The Differentiation of a Nation
The Swedish Nation Brand Management

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight how the recent developments in international relations has created an environment with increased competition between countries for attention and assets and how these changes has promoted the increased use of public diplomacy to reach out to new actors. The study will focus on the public diplomacy sub-discipline of nation branding. The paper will analyze reputation management in international relations through the lens of corporate branding. This approach will help bridge the gap between marketing and international relations and expand the analytical toolkit for public diplomacy. While many studies have focused on branding campaigns this study will focus on the brand management to see whether it is capable of creating distinction and relevance for a nation brand or national reputation. The paper aims to give an descriptive analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats the Swedish reputation management faces in order to assess how the management can improve but also provide an analytical framework for researchers interested in studying reputation management. The paper will employ a qualitative method consisting of text analysis and interviews to connect the theoretical models with business practice to then present the results using a SWOT-analysis. The data gathered from the Swedish Institute serves to provide empirical data on the business conduct in relation to brand management and several indexes will be used to assess the Swedish brand. Results show that the Swedish nation brand management have adopted a wide range of methods to strengthen the distinctiveness and relevance for the Swedish brand and that the weaknesses are mostly connected to communication failures. The brand management has also good opportunities to further project a strong image of Sweden and the threats towards it are only marginal. The brand management should continue its current work while developing new methods and solutions to overcome the communication problems towards certain target groups. While the study have made contributions to understand how reputation management could be analyzed through corporate brand management, further research should look into whether a nation brand or reputation has been used as a power asset that is capable of actually acquiring global assets.

Keywords: International Relations, Communication, Marketing, Sweden, Public Diplomacy, Nation Branding, Corporate Branding, Nation Brand, Competitive Identity, Brand, Reputation, Brand Management, Swedish Institute
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1.1 Competing for Influence

In recent years there has been a growing interest from states to adopt so called nation branding as a part of their diplomacy models.¹ The main reason why nation branding has become relevant is the process of globalization; which is defined as the increased transnational flows of goods, capital, people and ideas, and the growing interdependence and increased touch points between actors on all levels in international relations.²

While traditional diplomacy consisted of state-to-state relations behind closed doors, two trends of globalization have led to the emergence of new actors in world affairs and thus changed the conditions for conducting foreign policy and diplomacy.³

The first trend is the globalization of communications. The rapid information exchange has propelled foreign publics as an actor and target group that states need to interact with. Moreover has the sheer amount of communicated messages generated a background noise. In the information age attention rather than information has become the scarce resource and the challenge is now to break through the noise.⁴

The second trend is the economic globalization that has caused a free flows of production factors. As capital, people and ideas can move across borders, states need to compete for these assets on a global scale.⁵

States now engage in so called public diplomacy to address the new actors and attract the global assets but the international competition and background noise present challenges to achieve these goals. This is where branding becomes relevant. Nation branding is defined as the "Unique multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all its target audiences".⁶ The essence of nation branding is to create meaningful differentiation aimed to position the country above their competitors.

The notion of being competitive is something that is highlighted both in marketing by Simon Anholt who refers to nation branding as competitive identity and by Joseph Nye, who writes in the sphere of international relations and public diplomacy, and stresses the importance of competitive credibility.⁷ Thus a new global landscape has emerged, shaped by neoliberal characteristics where the goal of the state is to act as a vehicle to attract global assets,⁸ and both scholars and practitioners are responding to the development.

¹ Melissen, "Wielding Soft Power", 22.
³ Huijgh, "Public Diplomacy", 441.
⁵ Anholt, Competitive Identity, 19-20.
⁶ Dinnie, Nation Branding, 15.
⁸ Aronczyk, Branding the Nation, 172. Dinnie, Nation branding, 19.
So how do these global shifts and the rise of branding connect to Swedish interests and diplomacy? Sweden is a small country which is dependent on the international development. The process of globalization is thus something that affects Sweden to a very high degree. A Swedish governmental inquiry (SOU) highlights the substantial changes in international affairs and makes an explicit link to globalization. Thus both scholars and practitioners recognize the changed landscape for international affairs with an increased competition for assets and attention.

On a more theoretical level the development of an increased interest in branding echoes the sentiments of constructivist theory which claims that state interest is actively formed and shaped and that other assets than raw economic and military power play a role in international relations. The many touch points between theory, scholars and practitioners show that the field is alive and relevant for research in the context of international relations.

The Swedish governmental inquiry regarding the conduct of foreign policy highlights public diplomacy as a tool that can further strengthen the Swedish interests in the globalized world. This opens the door to investigate what kind of power-assets diplomacy and in this case, public diplomacy can offer in the context of foreign policy. Public diplomacy aims to pursue state interests by so called soft power. Soft power works through attraction rather than coercion and relies upon soft power resources such as policies, values and culture according to Joseph Nye who coined the term.

The Swedish public diplomacy aims to build long term relations with foreign publics by communication in order to expand the Swedish influence. A major component for exercising this influence is the country’s reputation which can act as an enabler to establish desired political and business relations. In this context branding becomes relevant as it can help to shape this reputation.

The bottom line is clear: If people know about you and like you they are more likely to listen and engage with you. Thus reputation serves as a passive soft power resource that states need to cultivate in order to compete for influence. This brings us to the core of this paper which is grounded in two assumptions:

- **There is a case for branding as states aim to create a meaningful differentiation on the global marketplace.**
- **And where there is a case for branding, there is a case for brand management.**

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1.2 Research Question - How to Manage a Reputation?

In the previous section the case was made that public diplomacy is used to respond to the changing face of international relations brought by globalization. This brave new world has created increased competition for assets and attention. The goal is to create meaningful differentiation to cut through the noise and this paper will argue that this can be communicated through a reputation. While the notion of reputation and how it should be managed is somewhat fuzzy in international relations it shares many similarities with the notion of brand. The marketing literature offers a wealth of knowledge and tools to examine more in depth how differentiation is created. The convergence between public diplomacy and public relations has been proved by scholars such as Stignitzer & Combs, while Dinnie highlights that nation branding and corporate branding share many features with each other. A nation brand is far more complex than product brands and has more in common with corporate branding due to the wider range of stakeholders, the various communication channels involved, the difficulty in encapsulating the essence of a multifaceted entity and the wider number of uncontrollable factors that affect the brand.\textsuperscript{16}

This gives me enough confidence to motivate my choice of corporate branding as the primary theoretical framework for a research study of public diplomacy and international relations. This paper will thus attack the question of reputation from the angle of

\textsuperscript{16} Dinnie, Nation Branding, 193.
corporate branding theory and its approach will be a first step in trying to fuse the two disciplines. The paper aims to answer the following descriptive research question:

What constitutes a nation brand management, and how does the Swedish brand management perform in creating a meaningful differentiation?

