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## **ANALYZING NATION-BRANDING STRATEGIES: INVESTIGATING MEDIA AGENCIES**

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**Abstract:** Nation branding, a relatively recent phenomenon, has garnered significant academic attention in recent decades. This paper provides an overview of the field's development and various approaches to nation branding. While the technical-economic approach has dominated early research, focusing on administrative aspects and conducted by stakeholders involved in the campaigns, a political perspective has emerged. The political approach, grounded in international relations and public diplomacy, suggests that nation branding is supplanting traditional diplomacy. It emphasizes the need for states to establish a unique brand identity, engage in competitive marketing, ensure market satisfaction, and cultivate brand loyalty. This evolving field offers valuable insights into how governments, in collaboration with public relations consultants and corporations, strategically promote their nation's image. As nations increasingly vie for global influence, understanding the multifaceted nature of nation branding is crucial. This paper provides a foundation for further exploration of this dynamic and complex field.

**Keywords:** Nation branding, public diplomacy, International relations, Brand identity Competitive marketing.

### **Introduction**

Nation branding, the practice of governments in conjunction with public relations consultants and corporate businesses to launch campaigns promoting a certain image of a nation-state, is a rapidly developing area of study. Given its short history over the past three decades (Aronczyk, 2013), the amount of scholarly output has increased substantially in pace with the spread of the phenomenon. Nadia Kaneva (2011) has usefully reviewed the early literature in the field and distinguished three approaches to nation branding: the technical-economic, the political, and the cultural. The technical-economic, which Kaneva finds making up the vast majority of research up until 2009, consists of mainly “administrative research” (Lazarsfeld, 1941) conducted by people with vested interests in the activity, being at the same time the orchestrators of campaigns and their evaluators. These are the academic consultants (e.g., Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2008; Olins, 2003; Szondi, 2007) who are also based in departments of business

The political approach to nation branding is made up of analyses based in international relations, public relations, and international communication, where the concept of public diplomacy is at times used interchangeably with nation branding. An early proponent for this approach is political scientist Peter van Ham (2001), who argues that nation branding is rapidly replacing traditional diplomacy, and that contemporary politicians are faced with the task to find “a brand niche for their state,” engage in “competitive marketing,” assure “market satisfaction,” and create “brand loyalty” (p. 6).

The third (and up to 2009, the smallest) part of nation-branding research consists of what Kaneva calls cultural approaches, grounded in “critical theories of culture, communication and society” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 127) and mainly published in communications and media studies journals. From this approach, argues Kaneva, “counter-

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arguments” against the other two perspectives are formulated, and it is clearly this perspective she aligns herself with (as do we). This critically oriented strand of research is then further divided into essentialist and constructivist parts. The essentialist position criticizes the phenomenon for producing distorted images of national identities, ultimately producing false consciousness. The constructivist position is more concerned with struggles over power to define national identities and shares a concern “with the commodification of national identities” (p. 131). Against this background, Kaneva calls on communication scholars to seriously engage in the debate: “Communication scholars should be particularly interested in developing a critique of nation branding because efforts to rethink nations as brands relate to theoretical debates central to critical scholarship of culture and communication” (p. 118).

Kaneva’s call for a critical nation-branding research agenda has met with a positive response among media and communications scholars (e.g., Graan, 2013; Valaskivi, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011), not least since she herself gathered many of them in her edited volume *Branding Post-Communist Nations* (Kaneva, 2012).

However, despite the fact that many of the analyses are published in media and communication studies journals (and by people belonging to media or communications departments), strangely enough, few analyses investigate the specific role of the media in nation-branding processes. 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.

