

The mediatized nation

Identity, agency and audience in nation branding campaigns

A nação mediatizada

Identidade, agência e audiência em campanhas de *nation branding*

La nación mediatizada

Identidad, agencia y audiencia en las campañas de *nation branding*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18861/ic.2019.14.2.2926>

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Fecha de recepción: 8 de septiembre de 2019

Fecha de aceptación: 5 de noviembre de 2019

ABSTRACT

Nation branding is a dynamic and rapidly developing practice and a subprocess under the wider process of mediatization for promoting or readjusting images of a

nation-state for tourists or investors. Especially young nation states have a felt need to build new images of themselves in the eyes of the surrounding world, but since these nation states also have a short history of sovereignty, they simultaneously need to build the social solidarity and community inwards, to form the basis needed for the building of a nation. This article takes its departure in this tension and addresses three themes –agency, audience and identity– that we consider needs further theorizing due to the fact that the practice is yet trying to find its form. These themes are discussed in relation to the branding efforts in the new Eastern European state of Ukraine over the past decade. It is concluded that the nation branding campaigns are today orchestrated also by domestic PR agencies (to the contrary of the previous dominance of British agencies), that the domestic audience is taken into consideration in other ways than in previous branding campaigns, and that the questions of identity construction is more complex than what is previously accounted for. The Ukrainian case thus illustrates the mediatization of national symbols in contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: *nation branding, mediatization, identity, audience, agency.*

RESUME

Nation branding é uma prática dinâmica de rápido desenvolvimento, é um subprocesso do processo de mediação mais amplo, utilizada para promover ou reajustar imagens de um estado-nação para turistas ou investidores. Especialmente os estados-nação jovens, sentem a necessidade de criar novas imagens de si mesmos aos olhos do mundo, mas, como esses estados-nação também têm uma história de soberania ainda breve, precisam simultaneamente, construir a solidariedade social e a comunidade interna, para formar a base necessária para a construção de uma nação. Este artigo parte dessa tensão e aborda três temas – agência, audiência e identidade – que consideramos necessitar de mais teorização devido ao fato de a prática ainda estar tentando encontrar sua forma. Esses temas são discutidos em relação aos esforços de criação de marca do novo estado da Ucrânia, no leste europeu, na última década. Conclui-se que as campanhas de *nation branding*, hoje, são orquestradas também por agências de relações públicas internas (ao contrário do domínio anterior das agências britânicas) que levam em consideração o público interno de outras maneiras, diferentes das campanhas de *branding* anteriores, e que trazem questões de construção de identidade mais complexas do que as que foram utilizadas anteriormente. O caso ucraniano ilustra, assim, a mediação de símbolos nacionais na sociedade contemporânea.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *nation branding*, mediação, identidade, audiência, agência.

RESUMEN

Nation branding es una práctica dinámica que se desenvuelve de manera rápida, es un subproceso de un proceso de mediatización más amplio, utilizada para promover o reajustar imágenes de un Estado-Nación para turistas o inversores. Especialmente, los Estados-Naciones jóvenes, sienten la necesidad de crear nuevas imágenes de sí mismos a los ojos del mundo, pero, como esos Estados-Nación también tienen una historia de soberanía aún breve, precisan simultáneamente, construir una solidaridad social y una comunidad interna a fin de formar una base necesaria para la construcción de una Nación. Este artículo parte de esa tensión y aborda tres temas: agencia, audiencia e identidad, que consideramos es necesario de una mayor teorización debido a que la práctica está intentando aún encontrar su forma. Estos temas son discutidos en relación a los esfuerzos de creación de marca del nuevo Estado de Ucrania, en Europa oriental, en la última década. Se concluye que hoy las campañas de *Nation branding*, son orquestradas también por agencias de relaciones públicas internas (a lo contrario del dominio anterior de las agencias británicas) que tienen en consideración el público interno de otras maneras, diferentes de las campañas de *branding* anterior, y que traen cuestiones de construcción de identidad mucho más complejas de las que fueron utilizadas anteriormente. El caso ucraniano ilustra, así, la mediatización de símbolos nacionales en la sociedad contemporánea.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *nation branding*, mediatización, identidad, audiencia, agencia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nation branding, the practice of governments in conjunction with PR consultants and corporate business to launch campaigns promoting a certain image of a nation-state, is a rapidly developing area of study. Given the short history of the phenomenon, only dating back to the late 20th century, the amount of scholarly output has increased exponentially, in due pace with the spread of the branding campaigns themselves. Arguably, many writers on the subject are in fact also heavily involved in the practice of nation branding but a body of critical academic research is also growing (Aronczyk, 2013; Bolin, 2002; Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010; Graan, 2013; Jansen, 2008; Kaneva, 2011; Valaskivi, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011)¹.