*Brand management* refers to the construction, communication and monitoring of the brand itself and is different from branding which refers to specific communication and PR campaigns. The underlying assumption is that a good nation brand management will create a strong *nation brand* which, just like the reputation, can generate the desired differentiation effect as mentioned by Balmer. This *differentiation effect* is defined by Bickerton & Knox as *relevance and distinctiveness*. The functions of nation brand, brand management and differentiation work in the following steps:

The differentiation is aimed to better position the country as it competes for attention and global assets. The nation brand will provide this differentiation effect which relies on the brand being relevant and distinctive The management is responsible for administer the components that build the relevance and distinctiveness.

![THE LOGIC OF THE NATION BRAND AND THE MANAGEMENT](image)

Figure 2

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19 Bickerton & Knox, "The six conventions of corporate branding", 1001.
To assess the Swedish brand management empirical data have been gathered from the Swedish Institute which is a governmental public diplomacy agency. The data have been obtained through an interview at the Swedish Institute with Henrik Selin who is Manager for the promotion of Sweden at the agency.

The terms reputation and brand will be used interchangeably throughout the paper as they share a similar meaning, and a detailed definition will be provided below. To understand the connection between brand management and differentiation the paper will analyze the important components of brand management, compare it with the practice and empirical data, then assess the strengths and weaknesses of the brand management in line with the theories. The results can then be used to assess how the soft power resource of reputation can be managed and used as a soft power resource in international affairs.

1.3 Previous Research

Previous bachelor papers have also looked into Swedish nation branding, thus a small pool of research has already emerged. Sjöberg 2014, focused on a critical analysis of the different approaches towards nation branding. The paper explored how different nation branding efforts affected the democratic mandate and inclusion in the national narrative.

Dahl & Thungren 2013, researched how the Swedish Institute constructed their e-image of Sweden through their home page and how coherent this perception was with the public perception of the country through a semiotic analysis. The paper touched upon the legitimacy of nation branding through the relationship to its public stakeholder group.

Åström 2012, maps how the Swedish Institute has changed through three different time periods. The study also researches the power and communication relations of the Swedish Institute in relation to the ministry of foreign affairs.

Beside the bachelor papers focusing on the Swedish Institute a wide range of scholars have researched public diplomacy and nation branding. Aronczyk has done research of nation branding as a phenomenon and also analyzed specific country's branding efforts. She concluded that nation branding has gone from a laughable fringe activity to occupying a central spot within the public diplomacy. Anholt who was among the first to coin the term nation branding has tried to rebrand the word into competitive identity

20 Svenska Institutet, ”Vår Strategi”.
25 Aronczyk, Branding the Nation, 4.
and argues that it is vital for states in the globalized economy. Stignitzer and Combs have explored the conceptual convergences between public diplomacy and public relations and conclude that a separation between the two is fruitless. This particular conclusion strengthens the incentives to utilize corporate marketing theory. Melissen further elaborates on how soft power, public diplomacy and nation branding are connected.

These findings, linking public diplomacy, marketing and nation branding, build the base for my research paper but the most relevant piece of research for this paper is presented by Gilboa and Melissen. Gilboa highlights the convergence between public diplomacy and public relations and how the two disciplines have developed independently in their own silos, preventing them to add contributions to each other. Thus a "new research agenda is needed to bridge the wide gaps" and public diplomacy research could greatly benefit from combining more disciplines. Melissen highlight the same issue as he describes how students of nation branding schooled in international marketing are unaware of the field of international relations and diplomacy and vice versa.

It is in this context my research finds relevance. The paper will bridge the gap between public relations and public diplomacy by focusing on nation brand management and utilize the lens of corporate brand management as the primary analysis tool. This will create a fusion between the theories and issues connected to international relations with those connected to marketing theory. The paper will provide a deeper understanding of national reputation through the perspective of corporate brand management and expand the research of public diplomacy but also marketing as it connects how the notion of brand can be used as a tool for foreign policy.

1.4 Methodology & Design

The design of the study is based on a descriptive research question as it aims to answer how rather than why. A qualitative methodology suits the paper best as the research question is centered around an intensive study of a single case, namely the Swedish brand management where the Swedish Institute will serve as a source of empirical data. The research is based around three pillars, the theoretical framework, the practice and an
analysis that will connect them and assess the management. *Focus have been given to how these strategies can contribute to creating relevance and distinctiveness.* In order to assess the Swedish brand, which is important to give a picture of the relevance of the brand, quantitative data from various international indexes will be used. The methods used to will thus be qualitative text analysis, semi-structured interviews and the primary analytical tool will be a SWOT-analysis.

The semi structured interview provided tools to get a better picture of the management and strategies utilized. The format of the interview ensured a clear structure to follow and also gave space to develop further on certain question and issues. The dialogue aspects of the interview also provided answers regarding the strengths and weaknesses that otherwise wouldn't have been obtained. The drawback of the interview was that not everyone of the interview subjects did respond thus one of the weaknesses of the paper is the lack of perspectives on the Swedish brand management from other actors engaging in public diplomacy and marketing. This weakness is acknowledged but the in depth interview with the Swedish Institute provided reliant data to answer the research question. However more interviews with other actors could help confirm or dismiss the conclusions.

As mentioned above the analytical tool for this study is the SWOT-analysis. *SWOT* is an acronym for *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats* and is also known as *internal-external analysis.* SWOT-analysis is used for strategic planning and evaluation, competitive analysis, quality assessment and trend research; applied to groups, organizations, industries and countries. The external and internal element of the analysis tool suits the paper well as brand management is dependent on both internal and external factors. The SWOT-analysis will connect the theoretical aspects of brand management with the business practice surveyed through the interview. By comparing the two elements the paper will be able to identify differences between theory and practice and thus assess the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The main criticism against the SWOT analysis is that it lacks theoretical grounding. The simplicity of the tool is also criticised by Lippitt who advises adding more dimensions to the model to make it better. Criticism has also been levelled about the arbitrary nature of assigning variables to either sector, but proponents of the theory highlight that the variable assignment is dependent on focused methodology and evaluation.

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32 Helms and Nixon, "Exploring SWOT analysis – where are we now?", 224-227.
33 Helms and Nixon, "Exploring SWOT analysis – where are we now?", 229, 232, 235.
34 Ibid., 234.
SWOT analysis on its own is more of an executive action and is dependent on a framework to ground the assumptions. The tool only becomes truly efficient when it is used in combination with indexes and theories that establish a focal point. The classification of the variables will be grounded in the corporate marketing theories which will eliminate the arbitrary nature. The SWOT-analysis is well suited as it provides a structured tool to connect the theory and interviews to the conclusion. The weakness of using the tool is that it lacks properties for theory building.\(^{35}\)

This study makes no generalization claims as it is focused on a single case with unique characteristics. The goal is to provide a solid framework for future researchers to utilize when evaluating the nation brand management of other countries. This framework will measure activity and strategy rather than effect. The long term approach of nation branding and public diplomacy is notoriously hard to prove due to the wide array of factors involved, which make an isolation of a variable impossible.

