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**Role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat.
Case study of Sweden**

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Abstract

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Everybody is a nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of his/her country of citizenship or residence or both. This phenomenon is receiving more presence in modern public diplomacy. Sweden is an epitomized example in this regard as a single state in the world that allowed its citizens to run the official Twitter account of the state. This thesis explores Sweden as a case study to illuminate the cutting-edge phenomenon of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. It seeks to expand the understanding of the role from a strategic communication lens. For this purpose, the CCO perspective and alignment of strategic communication are used as the theoretical framework. The interviews with the public diplomacy officials and the participants of public diplomacy activities under the auspices of the Swedish Institute were conducted and complemented with the document analysis to comprehensively explore the government and people's perspectives on the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. The findings showed that the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are primary actors in the public diplomacy of Sweden integrated into its brand vision as the country that seeks together with people the solutions to global challenges. In this configuration, the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat empowers both the state and individuals who perform it. It can be concluded that nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are both the products and producers of the soft power of the state.

Keywords: public diplomacy, citizen diplomacy, nation branding, soft power, nation brand ambassador, citizen diplomat, strategic communication

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Thank you, my small Swedish family,
And my Ukrainian family,

Sincerely,
Mariia Dovbenko

1 Introduction

When Elvis Presley arrived in Germany, he told reporters: "What we do here will reflect on America and our way of life" (Mueller, 2020, p. 117). In the language of strategic communication, it means that we are all unofficial nation ambassadors. If in Elvis' times we assumed this role mostly when travelled then nowadays it became our second nature. Digital tools and social media enabled people to share news and insights from their countries instantly (Attias, 2012). These technological developments, together with the rising public skepticism about the information disseminated by the governments, made ordinary people powerful voices of the state (Attias, 2012). The Covid-19 crisis galvanized it. In search of information on how others cope with the coronavirus, ordinary people started to share the Covid-19 stories from their countries on social media throughout the globe (Bjola & Manor, 2020).

Despite boosting evidence of people acting as the voices of the state, such a role of individuals remains unclear in the state policy. Some governments started to integrate people into their public diplomacy activities (Samuel-Azran, Ilovici, Zari, & Geduld, 2018). But the studies tend to conclude that the states are pursuing only marketing logic in this (Christensen, 2013; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). If so, this rather limited understanding of the role of people as the voices of the state can lead to the overlook by the governments of their potential. But people can and do act as the voices of the state on their own initiative (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018; Biltekin, 2020). Strategic communication requires understanding by the organization of the important role of its members as the communicators (Heide, von Platen, Simonsson, & Falkheimer, 2018). If this remains beyond the attention of the governments, the states will not be able to manage their communication strategically.

The role of people as the voices of the state remains vague on the theoretical level, with many different concepts developed in this regard. Among these, the most elaborated and commonly used are *citizen diplomat* (Mueller,

2020; Sharp, 2001) and *nation brand ambassador* (Dinnie, 2015). These concepts are disseminated in different disciplines, mostly in international relations and marketing, which led to a very fragmented understanding of this role. I argue that the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador should be explored within the strategic communication field following the CCO perspective that recognizes the communication role of different members of the organization (Heide et al., 2018). This will provide a more holistic conceptualization of the phenomenon and place it within the strategic communication field.

While many scholars (Jarvis, 2020; Magu, 2018; Mueller, 2020) tend to highlight the importance of the citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors in the promotion of the state interests, the understanding of which tools and platforms people can be utilized to act on in this regard remains lacking (Nye, 2010). Social media were argued as such a platform (Dinnie, 2015), but Samuel-Azran et al. (2018) pointed out that more research needs to be conducted in this regard as well as more case studies are required to illuminate the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador.

