Nation' as a concept is often used interchangeably with concepts like 'country', 'state' and 'nation state'. While all these are complex and polysemic concepts, 'state' is less so. It usually indicates a political-administrative unit with sovereign rule over a geographical territory (as does 'country'), whilst 'nation' can also have an ethnic meaning and is caught up in common-place ideologies and political feelings. Ideologically 'nationalism' refers to the 'principle that the political and national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983: 1), and is, thus, about fostering 'territorially based identities' (Eriksen, 2007: 2) within the framework of a 'state', in order to gain 'political legitimacy' (Gellner, 1983: 1). Although

Gellner notes that state and nation are notoriously difficult to specify, he insists that they are not the same and should not be confused with one another. The state is a political unit related to (coercive) power, while nation is a cultural entity, related to belonging.

Relatedly, there have been debates around whether nation branding as an activity is mainly directed towards external audiences of potential tourists and investors, or whether it has an internal, domestic component, where some researchers argue that it aims at building national identities and social solidarity (Jansen, 2008), while other sees it as a way to govern populations (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). Sue Curry Jansen, for example, has argued that the 'primary audiences (customers or consumers) targeted by nation branders are international tourists, foreign investors, and potential trading partners, *as well as* the citizens of the branded country' (Jansen, 2012: 79, emphasis added). In this description governments seemingly have dual aims, trying to address an external international audience of investors and tourists and a domestic audience of citizens at the same time (see also Valaskivi, 2016 and Kania-Lundholm, 2016).

Even when it is not the primary goal, apparently the outwardly-directed nation branding campaign may have internal, domestic effects. Mediated communication here works in two different ways: Firstly, the external audiences of tourists and investors are addressed with mass mediated advertising clips broadcast on international television channels such as CNN, Bloomberg and BBC World, and magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. (The main (and stated) aim is to attract these audiences and make them want to spend a week as tourist, or to invest in the country.) Secondly, the possible effect this communication might have on domestic audiences is not via the external tourist gaze; national pride may rather be produced as citizens appreciate the government's efforts of placing their country on the map.

The differences between nation building and nation branding can be summarised with four distinct features, concerning the *agents* involved, the *audience address*, the *temporal direction* privileged and the *media* utilised. See Table 1.

Commented [g1]: orientation

Table 1. Characteristics of nation building and nation branding practices (After Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010)**.**

	Nation building	**Nation branding**
Agents	Politicians, artists, intellectuals (political & cultural logic)	Politicians, marketers, corporate business (economic logic)

Audience address	Domestic (citizens)	Foreign (consumers)
Temporal direction	Looking back (history as resource)	Looking forward (future as resource)
Media	Art, literature, poetry, maps, museums, music, educational media; later: cinema, news media (radio, television)	PR, advertising and marketing media, often embedded in print and broadcast mass media (including native advertising)

Commented [g2]: orientation

The first feature that distinguishes nation branding from historical examples of nation building concerns the agents involved. The process of nation building involved politicians in conjunction with musicians, authors, poets, artists within painting and sculpture, architects, intellectuals, etc. (see e.g. Bohlman, 2004; Adams & Robins, 2000), whereas nation branding is executed by representatives from the commercial market system. The former agents are acting within the frameworks of a political and cultural logic, whereas the latter act on the basis of an economic logic.

Secondly, the branded nation, as a commodity, is not primarily meant for domestic consumption, but constructed to attract the attention of an external, international audience of investors, tourists, and others that are *not* the citizens of the nation state. The consultants that create nation brands are not particularly interested in building social solidarity among citizens, which is the basis for any nation building project (cf. Calhoun 2007), not least because they themselves are often not citizens of the branded commodity ('the nation') (cf. Aronczyk, 2013). Their primary aim is not to produce communities but commodities. If nationalists were obsessed with defining the inner essence of the nation and in addressing its citizens in terms of a collective 'us', contemporary brand consultants have been more concerned with convincing 'you', who are not a citizen of the branded country. It is 'All about U', as one Ukrainian branding campaign formulated their slogan (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). This is not to say that the branded nation could not ever be useful in domestic political projects – just as nationalist imaginaries sometimes also appear in front of external audiences, for example at World Fairs (Bolin, 2006b). However, to understand the dynamics of nation branding, it appears more fruitful to understand how a group of cosmopolitan, elite actors construe the 'nation' for audiences other than its citizens rather than to focus on incidental domestic effects.

