NATION BRANDING BY DESIGN

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Abstract:

Nation branding has been the topic of many researches and studies in different disciplines, such as diplomacy, economy, and marketing, during last twenty years. But there are a few studies about this topic from design perspective. This paper will therefore approach the nation branding topic from design point of view.

Design used to be employed in commercial and business context as a problem solver and communicator between producers and users. The domain of design has expanded from a creator of forms and functions, to a strategic decision maker during recent years. But this is not the case in diplomacy context. Recent changes and new approaches in diplomacy, specially public diplomacy has opened it to public much more than before and needs new actors. But designers still are not into it and design is still immature and has not developed enough in this field. This paper tries to figure out a development path of design in business context, and accordingly suggest the future path of design domain in public diplomacy and nation branding. Finally it suggests a thorough involvement of design thinking in whole process of nation branding.

Keywords: Nation branding, Design domain, Design progress path

1. Introduction

Nation branding is a relatively new term of theory and practice which aims to evaluate, re-build and manage the reputation or image of countries. Many countries now dedicate resources to improve their image globally, to gain more favourable conditions in the world, attract more intelligent work forces and investors, or sell more products in the global market. Managing the image of a country is not a new issue in public diplomacy, but the notion of "Nation branding" was coined in 1995 by British expert Simon Anholt for the first time, which suggests using the marketing tools for branding nations and countries. In following years many researchers and scholars, as well as politicians and governors have talked about and investigated different aspects of nation branding. But there are a few, if any researches from design perspective on this issue.

The prominent influence of design thinking and design creativity on the most famous brands and leaders of the biggest multinational corporations in recent decades, made the author of this paper to look for new roles and deeper contribution for designers in the challenging realm of diplomacy. So the

main goal of the paper is to observe the historical path of progress of design domain in business context and predict the next steps in the new context of nation branding.

2. Methodology

To obtain the abovementioned goal of the paper, a four-step methodology is hired as below:

First, Sense intent: we explore the traditional and new ideas of public diplomacy and the new concept of nation branding. Then explain the necessity and importance of nation branding and describe different aspects and dimensions of it. Also have a literature review on this issue to find the gaps in research areas.

Second, Know context: we discuss the historical relationship between art and diplomacy, and the current role of design in nation branding. Then try to clarify the design domain in the nation branding process.

Third, Explore concepts: we have an overview on design and design thinking development path and progression of design domain in the business context. Then we extract a pattern out of this progress.

Fourth, Frame solutions: In this step, referring to the design thinking development pattern, we suggest a new domain of design and design thinking in nation branding, covering all levels and steps of nation branding process.

3. Sense intent: what is nation branding?

3.1. Public diplomacy and Nation branding

Nicholas J. Cull suggests a traditional definition of diplomacy as 'international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with another international actor' (Public diplomacy: lessons from past, 2009) and traditional definition of public diplomacy is: 'an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public'. Cull in his book describes some significant differences between traditional and new public diplomacy. Two of the most important changes are:

- *International actors are increasingly non-traditional and NGOs are especially prominent;*

- *The New Public Diplomacy speaks of a departure from the Top-down messaging and actor-to-people and the arrival of a new emphasis on horizontal messaging and people-to-people contact for mutual enlightenment, with the international actor playing the role of facilitator.*

'In the broadest sense, nation branding simply refers to the application of corporate branding strategies to individual nations with the aim of influencing foreign affairs and international interactions'. (Teslik, Lee Hudson, 2007) Nation branding focuses on developing an appealing, positive image in order to support a nation's presence and influence in the international realm.

3.2. Why to do nation branding?

In the current globalized international atmosphere, every country have to compete with others to attain more and more portion of attention and respect from international potential consumers, investors, tourists, media, and governments of other nations. This provides them with a competitive advantage among other competitors. Now many countries and states are investing on nation branding programs and there are many successful or failed stories of nation branding plans in different countries.