The practice of Sweden could be extremely relevant in this regard since the participation of people as well as digitalization is at the core of its nation branding and public diplomacy (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018; Pamment, 2011). For instance, the Swedish Government allowed its people to tweet on the official Twitter account of @Sweden, and thousands of people became the curators of Sweden on social media (Christensen, 2013). Swedes also volunteered to answer the questions from the international callers about Sweden via a smartphone app and quickly outperformed in the expected number of such brand ambassadors (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018). Therefore, exploring Swedish experience could help to illuminate the understanding of the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to expand the understanding of the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador and to elevate this role both within the studies and practice of strategic communication. The study aims to contribute to the conceptualization of the role of nation citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador

from a strategic communication perspective as well as to the governmental practices in this regard through the case study of Sweden.

In order to address the aim of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

- How do the public officials perceive the role of people as nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats?
- How do people perceive their role as nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats?
- How does the alignment between the nation brand and the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat take place, if at all?

1.2 Delimitations

It is important to note that this thesis will not focus on the practice of Sweden in engaging people to act as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors or people acting as such. It will rather address the interpretation of the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador by the state actors that envision it and by the people who actively perform it. Therefore, it will contribute to a better empirical understanding of the concepts. It should also be clarified that this study adopts the titles *citizen diplomat* and *nation brand ambassador* though there is no uniform and explicit usage of these terms in Sweden. They are used in the study in relation to ordinary people who talk about Sweden and thus, represent the country. Since only Sweden is explored, the findings of the research may not be relevant for all other countries. But as with any case study, it is generalizable not to the populations but to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2016). Therefore, the results will be illuminating for approaching the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador within the strategic communication field.

1.3 Disposition

This thesis is structured in the following way. The literature review follows the introduction and presents an overview of different conceptualizations and the government practices in relation to citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. Thereafter, the theory chapter provides the overarching CCO framework, role

theory, and alignment theory of strategic communication. Then, the methodology is explained, covering the epistemological standpoint, research design, case study and ethical considerations. The empirical findings and analysis follow to reflect on the role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors linking it to the theories and literature used in this study. Finally, a concluding discussion is provided where conclusions and recommendations for future research are drawn.

2 Literature review

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the research on citizen diplomacy/nation branding. Firstly, it reviews the concept of citizen diplomacy as a part of public diplomacy and relates it to nation branding and soft power. Following this, the role of citizen diplomats, nation brand ambassadors, and other related concepts is analyzed. Then the government policy on integrating people in public diplomacy and nation branding is overviewed. And finally, the impact of digitalization on the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador is addressed. At the end of the chapter, a synthesis is provided to summarize the literature review and integrate the aspects to be addressed further in this study.

2.1 Public diplomacy, nation branding and citizen diplomacy as soft power

Soft power is considered to be attractive power due to its central idea of attracting and enticing (Nye, 2008). The resources of soft power are "the assets that produce such attraction" (Nye, 2008, p. 95). Public diplomacy is an important tool of soft power that mobilizes the culture, values, and policies of the country to attract people around the world (Nye, 2008). Pamment (2013, p. 1) defined public diplomacy as "the communication of an international actors' policies to citizens of foreign countries". It means that in contrast to traditional diplomacy, its target audience is the public, not the government and officials. Thus, one of the crucial dimensions of public diplomacy is relationship building with people (Nye, 2008; Storie, 2017).

Along with public diplomacy, the concept of nation branding emerged, which could be seen as "the postmodern mutation of public diplomacy" (Szondi, 2008, p. 30). Both public diplomacy and nation branding are "about country promotion with the ultimate goal of creating positive images" (Szondi, 2008, p. 29). While public diplomacy is often criticized as propaganda, nation branding receives criticism as a commercial effort (Szondi, 2008). Dinnie (2015) sees

nation branding and public diplomacy as interchangeable terms. This logic is followed in this study.

Scholars discussed the emergence of new public diplomacy that shifted from the government institutions being the key actors in the communication of the state to people (Pamment, 2013). This potential of people was voiced a long time ago by Delaney (1968, p. 3), pointing out that along with the government, "private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly public attitudes and opinions". More recently, Dinnie (2015) highlighted the important role of every single person in this regard. This new public diplomacy is conceptualized in a separate stream of citizen diplomacy as "non-governmental action by private citizens on international issues, allowing citizens to bring about change and promote their country's global stance" (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018, p. 39). It could be done through educational and cultural exchanges, social media and web communication, and foreign visits (Eastwood, 2007; Agbu, 2009; Shemesh, 2012). Activities traditionally considered as public diplomacy constitute citizen diplomacy. So, citizen diplomacy should be seen as an integral part of public diplomacy that is followed in this study to further contribute to the field.

