

THE
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT:
MASTER PAPERS

SBM

STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

MASTER PAPERS

**Antagonistic Nation Branding Strategies:
The Case of North Korea**

*Neila Zaraq, Stefan Pelev,
Christina Julia Pretz*

Sixth Edition

Student.Papers

2020
September - October

Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers

The Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is essential reading for brand strategist in both private and public sector organisations, and academics in universities and business schools.

The papers are written by master student groups and follow an international journal format. The student groups selected the topics of their papers and provided updated and relevant insights into the strategic management of brands.

The mission of Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is to “present and develop useful tools and theories for the application in practice of managing brands, and to forward the academic field of strategic brand management.”

The intent of the series is to bridge the gap between academic teaching and research.

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers in the course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21 – 7.5 University Credit Points; 8 weeks 50% study time), part of the master program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The published papers represent the result of the intellectual work of students under supervision of the heads of course. The content of the papers is to be read as student reports albeit the journal format. The papers are free to download and should be cited following international conventions.

Editors

Mats Urde
Associate Professor

Frans Melin
Assistant Professor

Heads of master course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21), part of master program International Marketing and Brand Management.
Lund School of Economics and Management

SBM
STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT
MASTER PAPERS

Antagonistic Nation Branding Strategies: The Case of North Korea

Neila Zaraa, Stefan Pelev, Christina Julia Pretz

Abstract

Purpose—This paper aims to uncover the complexity of nation branding strategies, specifically in relation to antagonistic nations using a case study of North Korea.

Design/methodology/approach—To provide background context and discuss all relevant theories to this analysis, an extensive literature review has been conducted. As such, different conceptions of corporate branding, nation branding and propaganda have been studied. This paper adopts a qualitative approach, using the single case study of North Korea, accompanied by an online questionnaire. This research article also includes an application of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, a research tool to gain in-depth understanding of the country's identity, symbols and values.

Findings—This paper determines, through the scope of brand management concepts, the use of a nation branding strategy of North Korea. This study reveals a number of insights in relation to North Korea's nation brand which strives to gain legitimacy, disregarding public approval, through propaganda displays of power and heritage. The application of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix to North Korea also allowed us to build a clearer picture of the country's core identity elements that make up the fundamentals of its nation branding strategy.

Research limitations—The single case study approach lacks extensive empirical data and is not systematically applicable to other nations or organizations. As such, more in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies need to be conducted to fully understand the phenomenon of nation branding. Additionally, this research paper mostly uses secondary data thereby limiting the findings.

Originality/value—By filling the gap in nation branding research literature and analyzing North Korea through the lens of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, this paper manages to go beyond popular standards and theories in the field by investigating a country who chooses to brand itself in an antagonistic and unconventional way.

Keywords— Nation Branding, Brand Identity, Propaganda, Symbols, North Korea

Introduction

Concept of Nation Branding

One can easily remember a random ad seen on TV where an automotive manufacturer features a group of adoring friends trying out their latest car. But the conversation is in a foreign language and without subtitles. The end of the short film provides us the key to this conundrum: why translate positive comments and conversations about the product since the "made in Germany" stamp appears to be – in itself – a sign of quality?

This commercial emphasizes the power behind a nation's image and introduces us to the concept behind it: nation branding. It shows us that in the face of increasingly fierce global competition with external markets, improving one country's reputation on the world stage has been highly valued and important to government officials and administrations (Porter, 1990).

The application of branding techniques and terminology to nations is a relatively new phenomenon, growing in frequency (Dinnie, 2016). Interest has been increasingly strong in this area of research for the last decade as multiple relevant cases in terms of nation brand image, reputation, strategy and architecture, appear (Dinnie, 2016).

According to Ying Fan (2006), there is no set definition of nation branding. Therefore, some defined nation branding strategies as being dependent to a large extent on a country's visibility and image and thus, on the values and stories conveyed by the nation's brand (Anholt, 2013). For others, it is more of a consistent and all-embracing plan which determines the most realistic, competitive and compelling strategic vision for the country (Fan, 2006).

One exceptional example of the latter is South Korea's momentum and drastic action to raise the brand value of its country by establishing the Presidential Committee in Nation Branding (PCNB) to deal with policy matters on nation branding and

establish a coherent nation-wide strategy (Choi, Kim 2014). The Korean wave (or hallyu), in full-force the last few years, is a by-product of this strategy and highlights how popular culture, among many other elements, can help polish and strengthen a nation's image (Huang, 2011). As such, each nation has its very own identity, defined by its history, culture, values, symbols and personality (Dinnie, 2016).

More than these core elements and values, research reveals consistency and coherence are of the utmost importance in a nation's brand strategy and outside-in perception. It comes from the academic postulate that the rest of the world can only form a positive opinion of your country if the messages received are homogeneous and agree with each other (Hong, 2014). This can only be done – efficiently – if all interfering actors are oriented and if their actions are guided by one unifying entity (e.g. South Korea's PCNB). This, in order to make sure a consistent identity, vision and mission is proclaimed so that one nation brand's image is perceived in a fair and positive way (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

Problem Discussion

As mentioned before, the level of interest in the concepts related to nation branding, image and reputation continues to grow, and apparently nowhere faster than in Asia (Anholt, 2008). The idea of creating a country brand continues to generate great interest among researchers.

According to Keith Dinnie, the growth of interest in the field has also been accompanied by critical perspectives that challenge the practices of nation branding (Aronczyk, 2013; Browning, 2014; Kaneva, 2011). However, we have noted that very few go beyond popular views and paradigms.

Indeed, Simon Anholt, cited before and world's leading expert on "nation-branding", tells us that the only one global superpower these days is the public opinion

of 7 billion people and that the core question for governments and nations is how to marshal that power. This popular vision in his research is represented by the creation of the Nations Brand Index which ranks countries in order of how positively they are perceived, and the Good Country Index whose goal is to figure out which country is the “goodest”. As such, scholars have neglected to go beyond the positiveness spectrum of nation branding. What about countries that aren’t obviously liked or popular? What about their vision, mission and values? What opinion do we have about them? Do they have a strategy?

The purpose of this research paper is to answer those questions based on an extensive literature review of nation branding, corporate branding and propaganda concepts. This, with the objective to fill in the gap on nation branding, in which most theories and frameworks seem to link it to country attractiveness and appeal (Incredible India, Malaysia: Truly Asia...), while some organizations and countries’ narratives thrive on instilling very antagonistic feelings.

