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America's Selfie: How the US Portrays Itself on its Social Media Accounts

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Introduction: In recent years, nations throughout the world have incorporated the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS), such as Twitter and Facebook, in their diplomatic efforts. Digital diplomacy is seen by researchers as an important tool in furthering a nation's foreign policy as it enables direct interaction and engagement with foreign publics (Metzgar 2012; Cowan & Arsenault 2008; Hayden 2012). Yet digital diplomacy may also prove a useful tool in nation branding activities. While the existing scholarly work on nation branding is extensive, few studies to date have evaluated the manner in which nations use digital diplomacy to proactively manage their image. This could be a result of the fact that until recently, nation branding activities focused primarily on traditional media such as advertising campaigns in television, radio and print. Moreover, as the practice of digital diplomacy is still evolving, the use of SNS in order to manage the national image and reputation is a novel practice. Investigating the manner in which foreign ministries employ social media in their nation branding activities is warranted as it may represent a shift in the conceptualization, practice and assessment of nation branding. This study attempts to fill this apparent gap.

In the first part of this chapter we explore the current literature on nation branding, and illustrate the manner in which digital diplomacy can further nation branding activities by altering an image of a nation that has taken root in the minds of international audiences. As nation branding is an attempt by a nation to draw its own portrait, we refer to the use of digital diplomacy in nation branding activities as Selfie Diplomacy. In the second part of the chapter we analyze America's Selfie by searching for recurring themes in all social media content published by the US State Department over the duration of one month. By so doing we demonstrate the manner in which nations use digital diplomacy to manage their image and offer scholars the means by which to investigate such images.

Our study aims to expand the reach of nation branding research to SNS, and offer a conceptual model for the relationship between digital diplomacy and nation branding. While SNS is increasingly employed by foreign ministries, our study shows that digital diplomacy is particularly useful in altering the prevalent image of a nation among foreign audiences, and mend national images following times of crisis. It also demonstrates that analyzing digital diplomacy content enables one to identify the new national image being promoted. We therefore believe that this chapter may be beneficial to both scholars and practitioners of digital diplomacy.

Nation branding: The body of scholarly work on nation branding has grown substantially over the last decade. However, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers remain divided over the question if nations can, or should be branded like commercial products or financial

corporations. Gudjonsson (2005) identified three separate groups of researchers within this debate. Absolutists are those who believe that nations share the same qualities and obey the same rules as brand products and can therefore be branded. Absolutists believe that like brands, nations attempt to differentiate themselves from other nations and even re-invent themselves from time to time. Following this logic, the motto "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" was an attempt by France to differentiate itself from the old system of government, and by so doing reinvent the French brand (Gudjonsson 2005). Moderates believe that nations differ from products as they consist of individuals with varying needs and characteristics (e.g., gender, education, social class). Thus, unlike a brand, the nation is not one monolithic unit and cannot be branded as such. However, moderates also believe that the government's main goal is to ensure the prosperity of its citizens. Thus, they suggest that branding techniques may be used by a government in order to shape the nation's image, and strengthen its industries and brands. The third group, referred to by Gudjonsson as royalists, believe that changes that occur within a nation are far more profound than changes that influence a product. Such changes and reforms are based on a higher philosophical ground, and have greater significance than changes that occur to a product. Royalists view the nation as holistic and even divine, and therefore believe that the nation cannot, and should not be branded like a bottle of Coca Cola (Gudjonsson 2005).

While settling the aforementioned debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, we are drawn to the middle ground accepting the notion that nations differ from products but that branding techniques may be used to shape a nation's image and reputation. We therefore adopt the definition of nation branding as "a process by which a nation's images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience" (Fan 2010, p.6). In this case the "image" of a nation is what its people recognize and maintain as most central, enduring and distinctive about their nation. Reputation, on the other hand, is a form of feedback received from the outside world concerning the credibility of the nation's identity claims. Thus, nation branding is understood to be a tool for both image and reputation management ([Kaneva 2011](#)).

Aronczyk (2013) further suggests that nation branding is an integral part of national identity. A nation has to be imagined before it can exist and be branded. Branding techniques constantly communicate the national identity, using tools and expertise from the world of corporate brand management. Aronczyk also identifies three dimensions of nation branding. First, nation branding is a strategy of capital generation achieved by using national resources to obtain fiscal advantages over other nations. Second, nation branding is used to generate an image of legitimacy and authority thereby enabling the nation to find a seat at the tables of trans-national institutions and organizations. Third, by creating a unique national identity leaders hope to generate positive foreign public opinion which may "boomerang" and foster domestic consensus and pride (Aronczyk 2013, p.116).

Rooted in marketing research, nation branding first emerged from studies examining the Country of Origin Effect (COO), which states that consumers use country of origin information (i.e., made in America label) as an indicator of product quality ([Kotler & Gertner 2002](#)). While the definitions, methods, concepts and principles of nation branding have all been addressed by researchers, it is the varied origins of such scholars (e.g., marketing, international studies, public relations, public diplomacy) that have created a research body that is as comprehensive as it is diverse. However, a review of the existing literature has

enabled us to identify common arguments that resonate across the research corpus with regard to nation branding.