In practice, citizen diplomacy is embraced by many governments around the globe (Attias, 2012). It was argued that citizen diplomacy could complement official diplomacy creating opportunities for cross-cultural communication (Davies & Kaufman, 2002), and the countries that could harness the communication potential of their public would succeed in their public diplomacy (Attias, 2012). Despite the recognition of the importance of citizen diplomacy and its integration into government policy, scholars point out the lack of literature on the topic and the need for more case studies to understand the viability of the citizen diplomacy concept (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018).

2.2 Citizen diplomats, nation brand ambassadors, and others

Citizen diplomacy rests upon the powerful role of citizens and considers them, specifically those acting beyond the national borders such as tourists, international students, and business people, as diplomats of their country who may assist in promoting its image abroad (Nye, 2010). Such role of an ordinary citizen was

explicitly articulated by the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom: "We must unleash the energy of 60 million budding ambassadors in Britain's schools, businesses, local authorities, political parties, and communities" (Leonard & Alakeson, 2000, p. 5).

The concept of *citizen diplomat* is not new, but it is becoming more popular now that each individual should perceive himself as a citizen diplomat (Mueller, 2020, p. 118): "Whether a student sitting next to a foreign scholar in a university classroom, an athlete competing abroad, an elected official welcoming foreign counterparts, a rock star performing in another country, or a business representative overseas, you are a citizen diplomat". This means that each individual represents his or her state in some capacity. An attempt to determine these different capacities or modalities was made by Sharp (2001). The scholar suggested viewing citizen diplomat as a go-between; as a representative for a sectoral, regional, and local economic interest; as a lobbyist or advocate for a particular cause; as a subverter or transformer of existing policies; and as an autonomous agent in the international relationships (Sharp, 2001). The latter conceptualization of being an autonomous agent is the closest to the latest understanding of citizen diplomat as an ordinary individual. But according to Sharp (2001) citizen diplomat as an autonomous agent needs to have sufficient resources, either wealth or moral authority, to perform his or her role (Sharp, 2001). It should be viewed as a limited understanding of citizen diplomat, especially now with the emergence of social media platforms that empowered ordinary people to represent their state (Attias, 2012). This study sets out to explore the Swedish citizen diplomats acting in the last decade to contribute to the modern understanding of the citizen diplomat.

Along with the *citizen diplomat* term, some scholars (Dinnie, 2015; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012) use a *nation brand ambassador* title. This term also views citizens as "representatives of their home nation" abroad (Dinnie, 2015, p. 228). Besides official ambassadors employed by the state, famous figures and ordinary people can perform the role of nation brand ambassador without being formally assigned to it (Dinnie, 2015). People are invited to live the brand and act in ways that are compatible with the national brand (Varga, 2014). They "immerse" themselves in the brand identity, carry "the microbes of the brand," and "infect" others (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 54). As it was explained earlier – that

citizen diplomacy and nation branding basically represent the same phenomenon – this study also assumes the *nation brand ambassador* and *citizen diplomat* concepts to stand for the same role of the individual of representing the state and being its voice abroad.

There are many terms related to brand ambassador/citizen diplomat developed in different fields. One of the most elaborated concepts is a *student ambassador* that was given arise due to the proliferation of government-sponsored educational exchange programmes such as Fulbright, Erasmus, Visby (Akli 2012; Glover, 2011b; Jarvis, 2020; Lima, 2007; Perilli, 2017). It was argued that "study-abroad students play their cultural ambassadorial role in a people-to-people spirit to improve communication and build relationships among individuals" (Akli, 2012, p. 41). At the same time, students acquire different skills underlying their future professional success and feel more responsible towards society (Gannon, Tracey & Ullman, 2018). Students were also called culture carriers who pass on their home culture to the host country and pass on their experience in the host country back to their home country (Eide, 1970). The role of the students was also recognized in the rebranding of the host destination (Glover, 2011b; Jarvis, 2020). This is a part of another big stream of studies that focus on an *ambassador for destination* concept (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012).