3.3. Nation branding History

The term "nation branding" was first coined by Simon Anholt in the 1990s. He suggests marketing strategies can be applied to states and countries to create and promote a distinct self-image and international reputation. In its 2005 "Year in Ideas" issue, The New York Times Magazine listed nation branding among the year's most notable ideas. (Nadia Kaneva, Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research, 2011)

3.4. Measuring and ranking nation's brand

The concept of measuring global perceptions of countries across several dimensions was developed by Simon Anholt. His original survey, the Anholt Nation Brands Index (NBI) was launched in 2005 and fielded four times a year in 20 strongest countries about 50 selected countries. The NBI index considers 6 dimensions of a country,as shown in figure 1.
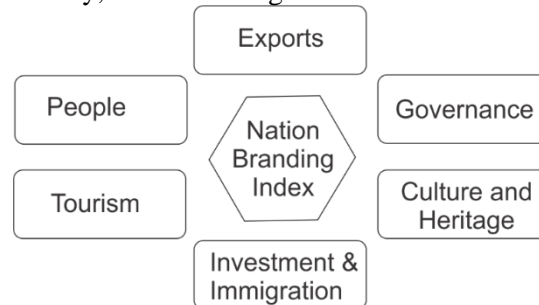

Figure 1. Anholt hexagon model for nation branding (Anholt. 2007)

Later in 2008, East West Communications in Washington, D.C., released a competitive ranking of nation brands. Unlike the NBI index, the East West Global Index 200 looks at all 192 UN members, as well as 8 territories, based on how they are perceived in the international media.
NBI measures consumers' perception, while East West global index measures global media's perception.

3.5. Nation branding process

Wally Olins as one of the pioneers and influential authors in this field, in his book Trading Identities (2000) presents a simplified, but highly accurate seven-step plan for nation branding programs. These steps are including:
Setup working groups, 2) Perception of the nation, 3) Evaluate strength and weaknesses, 4) Central idea creation, 5) Visualization, 6) Message coordination, and 7) Launch liaison system.
This plan has been referred by many other researchers later, and is considered as a universal plan in any nation branding program.

3.6. Different approaches to nation branding research

One of the most comprehensive literature review papers on this object (Kaneva, 2011) shows that 57% of the produced literature about nation branding is from technical-economic perspective, these include marketing, management, and tourism studies.
The paper shows that about 35% of sources are published in different fields of diplomacy, including public relations, international communications, and public diplomacy.
Finally there are only 18% of the literature from cultural point of view, which most of them situate themselves in the field of media and cultural studies.
My limited literature review and studying several other literature reviews from different sources of nation branding does not show any design or design thinking approach to this issue.

4. Know Context: Design in diplomacy and nation branding

4.1. Art and diplomacy

The relation between art and diplomacy is not a new relationship. Its history is as long as history of diplomacy itself. Art has been a tool for governments to show off their power, or make a good reputation for them. 2500 years ago, Persian empires have the artists to engrave their victorious battles on the stone, so that we can read the history after such a long time from these relieves. Artists had similar mission during medieval times or later to serve as a recorder of history by painting historical events such as battles, iconic meetings, or royal family portraits. Architecture as one of the earliest forms of design has always used as a powerful tool for governments to compete with other nations in

form of cathedrals or mosques. Even now architecture has still kept its prominent role in this competition in form of the tallest skyscrapers and towers, huge stadiums, eye catching Expo monuments, or embassy buildings.

In 20st century several design disciplines was employed in diplomatic relations. Many governments use graphic design to influence people and their attitude toward a particular idea or situation. It has widely used in cold war era propaganda programs to transfer the messages of both sides to their own or the other side's public. Newer forms of art and design such as movie and video advertisement has been employed later as a strategic tool in public diplomacy.