Thirdly, if nationalism as the core sentiment and tool for nation building has been passionately preoccupied with history and tradition, nation branding campaigns, especially when directed towards investors and corporate business, are more occupied with *the future*. The future is for nation branding what history is for nationalism, as the future holds opportunities, while the past is often considered an embarrassment that should be concealed. The past is to be explained away, especially in post-Soviet and other post-colonial countries, as a deviation from the straight road to modernity (cf. Aronczyk, 2013: 160ff). The future, on the other hand, is of utmost importance since branding is part of strategic communication orchestrated to achieve a measurable effect (increased tourist flows or corporate investments). Potential historical imaginaries are then subsumed into this future orientation.

A fourth distinction between nation building and branding concerns the different cultural technologies employed. A cultural technology is a means for cultural production, which includes representational forms and genres as well as the material technologies of communication (Bolin, 2012). Cultural technologies thus include, but also extend beyond, 'the media' – both as organisations, technologies and structures of content or representation. The nation is, for example, constructed culturally through various mass media and individual practices such as painting, music composition, as well as various literary forms such as educational materials, poetry, the novel, but also through the production of maps through cartography, and exhibitions within the framework of the museum (Anderson, 1991/2006: 206ff). In later phases of nation building projects the mass media of radio, television and the cinema also helped shape social solidarity and cultural commonality (Löfgren, 1990). The cultural technologies used by the orchestrators of marketing and branding campaigns are also often embedded in print or broadcast mass media. They might include, for instance, the commercial clips that are broadcast on CNN, BBC World, or the ads embedded among features in print media such as *Time, Newsweek*, and similar high-profile outlets (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2015; Kaneva, 2017).

In summary then, nation building and nation branding as practices are very different. They are orchestrated by different agents and address different audiences. They have different temporal directions and for the most part they use different media technologies and genres. Below we will focus on nation branding and especially on how 'the media' as technologies, organisations and representational structures are the arena in which nation branding campaigns intersect with how the nation is imagined.

> **Commented [g3]:** orientations

'Nation branding' and the media

Although critical scholars have been keen to try and understand the ontological nature of the practice of 'nation branding', its conceptualisation has been overlooked, and hence uses of the concept are imprecise. Nation branding is not an analytical concept. As Melissa Aronczyk (2013: 38ff) shows in her historical account of the rise of nation branding as an activity, it is the very commodity produced by the transnational promotional industry that is then sold to governments and corporate business (cf. Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016: 285). To understand why the practical and analytical uses of 'nation branding' have been conflated, resulting in a conceptual void around the concept, we need to contextualise the activity of nation branding as a communicative practice.

Branding as a communicative and signifying practice deals with the production of sign value and difference (Baudrillard, 1972/1981; Bolin, 2011, 2016). Initially, branding as an activity meant marking up one's property (Moor, 2007: 15ff), but from the late 19th century onwards it moved into marketing (Lury, 2004: 17ff). Successively, brands penetrate new areas and start to connote 'different types of values, meanings and reputations' (Moor, 2007: 15) which gets institutionalised into common practices. This is also the phase (around 1990) in which nation branding enters as a practice, in order to attach these values, meanings and reputations to countries, and market these for foreign tourists and investors (Aronczyk, 2013: 43ff). According to Melissa Aronczyk (2013: 68ff), branding campaigns today consist of four 'distinct steps': research/evaluation, training/education, identification of the core brand value, and lastly, implementation/communication. (Curiously enough, Aronczyk skips reception and evaluation which should be the most interesting step for the customer who has commissioned the branding campaign. Cf. Pamment 2014b.)