- 1. The Financial Aspect:** Although it attracts scholarly work from numerous fields, nation branding is still seen as an inherently economic imperative. In the globalized marketplace, nations aggressively compete over investments from multi-national corporations, Direct Foreign Investments and tourism (van Ham 2001; Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Anholt & Hilderth 2005; Rawson 2007; van Ham 2008; Kaneva 2011; Wang 2006). The globalized marketplace necessitates that nations differentiate themselves one from the other in order to successfully compete with a growing number of competitors over a shrinking pool of available resources (Aronczyk 2008, p. 42) Such differentiation is achieved by developing a unique national image. Poland, for instance, uses its official Facebook page (www.facebook.com/polandgovpl) to promote all things distinctly Polish ranging from Polish artists and culture to Polish foods and its national space agency.
- 2. The Cognitive Aspect:** Researchers seem to agree that countries have images whether they proactively manage them or not (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Kotler & Gertner 2002; Anholt & Hilderth 2005; Kaneva 2011; Aronczyk 2008; Fan 2010; Jane & Winner 2013). Moreover, a nation's image is believed to be a cognitive mechanism similar to stereotypes (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Kotler & Gertner 2002; Gudjonsson 2005) and as such, they enable people to make sense of the world around them. However, viewing a nation's image as a cognitive device suggests that altering a nation's image and reputation is a complex and long term process (Fan 2010; Kotler & Gertner 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002), involving an intricate interaction between governments, media and people. In an attempt to alter and perhaps "soften" its national image which is associated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel's foreign ministry now operates a twitter account (@Israel), which deals solely with Israeli technological innovation, culture, lifestyle & tourism.
- 3. The Personal Aspect:** People's perceptions of nations are often shaped by personal experience, be it when someone arrives at a foreign destination as a tourist, or when one encounters citizens of a foreign country (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Fan 2010; Jain & Winner 2013). Therefore, marketing scholars often call on citizens of nations to "live the brand", and manifest the nation's image in their own personal behavior (Aronczyk 2008; Gudjonsson 2005; Anholt & Hilderth 2005; Rawson 2007; Anholt 2005). Yet, the personal aspect of Nation branding also calls on nations to engage directly with foreign audiences in order to promote their image and reputation and build long-lasting relationships that may facilitate brand loyalty (Szondi 2008; Lodge 2002; Fan 2010; Skuba 2002). The US State Department, for instances, engages with global audiences through live Q&A sessions with US officials hosted on the State Department's English facebook page (www.facebook.com/usdos)
- 4. Implementation:** Successfully branding a nation calls for close cooperation between all various stakeholders taking part in the process. These can include policy makers,

governmental agencies, governmental ministries, marketing agencies, and financial corporations who believe that the nation's image has an impact on their own brands (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Fan 2010; Skuba 2002). Some world leaders (i.e., US President, Chancellor of Germany) are seen as influential components of nations' brands given their high media visibility (Rawson 2007). While these leaders are but a part of the national brand, they also have the ability to affect the brand in its entirety, an effect referred to as a "Halo effect" (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002). The influential status of some world leaders in the age of social media is best exemplified by US President Barack Obama who is followed on twitter (@BarackObama) by more than forty three million people throughout the world (Twiplomacy, 2014).

5. **Limitations:** In order to be effective, a nation's brand and image must hold true to reality (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Fan 2010; Skuba 2002). A nation torn by civil war, for example, will not be able to brand itself as an attractive tourist destination. Yet, unlike consumer products, a country's image and brand are not always under the control of marketers. World events, and nations' reactions to these events, often shape the nation's image, reputation and brand (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002, Anholt & Hilderth 2005; Fan 2010). Such was the case with the brand "America" following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Between nation branding and public diplomacy: Szondi (2008) attempts to explore the relationship between nation branding and public diplomacy. Szondi states that recent definitions of public diplomacy no longer place an emphasis on influencing foreign governments but rather on influencing foreign publics in order to create a receptive environment for foreign policy goals and the promotion of national interest. Such definitions reflect certain similarities between public diplomacy and nation branding as both target foreign audiences both focus on facilitating dialogue with foreign publics and both aim to promote national interests such as a nation's image. Szondi's extensive literature review reveals that there are four distinct models with which one can interpret the relationship between the two concepts. The first views public diplomacy and nation branding as distinct spheres since branding deals more with economic goals and public diplomacy with foreign policy goals in general (ibid, p. 15). The second holds that public diplomacy is part of nation branding, as some believe that foreign policy initiatives can also be branded (ibid, p. 19). The third model states the exact opposite, i.e., that nation branding is part of public diplomacy as nation branding is understood to be an instrument through which foreign publics and nations can be reached (Szondi 2008, p. 22). The fourth and final model, which we adopt for the purpose of this chapter, is that these are two distinct yet overlapping concepts. Elements shared by the two concepts are image creation (as positive images of a nation are by-products of both activities), promotion of a national identity, culture and the promotion of national values, which are important facets of the nation's image and brand (ibid, p. 26). Szondi adds that relationship building and two-way communication should be the ultimate goal of both public diplomacy and nation branding and can serve as yet another element that integrates the two concepts.

By contrast, Pamment (2013) does not believe that two-way communication *should* be the goal of public diplomacy but rather that two-way communication is the very essence of the new public diplomacy. According to Pamment, the old twentieth century public diplomacy was characterized by a one-way flow of information in which there was limited interaction between communicator and recipient and which relied on persuasion models that were deterministic in their interpretation of the effects of political communication on audiences. However, the emergence of a new media landscape, characterized by a continuous global flow of information, challenged the position of foreign ministries as the sole communicators of foreign policy. These changes necessitated new tools for communicating public diplomacy to non-governmental international audiences. Thus, the new public diplomacy is characterized by dialogue, collaboration and inclusiveness. It represents a clear break from the one-way broadcasting model of public diplomacy and takes advantage of social media to establish two-way engagements with publics (ibid, p. 3). It is this two-way engagement that enables social media to serve as a very useful tool for change management.