4.2. Design and propaganda

In propaganda programs, designer or artist was just visualizer of the concepts and ideas prepared by political leaders. The value of design was the effectiveness of the visual message which was created to influence public.
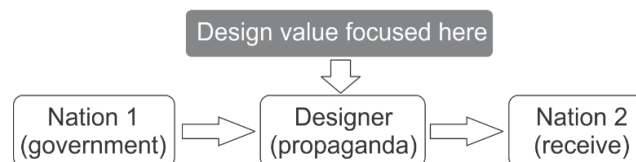

Figure 2. Design value in propaganda

Later as the media and communication channels developed, the media and carrier of the message changed, but the role of artists and designers didn't change a lot. Radio and television, international events, and internet as the latest channel, are the most effective channels for propaganda, and designers are the visualizer of the pre-defined messages through different media and channels.

There are also many designed products or design trends which can reflect a national identity or national characteristics of a nation, such as Scandinavian furniture design or Italian car design and so on. But we cannot consider them as a nation branding approach or pre-planned program for branding a nation.

4.3. Design and new public diplomacy

New public diplomacy emerged with new characteristics, which is mentioned in this paper before. The top-down messaging replaced with horizontal messaging, and monologue communication changed to dialogue. Nation branding as a strategic approach to international relationship is accepted and practiced in many countries. But design still has its traditional domain of visualizing the message. In fact it is not considered or recognized to be able to widen the domain to other areas of nation branding process. Simon Anholt – as the most influential author on the subject- don't believe that design "has anything to do with a nation's image." In an e-mail interview he clearly mention the role of designer as "packaging or communications or logos or advertising campaigns…" (Korea Herald, 2011)

But there are some cases to show better understanding of design potential capabilities. House of Sweden shows a much deeper involvement of design in government-public communication. Design not only create and form the message, but also deliver it to the audience through a designed atmosphere.
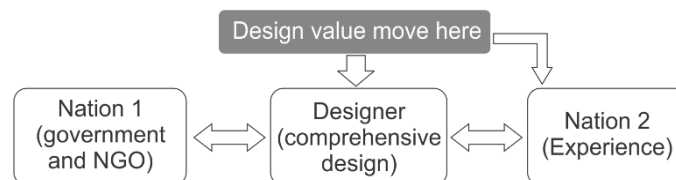

Figure 3. Design value in New Public Diplomacy

Referring to Olins' seven-step program for nation branding, we can consider the traditional role of design focuses on the fifth step, visualization, and the new approach of design is going toward next steps such as establishing liaison system and direct contact with audiences. It shows that design is already developing its domain in the nation branding process. But despite of design domain in business context which is already mature and widely accepted in whole process, it is immature and not

developed in nation branding. To explore the next possible progress path, we should take a look on this path in business context.

5. Explore concepts: Design development path

In this step, we mention 3 different point of views from 3 influential authors on this issue, then put these three patterns into a framework to compare them and clarify the common pattern among them.

5.1. Four order of design

Professor Richard Buchanan in his paper *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking* (1992) identified four orders for design which has been discussed by many other experts later, and explained by him again and again in different lectures and interviews.

'The first order of design is communication with symbols and images. The second order of design is design of artefacts as in engineering, architecture, and mass production.' In these two orders designer is just responsible to deliver a tangible 2D/3D artefact. The third order is designing interactions, including human-computer interactions and later any kind of machine-man human-human interaction. And finally the forth order of design is identified as 'the design of the environments and systems within which all the other orders of design exist'.

5.2. Widened Design domain

From another point of view, Tony Golsby-Smith in his paper *fourth Order Design: A Practical Perspective* (1996) implied the case for an expanded vision of design's ability to configure our worlds. He explores the four places mentioned in four order of design with regard to widening domain for design. The widening *domain* is a 'widening of the influence of design outwards into the surrounding medium-the life of organizations in the modem world, or of governments and communities'.