The executive part in a nation branding project is to implement the campaign by way of communicating its core message to relevant audiences. In order to communicate the brand messages, the branding organisation (or individual), needs to use a medium of communication. By medium we here refer to technologies of communication that extend and go beyond the communication means of the human body (e.g. voice, gestures, etc.). Each medium has its own specificity in terms of capacity for representation (e.g. visual/aural/tactile), mode of communication (one-to-one/one-to-many), context of reception (e.g. mobile/stationary; private/public), and technical and economic/organisational contexts of production (e.g. commercial/public service). In short, which medium one choses for communicating will have consequences for which audiences one reaches, and the conditions under which they make sense of the message.

In a recent review of the role of 'the media' in previous nation branding analysis, Bolin & Ståhlberg (2015) found that, firstly, much of the previous research on nation branding deals with case studies of single countries and their branding efforts, and secondly, that most studies treat the media as neutral platforms for the agency of political and commercial others. Those studies that focus on the media can be divided into three groups: Firstly, those who have focussed on nation branding in relation to specific *media events* (Dayan and Katz, 1992) such as the Olympics (Panagiotopoulou, 2012; Brownell, 2013) or the Eurovision Song Contest (Bolin, 2002, 2006b; Jordan 2014a, 2014b; Miazhevich, 2012). The second approach is represented by those who have focussed on *the agents of nation branding campaigns*, mostly the consultants that work with orchestrating campaigns. These studies rely mostly on interview data with consultants and others involved in the campaigns (Aronczyk, 2013; Graan, 2013; Jordan, 2014a, 2014b), but also on campaign material such as the research/evaluation documents of the first step mentioned above (Valaskivi, 2013, 2016). A third approach consists of those focussing on the textual and representational side of the campaigns, engaging in *textual analysis* of brand books, advertising and PR, video clips and other campaign material (e.g. Bardan & Imre, 2012; Bolin, 2006a; Christensen, 2013; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011). This is, of course, the approach that deals most with 'the media', or at least, with mediated representations. While some studies consist of combinations of these approaches (e.g. Al-Ghazzi & Kraidy, 2013; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016), there is very little critical attention given to the role of the media as organisations with their own agendas, or as technologies with specific affordances when it comes to reception of the communicated messages (but see Kaneva, 2017).

An understanding of the media as organisations needs to acknowledge the political economy of communication (Mosco, 1996; Kaneva, 2017). Any media organisation has an agenda, and, for example, commercial media producers may aggressively push for their business, approaching corporations as well as governments and ministries to offer their services.

An understanding of 'the media' as (also) a set of technologies would analyse branding projects from the vantage point of what the media can, and cannot do. As Benedict Anderson's (1991/2006) did in his famous account of the rise of nationalism, referring to the novel and the newspaper as the main media for the production of nationalism through simultaneity and synchronisation (Anderson, 1991/2006: 24ff), we need to find out what specific media have allowed for a successful business of nation branding to come into being. In addition, like Anderson, we then need to understand how the specific qualities of those media, whether in their narrative functions, generic conventions or production contexts, help to build specific audiences. Those audiences should perhaps not be

conceived traditionally, as the end receivers of a media text, but at the very least as those who (in/directly) commission nation branding projects. Nation branding campaigns, after all, address several kinds of audiences simultaneously including both general audiences, opinion leaders and intermediaries such as journalists. As we are in the early days of nation branding research as a form of media practice, we must first pay attention to the specificities of the media technologies used in addressing these. A brand book, for example, is a medium directed to the commissioning clients of the branding organisation, while a video clip on broadcast international television addresses potential visitors and, perhaps, investors. As nation branding research has mostly focused on specific campaigns as representational sign structures, we hope in this special issue to also address how nation branding as a mediated practice is better understood when using organisational and technological vantage points to understand how the campaign is constructed. While the future research might look into how branding campaigns become meaningful to their intended and intended audiences, this special issue, which we will introduce in the next section, deals more with the 'production' aspect of nation branding. The articles here focus on how nation branding is a form of 'soft power', which both capitalize upon, and also constrained by, the various affordances of media's technological, organizational and representational forms.