### 1.5 Examined Actors - The Swedish Institute

The Swedish public diplomacy is administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is organized in the *Council for the Promotion of Sweden Abroad* (CPSA). The committee consists of four actors, The Swedish Government, Visit Sweden, Business Sweden and the Swedish Institute.\(^{36}\) The goal for the CPSA is to develop a coherent strategy for the Swedish Public diplomacy that the four actors will implement. The structure of the CPSA ensures that all of the included actors have an equal footing in the forum.\(^{37}\) Initially the CPSA warranted interest but it has become clear that the most relevant actor in strategic brand management is the Swedish Institute as the body of CPSA holds no decision making power.\(^{38}\)

The Swedish Institute has since 2008 been officially tasked with formulating major parts of the Swedish public diplomacy.\(^{39}\) The Institute is a governmental agency under the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but undertakes missions from other departments and engages in joint missions with external actors.\(^{40}\) It is funded by the government with a total annual budget of around 56 million US dollars and is acting in accordance with specific appropriation laws and governmental instructions.\(^{41}\) Since the agency describes

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35 Ibid., 240.
36 SOU 2011:21, 45-46.
37 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
38 Ibid.,
41 Svenska Institutet, "Vårt Uppdrag".
itself as a Swedish export organization for public diplomacy \(^{42}\) it proved the natural target for gathering empirical data regarding the branding strategies and management methods.

The Swedish Institute’s mission is to increase the world’s confidence and interest in Sweden by communicating Swedish competences, values and experiences from a broad perspective. It aims to build long term relationships between Sweden and other countries with the goal to increase Sweden’s attraction power. The agency cooperates and promotes partnerships with governmental agencies, the business sector, cultural institutions, universities and civil society. The stated goals of the agency is to:\(^{43}\)

- Strengthen the Swedish influence and Swedish interests.
- Promote cooperation between states and individuals to solve global challenges.
- Develop long term relationships with foreign partners.

### 1.6 Clarifications

There is a difference between brand and branding and brand management. This difference is vital for the paper. Every nation has a brand, or say, reputation. Branding refers to the active efforts made to change this brand or reputation. The brand management refers to how the aspects creating distinctiveness and relevance is created and communicated. \(^{44}\) This study aims to examine how the brand of Sweden, something that already exists, is managed. An alternative study could have focused on the branding of Sweden, meaning how different campaigns and strategies are aimed at changing the brand. As the paper is navigating within the context of foreign policy, it will be more fruitful to examine how the Swedish Institute is managing the contemporary Swedish brand.

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\(^{42}\) Svenska Institutet, "Vår Strategi".
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Bickerton & Knox, "The six conventions of corporate branding", 998-1001.
1.7 Criticism & Considerations

Branding is controversial. Critics claim it renders national identity into a commodity.\(^{45}\) Scholars and practitioners alike acknowledge that branding is a dangerous term that has a high potential of coming off as cynical, thus it is usually not used in official statements or by politicians.\(^{46}\) The aversion to the word might also further help explaining why the fields of public diplomacy and public relations are operating isolated from each other.

But can nation branding really change the reputation of a nation? The short answer is no. There has been no known case of a successful branding campaign. Henrik Selin also states in the interview that the Swedish Institute can only change the image of Sweden marginally.\(^{47}\) However when people talk about branding they often refer to re-branding and short terms campaigns.\(^{48}\) Nation branding is about long term commitment and no amount of marketing can change a tarnished reputation, only actions can.\(^{49}\) But measuring the long term results of nation branding is also notoriously difficult due to the multitude of variables that affect the outcome. It is far from certain that the promotion activity produced the result that might only become visible months after. The Swedish Institute evaluates their long term impact by conducting interviews with participants later on to assess whether the activity had any effect but states that the long term evaluation is a constant work in progress.\(^{50}\)

So if branding can only affect the reputation marginally and there are no clear answers whether the activities generate the intended long term results, \textit{why bother?}

The answer is quite simple and is surprisingly something that both proponents such as Keith Dinnie and critics such as Simon Anholt agree on and was furthermore highlighted in the interview. If you \textit{don't} communicate or manage your reputation, someone else will, and that might lead to the rise of unfavourable images and damaging stereotypes that might limit a country's opportunity.\(^{51}\) Branding has thus a proactive role to create the differentiation effect and awareness but also a reactive role where it has to respond to disinformation and keep the lane clear from obstructions.

\(^{45}\) Aronczyk, Branding the Nation, 175-176.
\(^{47}\) Selin, Henrik, Interview on 15-12-2017.
\(^{48}\) Aronczyk, Branding the Nation, 168.
\(^{49}\) Anholt, Simon. "Why nation branding doesn't exist".
\(^{50}\) Selin, Henrik, Interview on 15-12-2017.
\(^{51}\) Anholt, Simon. "Why nation branding doesn't exist".
2.0 Definitions

To start off the analysis the paper will first clarify a couple of definitions. Since the paper will interpret the term of reputation in the form of brand, the first exercise must be to establish the validity and relation between the two terms. The paper aims to study brand management, so the second exercise must be to operationalize the term nation brand. This will establish the connection between brand management and the differentiation effect a nation brand is supposed to deliver.

2.1 Brand & Reputation - Conceptual Convergences

The notion of brand shares many similarities with the concept of reputation. Both are abstract and intangible assets and a closer look at the definition reveals they have much in common. Communication scholars define reputation as "the cognitive representations of the actors in the minds of publics and the overall evaluation of that actor." Marketing scholars classify brand as "The functional and non functional elements that identify a product or organization and differentiate them from the competitors in the minds of the consumers." The important link between the two terms lies in the notion that brand is "something that rests within the minds of the consumer." The two terms consist of subjective cognitive images created by internal input from the actor and external output from the target audience. The formation of a brand is thus the result of the constant struggle between brand projections and consumer perceptions.

The fact that a brand or reputation resides in the minds of the audience means that the brand can never fully be controlled by the actor which is important when assessing what approach should be used to create a strong brand and what factors brand management can control. The concluding remarks from this section is that in order to create a successful differentiation the internal and external projections and perceptions have to be taken into account.

2.2 Nation Brand & its Essence

While nation branding refers to activities and communication, nation brand refers to what is being communicated. Nation brand is defined as:

52 Zatepelina, "Non-State Ambassadors: NGO's contribution to America's public diplomacy", 158.
53 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 15.
54 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 44.
55 Ibid., 43.
"The unique multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all its target audiences."\textsuperscript{56}

As previously discussed the element of creating "meaningful differentiation on a strategic basis" holds the key to understanding the function of a nation brand. The notion is that the nation brand or reputation will provide this differentiation effect which depends on the nation brands relevance and distinctiveness.