The role of the *ambassador for the destination* describes the potential of the citizens and residents of the place to raise its attractiveness for the tourists (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013). Studies in this regard identified that people had different motivations in performing this role, such as seeking publicity, networking, business advantages, societal changes or expression of pride (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013) and wanted to feel empowered in performing this role (Wassler, Wang, & Hung, 2021). In relation to place branding, Nagy (2017) used the concept of *good-will ambassador* to describe the role of the tourists in contributing to the image of the visited foreign country when coming back to their country. This concept was further developed by Kantek, Veljanova, & Onnudottir (2021), integrating the studies on the *student ambassador*.

The *good-will ambassador* role in its conceptualization by Kantek et al. (2021), together with the *transnational entrepreneur* (Lee, 2019) and *policy ambassador* concepts (Porto de Oliveira, 2020), could be seen as another recent

stream of studies on the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. The *good-will ambassador* describes the socio-cultural role of the participants of the study abroad programmes of contributing to the developments both in their country of origin and residence and to their own development as a leader (Kantek et al., 2021). The bilateral role of the individuals is also highlighted in the *transnational entrepreneur* concept that perceives foreigners who conduct business in another country as serving "multiple diplomatic missions" (Lee, 2019, p. 143). The *policy ambassador* concept also reflects this transnational role and contribution describing the individuals that promoted policy at the local, national and international levels (Porto de Oliveira, 2020).

All these concepts are grounded in different fields and exist rather separately – though, in fact, they are all interconnected and reflect the same phenomenon of ordinary people acting as ambassadors of the state, its representatives, and voices. Several tendencies can be outlined to describe this phenomenon connecting these different conceptualizations. First, it is a globalized perspective of detaching the ambassador from his/her country of origin (Kantek et al., 2021; Lee, 2019; Nagy, 2017). Second, it is the role of empowering the state by promoting its image (Nagy, 2017), policy (Porto de Oliveira, 2020), relationships (Akli, 2012; Eastwood, 2007; Lima, 2007). Third, it is self-empowerment through acquiring new skills (Gannon et al., 2018) and developing as leaders (Kantek et al., 2021).

2.3 Government policy on citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors

The important role of ordinary people along with the official diplomats in public diplomacy was explicitly articulated by the President of the United States Dwight Eisenhower: "There will never be enough diplomats and information officers at work in the world to get the job done without the help of the rest of us" (as cited in Mueller, 2020, p. 113). This idea was shared by the government institutions around the globe that integrated private individuals, bloggers, and opinion leaders into their public diplomacy activities (Attias, 2012). It was argued that the governments were forced to do so due to the increasing participation of people in international life (Attias, 2012). At the same time, it was pointed out that the

ability of the government to nurture the communication potential of ordinary people might determine the efficiency of its public diplomacy (Attias, 2012) and that citizen diplomats should be "courted, coddled, and, when possible, educated" (Sharp, 2001, p. 148). Otherwise, leaving people excluded from the nation branding process would make them feel outraged (Bennett & Savani, 2003; Braun et al., 2013; Fan, 2010; Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013; Zenker & Seigis, 2012).

Two approaches were discussed in the literature in relation to citizen diplomacy, top-down and bottom-up (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). The top-down approach views the government's active participation and encouragement of people to act as citizen diplomats (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). In contrast, the bottom-up approach sees the initiatives of the individuals primarily to perform the role of citizen diplomats (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018).