Nation branding, the media and the information management by nation states

The papers for this special issue address an under-theorised area of nation branding research by focussing on the way in which the media – as technologies, organisations and representational forms – impact on nation branding activities, or which specific role they play in them. In doing so, the papers build on how nation branding depends on the operation of *soft power* (Nye, 2004) which concerns the control and management of information. Soft power is the 'ability to shape the preferences of others', or, more bluntly, the power of 'getting others to want the outcomes that you want' (Nye, 2008: 95). Political scientist Joseph Nye, who coined the term, relates this power of attraction to the concept of *public diplomacy*, by which he means the activity of a nation state to 'promoting a country's soft power' (ibid.: 94). He sees this as the key explanation for the outcome of the cold war. In the theory of soft power and public diplomacy, then, information management aims at impacting external audiences, aiming to attract them to the world-views of the state that orchestrate communications operations (cf. Surowiec, 2016). This is exactly what nation-branding campaigns aim to do.

One way of attracting positive international attention is to launch campaigns that aim to have foreign audiences in 'awe' of the country in question. For example, Estonia aims at being a technological avant-gardist when it comes to statecraft. The country prides itself on having the first paperless parliament in the world. It has initiated a program for 'e-residency' where the country offers e-citizenship to foreign nationals which is analysed by Piia Tammpuu and Anu Masso (in this issue). The strife for 'soft power value' through engaging in such projects is evident. A similar example is that of the Swedish government – then headed by techno-optimist Prime Minister Carl Bildt – when it launched the first embassy in the virtual environment of Second Life. All activity was abandoned once the goal of getting international press attention was reached (Bengtsson, 2011). Another example would be 'The Swedish Number' campaign, subtly analysed in this issue by James Pamment, where the external audience of foreign citizens can call a random Swede through a specifically dedicated telephone number.

The e-residency of Estonia, the Swedish Number campaign and the setting up of a Swedish embassy in Second Life, illustrate what could be called a 'virtual two-step-flow of communication', where the main goal is to launch seemingly path-breaking *technological* projects in order to get the attention of the traditional mass news media: the press, radio and television. While the campaigns appear to build on ordinary media users' engagements through participatory media, as Pamment points out, they are engaging in a version of public diplomacy. They are forms of soft power used by the respective nation states to interest foreign citizens. Essentially, they adopt branding techniques intended to spark attention – and possibly awe – among elite political and corporate audiences.

Relatedly, as Galina Miazhevich (in this issue) shows, the state-owned Russian broadcaster RT (its English language version) can be analysed at the intersection of nation branding and soft power through their combination of traditional broadcasting and 'participatory digital media' such as Twitter and Youtube. The analysis focuses on the range of strategies employed by RT within a distinct 'counter-hegemonic' remit. Miazhevich also argues that the fluidity of around-the-clock news broadcasting, and the asynchronous character of the social media does not really allow for the 'simultaneity effect' of print media, but rather work as a destabilising factor in the 'post-broadcast multi-platformativity' of international news flows.

Stanislav Budnitskiy and Lianrui Jia interrogate the intersection of nation branding and soft power in their analysis of Russia and China's use of internet policy to 'communicate their status aspiration' to the global arena. Seeking to

brand their respective internet governance policies, these two nation states create their core brand essence around the themes of 'Internet Freedom' and 'Internet Sovereignty', in stark opposition to the US dominated discourses around the Internet as a 'neutral' technology.

The management of information deals with the control over the means to produce what Bourdieu (1991) calls 'symbolic power', that is, the power to win legitimacy for one's own way of representing the world. In that sense, there is a similarity in the communication techniques and practices adopted in nation branding, soft power and public diplomacy. The difference lies chiefly in the aims of the activities, who is the orchestrator, who is the intended audience and the expected outcome. Bourdieu was mainly referring to spoken and written language in his theory of symbolic power. Language is also the focus of Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen (this issue), who analyses the ways in which the Danish language is utilized as a branding item in the marketing of Nordic Noir crime television drama series such as *The Killing*[1] and *The Bridge*.[2] Although the Danish Trade Council and Visit Denmark had high hopes for showcasing Denmark to foreign audiences (in the case of Jacobsen's analysis, Japan), staff from the Danish Embassy in Japan had a less optimistic view of how television drama could benefit branding ambitions.