This new scholarship is definitely expanding our empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding of the practice of adopting branding techniques for constructing nations and filling these with content. But this scholarly work is done almost simultaneously as the professional field is developing and refining its own techniques. It is therefore not strange that that early efforts of analyzing nation branding practices have several undertheorized parts. In this article we will deal with what we regard as weak points and unresolved problems in academic writings of nation branding. Empirically, we are dissatisfied with how previous research have attempted to answer three basic questions: 1) What kind of identity is produced by nation branding? 2) For whom, and why, are nations being branded? 3) How should we regard the influence of various agents involved in this practice? Thus, our critique will revolve around three concepts that we find poorly elaborated in several key works: identity, audience and agency.

Several of the flaws we identify have their origin in the conflation of nation building and nation branding, a problem that we have dealt with more extensively elsewhere (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010). This conflation is mainly due to a misrecognition of the process of *mediatization* in the management of national symbols (cf. Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2014). Nation building (or nationalism) and nation branding are both historically specific ways of constructing the nation. However, they rely on very different logics: The nationalist logic elevates national symbols in order to construct a cultural community for domestic political consumption. Due to the mediatization process, and the increased media logic underlying it, 'the nation' in nation branding projects becomes a sign commodity to be consumed on a global market. Thus, nationalism is primary a phenomenon of political logic, while nation branding is a highly mediatized phenomenon that works within the logics of the media and consumer society (although with clear political significance). However, as we

¹ An early version of this article was published in Swedish as "Nationen som vara och gemenskap: identitet, agens och publiki nationens marknadsföring", *Nordisk Östforum*, 29(3), 289-312. The empiric example from *Kyiv post*, and our case study of the PR agency CFC has also been used in our analysis of the specific role of the media in nation branding campaigns in Bolin and Ståhlberg (2015), where it is accordingly analytically framed very differently.

shall see from our empiric example below, in the contemporary 'mediatized world' (Krotz & Hepp, 2014) these two logics exist simultaneously. Particularly new states, not least in Eastern Europe, are at the same time struggling with constructing their nation as a political community and at the same time shaping it as a global commodity. If scholars in these cases are confused about issues of identity, audience and agency, this should not be surprising, since the field of nation branding research itself is confusing.

In this article we will first elaborate around these three concepts, trying to clarify where we see problems in previous research. From this background we will proceed to present the problems of constructing a national image for one new East European nation-state: Ukraine. We will present this particular case from the perspective of one nation branding agency involved in branding Ukraine over an extended period, up until the dramatic and tumultuous political events, known as the Euromaidan Revolution, in the winter of 2013 and 2014.

2. IDENTITY

A prominent theme in the literature on nation branding has been on the construction and promotion of *national identity* within particular nation branding initiatives. This is, for example, the focus of several of the chapters in Kaneva (2012), but the identity theme also appears in Jansen (2008), Aronczyk (2008), Kaneva & Popescu (2011) and Varga (2013). Nadia Kaneva and Delia Popescu, for example, analyzed branding campaigns in post-communist Romania and Bulgaria, where they conclude that national identities are appropriated "for the purpose of neo-liberal globalization" (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 191). Taking their point of departure in theories of the construction of national identities (Anderson, 1991), they seek to analyze "the ontological aspiration beyond the profit motive", that is, "the politics of identity construction" (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, pp. 195-198). In a similar way, Jansen (2008), argues that nation branding produces national identity in an "undemocratic" way, since nation branding privileges those parts of national identity that has market value. Thus, nation branding is often described as a way to "offload the process of national identity-building onto the private sector" (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 600), or a way of transferring "the power to articulate national identity into the hands of marketing and branding *experts*" (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 203). We do indeed sympathize with the critical intentions in this literature, and the neoliberal context in which most nation branding campaigns operate should of course be highlighted. The problem we have with this scholarly perspective is that it is too closely related to the discourse of the branding business itself. As a matter of fact, branding consultants do often claim that they are building national identities, and the conflation of collective

identity with brand identity is typical in the rhetoric of business authorities like Olins (2003) and Anholt (2007).

However, national identity is but a resource that branding consultants may use and turn into the representation of their choice as a “brand identity” – a kind of mediatization of identity, if you will. But, since the ambitions to actually form national belonging is rather weak, this is a rhetorical move in order to produce *images of* national communities. The primary aim on part the consultants is not to change, influence, develop or construct collective identity, but to create a commercial artifact. Admittedly, branding can have effects on national identities, especially by altering “the cultural contexts in which national identity is articulated and understood”, as Melissa Aronczyk (2013, p. 64) rightly argues, but these consequences are rather bi-products and rarely intended outcomes of particular campaigns.

We have elsewhere argued that “national identity” from a perspective of cultural or political nation building is something very different from the ‘identity’ that occupies nation branding efforts (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). The problem with much of the existing literature on nation branding is that it is trapped by the object of the phenomenon of “the nation”. And the nation usually has something to do with identity in a very strong sense of the word: a nation is something to *identify with* – to the extent that people might even be ready to die for it (Anderson, 1991). But this is a view from a traditional nation building perspective in which the nation is the essence of a political project.