The studies exploring the bottom-up approach are scarce. One of them is a case study about *the Hot Dudes and Hummus – Israel's Yummiest campaign* (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). The study explored how Israeli students promoted a country image by posting on Instagram photos of attractive Israeli men eating hummus, the famous national dish. It was identified that this student-driven initiative encouraged Israeli citizens to act as brand ambassadors, strengthened commitment to their nation brand, and conformed to the Israel's government vision of nation branding (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). It elicited the understanding of the people perspective in performing the role of citizen diplomat and the possibility of its correspondence with the government vision, but it left beyond the attention the actual perception of this role by those who perform it. A study about Swedish women as unofficial ambassadors to the United States (Biltekin, 2020) provided some insights into it. It identified that Swedish migrant women perceived their activities as "complimentary charitable work that displays Swedish culture in the United States," and the official Swedish government representatives recognized their role as such (Biltekin, 2020, p. 964). So, this work provided an example of an alignment of the perceptions of the citizen diplomat role between the people and the government. But the finding of this study may be questioned from the methodological standpoint since the research was based exclusively on the review of the archival materials omitting the views of the migrant women and government officials. The perceptions of people on their role as citizen diplomats were taken into account in the study about vlogging

where popular vloggers that posted about South Korea were interviewed to illuminate the topic (Geun & David, 2014). But this study addressed in the first place the perception of vlogging as a tool of citizen diplomacy rather than vloggers' self-perception as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. So, the above studies exploring the bottom-up approach to citizen diplomacy provide the understanding of how the role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors is performed by people and could be aligned with the vision of the state, but they tend to overlook how people perceive their role as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. This thesis seeks to address this issue by interviewing people who act as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors of Sweden on their self-perception of this role.

The studies exploring the top-down approach in citizen diplomacy are more actively elaborated. They analyze how governments address the concept of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador in their policy. One such study explored the prominent *@Sweden Twitter project* about how the Swedish government allowed ordinary Swedes to tweet on the country's official Twitter account (Christensen, 2013). It was argued that the participants didn't have as much autonomy in the role of curators of the country on Twitter as it was declared by the government (Christensen, 2013). But it was not explored how the participants perceived the level of autonomy they had and needed for performing the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador. It was also argued that the project pursued public relations logic to position the country as open and democratic rather than genuinely sought to empower people to represent their country (Christensen, 2013). A similar argument about the marketing logic of such campaigns was made in another study about the "I feel Slovenia" campaign (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011) that looked into how the Slovenian government invited the public to brand Slovenia through spreading the message "I feel Slovenia". The same intention could be seen in the study about Abang-None Jakarta as a brand ambassador (Pebriani, Hernando, & Junarta, 2020). The Indonesian government arranged a pageant to elect a culture and tourism ambassador to promote the image of thousand islands as the New Bali (Pebriani et al., 2020). These studies critically analyzed the initiatives of the governments to encourage people to perform the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand

ambassador, but it remained unexplored how people actually felt about performing this role. Therefore, this will be addressed in this study.

Although they were criticized for only following a marketing logic, some studies argued that the governments indeed pursued the intention of real changes by elevating people in their foreign policy initiatives. For example, it was explored how the Nigerian government launched a new approach in foreign policy to improve the neglected position of its own citizens, who were supposed to become the main beneficiaries of it (Oshewolo, 2020). Another study on the Peace Corps showed the United States launched the national program to nurture citizens to perform the role of citizen diplomats, who subsequently turned out to be real policy changers (Magu, 2018). It was identified that the representatives of the Peace Corps influenced the voting of some countries at the United Nations General Assembly, aligning them with the position of the United States (Magu, 2018). While all the above studies explored the approaches and practices of the governments in relation to citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors, they remained uninterested in how the government actually sees the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador. This thesis will address this aspect.