He argued that designers can do more than solve given problems of form and organization; designers can discover new problems and possibilities. Designers can do this because they combine within a single practice the skills of analysis, reflection and action. The model offered by Golsby-Smith mostly describes the role of a designer within a team. How the designer involves client's or customer's concerns, and how design expands its role in whole process.
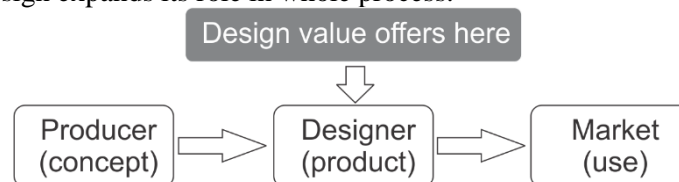
Figure 4. traditional design domain (revised illustration from Golsby-Smith)

Later, innovative problem solving skill recognized as a useful tool to solve other problems out of industrial artefacts, and skilful problem solvers involved other areas of business such as ideation for services or channels, which has direct connection with customers. Design thinking movements broadened the path further into the strategic decision making of the organization. Now the designer participates in whole categories of a business innovation and success.
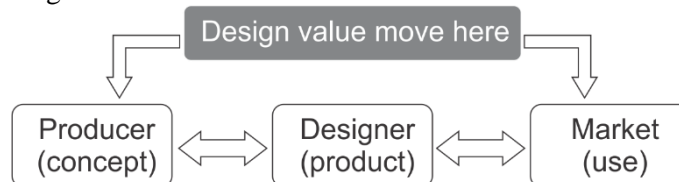
Figure 5. widened design domain (revised illustration from Golsby-Smith)

5.3. Experience economy, experience design

Pine and Gilmore in the paper published in Harvard Business Review in 1998, noted that we are entering a new economic period. They believe the economic values has changed from commodities to

goods, then to services, and now the emerging battleground of competition lies on experiences. So the design also can find its future in experience design.

Stefano Marzano (2003) define Experience design (XD) as 'the practice of designing products, processes, services, events, and environments with a focus placed on the quality of the user experience and culturally relevant solutions'.

Experience design focus on the quality of moments of engagement between people and brands, or touch points, and emotions, images, and memories that these moments can create.

Experience design nowadays – maybe more than any other field - is widely used as a marketing tool. Some surveys revealed that experience marketing can be used successfully to create memories, change the mind of dissatisfied customers, and stimulate positive word of mouth. Creating durable memories and changing images are very strategic tools for any organization, and also has the most important role in the new domain of design thinking which will be suggested in this paper later.

5.4. Design overall paths

Larry Keeley, Helen Walters, Ryan Pikkel, and Brian Quinn in the book "Ten types of innovation" propose a framework including ten blocks to describe different sections of a business which can be focused to make breakthrough innovations.

Figure 6. Ten types framework (revised from Larry Keeley, Ten types of innovation, 2013)

This framework extracted 10 places in an organization which has been stressed and focused by successful companies to make innovation. Some of these areas which take place in offering category of the model, are traditionally considered as the domain of design. But new widened domain of design as described by Buchanan, Golsby and some others, expands the domain to other categories too. We can consider the traditional design domain started in offering category (e.g. designing form and function of products), then moved forward to experience category (e.g. services, branding, channels), and later to configuration category (e.g. process, structure, profit model).

So we can shorten all the mentioned viewpoints as below:

Table 1. design overall path from different viewpoints

From	To	To
2D-3D product	service	thought
tangible	intangible	
form/function creating	decision making	
product	service	experience
one discipline	multi-discipline	
offering	customer experience	Organizational configuration

6. Frame Solutions: future comprehensive contribution of design in nation branding

Based on the Ten-type-frame work, we can consider 3 main domains in the whole process of nation branding, and put the seven steps of Olins' program under these domains.

Table 2. Categorizing the nation branding steps

configuration				offering		experience
Set work groups	Perception of the country	SWOT	Central ideation	Visualization	Coordination the message	Set liaison system (deliver, experience, feedback…)

Considering the historical role of art in diplomacy, and design in nation branding, we can see the traditional role of design is mainly focus on the offering category. Some traditional design disciplines such as product design and graphic design play the most significant role in this category. Designing products to improve the exported-products dimension of nation branding, and designing graphics in different media to transfer a clear message to the target audience, are the most proved abilities of designers. This role can be developed to the experience category, especially if we look at the liaison system in details, and split it to more detailed steps such as delivering or experiencing the message. Newer design disciplines such as service design and experience design are prominent here. Some samples of nation branding practices such as world Expos, or the case of house of Sweden can be mentioned under this category.