The aim of this article is, therefore, to follow up Kaneva’s call and critically review the approaches to the media in nation-branding analysis and to argue for a more systematic analysis of the role of the media in these campaigns. This means studying the media in their own right as technologies (e.g., television, the Internet, the press, advertising spaces) and as organizations (e.g., corporations such as the BBC, Euronews, CNN) and as entities with their own agency in the practice of nation branding. We adopt a media perspective influenced partly by medium theory (McLuhan, 1964; Meyrowitz, 1985/1986), but also from institutional media analysis (e.g., Hjarvard, 2013) and theories on the symbolic power of the media (e.g., Bolin, 2011, 2014; Couldry, 2000, 2012). From medium theory, we draw insights about the technological character and capacity of each specific medium’s impact on the possible ways each individual medium can form its messages (e.g., Winston 1996), affect which specific audiences can be addressed and reached (Das, Kleut, & Bolin, 2013), reception situations where texts are interpreted, and, hence, which “decodings” will be privileged (Hall, 1973). A message distributed via an in-flight magazine, for example, will reach different readers than a video clip on CNN, in another reception context, and with other possible decodings. From institutional theory and theories on symbolic power, we acknowledge the abilities of institutionalized media to organize communication and construct symbolic environments, and thereby influence the ways in which the world appears before media users. The credibility and legitimacy of the message-producing institution, and the communication environment in which it can contextualize its messages, will matter for the ways subjects will relate to messages (Couldry, 2006).

By emphasizing the part played by the media in nation-branding campaigns, we hope to contribute to the development of a model by which the phenomenon of nation branding can be analyzed in all its complexity. Similar to Kaneva, we will concentrate our analysis on the cultural approach to nation branding, because we argue that it is in this particular field of study that the critical edge of analysis can be sharpened.

Our argument proceeds in three steps. First, in the next section, we review the research efforts within the cultural approach to nation-branding research, with a special focus on which media technologies and organizations are at the focus of analysis, and in which ways the media have been analyzed. Our aim is not to take previous research to task for neglecting the role of the media in nation-branding analysis; some of our own previous writings are also lacking in this respect (Bolin, 2002; Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010), as one can indeed have other motives for doing research than looking at the specific role of the media. However, we argue that, in some instances, a better understanding of the role of the media as agents in their own right is important and that this ultimately sheds light

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on some of the themes previously discussed in the literature. Second, to illustrate this point, we present a case study of recent nationbranding efforts in Ukraine. Ukraine is an interesting case, not because it is representative of Eastern Europe or any other country but because of the complex and dynamic processes that surround its nationbranding efforts (during our fieldwork, these efforts were increasingly affected by the war with Russia, about which we have written more explicitly elsewhere; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2015), involving both foreign and domestic public relations agencies, political administrations, and local as well as national and international media producers. Our case study takes its point of departure in one Ukrainian public relations agency to follow the links to other agents involved in the management of information. Finally, we conclude that the complexity revealed in our case study also sheds a light on some of the previous research on nation branding in highlighting the agency of the media, and especially the role of nation branding in fostering nation-building processes and national identities.

### **The Media in Previous Nation-Branding Research**

Branding, marketing, and image production are communicative activities that presuppose some sort of mediation. According to Aronczyk (2013), this is the fourth and most “critical” phase of the nationbranding campaign process (following research/evaluation, training/education, and identification of the core brand value). This mediation can, quite naturally, take many forms: advertising clips on national and/or international television channels and in the press and the production of portfolios of pictures, information leaflets, or lobbying (for example, by having print or broadcast media produce content about the country in question). The fact that campaigns have mediation at their center does not, of course, necessarily mean that one needs to focus only on the communicative aspects of branding. In fact, as already stated, few actually have. The literature so far has focused on either the process leading up to the actual mediation or the consequences of nation branding, often concerning the consequences of neoliberal ideologies on national identity.

Although there are some general discussions on nation branding among the more critically engaged scholars (e.g., Saunders, 2012; Sussman, 2012), most articles are based on case studies of specific branding campaigns. Most of these empirical analyses can be broadly described as *campaign analysis*. This often involves analyzing the events leading up to campaigns and includes interviews with politicians, branding consultants, representatives of public-private organizations (e.g., Enterprise Estonia) as well as analysis of campaign material (slogans, brand books) and policy documents. These analyses are often at the level of discourse, and they usually discuss the branding material within the framework of a neoliberal discourse. This is, for example, the case with the analyses made by Bolin (2002) on Estonia, Volcic (2008) on post-Yugoslav countries, Volcic (2012) and Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) on Slovenia, Jansen (2008, 2012) on Estonia, Surowiec (2012) on Poland, Valaskivi (2013) on Japan, Varga (2013) on Germany, and Marat (2009) on Central Asia.