Digital diplomacy as a tool for change management: Our main proposition is that nation branding practiced through digital diplomacy channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), can serve as an effective tool for image and reputation management and as such may help nations alter their "status quo" images. By digital diplomacy we refer mainly to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation.

Digital diplomacy exists at two levels, that of the foreign ministry and that of embassies located around the world. By operating on these two levels nations can tailor foreign policy and nation branding messages to the unique characteristics of local audiences with regard to history, culture, values and traditions, thereby facilitating the acceptance of their foreign policy and the image they aim to promote. Digital diplomacy can also overcome many of the obstacles of nation branding. Foreign Ministries can oversee cooperation between all stakeholders in the branding process as they may work horizontally with other governmental branches and agencies and vertically with local embassies and diplomats. Digital diplomacy could help ensure that the image a nation promotes is linked with reality as content shared on social media accounts deals both with foreign policy goals as well as the concrete actions taken by a nation in the global arena. Moreover, social media enables two-way interaction and engagement between foreign ministries and their followers thus facilitating the creation of long-lasting relationships and brand loyalty. Finally, digital diplomacy is an important tool for image management as people who visit a nation's social media accounts often seek interaction and are therefore willing to open channels of dialogue. As Yoram Morad (2014), director of the digital diplomacy unit at the Israeli foreign ministry told the authors in an interview, when people ask question on Facebook pages or Twitter they indicate a willingness to listen, and to open channels of dialogue which may pave the way to understanding and even persuasion.

The Crisis in Brand "America": Studies on nation branding have shown that intervening events may have immediate effects on a nation's image. Such was the case with the 1988 Olympic Games in South Korea and the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002). With regard to the US, some scholars view the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a

watershed event that dramatically impacted brand "America". These researchers believe that as it emerged victorious from the Cold War, the US was judged favorably by nations and citizens throughout the world on three dimensions: military, moral and economic (Quelch & Jocz 2009). America symbolized values such as democracy, freedom, prosperity and human rights. Yet the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the US response to these attacks, altered the manner in which the US was perceived and altered the values that comprised brand "America". The global war on terror and military invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, lead many to view the US as arrogant, imperialistic and a threat to world peace (Silver & Hill 2002; Rawson 2007; Quelch & Jocz 2009). The new perception of the US, and its transition from a beacon of democracy to a militaristic empire, led to a crisis in brand "America". It is this crisis, and the US's desire to regain its standing in the world, that demonstrates the relevance of the US case study with regard to the exploration of nation branding practiced through digital diplomacy.

The crisis in brand "America" was made evident in a Gallup poll conducted in nine Muslim countries during January 2002. The poll revealed that most of the respondents viewed the US as having a corrupting influence on their societies and as being Anti-Muslim and specifically anti Palestinian (Skuba 2002). The Pew Research Center's Global Attitude Project documented the decline in America's image during the Bush years. Surveys taken between 2002 and 2004 showed that America's image, following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, became unfavorable even in the eyes of its closest allies (e.g., UK and Spain) and friendly Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan (Fullerton et al. 2005). During this period, America's favorability suffered from double digit drops in many countries including Germany, France and Turkey (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 2013), and hatred towards the US intensified in Muslim countries (Fullerton et al. 2005). A BBC world service poll from 2007 found that across all countries polled one in two respondents saw the US as playing mainly a negative role in the world (BBC World Service 2007).

Some believe that President Bush personified the values that came to define brand "America" following 9/11, and may have had a "Halo Effect" on the brand in its entirety (Quelch & Jocz 2009). Studies from 2005 and 2007 demonstrated that the Anti-American sentiment was tied to America's foreign policy and its leaders, but not to the American people or American culture (Rawson 2007; Fullerton et al. 2005). Given the negative views associated with President Bush, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 was seen as an opportunity to "wipe the slate clean" in the hope that Brand Obama would save brand "America" (Quelch & Jocz 2009).

Pew's latest global survey from 2013 indicates that Obama's election in 2008 did in fact aid brand "America". America's image and reputation is now more positive than it was during the Bush years. Amongst its allies in Europe and Asia America's image is now more favorable than unfavorable. However, the 2013 survey also indicates that brand "America" has yet to be restored to its former glory. The majority of respondents still believe that America acts mostly in its own self-interest, while ignoring the interests of other countries. Notably, the image of the US in the Middle East is overwhelmingly negative with less than one in five Palestinians, Jordanians and Egyptians holding a positive view of the US. While President Obama is still rated higher than President Bush, his global image has sharply declined since

2008 with confidence in the US president plummeting in double digits in 10 of the 22 countries surveyed (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project 2013). A BBC World Service poll from May 2013 revealed that positive views of America had declined yet again throughout 2012 and 2013 in European and Middle Eastern countries such as UK, France, Germany and Egypt (BBC World Service 2013).