While the following sections will examine the features that create a differentiation, a description of the essence of the nation brand helps to understand the ground premise for successful brand communication. The key element of both public diplomacy and nation branding is 	extit{authenticity}. Both soft power scholars like Nye and nation branding scholars like Dinnie and Anholt highlight this particular element.\textsuperscript{57} If a nation brand is not grounded in authenticity it will become plastic, fake, and people will see through it. Thus the authenticity is dependent on consistent actions corresponding to the projected image. Anholt puts it that a brand need to chime with its target audience's perceptions in order to succeed.\textsuperscript{58} Dinnie echoes the thoughts of Anholt as he states that a strong brand must co-exist with the prevailing zeitgeist, or contemporary mood. Nye also stresses that in order for a public diplomacy to be successful it has to be authentic. PR campaigns that act as mere smoke screens for hard power projections are likely to fail and be even counterproductive.\textsuperscript{59}

Thus the element of authenticity and credibility is key when it comes to understanding nation branding and is also something that distinguishes it from propaganda and mere PR stunts.\textsuperscript{60} The Swedish Institute is also aware of this and says that the Swedish brand is very much dependent on coherent actions and a balanced image-projection.\textsuperscript{61} If Sweden starts to act in a way that is not consistent with its projection and perceptions, the image will take damage. \textit{The key to success and recognition is to live the brand}.\textsuperscript{62}

\textbf{2.3 Nation Branding & Public Diplomacy}

The introduction mentioned how a neoliberal framework and crowded information environment has emerged. This section will clarify how the public diplomacy and nation branding can respond to these developments and serves as the starting point in order to

\textsuperscript{56} Dinnie, Nation Branding, 15.
\textsuperscript{57} Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", 100.
\textsuperscript{58} Anholt, Competitive Identity, 75.
\textsuperscript{59} Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", 102.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{61} Selin, Henrik, Interview on 15-12-2017.
\textsuperscript{62} Anholt, Competitive Identity, 16.
move onto the brand management of a nation brand. At its core nation branding is about managing a state's reputation or brand through communication, but the reasons may vary for doing so. The three major incentives for engaging in nation branding revolve around:  

- Attracting human and financial assets.
- Managing the nation's credibility and existing reputation.
- Re-branding the nation in order to acquire a new niche within the international system.

And while nations have always managed their national reputations, it is the use of marketing and branding techniques that make nation branding different. Aronczyk describes nation branding as "Engaging the profit-based marketing techniques to create and communicate a particular version of national identity." At the core of the debate lies the greater discussion about what role the nation state has to play in an increasingly globalized system. Aronczyk claims nation branding is a mere tool used by corporate marketers and nations to give states some kind of foothold in a globalized world, while Anholt and Dinnie argue that national identity has become the only meaningful differentiation in a globalized world, and is the key to competitive success. While the scholars debate about the importance of the state they have concluded that the very nature of the state has changed by adopting this approach. In their eyes the state becomes a vehicle made for attracting investments and talent in a neoliberal sense of the word.

The information revolutions did create a wider number of actors that states need to engage with in order to pursue their interests. The public diplomacy constitutes an instrument that is ready to respond to the competition for attention as it actively reaches out and tries to engage with target audiences. The relationships the public diplomacy seek to create and maintain helps to consolidate the country’s position as potential partner and increase the country’s market share of the attention.

The concluding remarks from this section highlight that nation branding can help a country compete for global assets such as human and financial capital and that public diplomacy can be utilized as a tool to break through the noise.

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63 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 15.
64 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 17.
65 Aronczyk "Living the Brand", 43.
66 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 23.
68 SOU 2011:21, 22.
69 Svenska Institutet, "Vår Strategi".
3.0 Theoretical Framework & Analysis

We now understand that branding has a place within the Swedish public diplomacy as the country seeks to create a differentiation that will help it compete for global assets and attention and that scholars such as Bickerton & Knox defines this differentiation as relevance and distinctiveness. The task of the brand management is to build, communicate and monitor the brand components that provides these two features. The first question that has to be asked is what features of the brand management are important for making a brand relevant and distinct. The second question that has to be asked is how does the Swedish brand management perform in this quest? While there exists a range of different models for assessing brand management not every feature of the different models presented are related to the elements of relevance and distinctiveness. This paper will thus use a mix of the models presented in the literature and will focus on four core areas to assess the brand management. The next sections will analyze the following components of brand management and relate to how they are related to the element of differentiation.

- **Projections:** Brand Identity.
- **Perceptions:** Brand Image, Conditioning, Perceived quality.
- **Communications:** Stakeholders, Audiences.
- **Environment:** Zeitgeist & Competitors.

The goal for the brand management is to improve the relevance and distinctiveness. In a product management analogy the notions of relevance and distinctiveness would correspond to; Do you provide an attractive product, and what makes your product different from the similar ones offered by competitors?

Projection elements contains the features that are supposed to be deemed attractive to the audience. Simply put; What are you selling?

The perception elements are important since awareness and associations determines whether the target audience will engage with the actor or not. You might be relevant for having a wonderful product, but if people do not know about you from a lack of being distinctive, the opportunity is lost. Or worse, if they know about you and do not hold a favourable opinion about you.

Communication provides the connection key for the brand management in delivering the projected features to the audience. It is important to shape relations with both

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70 Bickerton & Knox, "The six conventions of corporate branding", 1001.
stakeholders and audiences which will increase the brand loyalty, awareness and improve the distinction of the brand.

The environment is also an important factor that creates some of the basic premises for the relevance of the brand. The environment is full of trends and moods that shape consumer perceptions and the market size for the projected features. Each product has to be adapted to its own time and society to stay relevant. Competitor performance might also affect the impact of the attention that the brand receives and might thus affect the distinctiveness.

### 3.1 Brand Identity

In order to be relevant and distinctive to stand out in the global competition you need something to market. Brand identity is the central component that defines what features are being projected to the audience and refers to the *true identity* of the brand, its real
While many of the other components are outside the direct control of the brand managers, the brand identity is something that they can fully control and nurture. The theoretical framework for brand identity is built on Martin Rolls model and Harris & De Chernatony. As both models share similar features the chosen model should pin-point the relevant feature. Constructing a brand identity involves, five elements.

1. **Brand vision** - Stating the goals of the brand.
2. **Brand scope** - Analyzes which market segments the brand should strive to enter.
3. **Brand positioning strategy** - Aims to reach out to target groups and shape segmentation perceptions.
4. **Brand personality** - Aims to help the customer to connect emotionally to the brand.
5. **Brand essence** - Provides the substantial differentiation and defines what makes the brand unique from its competitors.