Some of these campaign analyses have focused on specific (media) events that have centered on nation-branding projects. Roy Panagiotopoulou (2012) has, for example, analyzed branding efforts in relation to the Olympic Games when they were arranged by Greece and China. Although the analysis focus on media events, “the media” are not a part of the analysis. For the most part, this also holds for Susan Brownell’s (2013) analysis of the Beijing Olympics. However, in a short section, she discusses the advertising efforts made by Chinese and international and Hong Kong-based ad agencies and how they (unsuccessfully) attempted to produce a new image of China as well as how the Chinese government via CCTV launched a new Web channel—CNTV.cn—in connection to the Beijing Olympics.

Another media event that has received considerable attention related to its branding potential is the Eurovision song contest. Bolin (2002, 2006b) has analyzed the role of this pan-European event partly from a historical perspective but also from the event perspective (Bolin, 2010). Some, such as Baker (2008), also discuss Eurovision in terms of nationalism and national identity, and thereby touch upon the branding aspects of the media event. Similarly, Miazhevich (2012) and Jordan (2014a, 2014b) both focus on branding in their analyses.

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Some nation-branding scholars also systematically analyze the agency involved in nationbranding campaigns. Andrew Graan (2013), for example, analyzes “the political dynamics that have centered on Skopje 2014,” involving “corporations, NGOs, and international aid and development ventures” (p. 164). Some, in their mapping of agency, systematically address the “branding by whom” and “branding for whom” questions that were raised in Bolin and Ståhlberg (2010). Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy (2013) analyze the role of the Turkish television channel TRT-7-al-Turkiyya in Turkey’s efforts to reach Arab audiences with advertising and television drama and thus produce a more favorable image among these audiences. In addition to this institutional perspective, Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy conduct textual analysis, and, although the extent to which they concentrate on this part of the analysis is somewhat limited, this effort is rare in the field of nation-branding analysis. Melissa Aronczyk (2008) has systematically identified and interviewed the main agents as belonging to “corporate marketing and advertising, tourism, public diplomacy and public relations” (p. 46). This is also true of the analysis of nation branding by Paul Jordan (2014a, 2014b). However, following Brubaker’s (2006) methodology in his work on nationalism, Jordan has conducted both elite interviews and “grassroots interviews” with random samples of Estonians in the street. These are the citizens who are supposedly invited to be “living the brand” and the communicators of the brand messages. As might be expected, Jordan found that opinions were divided concerning the campaign, and many were openly critical of it.

Why are there so few textual analyses of nation-branding campaigns? Melissa Aronczyk (2013) hints at one answer while reflecting on her past experience as a creative involved in the construction of a tourism campaign for Quebec for McCann Ericson: “no one would afford tourism ads the same degree of scrutiny and contemplation that I had applied in conceiving them” (p. 7). This also may be why Aronczyk is one of a few who actually have analyzed logotypes (Aronczyk, 2013), although her main analysis relates to interviews and policy documents. According to Jansen (2008), the explanation for the lack of textual analysis is the simple nature of brand material: “Who, for example, can work up a semiotic sweat over ‘I love New York’ bumper stickers?” (p. 131). This explanation might, however, overly simplify the textual complexities of nation-branding campaigns. Quite true, the slogans and the buzzwords (“Nordic with a twist,” “positively transforming”) do confirm to Jansen’s comments, but single ads or slogans are only parts of the totality of textual material related to the campaigns. Nation-branding campaigns usually contain extensive visual and textual material, such as a brand book, portfolios of photographs, previous research, typefaces, visual patterns, specific colors, and maps. Bolin (2006a), for example, examines the “mediated speech acts” that ultimately construct the “representational landscape” of Estonia on the basis of Brand Estonia’s brand book *Eesti Stiil* with an analysis of the specific typeface that was produced for the campaign, the color palette, and the photographs in the brand portfolio.

Christian Christensen (2013) partly engages in textual analysis when studying the @Sweden Twitter campaign orchestrated by the Swedish Institute/Visit Sweden. In addition to accounting for the activities of the organizers, he reviews the mass media reception of the campaign. Contrary to most other analyses that contain general references to “media coverage,” Christensen cites Fox News, Reuters, and *The New York Times* and their reporting on @Sweden (as well as gives examples of tweets).