The most recent findings of the BBC World Service Poll and Pew's 2013 Global Attitude survey indicate that the crisis in brand "America" has yet to be resolved. This could be explained by the fact that nations' images are stereotypes and therefore take a long duration of time to change. As Kotler and Gertner explain (2002), people are more likely to process information that corresponds with their stereotype and disregard information that contradicts it. Moreover, people tend to avoid the effort necessary to reconstruct cognitive constructs such as nations' images (Kotler & Gertner 2002). Therefore, we propose that America's negative image and reputation, which has endured for more than a decade, can be viewed as a form of "status quo". We further propose that nation branding, practiced through digital diplomacy, is a powerful tool which may enable the US to alter its global image and reputation and, subsequently, revitalize brand "America". Thus, we view digital diplomacy to be a tool for change management amongst foreign policy makers.

However, nation branding cannot be regarded as a magical wand able to alter the US's image with one stroke. As Papadopoulos and Heslop (2000) state, nations attempting to brand themselves often face an uphill struggle. For instance, countries often fail to attract foreign direct investments given a lack of understating of corporate mentality and corporate decision-making processes. Moreover, nations often have more than one product that requires branding (e.g., Swiss scenery, Swiss banking) thus requiring a distinct branding strategy of each product. In his analysis of two nation branding campaigns, one for New Zealand and the other for Ontario, Lodge (2002) emphasizes the need for a long term commitment to a branding strategy which is often unattainable given domestic political transitions. Finally, countries engaging in nation branding walk a tightrope between image management and propaganda. Once nation branding turns into propaganda it becomes more of a double-edged sword than a magical wand. Illustrating the manner in which digital diplomacy can help reshape America's image first necessitates an understanding of the relationship between nation branding and public diplomacy

Selfie Diplomacy: Nation branding may be viewed as an attempt by a nation to draw its self-portrait. In the age of social media, such self-portraits are known as Selfies. Thus, the art of nation branding practiced via social media may be referred to as Selfie Diplomacy. As world nations attempt to proactively manage their image and reputation, analyzing a nation's digital diplomacy channels may enable researchers to characterize a nation's Selfie and illustrate the image it attempts to promote around the world. Since Selfie diplomacy is practiced through SNS it may, when used properly, enable nations to overcome some of the challenges of nation branding. SNS such as Facebook or Twitter offer specific tools and interfaces, enabling engagement with foreign audiences in the form of dialogue between foreign ministries and their online followers. By engaging with their followers in *meaningful* dialogues, foreign ministries may alter the perception of their countries given the fact that people's perception of a certain nation is influenced by their personal experience with that

nation. Selfie diplomacy is powerful as it reaches users wherever they are. It may thus be more effective in tackling stereotypes that have taken root in people's mind. This could be achieved by publishing attractive content, which reveals their multi-faceted nature. Countries perceived to be dull may highlight their dramatic landscape, while countries associated with armed conflict may emphasize their cultural heritage, democratic tradition, or diplomatic efforts to promote global peace.

Aronczyk argues that when used in the diplomatic arena, nation branding may serve as a proactive tool enabling the nation to repair reputations damaged by political legacies or avoid unfavorable international attention following unpopular domestic decisions (Aronczyk 2013, P. 16). In so doing she may also view nation branding as a tool for change management. By drawing a new self-portrait, nations may be able to distance themselves from their past and re-invent their brand. One method of creating the nation's new Selfie on digital diplomacy channels is launching a social media campaign, which focuses on a global issue. Such is the case with the UK's campaign to end sexual violence in conflict, which has been aggressively promoted on the Foreign Office's Twitter and Facebook channels using the hashtag #Timetoact. By targeting the issue of gender-based violence during times of conflict, the UK may be attempting to associate its brand with humanistic values and distance itself from the legacies of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, the term "selfie diplomacy" refers not only to the actual use of social media by nations to promote their desired image, but also to the entire SNS language that is required in order to achieve their goals.

Like the UK, the US has also used SNS in order to promote its new Selfie in various means. In the following section we analyze America's Selfie by evaluating two of its social media accounts: the State Department's English Facebook page and English Twitter account. We chose to analyze America's Selfie for several reasons. First, given its negative image and the crisis in brand "America", it is fair to assume that the US State Department is currently attempting to reshape America's image through nation branding. Secondly, America has eagerly adopted digital diplomacy and the US State Department is one of the most active and developed foreign ministries on Social Networking Sites (SNS). Finally, the US State Department is one of the most popular foreign ministries on SNS attracting a large global audience. We employ here a qualitative thematic analysis. This form of analysis seeks to find overlying themes, which stem from the research corpus itself. The data analyzed included tweets and Facebook posts published by the State Department on its English social media accounts between the December 1, and December 31, 2013. We chose this time period as December saw intensive US diplomatic efforts on a global scale, be it in leading negotiations between Israel and Palestine, halting violence in the Central African Republic and promoting a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions. A total of 147 tweets and 84 Facebook posts were published by the US State Department during the sampling period. Out of these, 63 Facebook posts and 112 tweets were analyzed and arranged in four overlying themes: mending relations with the Arab/Muslim world, America's moral leadership, America's military might, and America's economic leadership. Facebook posts and tweets that were not part of the analysis had various subject matters that could not be categorized (e.g., picture of Secretary Kerry and his dog, invitation to hear remarks by President Obama on the passing of Nelson Mandela, diplomatic trivia questions).

The following table presents the number of facebook posts and tweets comprising each of the four themes identified as part of America's Selfie.