As such, to answer these questions, our aim is to do a single case study on the most controversial territory as of 2020, North Korea. Our goal will be to understand whether North Korea uses nation branding. For this, we will analyze its core identity and outside-in perception through the scope of brand management and nation branding concepts, including an application of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2019) and a qualitative survey by a representative sample of people.

Literature Review

The following literature review follows three different phases. First, the concepts and theories surrounding corporate brand identity will be discussed briefly in order to provide a relevant basis for understanding how the application of branding techniques

and terminology to nations came to be and gave birth to the concept of nation branding.

This paper has as a central objective to study the existing links between application and appreciation of nation brand strategies. Thus, a general overview of nation branding literature will also be done to help us understand popular authors' works and concepts pertaining to this specific area of research.

The last part, independent of the first two, will focus on propaganda literature and seemed essential given the nature of our case study on North Korea’s nation brand. This last review makes it possible to extract the steps to follow in our analysis of North Korea’s strategy.

Brand identity

Brand identity can be defined as being “a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain” (Aaker 1996). It is unique and fits into the broader context outlined by the history of the company and as such, communicates about it. As explained by Aaker, it serves to define and provide a strategic direction and meaning to the brand. While image is how the brand is viewed, brand identity is aspirational in nature and is a game of associations (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2009). These associations imply a promise or value proposition made by the firm to its clients.

Therefore, Aaker offers a hierarchical model of brand identity built off of a brand essence, as well as core and extended elements to brand identity (Figure 1). According to him, core identity is fundamental to both the meaning and success of a brand (Aaker, 1996), while extended identity is a set of associations that are themselves linked to four entities: brand as a product, brand as an organization, brand as a person and brand as a symbol. These concentric circles make up a brand’s identity structure.

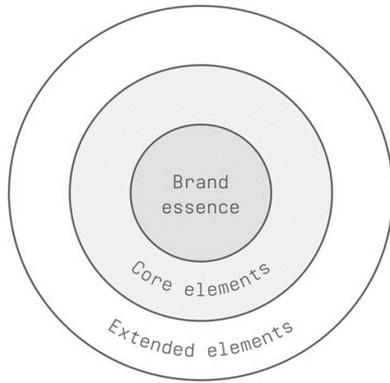


Figure 1 - David Aaker's Identity Structure
Source: Aaker (1996)

According to Kapferer (2012), who was the first to conceptualize brand identity, the concept can be seen as a dynamic source and DNA agent for the brand. He defines it as "the set of messages sent by an organization through its brand" (Kapferer, 2012) and as such, sees it as an element of differentiation for the brand in the eyes of consumers: it reflects the different facets of its long-term singularity and attractiveness (Kapferer, 2012).

Therefore, Kapferer developed the Brand Identity Prism (Figure 2), a conceptual tool subdividing brand identity into six different elements. This tool has the objective to give marketers power over the meaning and image of their brand. It also integrates consumer's perspectives to provide a better understanding of all interrelated components in a brand's communication. Distinguishing brand identity centered on the organization (sender) and brand image centered on consumers (receiver), Kapferer represents brand identity as a strategy developed in a back and forth game between sender and receiver, built upon six elements:

- *Physique*: the tangible attributes and physical aspects of the product (category, packaging, iconography, style)
- *Personality*: described as that of an individual (human traits), it is the

voice of the brand and builds up its character

- *Reflection*: this is the image of the brand user (or ideal target) in the minds of audiences (external mirror: what others might say about my choice)
- *Self-image*: this is the way in which people identify with the brand (internal mirror: what this choice says about me)
- *Culture* (internalization): a brand's spirit, it has its own system of values and vision of the world. It is not only driven by a culture but also conveys its own (Kapferer, 2012)
- *Relationship* (externalization): relations with customers and other audiences, either in terms of transactions or actual engagement

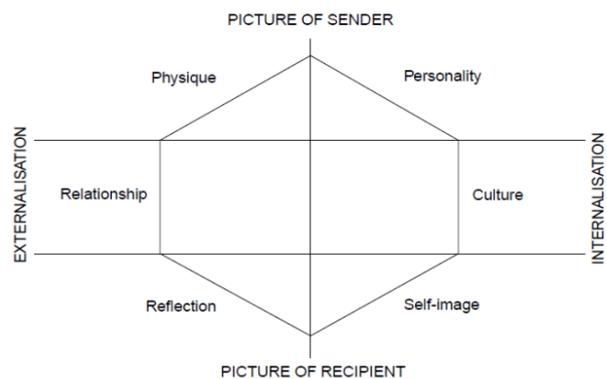


Figure 2 – Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism
Source: Kapferer (2012, p. 158)

While Kapferer and Aaker's visions of corporate brand identity build a basis for understanding core essence and associations behind one brand's name, they do lack substance and in-depth understanding of the organization's mission, culture, competences and other defining characteristics (Urde, 2013). As such, follows an analysis and review of a decisive framework in the field of research built and recently enriched in an academic journal study by Urde (2013).



Figure 3 – Corporate Brand Identity Matrix
 Source: Urde (2013)

Indeed, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Figure 3) is an in-depth framework intending to bring an extensive understanding of the concepts behind brand identity. It is a matrix parallel to the other frameworks presented above. The goal behind this study and matrix is to provide a structured and comprehensible overview of what corporate brand identity is made of.

The matrix guides the identification and selection of different types of “values and promises” and helps build upon those to define relevant internal and external communications for the brand (Urde, 2013). It also reveals key linkages between the different identity elements and is a steppingstone for brand building. All of this helps brand managers and marketers guide the creation and maintenance of competitive value propositions to build a stronger brand reputation (Urde, 2013).

Therefore, the matrix is made of nine identity elements defining a corporate brand’s identity and displayed in three

layers with internally oriented elements on the bottom, externally focused elements on the top and those that are both internal and external in the middle (Urde, 2013). All elements are linked together vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. This and the multidimensional aspect of the framework makes it so they work together, shape each other and echo the brand core in a cohesive ensemble (Urde, 2013).

Nation branding

As previously mentioned, the term “corporate branding” is widely known and discussed in the literature, while “nation branding” is a less explored but emerging area of marketing research that is receiving more and more international attention (Anholt, 2013). The field of nation branding is a complex subject that goes beyond advertising campaigns and logos but rather also includes the areas of culture, public relations, and politics (Dinnie, 2016). An increasing number of countries in recent

years have incorporated nation branding strategies (Dinnie, 2016). Thereby, nation branding is commonly used in conjunction with creating positive images of nations through the use of adequate marketing activities (Anholt, 2013).