The most thorough engagement in textual analysis of branding campaigns has been conducted by Kaneva and Popescu (2011), who analyzed “the images and symbols in the narratives of nation branding” (p. 192) in Romania and Bulgaria. The focus is on video clips broadcast on CNN and Euronews, where “symbolism, themes and implicit meanings” are discussed. Kaneva and Popescu’s (2014) analysis of the Romanian government’s campaign “Romanians in Europe” also adopts a discourse-analytical perspective.

Alice Bardan and Anikó Imre (2012) analyze the “vampire branding” of Romania through representations in several non-Romanian television shows (e.g., the United Kingdom’s *Top Gear* and the United States’ *Saturday Night Live*) and in relation to the video campaign “Romania—Simply Surprising,” broadcast on BBC, CNN, Discovery, and Euronews.



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It is possible to conclude that most analyses of nation-branding campaigns can be labeled *campaign analyses*, where campaigns are analyzed through interviews with those who initiate and execute the campaigns, typically a mixture of governmental (regional, national) and corporate agents (business in general as well as public relations and advertising businesses). On a few occasions, a wider citizenry has been included, while the media are mainly referred to as neutral platforms that mediate unfiltered the intentions of the orchestrator or provide media coverage. The media, hence, lack agency of their own in the literature on nation branding. In a few instances, the media coverage and the messages in terms of slogans and brand logos have attracted attention—that is, the media have been referred to as textual entities. Reflections on the role of technology are largely absent from the literature. And rarely have the media been treated as institutional agents in their own right, as organizations with their own agendas and objectives. This is strange given the fact that large-scale, international media corporations are mentioned in passing in several instances in the literature, but merely as platforms for the dissemination of content. In the next section, we examine the case of Ukraine and point to ways in which the media, as one among other actors, plays a central role in the campaigns—both as technological platforms for the agency of other actors and in its own right in the form of large media companies.

We use examples from fieldwork in Ukraine to exemplify how understanding of the role of the media as technologies and organizations can add to the other parameters that have been the focus of previous research. We first provide an account of the various branding activities from 2003 and onward in Ukraine (as they appear in our fieldwork). Then we discuss the ways in which the choices of media as technologies, and the involvement of certain media institutions, have impacted the activities.

### Brand Ukraine and the Media

In May 2013, *Kyiv Weekly*, a Ukrainian English-language business magazine, owned at the time by Donbas oligarch Vitaliy Haiduk, published a special issue on the status of Ukraine as a country seen from the outside. The cover headline “Ukraine: Choosing a Face” appeared over a photo of a man holding his faceless, egg-shaped head in his hands. The article and the illustration obviously aimed to characterize

Ukraine as lacking an identity in the eyes of the surrounding world and is illustrative of the fear of lagging behind and the longing for recognition felt among stakeholders with international ambitions (Kabachiy, 2013, pp. 2–3). Inside the issue of *Kyiv Weekly* were descriptions of Ukraine as “a brandless country” 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” (Stolyarchuk, 2013, p. 3). Clearly, the articles suggest that the international image 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 a “negative image of a ‘nation of bandits, prostitutes and migrant workers’” (Kabachiy, 2013, p. 2).

Now *Kyiv Weekly* is distributed both in print and electronic form on the Web. The print edition can be purchased at ordinary newsstands and shops, where it is integrated for display among other magazines and newspapers. The fact that *Kyiv Weekly* is an English-language business magazine might indicate that its readership primarily consists of international businesspeople. But something in the textual address also indicates a domestic readership consisting of people with an interest in addressing international businesspersons—that is, those who want to direct attention to their own business. Why, for example, would an international investor be interested in the degree to which the citizens of Ukraine feel a “genetic affinity that elicits an emotional reaction” in Ukrainian souls? And why would the “average European” be interested in the fact that he or she does not recognize a Ukrainian citizen? Would not the average European be more interested to see one described? The audience address indicated by these sentences rather reveals its direction toward a Ukrainian reader with international ambitions. The fact that the print edition is distributed nationally in newsstands is also indicative of this (although, of course, the Web edition might be read from outside of Ukraine).