Themes identified in America's Selfie	Number of Facebook posts	Number of tweets
Mending relations with the Arab and Muslim world	11%	18%
America's Moral Leadership	57%	58%
America's Military Might	17%	11%
America's economic leadership	14%	11%
Total	63	112

America's Selfie:

Mending relations with the Arab and Muslim world: Following his election in 2008, US President Barack Obama sought to mend America's relationship with the Arab and Muslim world (Quelch & Jocz, 2009). In a major foreign policy address delivered at Cairo University in June of 2009, Obama stated "I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the US and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition" (White House 2009). In his speech Obama addressed America's military presence in Iraq, its desire to enter into dialogue with Iran and the need to reach a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Four years after the "New Beginning" speech, mending America's relationship with the Arab and Muslim world seems to have remained a major foreign policy goal for the US. During the sampling period, the Middle East was the most frequently mentioned region on the US State Department's Twitter account far ahead of Europe, Africa and Asia/Pacific. 18% of all tweets analyzed dealt with Middle Eastern countries including Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and Israel, which was mentioned mostly in relation to the Middle-East peace process. The high visibility of Arab and Muslim countries on its Twitter account may represent an attempt by the US to portray its commitment to creating new relationships with these countries. During December 2013 America demonstrated its new policies towards Arab and Muslim countries. An example of these new policies is a tweet published by the State Department on December 23rd which stated that the "U.S. deeply concerned about jail sentences for peaceful demonstrators, worsening climate for free assembly in #Egypt". In this tweet, America seems to be distancing itself from military and totalitarian regimes in the Middle East with whom it is so often identified. By openly criticizing the Egyptian military regime, America may be signaling that it has altered its foreign policy, and that it is now committed to aiding Egyptians to realize their democratic aspirations. Such aspirations were made evident during the Arab Spring that swept through the Middle East during the summer of 2011.

Facebook posts dealing with the Middle East accounted for 11% of all posts analyzed. As was the case with its twitter account, the Middle East was also the most frequently mentioned region on the State Department's Facebook page. Arab and Muslim countries mentioned on

Facebook included Palestine, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Israel. Two posts published during the sampling period capture an important facet of the new image America is promoting via its social media channels. The first, published on the 8th of December included a remark by Secretary Kerry according to which diplomacy, backed by the credible threat of military force, enabled the world to tackle the menace of Syria's chemical weapons, and it may also enable the world to face the menace of nuclear weapons in Iran. The second post published three days later included Secretary Kerry's opening remarks when testifying in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the issue of the interim agreement reached between the world powers and Iran. Kerry stated that "This is a very delicate diplomatic moment, and we have a chance to address peacefully one of the most pressing national security concerns that the world faces today". In our opinion, these posts illustrate America's new commitment to settling differences with the Arab and Muslim world by means of diplomacy as opposed to military conflict. Thus, America's new image is that of a nation, which treats Arab and Muslim countries with respect, and is committed to dialogue with them on the basis of shared respect. This new image of America was best demonstrated by Secretary Kerry who was quoted in a post from the 12th December saying "It has never been more clear that diplomacy can be a transformational tool that shapes the world according to our values."

As the 2002 Gallup poll suggested (Skuba 2002), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a major source of tension between America and the Arab and Muslim world. During the month of December the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine were in full swing and Secretary Kerry frequently visited the region in order to seek an interim agreement between Israel and Palestine. From analyzing tweets and Facebook posts dealing with these negotiations, it becomes evident that the US went to great lengths to depict itself as a fair mediator between the two sides, who is also committed to realizing the aspirations of both sides. This attempt is best demonstrated by the fact that except for one instance Israel and Palestine were always mentioned in unison as were their leaders. If a State Department tweet mentioned Israel or Prime Minister Netanyahu, a second tweet soon followed mentioning Palestine and President Abbas. This symmetry was even more evident on Facebook. On December 5th, the State Department published an image of Secretary Kerry meeting with President Abbas opposite of a picture of Kerry meeting with PM Netanyahu.

On the 12th, the US State Department published a Facebook post that includes an image of snow falling on the Palestinian President's compound in Ramallah where Secretary Kerry was meeting with President Abbas. The following day, a post featuring an image of Secretary Kerry meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in a snow covered Jerusalem was also published. We assert that this systematic symmetry is not coincidental but rather an active effort by the US to alter its image among the Arab and Muslim world as being too pro-Israel. 6% of all Facebook posts and 8% of all tweets published during the sampling period dealt with the Israeli Palestinian negotiations. The high visibility of these negotiations is an important element of America's Selfie, and represents a proactive attempt to alter its image as being pro-Israeli while neglecting to promote the cause of Palestinian statehood.

America's Moral Leadership: The second theme identified in our analysis dealt with the US attempt to re-brand itself as the world's moral leader. Tweets dealing with moral issues

accounted for 58% of all tweets analyzed while Facebook posts dealing with such issues accounted for 50% of all posts analyzed. The most visible moral issue identified in this theme was that of America as a beacon of democracy that promotes democratic reforms, supports democratic transitions in foreign countries, and calls on world leaders to uphold the democratic process during times of civil unrest. A prime example of America's promotion of democracy can be found in tweets dealing with the mounting tensions in Ukraine. During the month of December, violent clashes erupted between pro-E.U. protestors in Kiev's Maidan Square and Ukrainian police forces. In a tweet from the 4th of December Secretary Kerry urged the Ukrainian government to "listen to the people who want to live in freedom, opportunity, prosperity". Following additional violent clashes on the 10th of December Kerry tweeted "Ukrainian authorities' response to Maidan Square protests is not acceptable, does not befit a democracy". In a Facebook post published the same day, the US "expressed disgust with the decision of Ukrainian authorities to meet peaceful protest...with riot police, bulldozers and batons rather than with respect for democratic rights and human dignity".