In the final paper of this special issue, Nadia Kaneva discusses the nature of nation brands as simulacra or 'sign commodities' and uses the case of Kosovo, which did not exist before 2008, and hence 'lacked a canonized and normalized narrative of national history or a well-developed repertoire of national symbols'. This new nation state had to build its own internal world of national insignia, while at the same time promoting its brand image to the external world. Framing her analysis with the political economy of Baudrillard (2001) and promotional culture (Wernick 1991), Kaneva argues for a 'renewed materialist analysis of nation brands as part of a global media economy of commodity-signs', an analysis which needs to carefully take the role of the media – as technologies and organizations, and most importantly – as producers of signs, into account.

Conclusion

---

[1] The first season (of three) of *The Killing* (org. Forbrydelsen) was broadcast in 2007, and produced by Danmarks Radio (DR), Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK) and Sveriges Television (SVT).
[2] The first season (of three) of *The Bridge* (org. Bron/Broen) was broadcast in 2011 and produced by Filmlance International, Nimbus Film Production, Danmarks Radio (DR) and Sveriges Television (SVT) , Film i Väst, Zweites Deutscher Fernsehen (ZDF), Film i Skåne, ZDF Entrerprises and Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK).

In this introduction we have, firstly, explained the relationship between nation branding as a practice, and nation building, based on the fundamental difference that nation building is about the creation of communities, whilst nation branding is about the production of (intangible) commodities. We have, secondly, discussed the role of the media in nation branding research and pointed to the importance of taking the agency of the media as organizations and the affordances of media technologies into account. In our last section, we have discussed the various contributions to this special issue in terms of how they have furthered our understanding of the role of the media in nation branding processes. Above all, the articles problematize the intersection between nation-branding, convergent media and transmedia practices, as well as question the mediation of nation branding within a more conceptual approach of simulacra or circulation of 'sign commodities'.

While there is a need for a more theoretical conceptualization of the relationship between media and nation branding, there are also numerous practice-based avenues for further research in the field. They might include an analysis of how the citizens of the branded nation perceive and respond to the centralized mediated nation branding initiatives, going beyond strategic campaigns into the understudied realm of popular culture and less 'orchestrated' nation-branding. Finally, following a critical cultural-studies approach (Kaneva, 2011), more research into how transnational media flows and the cross-cultural flow of meanings complicate the nation-branding strategies is needed.

Finally, as we have seen from the articles in this issue, the media play different roles across a broad range of nation branding practices which engage with the activities of soft power and public diplomacy. To fully understand this complexity, there is a strong need to incorporate an analysis of the media in their capacity as technologies with specific affordances, *as well* as institutions driven by their own logics and interests. This would be a further step in developing a truly critical cultural analysis of nation branding in an era of a vastly differentiated media landscape.

References

Adams S and Greutzner Robins A (2000) Introduction. In: Adams S and Greutzner Robins A (eds) *Gendering Landscape Art*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1-12.

Al-Ghazzi O and Kraidy MM (2013) Neo-Ottoman Cool 2: Turkish Nation Branding and Arab-Language Transnational Broadcasting. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 2341-2360.

Anderson B (1991/2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd ed.). London: Verso.

Anholt S (2007) *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Aronczyk M (2008) 'Living the Brand': Nationality, Globality and the Identity Strategies of Branding Consultants. International Journal of Communication, 2, 41–65.

Aronczyk M (2013) *Branding the Nation. The Global Business of National Identity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bardan A and Imre A (2012) Vampire branding: Romania's dark destinations. In N. Kaneva (Ed.) *Branding post-communist nations: Marketizing national identities in the "new" Europe*. New York, NY: Routledge, 168–192.

Baudrillard J (1972/1981) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis: Telos.

Baudrillard J (2001) Simulacra and Simulations. In Mark Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 166-184.

Bengtsson S (2011) Virtual nation branding: The Swedish embassy in Second Life. *Virtual Worlds Research*, 4 (1): 1-26.

Bohlman PV (2004) *The Music of European Nationalism. Cultural Identity and Modern History*. Santa Barbara: ABC Clio.