Design thinking has a variety of tools and methods, suggested and elaborated by pioneers of design thinking and design education. IDEO design methods and Vijay Kumar's *101 design methods* are some of the best references. Referring to Wally Olins 7-step plan for nation branding each step can be accomplished perfectly with several relevant design methods. Different user study methods should be employed to acquire the nation's perception (inside and outside of the country), several evaluation methods are usable to discuss the strength and weaknesses of the nation's brand, idea creation methods bring the team up with new and innovative core ideas, all different design disciplines integrated under the umbrella of experience design can effectively visualize, transfer, and engrave the message on audiences' mind, and finally an efficient liaison system would be established to get feedback continuously from the target public and adjust the message again and again.
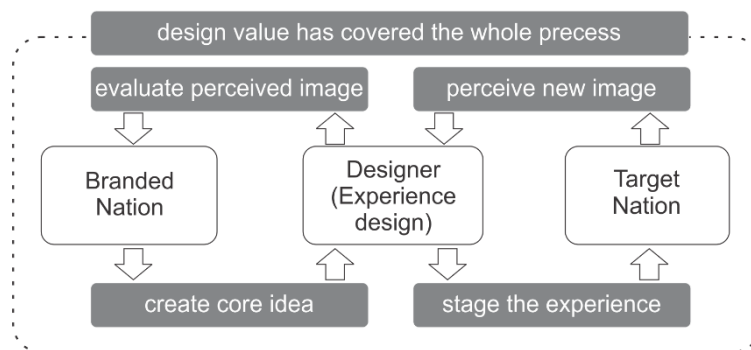

Figure 7. Comprehensive contribution of design in nation branding

So the future path of design in diplomacy is showing a comprehensive contribution of design in public diplomacy and nation branding. New public diplomacy needs new actors on the stage to perform a new role of horizontal communication between nations. Designers and design thinking methods will have an important role. These well-trained designers for this purpose can be distinguished as Diplo-Designers to offer their services to governments and policy makers, team up with a group of other stakeholders to form a multi-disciplinary working group, and finally take part in global nation-to-nation communication.

7. Conclusion

Design can be a strong diplomatic tool in strategic level, and a new generation of designers can be distinguished as diplo-designers to serve in diplomatic relations. Design thinking is a well-recognized way of thinking in management and business domain now. It can be introduced to diplomacy domain as well. Designing for nation branding needs several skills which are out of the traditional abilities of designers. But they can be trained and prepared to play a strategic role in diplomatic relations, especially in public diplomacy. They would be the main actors of horizontal messaging or people-to-people relations of public diplomacy.

Design thinking has the capacity to set new Nation-to-nation connections. While public diplomacy has changed from top-down or government-to-people to the new horizontal messaging and people-to-people connections, designing a nation branding methodology or a flexible platform can make it easy for any segment of the public to establish connections to other nation's public, without any conflict with the nation's core image or brand.

Design thinking is capable to take part in delivering new ideas in whole nation branding process, not just creating the message. Nation branding is a process, and is a long process. Traditionally design is involving after that the message is suggested, to be visualized, and its mission is finished before delivering the message to the audience. But design thinking methods can fulfil the whole process from beginning to the end. Designers not only – along with other stakeholders- can suggest the axis of the core message, but also can coordinate the team and get the outmost of the team ability by using different team work methods. On the other hand new methods and ideas can be employed to deliver the message to the international public, beside the conventional media. So the whole process can be affected positively or even coordinated by design.

Different design disciplines including traditional ones such as graphic design or product design and newer ones such as service design and experience design can accomplish a variety of missions needed in nation branding programs. Different dimensions of nation branding can employ several disciplines. For example, Product design is prominent in export-product brands, experience design in tourism brand, and graphic design in cultural heritage brand, and so on.

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