US support of democratic transitions and reforms throughout the world can be demonstrated by a tweet that congratulated Honduras on an "election that was generally transparent, peaceful, and respected the will of the Honduran people" and a tweet from December the 9th stating that the "U.S. strongly supports democratic institutions and the democratic process in #Thailand, a long-time friend and ally".

On December 10th, which marks the UN's Human Rights Day, the State Department published tweets, dealing with America's promotion of the rights of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender), and a statement by President Obama regarding the US's "unwavering support of the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights". The US observance of this day on its social media channels represents another instance, in which the US is portrayed as a member of the international league of nations. Additional tweets and posts dealing with human rights included a call on the Chinese government to release Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, concern expressed over anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda, a call on Russia to carry out judiciary reforms and a statement by Vice President Biden during a visit to Japan in which he called for the integration of women in the national workforce and leadership.

Finally, America's moral leadership was also expressed through its humanitarian aid to victims of violence and disasters. One example of America's support for disaster relief is a Facebook post from the 18th of December in which Secretary Kerry announced 25 million dollars in aid to typhoon victims in the Philippines. With regard to aid to civilians affected by violence and civil war, the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) was most visible during the sampling period on America's Social media channels. On the 5th of December the State Department tweeted that the "US is appalled by reports of the murder of innocent women & children outside of Bangui" in CAR. On the 10th of December a video address by President Obama to the people of CAR appeared on both the State Department's Twitter and Facebook accounts. The tweet promoting the video read "President Obama: You-the proud citizens of #CAR-have the power to choose a different path. You can choose peace". Rather than looking at this video through cynical eyes and calling for actions rather than tweets, we view it as a fascinating attempt by the US to re-

invent itself as a superpower that respects other nations, and believes that they have the right to determine their own fate without having one imposed on them by the US. It is our opinion that America's attempt to regain its standing as the world's moral compass is a cornerstone of America's new Selfie given the fact that "moral leadership lends legitimacy to hard power" (Quelch & Jocz 2009, P. 167).

America's Military Might: What was most surprising about this theme was the overall lack of references to America's military might. During the sampling period, the US armed forces were mentioned in only 14% of all posts and 12% of all tweets analyzed. None of these tweets and posts demonstrated America's military strength, America's presence in Afghanistan, or America's military superiority. US forces in Iraq were mentioned only once in a post from the 3rd of December detailing the manner in which dogs are assisting soldiers in removing mines from southern Iraq. This post was accompanied by an image of a US soldier embracing an army-trained his dog.

Other mentions of the US army included a video message reordered by Secretary Kerry, which was to air during the traditional Army-Navy football game, and a post showing wrapped Christmas presents to be distributed by the US Marine Corps Toys for Tots program to underprivileged children in the US. Finally, in a post from the 25th of December, President Obama and the First Lady wished US troops a merry Christmas stating "we want all of our troops to know that you're in our thought and prayers this holiday season".

While the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) was mentioned during the sampling period on the State Department's Twitter and Facebook accounts, it was not portrayed as a military organization but rather as an international peacekeeping organization. Facebook posts published during a NATO summit on the 3rd of December included a statement by Secretary Kerry saying that "#NATO will continue to protect freedom, continue to try to push for and bring about peace and it will do so for decades to come". America's commitment to peacekeeping was further exemplified by a tweet and Facebook post from the 16th of December which dealt with the training of UN peacekeepers.

The final component of this theme includes posts and tweets in which the US expressed solidarity with victims of terrorism following terror attacks in Egypt, Israel and Russia. In our view, such tweets may represent a shift from a military led war on terror to American lead solidarity in the face terror. As opposed to George W. Bush's famous "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists", these tweets echo a different sentiment, one of a united world battling the horrific consequences of terrorism together.

We view the overall lack of references to the US armed forces, as well as the portrayal of NATO as a peacekeeping organization, as part of an effort by the US to alter its image as an imperialistic nation, which achieves its foreign policy goals through military confrontations. Pictures of embracing animals and gifts to be donated by the US Marine Corps may also demonstrate an attempt by the US to "soften" its global image following a decade of wars.

America's economic leadership: The fourth and final theme identified in our analysis of the State Department's social media channels deals with America's economic leadership. Surprisingly, only 11% of all tweets analyzed, and 13% of all Facebook posts analyzed, dealt

with America's economic leadership. Given the fact that "America's business is business", we expected that America's economic leadership would be more visible and would serve as a major component of the image it presents to the world. This finding could be attributed to the fact that the US is seen by many as responsible for the 2008 financial crisis. Moreover, while America is seen as the leader of the globalized economy, it is also seen as responsible for the environmental damages this economy has brought with it (Quelch & Jocz 2009).

Quelch & Jocz (2009) maintain that during the previous decade America was perceived as a greedy polluting superpower. The elements comprising this theme demonstrate an attempt to alter that image. Throughout the month of December the US highlighted its investments in infrastructure in the developing world, be it in South East Asia or Africa. One such Facebook post, published on the 16th of December, stated that "only 16% of #Africa is connected to high-speed internet. What could be the impact of connecting Africa?" A tweet published during Secretary Kerry's visit to Vietnam on the 16th of December announced "\$32.5 million in assistance toward maritime capacity building in Southeast Asia".