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The suspicion that the debate in *Kyiv Weekly* is primarily directed to a domestic audience of branders and similar agents is supported by the discourse among the branding consultants and political administrators we interviewed. These professionals are uniform in their belief that Ukraine needs “a success story,” a specific material base through which they could build a campaign where “national symbols become understood by outsiders as well.” This would supposedly “attract tourists, but also raises the self-esteem of the nation and unites a country” (Stolyarchuk, 2013, p. 3).

The concern expressed in *Kyiv Weekly* about the lack of a common Ukrainian identity and positive image of the country abroad should be seen in light of the several attempts to brand Ukraine over the past decade. One of the main actors deeply involved in nation-branding efforts since 2003 has been a small public relations bureau called CFC Consulting.

Although based in Kyiv, the three partners of CFC are all trained at UK and U.S. universities in public relations and international relations. From their studies they are familiar with the models, methods, and literature on nation branding. In our interviews, the CFC partners were eager to explain that not only did they 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” (V. Myroshnychenko, interview, May 2013).

Myroshnychenko’s statement aligns with previous statements—for example, in an article written by Myroshnychenko in the Ukrainian Russian-language financial magazine *Companion*:

A National Brand Ukraine Program will not only contribute to establishing an international image for Ukraine, but will also work on establishing a national identity in Ukraine, a sense of a general purpose and national pride. This, in turn, could help unite

Ukrainians around a single idea: the economic development of their country. (Myroshnychenko, 2006, p. 55; translation by Myroshnychenko)

Looking at Brand Ukraine from the perspective of this agency reveals aspects of nation-branding practices that seem to have gone largely unnoticed in the previous literature on nation branding. A single branding project, starting with a government tender, could very well be described with a model consisting of four recognizable steps, as described by Aronczyk (2013), and, like other consultancies, CFC has been working in terms of (1) evaluating 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 the new image.

But CFC’s involvement with the branding of Ukraine goes beyond these steps of a particular project. Its business with nation branding started with an idea of “putting Ukraine on the map”—literally. To CFC, it was important to change the global perception of its native country, but, as a start-up, it was also important to have something in its portfolio to display. One thing that the partners had observed while studying abroad was that the weather forecast on the Euronews television channel showed no weather in Ukraine.

They showed this map at least five to six 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? (V. Myroshnychenko, interview, May 2013)

According to CFC, the proposals were taken into consideration by Euronews, and after a few months the channel did change the layout of its weather map and included Ukraine among European countries. It is obvious from the interviews that CFC regards this as one of its great achievements. It is one, however, for which they had no paying client, but they could use it to build up the reputation of their company. In addition, Ukraine gained a better presence on European television.

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The next step in CFC's business history was, according to the partners, to make Ukraine visible through the Eurovision song contest by promoting an artist who would stand a chance of winning, because that would give Ukraine the opportunity to host the show in Kyiv, which, in turn, would be an excellent opportunity to promote the country. According to the partners at CFC, they wrote a letter to the vice prime minister of Ukraine, trying to convince him of the idea. The minister gave his support, and with this support, CFC approached the national television broadcaster and secured a contract for this mission. CFC first worked with an artist who finished 14th in Riga in 2003. The next year, CFC signed a contract to promote Ruslana, a singer who won the Eurovision song contest in Istanbul in 2004—the same year Ukraine received world attention through the Orange revolution. Illustrative of CFC's branding ambitions is Ruslana's winning statement to have people “forget about Chernobyl” (*Moscow Times*, May 17, 2004, quoted in 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, 2006b).

Until this moment, the media—various technological platforms such as the television channel Euronews, the yearly Eurovision media event (and the media coverage of it in, e.g., the press), and the magazine *Kyiv Weekly*—had mainly served as platforms for other agents' actions. By 2007, however, another media actor entered the scene. CFC became involved in a collaboration with the television channel CNN to produce a campaign consisting primarily of advertising spots on CNN under the slogan “Ukraine, Beautifully Yours” (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Ukraine, 2008). The collaboration is celebrated as a landmark in CFC's business history; on the wall outside CFC's office, a placard the same size as the company logo reads, “CNN: Exclusive Representative in Ukraine.”