Before looking at the existing definitions of nation branding in literature, it is essential to acknowledge that these definitions of the terms “nation branding” and “nation brand” are evolved from the terminology of “brand” and “branding” itself, existing within the area of corporate brand identity as outlined in the preceding section.

Dinnie (2016) emphasizes that nation brands, compared to corporate brands, contain richer and more in-depth cultural roots. He defines the term nation brand as “the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie, 2016, p.5). He describes nation branding as a “multifaceted concept” where “language, literature, music, sport, architecture and so on all embody the soul of a nation” (Dinnie, 2016, p. 113). Thereby, nation branding plays a key role for countries to increase the country’s economic strength and to develop a competitive advantage (Dinnie, 2016). Nation branding aims to draw tourism, foreign consumers, and investors to use and buy goods and services and to be well-positioned in terms of branded export (Dinnie, 2016). Thereby, the image of a nation in people’s minds, which can be qualified as “clichés and stereotypes”, profoundly influence their attitude towards a nation, their population, and goods (Anholt, 2013, p.3).

Anholt broadly describes the process of nation branding as building up the reputation of a country through the components “strategy, substance, and symbolic actions” (Anholt, 2013, p.7). The strategy part refers to the fact that a nation must know how it is currently positioned and what the objectives for the future are,

while “substance” refers to the practical implementation of the strategy through actions such as reforms or investments (Anholt, 2013, p.8).

Fan (2016, p.6) states that “there is no single definition of nation branding” but a myriad of different definitions. When it comes to nation branding literature, Fan (2016, pp. 6-8) divides the different terms into the categories “product-related, national level, and cultural focus” which refers to the country of origin or a country’s stereotype. He emphasizes that the definitions and terms around the concept of nation branding are very complex, different, and multi-layered. The focus is not only on marketing as such but on all dimensions of the character of a nation (Fan, 2016). For his paper, he introduced his own definition, namely that “nation branding concerns applying branding and marketing communications techniques to promote a nation’s image” (Fan, 2006, p.6).

Aronczyk (2013) focuses her analysis of branding the nation on economic aspects and today’s competition in a globalized world. She defines the term nation branding as “the result of the interpenetration of commercial and public sector interests to communicate national priorities among domestic and international populations for a variety of interrelated purposes” (Aronczyk, 2013, p.16). Governments are endorsing the praxis of nation branding as it helps to build a nation’s global competitiveness by drawing investors, skilled labor, and tourism to the country (Aronczyk, 2013). Moreover, successful nation branding helps to take on an authoritative role within global competition, while the success of corporations is decoupled from national economic prosperity (Aronczyk, 2013). Aronczyk (2013) further highlights the role of elites who are economic, cultural, or political leaders who greatly influence a nation’s branding.

Propaganda

The notion of propaganda pertains to the domain of political science and security studies but could well be transplanted into the business domain.

The term propaganda is a contentious one, eliciting several attempts to decode its essence. One of the pioneers of propaganda studies in the United States defined propaganda as “the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols” (Lasswell, 1927, p. 627). A further attempt was made by Doob, who expanded the concept by dissecting propaganda as “the expression of opinion or actions by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to determined ends” (cited in Thomson, 1999, p.2). In a more recent context Chomsky and Herman (1988) linked propaganda to the manufacturing of consent. This paper will operationalize the conceptualization of propaganda by Thomson in his seminal work “Easily Led: A History of Propaganda” in which he defines the term as “the use of communication skills of all kinds to achieve attitudinal or behavioral changes among one group of people by another” (1999, p. 5), which is linked with internal and external communication, identity and symbolism.

Furthermore, Thomson (1999) systematized the eight categories of propaganda (Appendix 1). The author’s work is considered seminal to the field of propaganda, since it couples the categories of propaganda with different channels of how it can be communicated and conveyed to the general population, i.e. newspapers, operas, cinema, history, theatre, literature, military parades etc. (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). The subsequent content of communication is situated within the linear spectrum from “purely rational to quasi-rational to purely emotional” (Thomson, 1999, pp. 47-49), depending on the channel of communication and the occasion. As a

result, Thomson’s (1999) develops a four-step process of responding to the phenomenon: attention, attraction, absorption, and retention. This framework presents the process of propaganda internalization and how people interpret it.

Leadership

The discussion about propaganda is naturally linked with leadership theory, symbols, and values of a leader. There is a lacuna of research on the topic, however the strand that this paper is interested in is related to the charismatic leadership and the Weberian charismatic authority that leaders impose on their people (Adair-Toteff, 2005). Charismatic authority is linked to ideals such as character, heroism, leadership and religion (Webber, 1978). Bryman and Pollock emphasize the importance of the leaders by the following definition “the goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to the intentions, capabilities, and strategies of a state” (cited in Roth, 2010, p. 42). The values and the symbolic significance of the leaders are defined by the causes and ideologies they adhere to.

Ideological and charismatic leaderships are often drivers of change in countries, societies, and organizations. Antonakis and House (2013) have developed in their treatise a Full-Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) that attempts to engage with organizational literature. However one of its elements, inspirational motivation, is linked to the charismatic leadership concept, and refers to leaders as people “who inspire and motivate followers to reach ambitious goals that may have previously seemed unreachable, by raising followers expectations and communicating confidence that followers can achieve their goals, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.” (Mumford & Strange, 2013, p. 9-10). Such people can articulate vision, imbued within their values, and use slogans to motivate their actions and inspire others (Mumford & Strange, 2013). Often when

achieving power, the charismatic leaders aim to portray their vision into a tangible edifice, using symbols that are represented in flags, national anthems, monumental buildings, military parades and festivals that reaffirm the identity of the state and their own, so that a new joint identity is fostered (Medlicott, 2005).

Tucker (1968) first aimed at discussing charismatic leadership and theorized that charismatic leaders must be perceived and acknowledged by their followers as such in order to exert the necessary influence. One important point that the author makes is that a charismatic leader must have a “charismatic movement”, giving the example of Lenin and the Soviet Union, (Tucker, 1968, p.739) that clusters around its leaders and shares its values.