On the 12th of December, the State Department tweeted that the US would financially support CASA-1000, a program that aims to create a shared hydro-power electricity grid for the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The US support of the CASA-1000 program exemplifies important elements of the image the US is currently promoting on its social media accounts and that is America's newfound commitment to meeting the challenges of climate change. During a visit by Secretary Kerry to Vietnam, the State Department tweeted that the "US & #Vietnam are working together to tackle the most difficult environmental challenges of our day", and invited followers to "Read #SecKerry's remarks to students in #Vietnam about #climatechange and the environment". The following day a Facebook post stated that "70 million people rely on the #Mekong Delta for their livelihood. What will happen if the world's oceans rise 1 meter? #SecKerry spoke to students working on #climatechange in #Vietnam". The US support of the developing world, along with its determination to tackle the challenges of climate change, may represent an effort by the US to re-brand itself as a conscience economic superpower which aims to integrate the developing world into the globalized economy while recognizing the effect this economy has on the environment.

The final component comprising this theme are tweets and posts, which dealt with a trade agreement negotiated between the US and the European Union, and known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In promoting the TTIP, the US State Department stressed the fact that the agreement would benefit both Europe and the US. A tweet from the 19th of December read "#TTIP aims to lower tariffs, reducing costs for consumers on both sides of the Atlantic". A Facebook post from the same day asked "Can we increase trade and investment while creating jobs in both the U.S. and EU all at the same time? That's the goal" of the TTIP. By promoting the TTIP agreement as one that will benefit both American and European economies the US may be attempting to rehabilitate its image amongst European audiences who view it as responsible for the devastating 2008 financial crisis. We believe that this facet of America's image is meant to portray it as a responsible economic superpower.

Conclusion: For more than two decades nation branding has attracted scholarly work from diverse fields such as marketing, communications, public relations and international studies. Although researchers still dispute whether nations can be branded like products (Gudjonsson 2005), many have adopted the notion that nations have images (Papadopoulos & Heslop 2002; Kotler & Gertner 2002; Anholt & Hilderth 2005; Fan 2010). At times, nations may even have competing images as for some America may represent both a beacon of democracy and a self-serving superpower. However, once a certain image of a nation prevails, it becomes more difficult to alter (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Gudjonsson 2005). Using branding techniques to alter a nation's image and reputation is the very essence of nation branding.

Although the body of work on nation branding is both extensive and diverse, we find that few have attempted to illustrate how digital diplomacy, practiced through SNS (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) can serve as a tool for nation branding. In this chapter we attempted to fill this gap and extend the scope of nation branding to SNS. Our claim is that due to the fact that nations' images are cognitive devices, nations' images are strongly rooted in peoples' consciousness. Moreover, we believe that nation branding achieved through digital diplomacy can assist nations in altering their images, thereby serving as a tool for change management amongst foreign policy makers.

Recently, nations of the world have flocked to SNS such as Twitter and Facebook. By using such sites in order to promote their foreign policies, global actions, values, culture and economy, nations are already managing their image through digital diplomacy. Given that nation branding is an attempt by a nation to draw its portrait, and since self-portraits shared on SNS are known as Selfies, we refer to the practice of nation branding on SNS as Selfie diplomacy. In this chapter, we attempted to analyze America's Selfie.

We chose to focus on the US given the continuing crisis in brand "America" and its negative image around the world. While the US once symbolized democracy, freedom and human rights, the 9/11 attacks and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq lead many around the world to view the US as a greedy, polluting, self-serving, imperialistic and a militaristic superpower (Silver & Hill 2002; Rawson 2007; Quelch & Jocz 2009). Given its negative image we assumed the US State Department would be engrossed in an attempt to alter America's image around the world. Moreover, given the fact that the US State Department is one of the most active foreign ministries on SNS, we assumed that tweets and posts published during one month would provide sufficient data for Selfie analysis. Our analysis was a qualitative one, and we employed thematic analysis in order to identify recurring themes within all Facebook posts and tweets published during four weeks on the US State Department's English Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Our analysis revealed four main themes. The first was America's attempt to mend its relationship with Arab and Muslim countries. During the sampling period, the Middle East was the most frequently mentioned region in the State Department's Twitter and Facebook accounts. The high visibility of this region and the frequent mentioning of Arab and Muslim countries (e.g., Syria, Iran, and Palestine), serves to demonstrate that mending its relations with the Arab and Muslim world has remained an important US foreign policy goal. The

Second theme included instances in which America attempted to regain its reputation as the world's moral leader. An important component of this theme was the attempt by the US to re-brand itself as a beacon of democracy by calling for democratic reforms and safeguarding democratic processes in times of upheaval. Additional elements comprising this theme were US humanitarian aid for disaster relief and support for the protection of human rights. Some have maintained that the US war on terror underscored America's position as the world's moral compass (Quelch & Jocz 2009). This theme indicates that America is now attempting to regain its moral standing.

The third theme identified was that of America's military might. During the month evaluated, there was little mention of the US armed forces. When the US military was mentioned it was never in relation to American military conflicts around the world. We view the lack of references to American military might, and an emphasis on peacekeeping missions, as part of an attempt by the US to alter its image as an imperialistic state that relies mainly on its military in order to achieve foreign policy goals. The fourth and final theme identified in our analysis included posts and tweets portraying America's economic leadership. This theme included references to US investments meant to integrate the developing world into the global economy while taking measures to address the environmental impact of the globalized industrial economy. Herein lies an American attempt to present itself as a conscientious economic superpower. An additional element of this theme was a trade agreement negotiated between the US and the EU. We believe that by underlining the agreement's positive impact on Europe's ailing economies, the US is attempting to regain its standing with European allies who were negatively impacted by the 2008 financial crisis.