There are reasons to be cautious, however, about who was the initiator here. CNN (and, as described below, BBC Worldwide) clearly has its own agenda and large production teams that produce video clips to be broadcast on the various international versions of CNN (Africa, Asia, Europe, etc.). CNN's advertising production company, Turner Commercial Productions, states on its website: “Since 2006 we have been producing commercial creative for global clients and advertisers, specifically for the CNN international audience” ([www.turnercommercialproductions.com/](http://www.turnercommercialproductions.com/)). Global clients can be anything from countries to regions, associations, or corporations, as can be seen from Turner's showcase videos.

In 2010, CFC was awarded a new government contract, this time with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CFC was commissioned to develop a long-term strategy for Ukraine's nation branding. This project was somewhat controversial. CFC got the government contract without any public tender, and there was quite a lot of criticism from competing companies around the procedure. The ministry funded the project with US\$100,000, but the branding project grew substantially in scope when more funding came from the Ukraine Economic Reform Fund. The fund is, according to its website (<http://uerf.org/about>), a private initiative of sponsoring projects aimed at improving Ukraine's image abroad, but it also works closely with the Ukrainian government.

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 in the book is “Ukraine inspires,” a campaign featuring world-famous people with Ukrainian backgrounds (such as the artist Andy Warhol and the inventor of the helicopter, Igor Sikorsky). Other ideas included: promoting Kyiv as a center of modern art and fashion; starting 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 European Union elite in Brussels and Strasbourg. The brand book is a well-known tool in the nation-branding industry, and CFC's version conforms to a global model (Aronczyk, 2013). Also conforming to the global model, the production of the book was preceded by a research phase: A survey consisting of 11 questions on “What does Ukraine and Ukrainians mean to you?” was conducted both domestically and among selected foreign respondents.

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However, CFC's brand book can hardly have been intended for a wider audience, neither domestic nor international. The format of the book itself is a clear expression of that: The large 20-by-80centimeters printed product would not fit into the pocket or bag of most Ukrainian citizens. It was rather intended to lie on desks of government and corporate offices as an inspiration on how to think about Brand Ukraine. Rather than being meant as teaching material for citizens on how to "live the brand" (Aronczyk, 2008), the book was mainly addressed to the political elites of Ukraine to convince them to lend further support to the branding initiatives. One could say that the main function of the brand book was to establish a market where CFC and its colleagues or competitors could get contracts for producing brand campaigns.

A second book was produced for an even more limited audience. The president of Ukraine needed some material to distribute among a global elite when he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos 2011. CFC produced the brochure "Ukraine—Moving in the Fast Lane" (sponsored by the Ukraine Economic Reform Fund), which included features and information on the country, particularly for international business. The CFC partners admitted that the slogan 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 CFC's 2010 contract was a series of advertising spots that were broadcast on two major international news channels within the concept slogan "Ukraine. All About U." First, CFC once again collaborated with CNN, which produced two commercials: one directed toward a business audience ("Doing Business in Ukraine") and the other toward tourists ("Travel in Ukraine"). Soon after these videos started to appear as advertisements on CNN in January 2011, CFC claimed to have been approached by the BBC, which offered to do something similar. Most likely, this is also where the initiative came from, since the BBC sales teams "are pretty aggressive," in the words of BBC Worldwide's director of commercial content and delivery, Alison Farmery (interview, February 10, 2014). This suggestion resulted in four more video clips broadcast on BBC World News and built around the same slogan, "Ukraine. All About U." These commercials were broadcast between March and July 2011 and focused on lifestyle, tourism, economic performance, and investment, respectively. Both CNN and BBC had sent TV teams to film in Ukraine. The BBC offered to broadcast its commercials during a period when BBC News had a special focus on Ukraine, with about 80 hours of programming on the country. This is a common strategy of the broadcaster, and one that gives it a competitive advantage. The funding of the commercials for both the BBC and CNN came from the Ukraine Economic Reform Fund.