### I. Brand Vision - Areas of Interests

The Swedish brand vision is outlined by the CPSA for all the three promotion actors and aims to attract investments, promote trade, tourists, talents and establish long term relationships with other actors. Developing a coherent brand vision is key to identifying the areas the differentiation is supposed to affect, and measuring the development in these areas can help assess the efficiency of the nation branding. The Swedish brand vision taps into the areas associated with nation branding by clearly addressing the aforementioned global assets. The Swedish brand scope is however internationally homogenous as the stated goals could apply to every single country in the world and thus lacks distinction. But at the same time the chosen brand vision highlights how the competition for these assets is universal and occurring on a global stage. The identification of the brand scope helps the Swedish brand to navigate in the international and while the goals remain universal it is the other features that will help differentiate Sweden in the quest for attracting these assets.

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71 Dinnie, *Nation Branding*, 42.
72 Harris & De Chernatony, "Corporate Branding & Corporate Brand performance", 442-443.
74 Sharing Sweden "Sverigebilden i Utlandet".
75 Dinnie, *Nation Branding*, 42.
2. Brand Scope - Sweden's Profile Areas

The brand vision outlined the broad areas which Sweden hopes that the nation branding seeks to affect. The brand scope identifies the actual areas where Sweden will seek to differentiate itself from competitors. The Swedish Institute along with the CSPA have identified four broad so called profile areas consisting of innovation, sustainability, society and creativity, which Sweden seeks to communicate to the rest of the world.76

These four profile areas have been identified as areas capable of generating a bigger impact for the Swedish image77, but how relevant are these areas for creating the different? In order to assess this one must look at how he demand looks like in these four segments.

Henrik Selin explains in the interview that these four broad profile areas have been used for many years simply because they have been proven to be in demand by actors and partners working with Sweden.78 The Swedish Institute's target group analysis helps mapping preferences in order to offer demanded features such as parental-insurance policy and sustainable city planning for partners and visiting officials. Selin further explains that contemporary initiatives such as the United Nations Agenda 2030 offer a natural platform for the Swedish profile areas.79

The Swedish profile areas have a potential to be deemed relevant as they meet a contemporary demand, and the hype for sustainability and other areas tied to the Agenda 2030 increases the chances that the profile areas will stay relevant, and make countries turn to Sweden for solutions. Selin explains that one problem however is that Sweden in some profile areas lack the capacity to carry out demanded tasks such as building a sustainable city in India or China.80 So while the Swedish brand scope captures the attention of target groups and has a good potential to stay relevant in the future, efforts by Swedish actor to strengthen their capacity could help establishing deeper relations and partnerships. A changed conduct could also create economic opportunity in line with the brand vision.

![Diagram of Sweden's Profile Areas]

Figure 5

76 Sharing Sweden, "Sverigebilden i Utlanet".
77 Ibid.,
78 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
79 Ibid.,
80 Ibid.,
3. Brand Positioning - Cooperation and Co-Creation

Brand positioning focuses on shaping the consumers’ mental perceptions of the brand by defining what the brand is, who it is for and what it offers. Brand positions could for example be market leaders, challenger brand or family friendly. Brand positioning is thus central for creating an element of differentiation in the market segmentation. Successful positioning relies on clarity, credibility and competitiveness and should be based on the core values.  

In the interview Selin described that Sweden aims to be positioned as a cooperative country. The concept is that Sweden's free and open society will help partners tackle global challenges and boost co-creation and innovation. The aim to be perceived as a fair and reliable partner in relevant areas serve as the added value for the partners and enhances the distinctiveness of Sweden. However, the challenge is to make sure they subscribe to the conveyed image.

The positioning approach aims to achieve the brand vision goals indirectly as the primary aim is to foster long term relationships where the generated trust and reputation will act as a resource all the stakeholders can utilize. When looking at Sweden's high rankings in indexes such as sustainability, innovation and policy along with a political history of being recognized as a progressive force and mediator, there is reason to believe that the positioning enjoys both clarity and credibility.

However the aforementioned lack in capacity for delivering system solutions in some of the profile areas weakens the competitiveness of the Swedish brand positioning and needs to be further developed. Another problem mentioned in the interview was the so called "Smorgasbords-problem" where promoters such as embassies tend to promote every single aspect of Sweden in a catch-all-strategy. While a switched approach might lead to consistency problems, the current smorgasbords-problem obstructs the formation of a clear brand positioning in the minds of the target audience and is an area where the brand management should consider making changes.

4. Brand Personality - Bridging Foreign Policy & Public Diplomacy

To help define the nature of potential partners and relevant communications channels, the four core values of ingenuity, openness, originality, and caring have been identified by

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82 Selin, Interview on 15-12-2017
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., The Good Country, "Good Country Index - Results".
85 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
the CPSA. The four core values are also meant to guide how the profile areas are to be communicated and create brand associations and are related to the term of positioning. Dinne highlights how partners that co-brand or act as brand ambassadors present a cost effective way to reach a bigger audience. Having the right brand personality in order to attract the right partners is thus an important element in brand management which could help to increase the distinction in line in tandem with the positioning strategy.

The chosen core values correspond well to associations with Sweden as reflected from target group audiences and from indexes where Sweden score high in both innovation, transparency and press freedom.

5. Brand Essence - Progressive and Fair

The last piece of the brand identity is the so called brand essence which is supposed to encapsulate all the elements of the brand into one entity and serve as the overarching differentiating component, adding both relevance and distinctiveness for the nation brand. The key for a successful brand essence is just like the brand personality, a correlation between the conveyed identity and the perceptions of the target audience. While the brand vision is generic and the profile areas are thematically broad the core values and the essence are the components that offer the meaningful differentiation from competitors with the same vision and profiles.

The Swedish brand essence is defined as progressive by the CPSA. The brand essence and core values work in tandem where each helps to define the other. The progressive essence of Sweden is reflected in the areas that are communicated and demanded by partners. As previously discussed the brand vision and brand scope might be classified as generic. The brand essence turns these generic features into distinctive ones. So the progressive essence is something that would differentiate Sweden from example Singapore in the areas of innovation and sustainability where they could possibly compete.

Sweden has a strong legacy of being perceived progressive in politics and economics and thus has a stable brand consistency which has helped consolidate audience

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86 Sharing Sweden, ”Sverigebilden i Utlanet”.
87 Harrison & De Chernatony, “Croporate Branding & Corporate Brand performance”, 444.
88 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 72.
91 Sharing Sweden, ”Sverigebilden i Utlanet”.
92 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
perceptions. Selin highlights that for being a country constituting only 0.14% of the world population Sweden is remarkably well known.\textsuperscript{93}

But the shining brand also comes with some drawbacks. There is a perception among the target audiences that Sweden is too unique to be relevant for them. "Sure it works for Sweden but you are a rich country which had peace for 200 years and with a stable political system."\textsuperscript{94} These perceptions prevent Sweden to appear as a partner that could bring benefits here and now, that there is a too big of a distance between Sweden and its partners.\textsuperscript{95} So while the exceptional brand is perceived as distinct it has some relevance.
issues as it does also blind the target audience from the fact that Swedish solutions has the potential to be implemented in their own countries. The brand management has to focus on both communicating a strong brand while clearly communicate its adaptability to international partners.