When nation branding consultants are creating what they call “brand identities” (that, indeed, very few would be prepared to die for), they actually conflate two meanings of the word identity. The first concern product differentiation: the branded product should be distinguishable from other similar products. This is the work of creating an *identity of* the brand. Second, the consumer should ideally build up some kind of relation with the product. The brand should evoke associations and feelings that make the consumer *identify with* the brand (Lury, 2004)

Within the promotional industry, these two ideas are often blurred because “brand identity” is not an analytical concept; it is itself a commodity, produced and exchanged in a business-to-business transaction. Branding consultants have every reason to keep their idea of “brand identity” as open and flexible as possible. This is what they make their living out of.

Analytically, however, the two meanings of the word *identity* are indeed often contrasting. The *identity of* a product – an object, a person, an event or a nation – is a matter of emphasizing *difference*: the product in question should not be confused with any other product, it should have its own unique and *distinguished* qualities. To *identify with* a product, on the other hand, means working with *similarities*; the product should belong together with other things. In the first sense identity is (should be) stable, unitary and coherent. In the second sense identity is something fluid, flexible and always contestable.

To make things clear: A lawyer would most likely feel familiar with the first meaning of identity (because legal identities are rarely ambiguous), a therapist would probably be comfortable with the second meaning which is more social and relational. Imagine a situation when these two professionals discuss a problem about a particular person's identity. Some confusion might occur. But then, the branding consultant could possibly act as a mediator because he or she moves freely between these two contrasting perspectives in their daily work.

However, for scholars of nation branding it should be obvious to make a distinction between efforts of constructing an identity of a commodity or nation and attempts to make people identify with that object or nation. It is not necessarily the same thing.

Let us follow up on this distinction a bit further, by discussing the audiences for nation building and nation branding processes respectively.

3. AUDIENCE

When branding a nation, it is essential that the audience (tourists, investors, international policy makers) is able to recognize and understand the identity of this product, but not to *identify with* that nation – other than in the same limited way as someone may identify with a soft drink brand. Branding Brazil might thus involve strategies to make Swedish tourists feel attracted or attached to Brazil, even wanting to spend time there beyond the usual fortnight long tourist stay. But it would hardly include efforts to make them Brazilians. Importantly, this is not a matter of minor degrees between how much identification with a political entity a nation builder and a nation brander want to create. It would be essential for the nationalist to make Brazilians – incomplete attachment would be a failed project.

A complication when a branding consultant gets involved with nations is that they, apart from their crucial foreign audience, get a second audience interfering with their work in a way that would not be the case when branding a drink or a chocolate bar. This second audience consists of people who actually *do* identify with the nation in the manifest sense of the word, and who might very well have strong opinions on the branding campaigns and how their national identities are portrayed. A chocolate bar does not have that kind of agency and cannot protest on how it is represented. One explanation for why domestic opinions in nation branding campaigns previously have been underestimated could be the fact that most campaigns are orchestrated by foreign (often British) PR agencies, rather than by domestic branders, who would perhaps be more sensitive to how representations could backfire in domestic opinion. However, a main reason is also that in an age of mediatization, information flows may not easily be controlled.

This brings us to the domestic-foreign dimensions of nation branding

audiences, which we argue have been insufficiently theorized in the debate. Several researchers have emphasized the domestic dimensions of nation branding. Often with an assumption that the intentions of particular campaigns are “actually” a domestic audience and that state authorities are merely using these as techniques of controlling or reshaping their own populations. As we have noted, some researchers primarily regard nation branding as a tool of building national identity in a neoliberal age. Thus, Varga (2013) argues for the “inner-directed” dimensions of nation branding with Foucauldian terminology of “governmentality”, Aronczyk writes about “living the brand” and Volcic & Andrejevich about “commercial nationalism”.

We do agree that nation branding have consequences within the branded country. In fact, this is our main concern. We also believe that state governments might have intentions of shaping their population in a desired direction and to strengthen a collective national sense of community –besides the prime aim of reaching an international audience (Jordan, 2013). But we do object to the idea that this link between a specific campaign and the intended domestic consequences is very straight-forward. We are also very skeptic to the ability of governments to masterfully orchestrate a nation branding project in such a clever way that it can serve internal ambitions of population control or nation building. Rather than “living the brand”, the domestic audience might instead “dispute the brand”. Arguing from a case of branding Macedonia, Graan (2013) claims that “the formulation of nations as brands can open up a new space for politics when the nation-brand images emerge as sites of popular contestation” (2013, p. 165).