According to CFC, it produced the video spots "in collaboration" with the broadcasters. However, this is not exactly how the relationship is described by the BBC. Rather, it is more like a customer-client relationship, where BBC Advertising (the subdivision of BBC Worldwide that produces advertising and brand material) delivers a production and distribution service. Production is executed by one of the four or five production companies with which the BBC operates—for advertising as well as for feature productions (for this occasion, the British production company TwoFour). In essence, promoting a country is, to the BBC (and CNN), similar to promoting other products:

*Interviewer:* From your perspective, is it different to work with promoting a country, compared to a car, or an air company? Is it the same thing?

*Farmery:* Well, essentially it is, because you have a product. The product does change, countries want to do different things. I remember the Middle East was all about shopping, all they wanted to do. We've made ads for Oman, Qatar, and all they wanted to do a few years ago was talk about shopping, and now they are talking about a cultural experience. In the same way as cars, talking about green credentials. All of a sudden we are talking about mosques, temples, and theaters that you can enjoy in these countries. I think yes, it is a product, and it evolves and develops. (A. Farmery, interview, February 10, 2014)



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BBC Worldwide is a commercial company, driven by market logics and operating on the worldwide market for image production and dissemination. Its loyalties are not with the nation, but with those who pay for its services. BBC Worldwide also acts with a pan-national audience address, because this is in the technological and organizational character of the television medium:

The reason why we do a lot of work in Poland is that they have European grants to do this sort of thing. We work with LODZ, they got money from the European Parliament and they happened to work with us on the back of that WDA [Warsaw Destination Alliance] campaign. They saw that and wanted to work with us. To work with us as well you've got to have pan-regional budgets. The Scottish Development Agency [as an example] won't have pan-regional budgets to promote in one country and then another budget in another. When that's the case, it's not really worth the conversation. That's typically been the case with Visit Britain. Online you can buy country by country. If you want to buy TV, its Europe, and if you haven't got a budget for Europe and you want to promote a country in the Nordics, then it's not the right medium. (A. Farmery, interview, February 10, 2014)

The BBC is, according to this quote, definitely not a platform that is open to be utilized by anyone. It is an organization with a will and strategy of its own. Like all commercial operators, it can also choose not to work with certain countries, despite the money offered, because it can affect its own brand value (the sincerity, truthfulness, balance, and objectivity that is at the core of the "value of being public service" [cf. Bolin, 2004], a value that BBC Advertising as a commercial company benefits from). Thus, it avoids certain countries that might compromise and devalue the BBC's brand. This also means that loyalty is not with the customer but with the organization:

*Interviewer:* The Ukrainian case . . . these commercials on the BBC were just one part of a larger campaign. From your point of view, do you feel part of something larger?

*Farmery:* No, we just do our thing. We just do our thing, we don't feel that we are part of anything larger actually, which is a shame really, because together, if we knew who the other partners were . . . (A. Farmery, interview February 10, 2014)

What is expressed in this quote is the autonomy of the organization (the BBC) and the independence of the other parts of campaigning, and the only reason to be part of the larger whole is to advance one's competitive position. The fact that media companies such as BBC Worldwide, CNN, and National Geographic are heavily involved agents with their own specific agendas, and their own vested interests, has, however, gone quite unnoticed in the literature.

### **The Media as Technology and Organization**

To summarize the media technologies that have been involved in branding Ukraine, the audiences to whom these have been directed, and the messages distributed: First, the printed media such as *Kyiv Weekly*, *Companion*, and similar niche publications are seemingly directed to an international readership, but in this instance, they function mainly as a vehicle for producing the branding market domestically. These media are platforms in the sense that they are the arenas through which other agents make stakes.

Second, the special media—such as the brand books produced to convince political administrations or corporate businesses of the necessity to brand the country—are also vehicles to produce the domestic branding market. The messages might be in English, but their target audience is Ukrainian politicians and elites with an interest in reaching international audiences.