Schweitzer (1974), who expounded the concept of political charisma, devised a framework of Prototypes of Political Charismas based on the research of the pioneer Weber. The different prototypes can be found below (Table 2):

<i>Prototypes of Political Charisma</i>	
<i>Democratic Charisma</i>	<i>Revolutionary Charisma</i>
Charismatic Party leader	Prophet of Social Revolution
Charismatic Demagogue	Charismatic Hero
Caesarist Charisma	Revolutionary Ideologist
Aristocratic Charisma	Glorifier of Reason

Table 2 – Prototypes of Political Charisma
Source: Schweitzer (1974)

Methodology

The research will adopt a deductive approach where the researchers attempt to accumulate, gather, and analyze data to substantiate the analysis (Helenius, 1982). Consequently, the study proves or disproves the argument. In terms of epistemological considerations, our study adopts an interpretivist stand. As such, the research

paper remains open to any extraordinary findings that can potentially be uncovered throughout the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The research paper adheres to the business research criteria of reliability, replication, and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The paper adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes the exploratory single case study design, which entails a detailed and in-depth analysis of North Korea. Moreover, this research explores a deviant case in nation branding literature (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), which essentially means a case that defies mainstream theory. Case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the discussed case. The study will utilize primary and secondary resources as a research collection method. Furthermore, primary research methods are applied through a web questionnaire. They will aid this paper by providing more information about the perceptions of people towards North Korea and what feelings the country evokes in them. Consideration of online interviews was put forward, however, due to the time constraints the research team decided to only approach Dr. E.J.R. Cho as an advisor for this study, expert in security studies as well as researcher on nation branding and North Korea.

In addition, to the aforementioned methods, the research paper adopts the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM), created, and designed by Urde (2013), as a method on its own and applies it as a research analytical tool.

In essence, the matrix will aid the paper’s research by providing a clear-cut understanding of North Korea as a brand and the identity it aims to project to the world. This is the first paper that will utilize this model that comes from corporate branding and directly adapt it to nation branding. As a reminder, the matrix “provides a template for management in the analysis, definition, coordination and building of corporate brand identity for

improved performance.” (Urde, 2013, p. 744). The use of this model is key in our understanding of how North Korea aligns and defines its identity.

Empirical results and findings

Heritage and leadership

The official existence of North Korea traces back to 9th September 1948, when it was proclaimed by the Korean Workers’ Party. The faith and existence of this country is intertwined with that of its first leader Kim Il Sung and his subsequent ruling dynasty (Lankov, 2013). From its inception, the country has adopted an antagonistic version of the world, influenced by the ideas of its founding father Kim Il Sung. Based on Schweitzer’s Prototypes of Political Charisma, we can categorize the North Korean leadership as embodying a revolutionary charisma, exemplifying the characteristics of prophets of social revolution, revolutionary ideologists, and charismatic heroes.

Kim Il Sung embodies the aforementioned characteristics more than his successors, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un, since he participated as a guerilla fighter in the Chinese Civil War, the rebel movement against Japanese colonialism, and in the Second World War alongside Soviet Union troops (Kwon, 2003). The pre-North Korea period of his life is glorified by the state via storytelling propaganda of his zealous deeds and sacrifices during all these events, which perpetuates the cult of personality that subsequently evolved. Thus, during the 1970s, a reform was introduced that required every North Korean household to place a portrait of the Dear Leader in their homes, and attend monuments, i.e. Mansu Hill Grand Monument, dedicated to the Leader and the Korean Workers’ Party during national holidays (Lankov, 2013), essentially turning the leader into an icon.

The charismatic appeal of Kim Il Sung gave him legitimacy and permitted him to create a revolutionary ideology based on a blend

between communism and local Korean beliefs, called “Juche” (Chen & Lee, 2007), which is strictly adhered to by all North Korean leaders. The Juche ideology is based on three tenets (Lee, 2003, 105):

- *Chaju*: domestic and foreign independence – from internal and external threats
- *Charip*: economic independence – self-reliance
- *Chawi*: military independence – national self-defense

The Juche ideology contributes and serves as an explanation to the “mythologized view of North Korea” (Kurbanov, 2019, p.10), since it departs from the original scientific communism by adhering to the three tenets that serve its exceptionalism. The roots of Juche can be traced to pre-colonial times and they are heavily interlinked with Confucian tradition and Cheondogyo religion (Medlicott, 2005; Kurbanov, 2019). Both argue for complete fidelity to their leaders, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and familial nationalism, which solidifies the symbolic values of the Kim dynasty. Familial nationalism is part of the re-interpretation of the Confucian tradition (Cho, 2017), which viewed through the lens of Juche, meant separating the children from the family and subduing them to the will of State. Consequently, this establishes a child-father bond with the people and the North Korean Leader (Cho, 2017), which perpetuates the moral and political authority of the leader that gives him the legitimacy to act as the leader of the North Korean household.

In the following section, we will dive into our next key findings related to common symbols and values that North Korea’s regime communicates and internalizes.

Communication: military demonstrations, cultural spectacles and propaganda

As previously specified, symbols are often used as a tool by leaders and can exist in the form of flags, monuments, national

anthems, military demonstrations, and cultural events (Medlicott, 2005). North Korea, in this regard, can be described as a nation whose leader uses political symbols to create an appealing aura of strength and attraction (Kwon & Chung, 2012). According to Cho (2017), North Korea uses such symbols to strengthen its position and to build its nation branding.

An integral part of North Korea's nation branding strategy are military spectacles, such as military parades and nuclear weapon tests, which are a political symbol in the form of a spectacular demonstration and dramatic showcase that is intended to prove nationally and internationally how strong and influential the current political regime is (Cho, 2017). Another example of such an event is the military parade in Pyongyang, which took place in October 2020, being the largest in their history, attended by their leader Kim Jong-un who praised himself and his regime (BBC, 2020). Nuclear weapon tests can be seen as verbal threats communicated to the outside world while promoting obedience and satisfaction with the North Korean regime (Cho, 2017; Friedman, 2013). Another element to their use of symbols are their increasing attempts to reach foreign audiences through the use of social media, i.e. Un A's YouTube channel and Twitter account (Kuhn, 2020).

Other elements of North Korea's branding strategy are cultural spectacles and festivals such as the Arirang Festival. This festival is a mixture of art and politics (Kwon & Chung) and takes place annually for a period of two months and consists of artistic shows. The festival is intended to honor Kim Il-sung and the worker's party and showcase the success of the political system while mobilizing more than 100,000 citizens, which gives the regime authority over the public stage and can be seen as a propaganda event (Cho, 2017).