4. AGENCY

In our experience branding campaigns are not necessarily coordinated and directed based on very coherent ideas and strategies. The tendency for various governmental, corporate and individual actors to operate quite unsynchronized is, in fact, an essential feature of nation branding efforts. And, as we have argued at length elsewhere (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2015), the media organizations involved are most often very active in these campaigns, pursuing agendas of their own. Many features of campaigns are rather haphazard and the consequences unintended. This is not least so because the different agents involved have different agendas. As in all large-scale and complex communication projects –be it branding campaigns on an international level, or a media event of international proportions– the objectives will differ dramatically between those involved depending on their role in the production and their power to influence it.

It could be argued that this incoherence in organization was already present in the nation building projects of the 19th century, although the actual agents

differed. The process of nation building involved musicians, artists, intellectuals, etc. (Bohlman, 2004; Adams & Robins, 2000), utilizing media such as poetry, literature, art (sculpture, landscape painting, etc.), music (e.g. national anthems). Nation branding is executed by agents from the market system, typically using a broad range of mass- as well as personal media. And as the mediatization process means that there become ever more media platforms and media organizations involved in nation branding, this leads to further increased complexity (Bolin & Hepp, 2017).

With the fact in mind that nation branders are often consultants in the promotion business, working on behalf of a customer which in most cases is a government ministry (although often via a specific “independent” institute or foundation that has been primarily launched for this purpose), one might question if the audience in mind actually is either a foreign or domestic public. After all, in the first instance the branding consultants have to produce something that would convince those who pays the bill. This is of course not much different from other promotion work; no advertisement bureau sells ads to consumers. They sell to those that produce the product, and that wants to convince consumers to buy from them rather than from their competitors. The difference is rather that the success of a nation branding project is rather difficult to measure. The consultant sells one big idea and if it works or not is a later problem. This might sound as an academic problem, but, as we shall see, it is a necessary insight in order to understand several peculiarities in campaigns that we have observed.

To complicate things even further, one dimension we also have to take into consideration is that the practice of nation branding is a rather new phenomenon. Often governments have to be convinced by entrepreneurs in the promotion business that something needs to be done with the nations image and reputation. It is not always obvious who is really the initiator or promoter of a nation branding project – a government, a corporate initiative, a media company such as BBC World or CNN, or even a couple of entrepreneurial individuals. We wish in the following to further discuss this mediatization of the nation, and the ways in which the *mediatized* nation branding processes relate to the *mediation* of national symbols that have been part of the building of cultural and national identities. We will account for this historical shift in nation branding campaigns by looking in more detail on the branding efforts of Ukraine.

5. A COUNTRY WITHOUT A FACE

In May 2013, *Kyiv Weekly*, an English language business magazine addressed to an international readership, published a special issue on the status of Ukraine as a country seen from the outside. The issue was headlined: “Ukraine:

Choosing a face” and was illustrated by a cover photo of a man holding his faceless head in his hands (Figure 1). The article and the illustration were obviously aimed to characterize Ukraine and other post-communist countries as faceless in the eyes of the surrounding world and is supposedly illustrative of the initial despair of lagging behind, and the longing for recognition felt among stakeholders with international ambitions in the countries in question (a despair not necessarily shared by the general citizens of the country).

Figure 1. Cover of *Kyiv Weekly*.



Source: *Kyiv Weekly*, no. 18, May (2013).

Although the illustration shows a faceless person (in a men's costume, indicating the gender addressed), the reader is not invited to ask for his past, nor his present but for his future. It is not asking “what is Ukraine?,” but “what will it choose to become?”. The past is, as we discussed in our previous analyses (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010), a burden rather than an asset for post-Soviet countries. It is something to repress, something forced upon the country by historical circumstance. This context Ukraine shares with other post-Soviet countries, as well as with other post-colonial states of recent dates, and it means that the cultural assets has to be very old, from pre-colonial times, or very new and “uncontaminated” by the colonial masters, which also means that people that were active under colonial times are symbolically annihilated in the campaign material (Bolin, 2006b, p. 82).

Post-Soviet countries share the feature of having very short experience of national sovereignty. Their territories are often determined by occupiers, and their boundaries accordingly straight as if drawn on a map rather than being the result of organic cultural development. In the words of Geertz (1973), they are “bundles of competing traditions gathered accidentally into concocted political frameworks rather than organically evolving civilizations” (Geertz, 1973, p. 244; Wolczuk, 2000, p. 671). This means that the cultural past has to be constructed in inventive ways. And although all nation states have to “invent

tradition”, as Hobsbawm & Granger (1983) have shown, it is a question of how inventive one has to be, and what dominant apprehensions are already there. A country such as Sweden has a long history of sovereignty and can thus point to a historical past that is arguably “Swedish” in terms of those things have occurred within the “power-geometry” (Massey, 1984) that the territorial borders of Sweden represent. It has produced sports heroes that under the Swedish flag have set their mark in international competitions (Ingemar Johansson, Björn Borg), it has launched internationally successful consumer brands (Volvo, IKEA), famous artists (Greta Garbo, Birgit Nilsson, Ingmar Bergman), and prestigious prizes (the Nobel Prize).