Third, television and television channels and streamed video services such as YouTube also are used as platforms for the distribution of mediated information—that is, they are the cultural technologies used by various agents in the nation-branding process. However, the medium of television is mainly organized by large-scale, transnational media corporations such as Euronews, the BBC, and CNN, which are also agents in their own right. Considering the prominent role that media corporations such as CNN and the BBC have in the brand campaigns, one can indeed ponder the consequences for the analysis of the agency behind nation branding. In our previous analyses

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of nation-branding campaigns in Estonia and India, we concluded that nation branding has been addressed primarily to external audiences of investors and tourists and that spill-over effects, where campaigns were picked up by domestic audiences, often led to backfires (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010). In light of the above discussion, this conclusion should, however, be modified with concern for the different institutions involved in the campaign work: domestic political administrations, national and/or international branding consultancies, domestic and/or international media companies, and so on. As in all large-scale and complex communication projects—be it branding campaigns on an international level or media events of international proportions (Eurovision, the Olympics)—the objectives differ dramatically between those involved depending on their role in the production and their power to influence it.

Four different agents and objectives can be exemplified with the case of Ukraine. First, agents are found within the *political administration*: the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within this sphere, one has the dual aim to market the nation to foreign audiences (tourists and investors) *and* to promote social solidarity inward and build the newly sovereign nation-state through the means of a common project where citizens are invited to live the brand.

Second, there are the *branding consultants*—the communications experts. In the case of CFC, if one takes them at their word (and we do not see why one should not), the firm has the double aim of branding as well as building the nation. However, other branding consultants might be less interested in fostering national identity in Ukraine: For example, at GIZ, a German government-sponsored organization that has aided in Ukraine's branding efforts, interviews do not reveal much concern about Ukraine national identity. GIZ's aim is, rather, to achieve stability in the region and to "twin" Ukraine into becoming more European—that is, a political goal on the supranational level (O'Connor & Kowalski, 2005).

Third are the representatives for *corporate business*, here represented by the Ukraine Economic Reform Fund, whose founding members are mainly found within Ukrainian industry, but are also from state administration bodies such as the Donetsk Chamber of Commerce. Their interests are more oriented toward economic goals, seeking to develop the economy of Ukrainian industry (rather than cultural identities).

Finally, *the media* corporations are, on the one hand, platforms for the other three groups of agents to take advantage of and act upon and are, on the other hand, also corporate actors in their own right. Some of these actors, such as CNN and the BBC, also have substantial economic and symbolic muscle in addition to their gatekeeping functions. Large-scale international media corporations such as the BBC and CNN are hardly in this business out of loyalty to "the nation." They are like any other corporation acting on the international capitalist market. Like all large-scale corporations, one can naturally find a spectrum of different motives for engaging in specific branding campaigns on the level of individual staff members, but, as corporations, their ultimate goal is to create profit, not national identities. Admittedly, their actions have effects on national identities, which has been proven in several of the research accounts referred to above, but this is—as we have persistently argued in our previous writings—rather a side effect.

These four main types of agents are also internally heterogeneous, and they comprise competing interests and wills that must be negotiated in the daily business of their activities. But they have overarching goals and objectives that guide these activities and that, at the bottom line, each individual has to submit to.

### Conclusion: The Media as Agents

A more nuanced understanding of the role of the media in branding campaigns can contribute to the critical analysis of nation branding and related activities such as soft power, reputation management, and public diplomacy. Several scholars have responded to Kaneva's (2011) call to media researchers to engage in nation-branding analysis, since media scholars should be especially well equipped for conducting such analysis, but surprisingly little research has analyzed the role of the media as communication technologies, or the agency of national and international media organizations in these campaigns. However, such an analysis can reveal the

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complex web of interests that are involved in branding campaigns (as in most large-scale communication endeavors). Some interested parties have vested interests in, for example, shaping national identities and the cultural character of citizens, others have commercial interests, and yet others have political or other incentives for being engaged. The meetings between these different interested parties will produce effects in the branded societies as well as in the global culture of which they are a part. However, these effects will seldom be uniform; rather, they will depend on the power relations between the various agents involved and how these relations are negotiated. Media organizations are one such agent that has been relatively neglected in the literature. Large-scale international media corporations such as BBC Worldwide, CNN, and National Geographic are in the business of producing images. And although the initiators of the campaigns among national political administration, corporate businesses, and communications experts might have ideas on the domestic effects of the branding campaigns, the media have an important part in what will be covered, how images will be constructed, and in which reception contexts they will be interpreted.

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