Cho (2017) states that North Korea uses national spectacles such as military parades and cultural festivals to communicate with the rest of the world to be respected, which is part of their nation-building strategy. The goal of North Korea's external communication is to gain the prestige and respect of other nations, which is just as typical of liberal capitalist countries. In doing so, North Korea's regime is striving to adjust its own image in the eyes of the outside world according to its own vision, as the rest of the world has already acquired a particular image of North Korea for themselves (Cho, 2017).

To further understand the practical use of these symbols, this research paper has modified Thomson's (1999) 4-step process responding to propaganda (Figure 4).

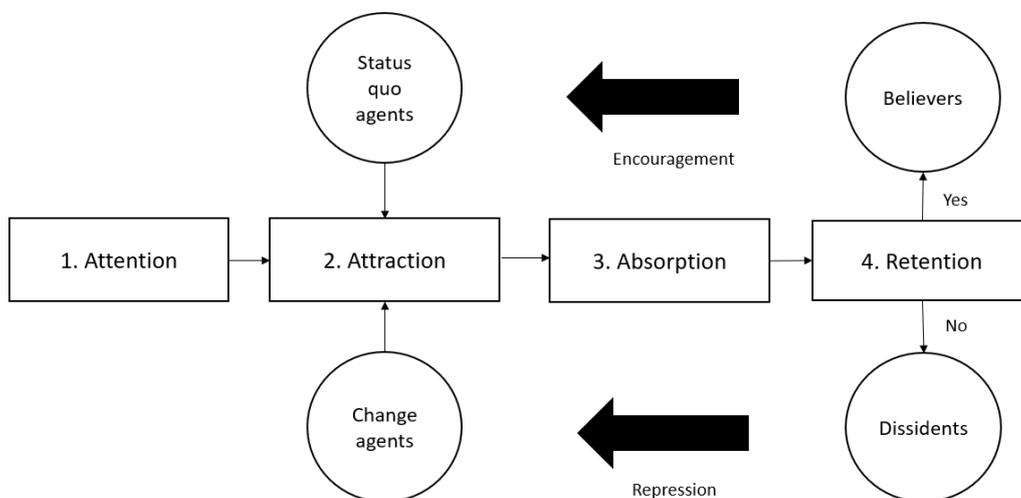


Figure 4 – Internalization Process of Propaganda

The author elaborates on the attention, attraction, absorption, and retention. However, our findings argue that more can be found in the “retention” step. This new framework reaffirms the idea that propaganda is a two-way process. If internalized, our research posits that propaganda agents become part of the people and themselves act as status quo agents. Thereby, helping the Kim dynasty to solidify its grip on power. If it is not internalized, North Korea’s regime represses dissidents, who we label as change agents, whose primary goal is to undermine the government. This process can be exemplified by the numerous accounts of people who left the country during the years.

Intended reputation and public perception

Public events, as illustrated in the preceding section, turned North Korea into a “grand theatre” or “theatre state”, governed by the regime to strengthen its position and to constantly instill their values among the population (Cho, 2017, p. 596). The concept of “theatre state” was introduced by Geertz (1980).

This term is presented to illustrate the uncommon combination between the dominant and typical idea of nation branding, and on the other hand, North Korea’s approach to portraying an alternative and distorted reality (Cho, 2017) which can be described as antagonistic nation branding.

In contrast to the common branding goals of creating a sympathetic image, North Korea attempts to be recognized as being “intimidating, strong and powerful” to other nation and being seen as an “equal partner” (Cho, 2017, p.600). Prevailing research on nation branding reduces the term nation branding to be connected to only creating “positive” images (Cho, 2017, p. 595). On the contrary, North Korea, “perhaps the most hardline communist country among those few left (i.e., Cuba and China)” (Cho,

2017, p. 595), maintains a strategy that aims to be “threatening” to the outside world, which is the very opposite of conventional nation branding strategies. The values that are important for this strategy are not economic welfare, but rather the objective that the political regime and heritage survive (Cho, 2017, p. 595).

Therefore, this research paper finds North Korea uses nation branding by projecting the image of being a potent and legitimate state.

A distinctive feature of North Korea’s strategy of nation branding can be found in “the self-proclamation of a role” and “the invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm, 1992). Self-proclamation of a role thereby refers to North Korea’s attempt to be perceived as a “powerful state” and to seek recognition within world politics as well as legitimacy (Cho, 2017, p. 615). The invention of tradition serves to counteract the risk of regime failure through the idea that the entire nation is considered an “extended family”, which was introduced early in North Korea’s nation-building practice (Cho, 2017, p. 605). A “father-children relationship” was proclaimed between the leader and the population in order to see the regime as providing guidance, trust and a sense of belonging (Cho, 2017, p. 605).

To evaluate more in-depth whether the aforementioned perception of North Korea really has mostly negative connotations, a qualitative survey (see Appendix 2) was conducted to examine the reputation of the country by a sample of 247 survey participants. These results support our analysis in determining the existence an application of an atypical nation branding strategy.

The most frequently mentioned words to define North Korea were *dictatorship*, *dictature*, *mysterious*, *isolated*, *nuclear*, *military* and *aggressive*. Most commonly named feelings were characterized as *fear*, *curiosity*, *respect*, *sadness*, *concern* and *hatred*. When asked about the degree of interest in visiting North Korea, about 42%

of the respondents said that they were rather interested, which can be considered relatively high in regard to the fearful image that North Korea portrays. Approximately 52% of respondents said they would click on topics related to North Korea in their newsfeed, indicating a general interest and curiosity towards the nation.

These survey findings support the hypothesis that North Korea is using an atypical nation branding strategy, which results in a negative outside-in perception. Despite the fear elicited by the country, a significant number of survey participants would still consider visiting North Korea. This may be partly explained by the degree of mystery surrounding the nation, making people intrigued. Thus, these findings strengthen the theoretical analysis of North Korea's nation brand building efforts.

North Korea Brand Identity Matrix

This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how different strategies can be used in relation to nation branding concepts depending on a country's objectives.

This multidimensional application showcases the transfer of brand identity elements to nation branding, specifically tailored to the case study of North Korea. This adapted framework (Figure 5) summarizes and displays our findings from this paper, specifically all elements gathered to illustrate North Korea's core DNA.

The application of the matrix serves as a unifying thread for this paper and helps readers better understand the essence of North Korea's nation branding strategy.