Ukraine does not share this historical trajectory as a country but can look back on events and happenings that have not occurred by the hands of citizens of Ukraine. Much of the country’s 20th century history was forcefully formed by Soviet rule, and before that the country had a mixed history under the rule of other empires (Russian, Habsburg). Despite an attempt at independence after WWI, final independence first arrived with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is therefore not surprising that there is a wish to dissociate oneself from the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, to name one example often connected to Ukraine. Although this disaster of global proportions technically occurred in Soviet times, the new nation-state of Ukraine has inherited its memory with the ruins of the city, undeniably today within its borders.

Thus, having a short history of independence, means that there is a felt need for nation building. In order to foster the social solidarity needed to for a minimal basis for national politics, one has to center on some basic common features (Calhoun, 2007). And as we have noted in our previous analysis, nation building means homogenization inwards, domestically, towards the own citizenry, whereas nation branding directs its efforts outwards, to an international audience of investors and tourists.

To orchestrate such a dual campaign is tricky, since it is not only means talking to different audiences, with different pre-conceptualizations of what a nation (in this case Ukraine) is and has been, but simultaneously make promises of what it is to become. And if artists and intellectuals can be utilized for the former, they are much harder to engage in the latter, since the commercial logic of the market that is activated in nation branding campaigns stand in stark opposition to the cultural values that these groups of artists and intellectuals embrace, according to the principle of culture as “the economic world reversed” (Bourdieu, 1993). Previous nation branding campaigns have largely downplayed the domestic aspect of the campaigns, often with the result that the campaigns have backfired due to heavy criticism and a strong negative domestic opinion (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 194; Jordan, 2013). It is our conclusion, however, that the field of nation branding have become aware of the mistakes made in previous campaigns and are trying to overcome them. In the

next section we will describe in more detail this change in strategy by looking more carefully at our Ukrainian example.

6. PUTTING UKRAINE ON THE MAP

Inside the issue of *Kyiv Weekly* mentioned in the above section can be read articles on Ukraine as “A brandless country”. There is a stark ambivalence in the issue and throughout most articles a dual problem is discussed, often in a rather blurred manner. On the one hand Ukraine is said to be in need of a “commonly accepted visual imagery with which the members of [the Ukrainian] society feel a genetic affinity that elicits an emotional reaction in their souls [and] proves that a nation is replete with its own distinctive culture” (p. 3). On the other hand, it is the international image that needs to be worked on. “The average European”, one writer claims, ‘cannot imagine a Ukrainian because they have not seen one. Or, if they have any idea, it is about a “nation of bandits, prostitutes and migrant workers” (p. 2).

Our informants among branding consultants and political administrators, as well as commentators in the press, seems to agree that Ukraine needs “a success story”, a specific material base through which it will be possible to build a campaign. In combination with “effective branding”, that is, “when national symbols become understood by outsiders as well”, this will supposedly “attract tourists, but also raises the self-esteem of the nation and unites a country” (p. 3). The issue of *Kyiv Weekly* in fact captures the potential tensions that we argue are indicative of postcolonial efforts of dealing with “the nation”: a wish to consolidate a national community coincide with a belief that the nation also needs to be attractive to an international audience. Thus, these states have to combine the mediatized logics of nation branding with those of nation building. This is not always easy.

Previous branding projects, for example Brand Estonia, has shown that a neglect of the domestic reception of the branding campaigns can indeed backfire, as the messages of the campaigns will most certainly “spill over” into the domestic domain no matter how much they are directed outwards to an international audience of investors, tourists and venture financiers (Jordan 2011 and 2013). Such a “spill-over” has also been a characteristic of certain attempts to create a Ukrainian Brand, a feature that will be shown with the following example.

There have, in fact, been several attempts to brand Ukraine during the last fifteen years. One of the main actors deeply involved in most efforts since 2003, and through the Orange revolution in 2004 as well as radical regime changes since then, have been a small PR bureau called CFC Consulting.

Importantly, CFC is a domestic Ukrainian agency with its office in central Kyiv. Thus, they are not among those London based branding firms that have

dominated so many attempts to brand countries across the world –and around which much of the theorizing about nation branding has been centered. Already this circumstance makes CFC's work with the branding of Ukraine stand out from one of the main characteristics of this business that Aronczyk (2013, p. 61) has described: the agencies and consultants that usually produce images of nations do not perceive themselves as part of those nations. The three partners of CFC Consulting do indeed regard themselves as Ukrainians. Unlike many other branding consultants working according to the same model, they are not completely outside the realm of the imaginary that they construct, neither geographically nor mentally.

However, the three partners are all trained at UK and USA universities. They are thus familiar with models, methods and literature on nation branding. But the CFC partners are also eager to explain that they did not only return from studies abroad with academic degrees and with exposure to a global marketing model. They also formulate their professional agenda in terms of a commitment to a national cause.