### 3.2 Brand Image

While brand identity is originating from the actor, the brand image originates from the target audience and consists of two components, brand awareness and brand associations. These two elements can arise either through first hand contact with the country but more importantly through second hand sources that portray the nation. Maintaining a good brand image is a vital part to be able to compete for opportunity. The nation brand won't simply have the intended effect if no one knows about it, or if they dislike it. Dinnie presents a theoretical framework for analyzing the brand image and the basic questions that need to be asked to examine the brand image are, do people know about the country and what are their associations?

**Brand Awareness**

To assess the brand awareness and brand associations the Swedish Institute conducts target group analyses, focus group interviews and public opinion research abroad which is in line with the recommendations in the literature by Dinnie. Results show that Sweden suffers from a lack of general awareness. Especially young people are not aware of what Sweden has to offer. Perceptions of Sweden mostly revolve around a vague image of nature. The Swedish brand image is also outdated and centered around the 70's and 80's. The new features of Sweden such a Spotify and Klarna are thus fairly unknown. Even though there is a general lack of awareness, Sweden has a surprisingly high level of awareness for being a small country and is the only Nordic country that is featured on the nation brand index.

**Brand Associations**

Sweden performs however better when it comes to the second element of brand associations. Of the people who know about Sweden, most of them have good

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97 Ibid., 71.
98 Ibid., 62.
100 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
associations of the country. However in the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015 a more negative narrative about Sweden began to emerge connected to the immigration and asylum issues. The agency has conducted opinion surveys that the group who Sweden negatively in the US constitutes 5-6% of the respondents. So while the negative brand associations are marginal Selin makes it clear that the issue needs further monitoring.\textsuperscript{102} As a result the agency has initiated a reactive component in order to combat false information related to the Swedish immigration.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Brand Conditioning}

To better understand the forces shaping perceptions a brand must continuously be monitored by the management in order to assess the relevance and distinctiveness in relation to the audience. The Swedish Institute uses target analyses in order to better map the demands of its target audience, utilize evaluations about their promotion activities and does also perform opinion surveys in order to map the perceptions of Sweden. This helps the management to re-structure its communication and approach to target audiences. The brand conditioning of the Swedish brand is thus solid as it is based on the internal analysis of their capabilities and activities as well as the perceptions of the target audiences. The challenge is to translate this knowledge into solutions that create changed perceptions.

\textbf{Perceived Quality - A frame for recognition}

Aaker highlights that perceived quality is an important factor in brand management as it channels interest, offers a reason to buy and acts as a differentiator.\textsuperscript{104} Simply put, how does the relevance and distinction fuse into a mental image that affects target audience's decisions. The first question to be asked is how does one measure perceived quality? One way is by comparing how a country performs in international indexes. The indexes can further provide an assessment of how the branding is related to the overall foreign policy goals of the nation. Dinnie suggest these indexes could give a notion about the effectiveness about the nation branding strategy but the abundant number of factors at play makes a casual correlation very unlikely.\textsuperscript{105} Thus the international indexes can serve as a guideline to assess the overall brand strength rather than as proof of a successful nation branding strategy.

\textsuperscript{102} Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{104} Aaker, "The Value of Brand Equity", 29.
\textsuperscript{105} Dinnie, \textit{Nation Branding}, 230.
The NBI Index developed by Simon Anholt ranks Sweden as number 10 on the index as for 2017, making it the only Nordic country on the list.\(^{106}\) The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index ranks Sweden as the worlds 7th most competitive country in the world\(^{107}\) and the so called Good Country Index ranks Sweden in the 1st place of nations that contribute the most to the overall good of humanity and the rest of the world.\(^{108}\) The World Bank ranks the Swedish GINI coefficient at 0.26 where 0.0 would be totally equal and 1.0 would be totally uneque\(^{109}\) while the World Economic Forum gender gap report ranks Sweden at 4th place.\(^{110}\) Sweden also scores 1st place in the global sustainability development index based on the UN Agenda 2030.\(^{111}\) When it comes to soft brand measuring the so called branding index by Brandfinance ranks Sweden as the 8th most valuable brand with a estimated value of 703 billion US dollars.\(^{112}\)

The selected profile areas of, sustainability, creativity, innovation and society all correspond with high rankings in the indexes. This indicates that the Swedish brand / reputation is strong and authentic, which creates a solid foundation for the brand management. Actions and words must be coherent if they are to increase the credibility and reputation and the concluding remarks from this section is that Sweden manages to live the brand.

### 3.3 Communications

The previous sections pointed out that increased awareness in combination with good associations are important elements in creating a strong brand. High levels of awareness and positive brand associations strengthen the distinctiveness and relevance.\(^{113}\) Communication is the key in achieving this and the corporate communication consists of both internal and external communications. The internal communication is focused on the stakeholders while the external communications are focused on the target audience. So what constitutes a successful communication?

Gilboa highlights that the most efficient public diplomacy communication model in order to create long term relationships is the so called two-way communication model

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\(^{106}\) Anholt-Gfk Nation Brand index. "Leading Countries".
\(^{107}\) World Economic Forum, "Global Competitiveness Index 2017-2018".
\(^{108}\) The Good Country, "Good Country Index - Results".
\(^{109}\) The World Bank, "GINI Index (World Bank Estimate)".
\(^{110}\) World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Index 2016".
\(^{111}\) Sustainable Development Solutions Network, SDG Index and Dashboards - Global Report. (2016)
\(^{112}\) Brandfinance. Nation brands 2017 - The annual report on the world’s most valuable nation brands.
developed by Grunig.\textsuperscript{114} In this model the actor both speaks and listens which ensures that the communicated messages are desired and relevant to the audience.\textsuperscript{115} The importance of the reciprocal elements is also acknowledge by the marketing theory in the notion of relational marketing. Szmigin and Bourne explains how the relational marketing is focused on the long term value of customer relationships rather than quantitative sales.\textsuperscript{116} Relational marketing based on long term relationship is proved to increase the consumption, return of investment and profitability has greater potential to create loyalty and a deeper relationship than transactional marketing.\textsuperscript{117} Bickerton & Knox highlights furthermore how the notion of brand confirmation is important to create a consistent communication between the stakeholders of the brand in order to strengthen the positioning towards a wide range of target audiences.\textsuperscript{118}

The baseline is that communication and relationship building generates awareness and trust, two elements that are key for achieving a competitive position. The Swedish Institute's communication approach is a direct adoption of the two-way communication and customer relational marketing model. It bases the communication on mutual interest, reciprocity and long term perspective, and aims to shape its dialogue on the demands of its target audience to stay relevant.\textsuperscript{119}