External	VALUE PROPOSITION Manufacturing diplomatic crises and sparking public debates	RELATIONSHIPS Distant, tension driver, controlled, asymmetrical	POSITION Intimidating, respected, equal and legitimate partner
	EXPRESSION Theatre state, cultural spectacles, military parades	BRAND CORE Juche ideology (self-reliance): Chaju, Charip, Chawi	PERSONALITY Authoritarian, isolated and traditional (importance of heritage)
	MISSION AND VISION Protection of legacy and continuation of communist ideology	CULTURE Confucian values, sovereignty, ascetic	COMPETENCES Propaganda Sparking public debates: military demonstrations (nuclear weapons)
Internal			

Figure 5 – North Korea's Brand Identity Matrix

Implications

Theoretical

Nation branding has been viewed as a “states attendant” in advertising campaigns (Cho, 2017). A narrow process that perceives national self-images generated through national branding strategies as being purely ‘positive’ (Cho, 2017). It is a recent concept in terms of application by countries and has been complicated to define and hard to fully capture. As such, according to popular views in research, nation branding almost exclusively entailed attracting external stakeholders and generating a positive nation image and reputation.

This paper aims to go beyond the positiveness spectrum of nation branding theories and filling the gap in research. Through an extensive case analysis of North Korea’s symbols, values, leadership and heritage, our paper uncovers the multiplicity of nation branding strategies. On the one hand, we have a country with a clear identifying image due to the way it chooses to communicate with the outside world; on the other hand, we have a very negative, mysterious and fearful perception by outsiders. This duality is left underdeveloped in research and is explored in our paper. In particular, the application of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix discussed in this article provides a general framework to understand the core similarities between how a corporate brand and a nation brand work, as well as a deeper visual understanding of North Korea’s unconventional nation branding DNA. We believe there is much to be gained by further disentangling the phenomenon of nation branding and studying unconventional approaches.

While research and standard views on nation branding might want to focus on entities with positive value propositions (Incredible India, Malaysia Truly Asia), we believe it to be even more relevant and interesting to focus on nations or

organizations that people love to hate (ISIS, Hell’s Angels). Therefore, our research paper takes experts in the field one step further in acknowledging unconventional branding strategies.

Managerial

This research paper focuses on debunking the myth that North Korea did not have a valid and feasible nation branding strategy. In the previous sections of the paper, in-depth exploratory evidence has been presented to substantiate the claim that the isolated country successfully performs a different variety of nation branding. In the previous paragraph, the theoretical implications solidified this paper’s contribution to scholarly literature on nation branding. The paper posits that several managerial implications can be drawn from this study. Firstly, the empirical findings can be utilized by public sector agents when they engage with North Korean officials. Dissecting the manifestation of power projections and the fear that it instills in countries and people, international NGOs or public agencies can accurately plan their moves when they engage in negotiations with North Korea. Professionals and diplomats engaged with state to state relations can benefit from this research by understanding local behaviors and customs. Thus, the paper would increase their understanding of how to properly conduct themselves when they engage with North Korean agents.

The current thaw of relations between North Korea and its neighbors elicits promising developments for the future. Through this research paper, business actors can familiarize themselves with the local culture and behavioral patterns of the country, which will facilitate their efforts in establishing and vying for trade deals with the local government. Once the economic sanctions are lifted, MNCs and private actors, via intermediaries from the People’s Republic of China, can engage in trade and export of consumer goods or provide services to North Korea, which would make

qualitative knowledge of the isolated country even more paramount.

Therefore, private sector actors, such as multinational corporations, global companies or entrepreneurs, can understand how to decode the messages that the ruling regime sends. The usage of symbolism, mass festival performances, and fear projection are all hidden signals that will allow culturally aware actors to perceive and uncover their hidden meaning in a correct fashion.

Lastly, this research facilitates and acts as a steppingstone for communication strategists and marketers, who want to expand their toolkits, by utilizing some rhetoric practices that the ruling regime relies on. Particularly, North Korea's internal communication methods aimed at the general populace, characterized with their vividness and boundless success.

Discussion and conclusion

This research paper and single case study has illustrated a different version of what nation branding can be. A version, in which a country does not have as main objective to draw tourism, foreign consumers, and investors but rather, building its reputation around its symbols and legacy, with no regard to public opinion. Hjalmar Söderberg, in his epistolary novel Doctor Glas (1968), tells us that:

"One wants to be loved, in lack thereof admired, in lack thereof feared, in lack thereof loathed and despised. One wants to instill some sort of emotion in people"

The study has revealed a number of insights with regard to the main theoretical concepts around corporate branding elements applicable to nation brands, as well as the multiplicity and complexity of nation branding definitions. Achieving legitimacy on a global scale and maintaining a strategy that aims to be "threatening" to the outside world, showcases the values that are important for North Korea's nation

branding strategy. Values which are not economic welfare, but rather the objective that the political regime and heritage survive on the world stage (Cho, 2017, p. 595). Indeed, nation branding in this case study plays a key role in layering all the dimensions that make up North Korea's core character and DNA, centered around self-reliance.

For this specific case study analysis, one part in achieving legitimacy for North Korea was through demonstrating its regime, position, values and symbols through public events and spectacles, with great control over what is communicated to the outside world. This aspect of the "theatre state" that is North Korea also means that the country increasingly tends to use standard communication tools (i.e. YouTube channel) to reach out to the world and gain public attention as well as the respect of other nations. The country strives to gain publicity in the media, not necessarily positive, through controlled displays of power and heritage. The application of the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix to North Korea also allowed us to build a clearer picture of the country's core identity elements that make up the fundamentals of its nation branding strategy.

The study also questions some existing theories on nation branding that assume it as being intrinsically linked to positivity. Such research bases a nation's branding strategy solely on their promotional capabilities, attractivity to outsiders and capacity to positively influence people's attitude towards the nation (Anholt, 2013, p.3). Although these theories discuss important aspects of nation branding, they fall short in the argument that a country such as North Korea, distinctly seen as mysterious and feared, would not make use of a nation branding strategy.

This research paper is based on an extensive country case study. In order to develop a more generalizable framework, more empirical data is needed, including

qualitative and quantitative studies. These should particularly focus on the process of how an organization transplants negative messages and values from the inside-out as well as in depth measurement of such strategies to fully understand this phenomenon. This study, although a very valuable example, raises more questions as to how one measures the efficiency of nation branding strategies. Answers to these questions in the future will enrich our understanding of branding concepts and theories.