We always felt that there is so little information of Ukraine globally, and that the information available is primarily negative. We personally believed that we could do something with changing it. (Myroshnychenko, 2013a)

For three young men returning home with a foreign education and plenty of experience, the state of Ukraine was an opportunity not to be missed. They started their company and just like other consultancies, CFC has been working in terms of 1) evaluation of a current perceptions of a country, 2) arranging seminars about the value of nation branding for government representatives and other actors involved, 3) defining a core “identity” of the nation, and 4) producing material to communicate their new image (Aronczyk, 2013, pp. 68-77). But CFC's involvement with the branding of Ukraine goes beyond these steps of a particular project. Their business with nation branding started with an idea of literally “putting Ukraine on the map”. One thing that they had noted while abroad was that the map of weather report on the Euronews television channel showed no weather in Ukraine.

They showed this map at least 5-6 times a day and when people of Europe looked at it, they probably thought that Ukraine did not exist, like no people were living here. So, we sent some faxes and told them we are a country in Europe with 45 million people, and why don't you add some cities in Ukraine and get at least the weather in Kyiv? (Myroshnychenko, 2013a)

According to this story, the young prospective nation branders actually succeeded, and after a few months Euronews did change the layout of their map and included Ukraine among European countries. CFC still regards this

as one of their great achievements. One, however, for which they had no paying client. It was completely an initiative of their own, and an effort that built up the reputation of their company, as much as it resulted in a better presence for Ukraine on European television.

Also, the next step in CFC's business history was another project that they had to invent by themselves. Their idea was to make Ukraine visible through the Eurovision Song Contest by promoting an artist that would stand the chance of winning, since that would give Ukraine the opportunity to host the show in Kyiv, which in turn would be an excellent way of promoting the country. The CFC partners explain that they started by writing a letter to the vice prime minister of Ukraine trying to convince him of the idea. The minister gave his support and with this approval they approached the national television broadcaster and secured a contract for this mission. CFC first worked with an artist that finished as number 14 in Riga 2003. The next year CFC signed a contract to promote the singer Ruslana who actually won the European Song Contest in Istanbul in the same year as Ukraine got world attention through the Orange revolution in 2004. After her victory Ruslana herself realized the potential for changing the image of her country and voiced the ambition to have people "forget about Chernobyl" (Moscow Times, 2004, apud Jordan, 2011, p. 156). When Kyiv thus hosted the contest in 2005 it became a huge opportunity to showcase the country – commercially as well as politically (Bolin, 2006a).

7. THE BRANDING CAMPAIGNS

CFC had with this managed to establish themselves in the promotion business. By 2007 CFC had both secured a contract with Ministry of Tourism for a promotion campaign and entered into collaboration with the American television channel CNN. They produced a campaign consisting primarily of advertising spots broadcasted on CNN under the slogan *Ukraine, Beautifully Yours*².

In 2010 CFC the Ministry of foreign affairs commissioned CFC to develop a long-term strategy for Ukraine's nation branding. The Ministry funded the project with 100,000 USD, but the branding project grew substantially in scope when more funding came from the Ukraine Economic Reform Fund. This fund is officially a private initiative of sponsoring projects aimed at improving Ukraine's image abroad, but according to their own statements they work closely with the Ukrainian government³.

The new branding strategy was presented (in Ukrainian) in the form of a "brand book" with visions, logos, slogans, designs and concrete suggestions on how to raise the international attention to Ukraine. Among the ideas described

² Accessible on: YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_b8wm4rx6w. Last accessed: 6 September 2016.

³ <http://uerf.org/about/>. Website now taken down. Last accessed 12 December 2013.

in the book is “Ukraine inspires”, a campaign making use of world-famous people with Ukrainian background (such as the artist Andy Warhol, and the inventor of the helicopter, Igor Sikorsky). Other ideas are to promote Kyiv as a center of modern art and fashion; to start up a news agency to disseminate positive stories about the country internationally; outlines for a Ukrainian pavilion at the World Expo 2015; and strategies on how to reach the EU elite in Brussels and Strasbourg.

The “brand book” is a well-known tool in the nation branding industry, and CFC’s version do indeed conform to a global model (Aronczyk, 2013). Importantly, though, CFC’s brand book was never intended for a wider audience, neither domestic nor international. The form of the book itself is a clear expression of that: the size of the printed product is 20 by 80 centimeters and would not easily fit into any pocket or bag of most Ukrainian citizens. It was intended to lie on desks of government and corporate offices as an inspiration on how to think about brand Ukraine.