In summary, we found that America brands itself as an economically responsible superpower, guided by moral values and committed to diplomacy and building meaningful relationship with the Arab and Muslim world. As such, America no longer portrays itself as the world's policeman, but rather as the world's social worker. Interestingly, we found that America's Selfie corresponds with Quelch and Jocz's article from 2009, in which they outline a roadmap for President Obama with regard to salvaging America's global image. The researchers called on Obama to fix three "major blemishes on the US's image": the military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the violation of international law symbolized by the Guantanamo Detention Camp, and the US-originated recession that has impacted the world's economy (Quelch & Jocz 2009). In other words, they call on Obama to re-shape America's image by regaining its position as a moral leader, by acting as a responsible economic superpower that is part of the solution to the global economic recession, and by decreasing its reliance on military strength.

Interestingly, there was one element that resonated across all themes and that is America as part of the global community. We found that in contrast to the Bush era, America is currently attempting to take its place in the international community. This was made evident by America's involvement in global initiatives such as the UN Human Rights Day, its support of international efforts to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis and its resolution to address climate change.

The elements comprising America's Selfie are not necessarily new ones. America has been an avid promoter of democracy and human rights for nearly a century. However, by using digital diplomacy to promote democracy and human rights, the US may be able to directly reach a large audience, without the mediation of local institutions. Thus it is able to strengthen the association between brand America and desired values, thereby mending its global image. By engaging with its global audiences, and listening to their comments and criticism, the US can further evaluate whether its nation branding campaigns are effective and if not, identify which elements have been rejected by followers. Thus, the US can continuously "fine tune" its nation branding strategies and increase their possible impact and acceptance. Moreover, by employing digital diplomacy at the embassy level, the US can tailor nation-branding campaigns to the characteristics of local audiences and the manner in which the US is perceived by such audiences. If engagement and listening can facilitate the acceptances of one's foreign policy amongst foreign publics (Hayden 2012; Metzgar 2012), they may also facilitate the acceptance of one Selfie amongst foreign publics. Herein lies the potential of nation branding delivered through digital diplomacy channels.

Like nation branding, Selfie diplomacy also has its limitations, specifically when world events come to dominate news cycles and international diplomacy. However, our case study revealed that at times, such events may be incorporated into the country's Selfie. During the month of December, former South African President Nelson Mandela passed away. In tweets and posts published by the State Department and dealing with Mandela's passing, Mandela was depicted as a man who fought for freedom, peace and human rights. In other words, Mandela epitomized the values promoted by the US on its digital diplomacy channels, and was therefore incorporated into America's Selfie.

The emergence of Selfie diplomacy necessitates that scholars begin to evaluate the impact of SNS on the art of nation branding. While Selfie diplomacy may represent a conceptual shift in the practice of nation branding, its effectiveness remains unknown. Future studies should examine the extent to which local and international audiences accept nations' Selfies. Barriers to such acceptance may be the belief that social media content published by foreign ministries is nothing more than propaganda. Likewise, studies should evaluate the effectiveness of nation branding campaigns delivered through SNS as opposed to those delivered through traditional media (e.g., print, television). It is also of paramount importance to examine whether engagement and listening do indeed challenge people's stereotypes regarding certain countries, and whether engagement on SNS with a foreign diplomat is tantamount to a personal encounter with someone from a foreign country. Finally, nation branding research should evaluate whether countries have been able to associate their brand with certain values by using Selfie diplomacy (e.g., US and democracy).

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to assess whether the US has been successful in altering its global image, such an assessment can be made by social media directors at both the embassy and ministry level. Doing so necessitates that operators of digital diplomacy accounts continuously monitor the manner in which nation branding messages are received and further disseminated by their online followers. An example of such an analysis can be illustrated based on a tweet published by US First Lady Michele Obama at the time of the writing of this chapter. On May 8, 2014, the First Lady uploaded a Selfie holding a sign with

the hashtag #Bringbackourgirls, referring to more than two hundred girls abducted by an Islamist group in Nigeria. The response to this tweet, which was published on the US State Departments social media accounts, was immediate as countless individuals took Selfies of themselves holding a sign with the hashtag #Bringbackyourdrones referring to the frequent use of drones by the US military in killing suspected terrorist. Such online responses to social media content should be continuously monitored by ministries of foreign affairs as they may assist in analyzing the degree to which a nation's promoted image has taken root.

As Szondi (2008) writes, the ultimate goal of nation branding and public diplomacy is to reach foreign audiences, open channels of dialogue, and build meaningful relationships with them. We believe this can be achieved primarily through engagement and two-way communication between foreign ministries, embassies and their online followers. Therefore, future studies should focus on examining the extent to which engagement takes place between ministries and their followers as well as the interactivity of messages, and how they are tailored and understood by local audiences. This calls for focusing on digital diplomacy at both the ministry and embassy level. Moreover, studies should examine the organizational processes of designing nation-branding messages, and whether the image portrayed on social media by a foreign ministry is indeed the result of a proactive attempt to manage one's image. This could be achieved by interviewing digital diplomacy practitioners around the world. Finally, researchers should evaluate whether nation branding activities have actually led to the desired effect amongst the target population of digital diplomacy - followers of social media accounts operated by foreign ministries and embassies.

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