Acknowledgement

This research topic has been selected in discussion with Associate Professor Mats Urde.

References

- Aaker, D.A. & Joachimsthaler, E. (2009). *Brand leadership*, New York: Free Press
- Aaker, D.A. (1996). *Building strong brands*, New York, Ny: Free Press
- Adair-Toteff, Christopher, Max Weber's Charisma, *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 189–204 (2005)
- Anholt, S. (2007). Competitive identity: the new brand management for nations, cities and regions, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan
- Anholt, S. (2013). Beyond the Nation Brand: The Role of Image and Identity in International Relations, *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 6-12
- Antonakis, J. & House, R.J. (2013), The Full-Range Leadership Theory: The Way Forward, Transformational and Charismatic Leadership: The Road Ahead 10th Anniversary Edition, Monographs in Leadership and Management, *Emerald Group Publishing Limited*, Vol. 5, pp. 3-33, Available online: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/S1479-357120130000005006>
- Aronczyk, M. (2013). *Branding the nation: the global business of national identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- BBC. (2020). North Korea displays 'massive' ICBM at military parade, Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54491657> [Accessed 13 October 2020]
- Browning, C.S. (2014). Nation branding and development: poverty panacea or business as usual?, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 50–75
- Browning, C.S. & Ferraz de Oliveira, A. (2017). Introduction: Nation Branding and Competitive Identity in World Politics, *Geopolitics*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 481–501
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods*, 3rd edition, New York: Oxford University Press
- Chen, C. & Lee, J. (2007). Making Sense of North Korea: "National Stalinism" in Comparative-Historical Perspective, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 40, pp. 464-570
- Cho, E.J.R. (2017). Nation Branding for Survival in North Korea: The Arirang Festival and Nuclear Weapons Tests. *Geopolitics*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 594–622
- Choi, D. & Kim, P.S. (2014). Promoting a Policy Initiative for Nation Branding: The Case of South Korea, *Journal of Comparative Asian Development*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp.346–368, Available online: <https://yonsei.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/promoting-a-policy-initiative-for-nation-branding-the-case-of-sou> [Accessed 11 October 2020]
- Dinnie, K. (2016). *Nation branding: concepts, issues, practice*, London: New York: Routledge
- Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the nation: What is being branded? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 5–14
- Fan, Y. (2008). Key perspectives in nation image: a conceptual framework for nation branding. Available online: <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/1872> [Accessed 5 October 2020]
- Friedman, G. (2013). Ferocious, Weak and Crazy: The North Korean Strategy, *Stratfor Worldview*, Available online: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/ferocious-weak-and-crazy-north-korean-strategy>, [Accessed 10 October 2020]

- Geertz, C. (1980). *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Greyser, S.A. & Urde, M. (2019), 'What Does Your Corporate Brand Stand For?', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. January February 2019, January February Issue, pp. 82-89, Available online: <https://hbr.org/2019/01/what-does-your-corporate-brand-stand-for> [Accessed 5 October 2020]
- Helenius, R. (1982). *Confronting social problems: inductive and deductive strategies in social research*, Stockholm: Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration
- Herman, E., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, USA*: Pantheon Books
- Hill, C.R. (2013). The Elusive Vision of a Non-nuclear North Korea, *The Washington Quarterly*, 36(2), pp. 7–19
- Hobsbawm, E.J. (1992). *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hong, K. (2014). Nation Branding of Korea, In: Lee, H.K. & Lim, L. *Cultural Policies in East Asia*, London: Palgrave Millan. pp. 69-84, Available online: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137327772_5
- Kapferer, J.N. (2012). *The new strategic brand management: advanced insights and strategic thinking*, London; Philadelphia: Kogan Page
- Kaneva, N. (2011). Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research, *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, pp. 117-141
- Kotler, P. & Gertner, D. (2002). Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective, *The Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 9, pp. 249-261
- Kuhn, A. (2020). North Korea Makes A Push to Reach Foreign Audiences on YouTube And Twitter, NPR, Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/12/901017310/north-korea-makes-a-push-to-reach-foreign-audiences-on-youtube-and-twitter?t=1601040123248&t=1602775480410>, [Accessed 12 October 2020]
- Kurbanov, S.O. (2019). North Korea's Juche ideology: indigenous communism or traditional thought?, *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp. 296-305, Available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14672715.2019.1566750>
- Kwon, H., & Chung, B.H. (2012). *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers
- Kwon, S. (2003). State building in North Korea: from a 'self-reliant' to a 'military-first' state, *Asian Affairs*, vol.34, no. 3, pp. 286-296, Available online: DOI: 10.1080/0306837032000136314
- Lankov, A. (2013). *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Lasswell, H. D. (1927). The theory of political propaganda, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 21, pp. 627–631, Available online: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1945515>
- Lee, G. (2003). The Political Philosophy of Juche, *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 105-112
- Lynch, J. & de Chernatony, L. (2004). The power of emotion: Brand communication in business-to-business markets, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 403-419

- Medlicott, C. (2005). Symbol and Sovereignty in North Korea. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp.69–79
- Mumford, M.D. & Strange, J.M. (2013), Vision and Mental Models: The Case of Charismatic and Ideological Leadership, Transformational and Charismatic Leadership: The Road Ahead 10th Anniversary Edition, Monographs in Leadership and Management, *Emerald Group Publishing Limited*, Vol. 5, pp. 125-158, Available online: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1108/S1479-357120130000005013>
- Porter, M. (2014). The Competitive Advantage of Nations, *Harvard Business Review*. Available online: <https://hbr.org/1990/03/the-competitive-advantage-of-nations>, [Accessed 6 October 2020]
- Pratkanis, A., & Aronson, E. (2001). Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion, USA: Holt Paperbacks
- Roth, A.I. (2010). Leaders and Leadership. In: Leadership in International Relations, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Available online: https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1057/9780230113534_3
- Sang-Hun, C. & Gladstone, R. (2013). North Korea Tones Down Language, Giving Hope for Dialogue (Published 2013), *The New York Times*, Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/world/asia/north-korea-tension.html?_r=0 [Accessed 15 October 2020]
- Schweitzer, A. (1974). Theory and Political Charisma. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 150-181
- Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options, *Political Research Quarterly*, vol 61, no. 2, pp. 294-308
- Söderberg, H. (1968). Doctor Glas, Sweden: Anchor Publishing.
- Huang, S. (2011). Nation-branding and transnational consumption: Japan-mania and the Korean wave in Taiwan. *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 3–18
- Thomson, O. (1999). Easily Led: A History of Propaganda, Surrey: Sutton Publishing House
- Tucker, R.C. (1968). The Theory of Charismatic Leadership. *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*, vol. 97, no. 3, pp. 731-756
- Urde, M. & Greyser, S. (2016). The Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix – The case of the Nobel Prize. *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 23, pp. 89-117, Available online: [doi:10.1057/bm.2015.49](https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2015.49)
- Urde, M. (2013). The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix, *Journal of Brand Management*, vol. 20, pp. 742-761, Available online: [doi:10.1057/bm.2013.12](https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.12)
- Yin, R.K. (2003). Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 3rd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Weber, M. (1978/1922). Economy and Society, edited by Roth, G. & Wittich, C., Berkeley: University of California Press