\textbf{Stakeholders}

Stakeholders refer to the actors that are vested in the brand and who are affected by the brand development.\textsuperscript{120} The concept of stakeholders is particularly important when it comes to nation branding done by an agency as the organization is only one of many stakeholders in a nation brand. Citizens are perhaps the most obvious stakeholders of a nation brand but also Swedish companies, culture exports, basically anyone who shares or works with features of Swedish identity can be considered a stakeholder.\textsuperscript{121} The key question is whether the brand communications reflect the interests and character of its stakeholders. The Swedish Institute is aware of this and conducts opinion research of Swedes to make sure their communication of the Sweden reflects the reality.\textsuperscript{122} The approach could help to strengthen the authenticity and credibility of the communicated

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 65-66.
\textsuperscript{116} Szmigin & Bourne, "Consumer equity in relationship marketing", 544.
\textsuperscript{117} Dinnie., \textit{Nation Branding}, 64.
\textsuperscript{118} Bickerton & Knox, "The six conventions of corporate branding", 1009.
\textsuperscript{119} Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
\textsuperscript{120} Dinnie, \textit{Nation Branding}, 187.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{122} Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
messages and is also an example of how the concept of brand conditioning is used in practice.

An interesting approach to the notion of stakeholders is the concept of the co-creation of a brand between stakeholders. The Swedish Institute's initiative to let foreign participants from the competence programs conduct activities on behalf of Sweden makes them both a target audience and stakeholders. This will make them feel more vested in the Swedish brand and increase their dedication to promote it, thus increasing the exposure and brand awareness.

**Audiences**

Audience refers to every target group that Sweden seeks attention from. The Swedish Institute aims to reach out to as many as possible but doing so directly would simply be too expensive. Instead they target so called connectors which refer to current and future decision makers, influential people and groups in a target country. These will in turn use their networks and experiences to further disseminate the Swedish image and experiences through a so called multiplier strategy. The networks can then be used by Sweden for conducting trade, tourism, attraction and politics. This approach is dependent on the interests of the connectors, and the Swedish Institute's adoption of the two-way communication model offers tools to map the interests of the target in order to establish a mutual interest and benefit in the communications.

The Institutes focus on establishing relationships built on reciprocity and mutual interests further highlights its use of relational marketing and is visible in its so called competence programs aimed at foreign future decision makers. The approach of the Swedish Institute has changed from merely conducting competence programs, similar to a transactional marketing approach, to a relational marketing model through the establishment of proper alumni networks and activities between Sweden and the scholarship recipients. Through the continuous interaction with future decision makers a brand relation is constructed that can help to increase the brand awareness and mental associations beyond its target audience through the multiplier strategy.

While the Swedish institute has started to better manage its networks there are still cases where it does not really take care of the relations it create. Another problem is the aforementioned lack of brand awareness in many parts of the world which might prevent it from reaching its intended target groups.

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124 Selin, Interview on 15-12-2017.
125 Sharing Sweden, "Sverigebilden i Utlandet".
126 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.Svenska Institutet, "Bygger relationer och nätverk".
127 Selin, Swedish Institute, Interview on 15-12-2017.
This section highlighted how communications is a vital part of establishing interest and vestment into the brand where the Swedish Institute has developed a solid model for addressing audiences and engaging them in even becoming stakeholders of the brand.

3.4 Environment- Market Features

While the brand management has to manage the projection and perceptions the brand is also affected by the contemporary environment which shapes trends and preferences. The environment determines if the brand resonates with the audience sets the premises if the brand is relevant. The branding literature uses the term zeitgeist which is defined as the contemporary mood and highlights that successful brands are those that manages to tap into the prevailing zeitgeist. So how does the Swedish brand perform in this area? The Swedish market segmentation, defined by the profile areas, taps into contemporary issues such as environment, sustainability and social progress sanctioned by influential actors such as the United Nations. The top ranking of the so called Good Country Index further indicates that the Swedish brand manages to respond to contemporary issues. But the changes in the political environment with an increased dissemination of negative portrayals of Sweden related to immigration and integration issues shows how a polarization is taking place. Selin highlighted how the issue which was not visible before has risen to prominence since 2015 and is pushed by actors with a clear agenda where they use the Sweden as an example and explained how the Swedish Institute has introduced a reactive component to combat disinformation.

Another element of the environment is the competitors. Sweden competes for attention on a global stage but its main competitors consists of its Nordic neighbours. The similarities between the countries offers both opportunities for co-branding and a potential that Swedish interests might be shared and communicated by the other countries, but this also means the relatively unknown countries compete for the attention from the same target audiences. The Nordic community is thus an asset and liability when it comes to achieving the differentiation effect.

128 Anholt, Competitive Identity, 91.
129 Dinnie, Nation Branding, 142, 149.
130 The Good Country, "Good Country Index - Results".
131 Selin, Interview on 15-12-2017.
132 Ibid.,
4.0 SWOT - Analysis of the Swedish Brand Management

The previous sections have provided the theoretical elements that constitute good practice and empirical data of the current business practice. The comparison between the two components will provide reference points for the SWOT-analysis which will present the results in an easy and structured format. The analysis will further build on the previous section of the brand components in order to evaluate the Swedish brand management and how well it meets the positioning goal of improving the relevance and distinctiveness of Sweden. The analysis will categorize the results in four categories: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Relevant and distinctive brand identity</td>
<td>- Lack of internal communication to certain stakeholders causes lost opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Two-Way Communication Model</td>
<td>- Issues to translate knowledge about the brand weaknesses into solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relational Marketing Approach</td>
<td>- Problems to turn new Swedish competences into brand associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good brand confirmation model</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Developed brand conditioning and monitoring of both stakeholders and target audiences</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Good positioning towards the zeitgeist</td>
<td>- Failure to respond to negative disseminations of Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cooperation with Nordic neighbours can create co-branding effects.</td>
<td>- Fragmentation and of internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Potential to use the Agenda 2030 to project Sweden</td>
<td>- stakeholder communications in combination with disruptive stakeholder actions</td>
</tr>
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Figure 7
**Strengths of the Swedish Brand Management**

The Swedish brand has through its management created a very structured brand identity and the profile areas make the brand relevant as it taps well into the zeitgeist. The Swedish brand has good brand associations and the country's high performance in the indexes, that corresponds to the areas the country seeks to position itself, gives reason to believe that the Swedish brand enjoys a great deal of authenticity which strengthens its credibility and attraction. The Swedish brand essence is perhaps the best example on how the Swedish brand management offers a distinctive and relevant projection.

The two-way communication model and focus on relational marketing is also one of the Swedish brand managements biggest strengths. The communication management corresponds well with the recommended practice of both the public diplomacy and marketing literature and has the potential to capture the attention, create strong brand associations, develop trust and improve the positioning. The positioning towards the target audience is further strengthened through the solid internal brand confirmation provided by the forum of the CPSA and the internal opinion surveys are also strengthening the legitimacy of the Swedish public diplomacy. The target analysis of both audiences and stakeholders corresponds well with theoretical model of brand conditioning and ensures that the brand keeps it relevance and authenticity. The co-creation element increases the vestment and interest in the brand from both audiences and stakeholders and also serves as a cost effective method to generate brand awareness.