Bolin G (2002) Nationsmarknadsföring. Eurovisionsschlagerfestivalen som modern världsutställning. In Ericson S (Ed.) *Hello Europe! Tallinn Calling! Eurovision Song Contest 2002 som mediehändelse*. Huddinge: Södertörn University, 33-42.

Bolin G (2006a) Electronic geographies: Media landscapes as technological and symbolic environments. In J Falkheimer and A Jansson (Eds.) *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom, 67–86.

Bolin G (2006b) Visions of Europe: Cultural technologies of nation-states. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 189–206.

Bolin G (2010) Media events, Eurovision and societal centers. In N Couldry, A Hepp, and F Krotz (Eds.) *Media events in a global age*. London, UK: Routledge, 124–138.

Bolin G (2011) *Value and the Media. Cultural Production and Consumption in Digital Markets*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Bolin G (2012) Cultural Technologies in Cultures of Technology. In G Bolin (ed.) *Cultural Technologies. The Shaping of Culture in Media and Society*. New York: Routledge, 1-15.

Bolin G (2016) The Construction of a Market for Place Branding and Public Diplomacy – A View From the North. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy,* 12(2): 236-241.

Bolin G and Ståhlberg P (2010) Between community and commodity: Nationalism and nation branding. In A Roosvall and IS Moring (Eds.) *Communicating the nation: National topographies of global media landscapes*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, 79–101.

Bolin G and Ståhlberg P (2015) Mediating the nation state: The role of 'the media' in nation branding campaigns. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 3065–3083. Retrieved from http://www.ijoc.org

Bourdieu P (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power.* Cambridge: Polity.

Brownell S (2013) "Brand China" in the Olympic context: Communications challenges of China's soft power initiative. *Javnost/The Public*, 20(4), 65–82.

Calhoun C (2007) Nationalism and Cultures of Democracy. *Public Culture*, 19(1), 151-173.

Christensen C (2013) @Sweden: Curating a nation on Twitter. *Popular Communication*, 11(1), 30–46.

Couldry N (2000) *The place of media power. Pilgrims and witnesses of the media age.* London & New York: Routledge.

Couldry N (2012) *Media, Society, World. Social Theory and Digital Media Practice.* Cambridge: Polity.

Dayan D and Katz E (1992) *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History.* Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press

Dinnie, K. (2008). *Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice.* Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Eriksen TH (2007) Nationalism and the Internet. *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1): 1-17.

Gellner E (1983): *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Graan A (2013) Counterfeiting the nation? Skopje 2014 and the politics of nation branding in Macedonia. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(1), 161–179.

Harvey D (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hjarvard S (2013) *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London & New York: Routledge.

Jansen SC (2012) Redesigning a nation: Welcome to E-stonia, 2001–2018. In N Kaneva (Ed.), *Branding post-communist nations: Marketizing national identities in the "new" Europe* (pp. 79–98). New York, NY: Routledge.

Jansen SC (2008) Designer Nations: Neo-Liberal Nation Branding – Brand Estonia. *Social Identities*, 14(1): 121-142.

Jordan P (2014a). *The modern fairy tale: Nation branding, national identity and the Eurovision song contest in Estonia*. Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University Press.

Jordan P (2014b) Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism? *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45 (3): 283–303.

Kaneva N (2011) Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research. *International Journal of Communication*, 5: 117-141.

Kaneva N (ed.) (2012a). *Branding Post-Communist Nations. Marketizing National Identities in the 'New' Europe*. New York & London: Routledge.

Kaneva N (2012b) Who Can Play This Game? The Rise of Nation Branding in Bulgaria 2001-2005. In N Kaneva (ed.) *Branding Post-Communist Nations. Marketizing National Identities in the 'New' Europe*. New York & London: Routledge, pp. 99-123.

Kaneva N (2017) The Branded National Imagination and its Limits: Insights from the Post-Socialist Experience. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 39(1): 116-138.

Kaneva N & Popescu D (2011). National Identity Lite: Nation Branding in Post-Communist Bulgaria and Romania. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(2), 191–207.

Kaneva N & Popescu D (2014). "We are Romanian, not Roma": Nation branding and postsocialist discourses of alterity. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 7(4), 506–523.