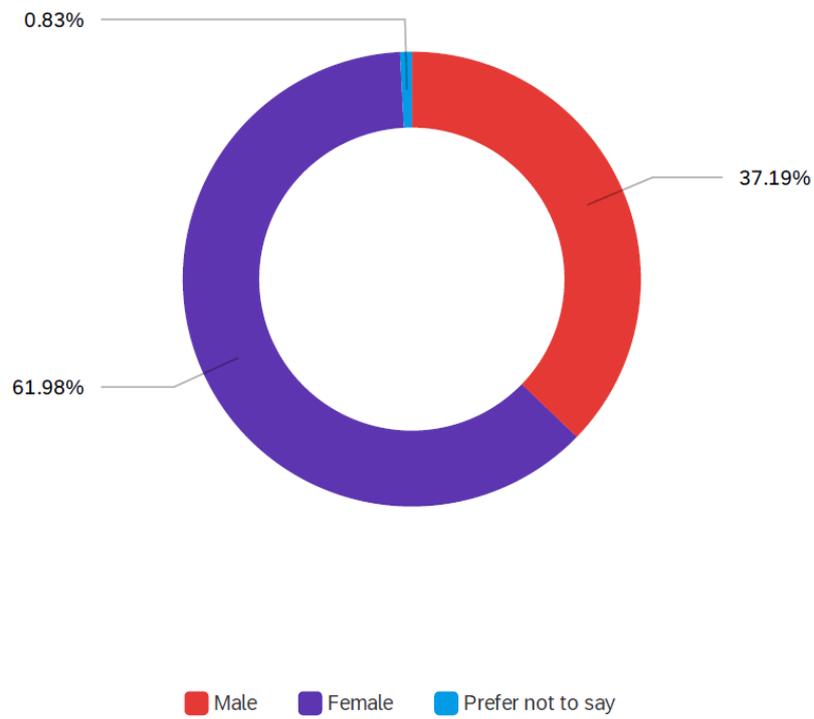
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Categories of Propaganda (Thomson, 1999)

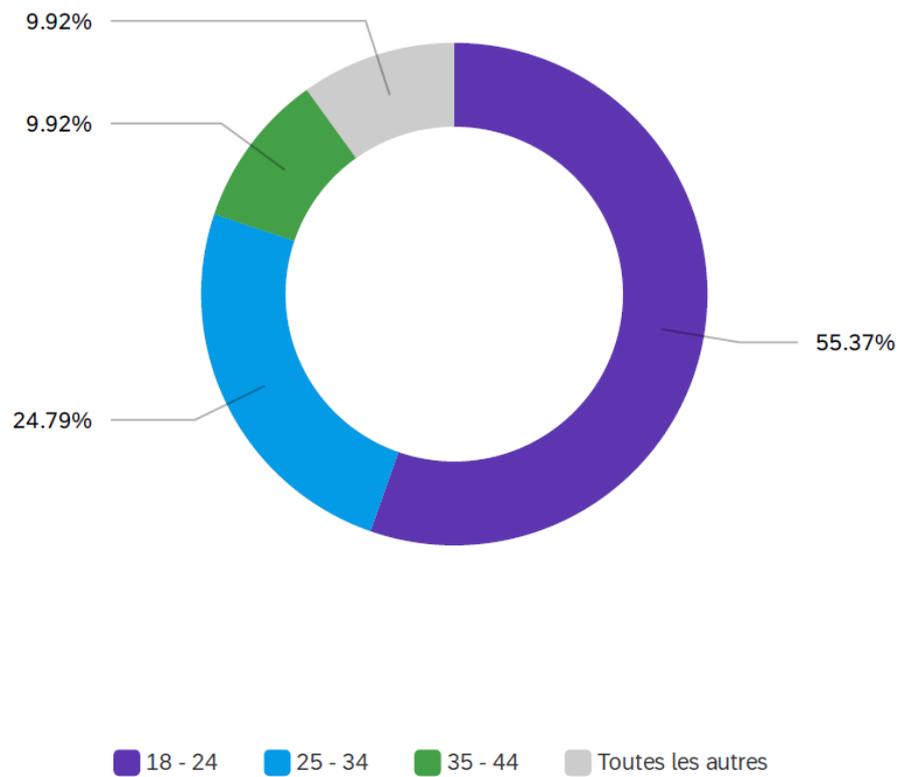
Category of Propaganda	Explanation
Political	Communication skills, manipulation and event management that lead to acquisition of political power. Building of myths, images; rhetoric of opposing parties.
Religious	Relies on emotional manipulation: irrational, mystical statements that cannot be proved. Attempt to prove them are the prophecies and miraculous events.
Economic	Persuading people to spend more or less money, conserve fuels, land gas, water, and buy/sell shares, not to panic.
Moral	Communication of codes of moral behaviour
Social	Covers the techniques of mass persuasion to project the superiority of casts, elites, races, male sex, dominance, slave ownership
Diplomatic	Specialist form of propaganda – utilized during periods of warfare. Organizing an appeal to other governments to take sides.
Military	Specialist form – geared towards demoralizing the enemies and makes them surrender.
Diversiory	Use of media to divert the attention of the population from the deeds of their elites.

Appendix 2 – Online Questionnaire

Question 1: *What is your gender?*



Question 2: *What is your age?*



Question 7: *If you see something relating to North Korea in your newsfeed, how likely would are you to click on it?*



Extremely unlikely Unlikely Neither likely nor unlikely Likely Extremely likely