A second book was also produced for an even more limited audience. The president of Ukraine needed some kind of material to distribute among a global elite when he was attending the World Economic Forum in Davos 2011. CFC produced the brochure “Ukraine, Moving in The Fast Lane” (sponsored by Ukraine Economic Reform Fund) including features and information on the country, particularly for international business. The CFC partners admitted that the slogan itself was too bold. Ukraine was hardly “moving in the fast lane” in 2011, and that catchphrase should, according to the branding strategy, not have been used until the economy had taken off in a safe direction: when there was a success story.

The most public part of the campaign originating from the 2010 contract was a series of advertising spots broadcasted on two major international news channels within the concept slogan “Ukraine. All About U”. First, CFC once again collaborated with CNN who produced two commercials, one directed towards a business audience (Doing business in Ukraine) and the other towards tourists (Travel in Ukraine⁴). Soon after these videos started to appear as advertisement on CNN in January 2011, CFC claimed to have been approached by BBC who offered to do something similar. This suggestion resulted in four more video commercials broadcasted on BBC World built around the same slogan “Ukraine. All About U”. These commercials were broadcast between March and July 2011 and focusing on ‘Lifestyle’, ‘Tourism’, ‘Economic Performance’, and ‘Investment’ respectively⁵. Both CNN and BBC produced their videos in-house and sent TV teams to film in Ukraine. BBC could furthermore offer to broadcast their commercials during a period when BBC News

⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/user/CFCconsulting?feature=watch>. Last accessed 6 September 2019.

⁵ Three of these can be found on YouTube, where CFC’s videos are collected: <http://www.youtube.com/user/CFC-Company/videos>. Last accessed 6 September 2019.

had a special focus on Ukraine, with around 80 hours of programming on the country. Ukraine Economic Reform Fund sponsored both the CNN and the BBC commercials, and all six videos were presented on their (now expired) homepage among funded projects.

8. THE BACKFIRE

One of the ideas outlined in CFC's brand book was the two "mascots" Sprytko and Harniunia (Figure 2). They were drawn with round, large heads and big blue eyes, and could be dressed up in various ways –in traditional costumes, in sports or business suits. Sprytko and Harniunia were meant to be produced as fridge magnets or printed on various merchandise. The inspiration to these mascots was from city branding campaigns in other parts of the world, such as Moscow and Beijing. This was a minor component in the "Ukraine. All About U" campaign, but it soon got a lot of attention domestically.

Figure 2. Sprytko and Harniunia



Source: Mascots Sprytko and Harniunia.

As we have described above, this campaign was criticized already from the start because of the obscure procedure when CFC got the government contract. Eventually the campaign itself received massive public criticism. Press commentaries referred to a range of difficulties in branding Ukraine:

How successful are Ukraine's branding efforts? Consider the current realities. First, the country already has a fixed and established image in Europe and the world. Very briefly, it may be defined this way: Ukraine is as a poor, divided and corrupt country with easily accessible women. The political opposition is behind bars, and the Orange Revolution was wasted. (Bezpiatchuk, 2011)

This picture was not at all denied by the consultants at CFC, who complained about the fact that the imprisoned former president Yulia Tymoshenko was over-shadowing all attempts at rebranding the country:

All the attempts to create a better image for Ukraine, her jailing to a great extent has destroyed all the achievements we had made. Because, it does not matter what campaigns you launch, what you do. It is still... everybody speaks about political prisoners. (Myroshnychenko, 2013a)

The campaign was the focus of a news feature on the television channel STB in June 2011 where a representative of the government and from CFC were explaining the campaign, counter-posed with the famous author, poet and essayist Oksana Zabuzhko, who voiced criticism about the campaign for representing the mascots in national costumes that were typical for how Ukraine was represented in Soviet time schoolbooks⁶.

In the current affairs television program *Velyka Polityka*, broadcasted in September 2011, CFC was attacked for not having a clear goal and vision (making it impossible to measure the impact of the campaign), using dated visual language and for having used stereotypes and representations of Ukraine that risk being ridiculed by foreign audiences⁷. At the center of the criticism were again Sprytko and Harniunia who were mocked as plainly ugly and weird-looking like cheap versions of Japanese anime figures.

The example with Sprytko and Harniunia perfectly illustrates the tensions between the two logics we have pointed to at the beginning of this article. To a non-Ukrainian, the figures are similar to other mascots that appear around media events of international magnitude, such as the World's Fairs or the Olympic Games. But it is obvious, that Sprytko and Harniunia touched some sensitive depths in the cultural identity among the Ukrainian citizenry. The mascots were in the face of criticism abandoned in the campaign despite that they, according to CFC, worked rather well when presented to a foreign audience.

Overall, despite all negative attention, CFC argued that there actually had been positive results from the campaign. Visa restrictions to Ukraine had been lifted, and several domestic companies were making use of their slogans and logos. CFS's "brand book" is still on many desks at government offices, they

⁶ Accessible on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og9ThcAdc_8. Last accessed 6 September 2019.