The strategy to build the communication on mutual benefits and a long term approach further prevents the public diplomacy from escalating into propaganda or short term PR stunts, thus retaining the credibility of the brand. All of these elements serve to strengthen Sweden's differentiation on the global marketplace and help Sweden pursue its foreign policy interests.

**Weaknesses of the Swedish Brand Management**

The weaknesses of the Swedish brand management is to a high degree connected to the weaknesses of the Swedish brand. First of all is the lack of brand awareness among certain target audiences and second is the somewhat outdated brand associations. There is a so called identity-image gap in the Swedish brand management. New methods to reach out to target groups that have a lack of brand awareness must be implemented as well as new methods to translate current Swedish competences, into brand associations.

While the country is known for its theoretical competence there is a lack of capacity for delivering system solutions that could open doors to new and deeper relationships and
improve the Sweden’s relevance. An improvement in communication towards stakeholders and companies could help close the gap between supply and demand.

Another weakness of the Swedish brand is that the country is perceived as too unique to be relevant for the target audiences right here and now. Thus the brand must be communicated in a way that makes it differentiated but also relevant.

What the branding literature makes perfectly clear is that changing perceptions is a long term project. So even if new communication approaches from the brand management would be implemented it would still take some time until the result was visible. Thus the factor of time must be taken into account when determining what solutions are deemed to be effective.

Opportunities for the Swedish Brand Management

The Swedish brand's strong authenticity and connection to the prevailing zeitgeist offers an environment with good opportunities for the Swedish brand management to further project Swedish profile areas that include many of the strategic foreign policy goals. By working through global forums such as Agenda 2030 but also in tandem with other Nordic countries, Sweden could strengthen its brand awareness. The networks with international stakeholders and decision makers from the competence programs offers further potential to increase the Swedish brand awareness and help improve the relevance of Sweden.

Threats to the Swedish Brand Management

Just like the weaknesses the threats to the Swedish nation brand management is connected to the threats to the nation brand. The dissemination of disinformation regarding Swedish society related to migration issues is one negative feature among many positive and has so far only had a marginal impact in the perceptions of Sweden. But as the issue is high on the agenda it could in the future affect the Swedish reputation if left unchecked. And while the Swedish Institutes has introduced reactive measures only the future can tell if they will have effect.

The biggest strength of the Swedish brand, as highlighted by Selin, is Sweden's ability to live the brand. A failure to live the brand would thus constitute the biggest treat. In terms of the brand management such a situation could arise if the stakeholders start to communicate and act in a widely dissonant way which runs counter to the brand identity. Scandals associated to Swedish business such as IKEA or a shift in the Swedish weapon exports are examples that might illustrate such a scenario. Thus maintaining communication between the stakeholders is key. The strong brand confirmation element provided by the discussion forum of the CPSA reduces the risk for a widely incoherent
brand communication but the wide array of stakeholders in the Swedish brand means there is always a risk that the interests of the nation brand and individual interests collide. The brand management must further foster a sense of internal consensus and commitment among the domestic stakeholders and prevent a fragmentation of the communication between them.

The concluding remark is that the Swedish brand has both distinctiveness and relevance which is supported by the high rankings in the indexes and that the Swedish brand management has developed a solid framework to improve its positioning. While the management is able to identity weaknesses of the Swedish brand further work must be done to develop methods that can translate this knowledge into actual solutions.

5.0 Conclusion

The globalization has created a new world where states compete for attention and assets against a wide range of actors. The public diplomacy aims to address the new actors and target groups and the increased adoption of nation branding among states correlates to the increased competition for influence. When interacting with a vast number of targets, with limited time and knowledge, the notion of reputation can act as a mental shortcut for the target to assess the actor. Reputation has a role for affecting how well a state can pursue its economic and political interests. This paper has chosen to study the reputation in the form of a so called brand, as the corporate branding theory provides tools to assess the issue from a new direction. The chosen approach corresponds to a need to fuse the areas of public diplomacy and public relations, which deal with the same issues unaware of each other's contributions to the field.

The paper's approach to study the national reputation has thus been translated to study the so called nation brand. The function of the nation brand is to give the nation a differentiation effect that will help it to compete for global assets and attention. The nation brand management focuses on the components of a nation brand in order to improve its distinction and relevance which are important to achieve the brand goals.

The paper has analyzed the Swedish conduct of brand management in comparison to theory in order to assess the nation brand management and answer the research question what constitutes a nation brand management and how well the Swedish one performs. The results from the examined components was presented in a so called SWOT-analysis which was grounded in the corporate branding theory. The SWOT - analysis provided a clear structure to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the
Swedish brand management in order to assess its current performance and propose improvements.

The SWOT-analysis concluded that the biggest strengths consisted of the formation of a strong brand identity and its internal and external communication models. The biggest weaknesses of the brand management was a lack of translating its knowledge of the brand weaknesses into methods that could generate solutions. The brand management's opportunities lie in its ability to communicate an already established and authentic brand, as well as an environment where the brand has the potential to be deemed both relevant and distinctive. The threats to the brand management were minor thanks to a clear brand confirmation among its stakeholders. Thus a deterioration of the internal communication leading to actions from stakeholders that runs contrary to the brand identity could constitute a hypothetical threat.

While the study showed that the brand management had considerable strengths the importance of the consistency of the Swedish brand along with Sweden's ability to "live the brand" should not be underestimated as it presents the ground premise for the brand management's ability to focus on projecting a desired image rather than constantly combating a negative image. The base line is that the brand management is always bound to a wide number of uncontrollable factors and a well functioning brand management can't save a country that fails to live the brand.

While this study has examined how the brand management could possibly shape the framework relating to the competition for assets and attention, an interesting question would be to focus how effective the nation brand is in actually achieving these goals which would help to further progress the field of nation branding and public diplomacy and strengthen the actual conduct and practice.

This whole paper has revolved around how brand management can strengthen the relevance and distinctiveness of the Swedish brand in order for it to compete for global assets and attention as outlined in the introduction. The study has found strengths and weaknesses of the actual brand management but in the end it is not entirely clear whether a relevant and distinctive nation brand can help to deliver all the assets that the state is competing for. So if the nation brand does not lead to a direct acquisition of global assets, why bother? What would then be the function for the Swedish nation brand management?

Every country has a brand, and in the information age where the dissemination of messages and formation of opinion are occurring faster than before, the risk that actors successfully manages to hijack a nations narrative and do the branding for them is higher than ever. Thus, in the crowded globalized world, staying silent is no longer an option. New actors and new issues need to be addressed where public diplomacy will play a vital role, beside the state-to-state diplomacy, as the states compete for influence.
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