Kania-Lundholm M (2016) Nation for Sale? Citizen Online Debates and the 'New Patriotism' in Post-Socialist Poland. In Volcic Z and Andrejevic M (eds) *Commercial*

Nationalism: Selling the Nation and Nationalizing the Sell. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 106-130.

Löfgren O (1990) Medierna i nationsbygget. Hur press, radio och TV gjort Sverige svenskt. In: Hannerz U (ed.) *Medier och kulturer*. Stockholm: Carlssons, pp. 85-120.

Lury C (2004) *Brands. The Logos of the Global Economy*. London & New York: Routledge.

Marat E (2009). Nation branding in Central Asia: A new campaign to present ideas about the state and the nation. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(7), 1123–1136.

Merkelssen H and Rasmussen RK (2016) Nation Branding as an Emerging Field: An Institutionalist Perspective. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 12(2): 99-109.

Miazhevich G (2012) Ukrainian Nation Branding Off-line and Online: Verka Serduchka at the Eurovision Song Contest. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64(8): 1505–1523.

Moor L (2007) *The Rise of Brands*. New York: Berg.

Mosco V (1996) *The Political Economy of Communication*. London: Sage.

Nye JS (2004) *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.

Nye JS (2008) Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616: 94-109.

Olins W (2002): 'Branding the Nation: The Historical Context', *Journal of Brand Management*, 9(4-5): 241–248.

Olins W (2003): *On Brands*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Pamment J (2013) *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.

Pamment J (2014a) Review of Melissa Aronczyk, Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity. *International Journal of Communication*, 8: 1803-1806.

Pamment J (2014b) Articulating Influence: Towards a Research Agenda for Interpreting the Evaluation of Soft Power, Public Diplomacy and Nation Brands. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1): 50-59.

Panagiotopoulou R (2012) Nation Branding and the Olympic games: New Media Images for Greece and China. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(16): 2337–2348.

Saunders RA (2017) *Popular geopolitics and nation branding in the post-Soviet realm*. New York: Routledge.

Ståhlberg P and Bolin G (2015) Nationen som vara och gemenskap: Identitet, agens och publik i nationsmarknadsföring [The nation as commodity and community: Identity, agency and audience in nation branding]. *Nordisk Østforum*, 29(3), 289–312.

Ståhlberg P and Bolin G (2016) Having a Soul or Chosing a Face? Nation branding and the Concept of 'Identity'. *Social Identities*, 22(3): 274-290,

Surowiec P (2016) *Nation Branding, Public Relations and Soft Power*. London & New York: Routledge.

Sussman G (2012) Systemic propaganda and state branding in post-Soviet Eastern Europe. In N. Kaneva (Ed.), *Branding post-communist nations: Marketizing national identities in the "new" Europe* (pp. 23–48). New York: Routledge.

Szondi G (2007). The role and challenges of country branding in transition countries: The Central and Eastern European experience. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *3*(1), 8–20.

Taylor C (2002) Modern Social Imaginaries. *Public Culture*, 14(1): 91–124.

Valaskivi K (2013) A Brand New Future? Cool Japan and the Social Imagenary of the Branded Nation. *Japan Forum*, 25(4), 485-504.

Valaskivi K (2016) *Cool Nations. Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*. London: Routledge.

van Ham P (2001) The rise of the brand state: The postmodern politics of image and reputation. *Foreign Affairs*, 8(5), 2–6.

van Ham P (2008) Place branding: The state of the art. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616*(*1): 126-149.

Varga S (2013) The Politics of Nation Branding: Collective Identity and Public Sphere in the Neoliberal State. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39 (8): 825–845.

Volcic Z (2008) Former Yugoslavia on the World Wide Web: Commercialization and the branding of nation-states. *International Communication Gazette*, 70(5), 395–413.

Volcic Z and Andrejevic M (2011) Nation Branding in the Era of Commercial Nationalism. *International Journal of Communication*, 5: 598-618.

Volcic Z and Andrejevic M (eds) (2015) *Commercial Nationalism: Selling the Nation and Nationalizing the Sell*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wernick A (1991) *Promotional Culture. Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*. London: Sage.