⁷ Accessible on: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PO0tcFoDIQ0&feature=youtube_gdata_player. Last accessed 6 September 2019. Thanks to Roman Horbyk for help with translation.

claim. Nevertheless, the representatives of CFC admit that they were severely hurt in the Ukrainian nation branding business after the heated debate.

When the Ministry of Tourism in 2013 invited tenders for a new Brand Ukraine project, CFC never took part. The partners agreed that they better had to wait some time before they could continue in this business, and started to develop other ideas, heading in new directions but often originating from their nation branding work. Another Ukrainian agency – WikiCityNomica – won the tender from the Ministry of Tourism and initiated an outline for a new brand strategy towards tourists. They began testing it against domestic and foreign audiences following the launch at the II Kiev International Tourism Forum in October 2013. As a part of this “testing”, 80 events were arranged at different places in Ukraine over a period of 40 days in the early autumn of 2013. It is apparent that the brand strategists at WikiCityNomica did not want to repeat the mistake that CFC had done with Sprytko and Harniunia and sought a firm anchoring of the campaign domestically (Volcic & Andrejevic. 2011, p. 609). However, as the political unrest grew in late 2013, the project came to a pause, with the intension to continue once the political conflicts were settled.

9. CONCLUSION

Our point of departure was that there is an inherent tension related to nation branding campaigns, especially in post-colonial countries and countries with short history of independence, between nation building and nation branding efforts. Naturally, the two processes of nation building and nation branding, and the ways in which they are orchestrated in each individual case, have consequences for each other. But they are distinct activities, with different aims, executed by different agents, aimed at different audiences, and with different communication platforms at their center. And while nation building is about mediating national symbols to a domestic audience, nation branding is a project of transforming the nation into pure sign for an external audience. However, in a mediatized world, these two practices are increasingly blurred. This is also why we have been dissatisfied with how questions of identity, audience and agency have been handled in previous nation branding research.

Firstly, we have argued that the concept of *identity* needs to be much more nuanced, and we need to distinguish between national identity as an ontological status, and the images of national identity produced in the campaigns. In nationalist projects the former is in focus, while the mediatized national identity is at the heart of nation branding. The point at which these representations reach the domestic population is the critical point for nation branding projects, since those represented can –and indeed often do– have opinions on how they are portrayed. The knowledge of this has been learnt the hard way by nation branders, who now engage more seriously in anchoring their projects

among the domestic citizenry, thus having effects on the organizational forms discussed in the previous paragraph.

Secondly, there is a need to be more observant on towards which *audience* a nation branding campaign is directed. Typically, nation branding campaigns in postcolonial settings, such as in Eastern Europe, need to address two audiences at the same time: one foreign (tourists, investors, etc.), and one domestic (citizens). The audience address varies quite substantially between these two audiences, and there is a fine line to thread if they are to be addressed simultaneously, since there is a profound risk for campaigns to backfire. As we have seen from our empiric example, such backfires undermine also other parts of branding campaigns, and disqualifies them in the eyes of those feeling misrepresented by them.

Thirdly, when it comes to *agency*, contemporary nation branding consultants and producers of brand messages are not particularly engaged in nations as such, especially those that work on the international arena (e.g. Interbrand, BBC, CNN). The branding agencies usually work with a lot of other advertising and PR activities as well. Branding consultants are part of the promotional industries, they are practitioners engaged in “identifying saleable products (a commodity, message, idea or individual), a potential audience (citizen, consumer, social group, elite decision maker), a communication medium (formal, informal, mass, digital) and a message” (Davies, 2013, p. 2). Thus, the promotional culture and practice of the branding agencies needs to be put in focus if one intends to understand the phenomenon on nation branding as part of the general process of cultural mediatization. However, we can now see that the composition of the agents involved are shifting, and initiatives can just as much come from domestic branding agencies, who might or might not, work with international brand experts or production teams. Such production teams, especially if they belong to large-scale international broadcasters such as CNN and BBC, have their own (commercial) agendas which makes these media institutions having power over other societal institutions.

As we have argued elsewhere (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2015), the role of the media as technologies and organizations have been surprisingly neglected in previous nation branding literature, despite the fact that many of the debates are published in media, communication and cultural studies journals. This also means that previous nation branding research has taken the process of institutional mediatization far too little into consideration, thus missing an important aspect of the phenomenon. Looking at nation branding from a mediatization perspective, one thing is immediately obvious. Nobody is supposed to live *in* the branded nation –because it is not a territory but a purely mediatized form of “the nation”. Thus, branders are concerned with putting their nation “on the map” or “giving it a face”, not in interfering with the social world. None is supposed to *be* the nation. However, the branded nation is not

an entirely non-social entity; it is a form of *seeing* the world rather than *being* in the world. You can live *with* the branded nation just as you would with any other commodity which may be part of your social life. It can be produced and consumed, enjoyed or despised and thus part of the mediatized world of the early 21st century.

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- *Contribución: el 100% del trabajo pertenece al autor.



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