Some studies paid attention to the alignment of the performance of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors and the vision of the state. For example, it was identified that the participants of *the Hot Dudes and Hummus – Israel's Yummiest campaign* conformed to the Israel's government vision of nation branding (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). The study on the Swedish migrant women highlighted that the official Swedish ambassadors recognized them as citizen diplomats (Biltekin, 2020). An interesting perspective in this regard was elaborated by Pamment and Cassinger (2018) in their study about *the Swedish Number campaign*, an initiative by an independent tourist association of Sweden where ordinary Swedes responded to the international callers asking about Sweden. It was concluded that this initiative mimicked the government policy of the nation branding in terms of theme, brand values, and participatory approach to digital tools and offered an opportunity for ordinary people to perform the role of state representatives that primarily belonged to the officials and royalty (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018). A study by Attias (2012) on the *Presenting Israel project* provided an example of how the government took an active role in the alignment of people. Before launching the project that invited people to express their own

views and experiences about Israel, the government asked people whether they wanted to represent their country abroad (Attias, 2012). So, the government didn't impose the role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors on people but instead negotiated it with them. The process of alignment in assuming and performing the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador is mentioned rather peripherally in these studies and remains unclear how the government and people see it. Therefore, the government strategies used in this pursuit are sought to be explored in this thesis.

It is seen from the above studies that the initiatives in relation to people as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors were explored by the scholars mostly from their interpretative lenses, while the first-hand interpretations by the public diplomacy officials engaged in these initiatives and their participants remained underexplored.

2.4 Impact of digitalization on the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador

The arrival of the web 2.0 era significantly enabled people to be citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. An ordinary person became an actor in international relations (Sharp, 2001) and a "walking news system" (Attias, 2012, p. 473). Citizen-generated online content was declared to be one of the future channels of public diplomacy and nation branding (Dinnie, 2015). But the applicability and viability of this idea were questioned, and more studies were called for in this regard (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018).

The case study on *the Hot Dudes and Hummus – Israel's Yummiest campaign* by Samuel-Azran et al. (2018) was an attempt to explore the use of social media in citizen diplomacy initiatives. The authors concluded that online social networks had an incredible potential for engaging people to share their photos and act as representatives of the Israel brand, and was argued the use of social networks by the citizens is "a crucial factor in maximizing the impact and spread of contemporary public diplomacy campaigns" (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018, p. 48). The potential of social media for engaging people to act as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors was also demonstrated in the case studies about the "I feel Slovenia" campaign (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011) and *the*

Swedish Number campaign (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018). It was argued that *the Swedish Number campaign*, with Swedes answering international calls via an app on a smartphone, allowed ordinary people to perform the role of the state representatives that primarily belonged to the officials and royalty (Pamment & Cassinger, 2018). The study on vlogging as a tool of citizen diplomacy also argued that a big potential opened up to people with the use of social media (Geun & David, 2014). While these studies may seem to pursue an optimistic perspective on digitalization as empowering people to act as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors, the more critical outlook on the issue was given by Christensen (2013) in his study on *the @Sweden Twitter project*. Though recognizing the engagement of Swedes to run an official Sweden's Twitter account as a big advancement in the utilization of the cutting-edge technologies for public diplomacy, it was argued that the campaign was a piggyback on the popularity of Twitter rather than genuine democratization of the communication (Christensen, 2013).

2.5 Synthesis

Literature review on citizen diplomacy/nation branding demonstrated relatively scarce research on the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador and the need for more case studies to expand the understanding of the phenomenon. At the same time, various conceptualizations to explain this phenomenon were identified in different fields and areas of studies. The concept of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador seems to be fluid and to require a more comprehensive understanding to illuminate its modern meaning. The globalization of the phenomenon, its role in nation empowerment, the empowerment of people acting as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors, and digitalization of the role were found as emerging tendencies that should further be paid close attention to. These highlights invite to revisit the existing conceptualization and comprehensively elaborate on the modern concept of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador. The literature review also identified that the governments tried to leverage the potential of people in public diplomacy and that people initiated themselves and participated in the nation branding/citizen diplomacy activities.

But the alignment of the government vision and the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador remained marginally addressed in the research.

Following the findings in the literature, this thesis sets out to illuminate the citizen diplomacy/nation branding research with a case study of Sweden. It seeks to embrace a digital dimension as well as to integrate the government and people perspectives on the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador and place the study within the strategic communication field.

3 Theory

This section presents the theoretical underpinning of this thesis. It introduces CCO – communication constitutes organization – perspective as an overarching framework for the study that will be adopted in relation to the nation as an organization. Then, role theory and the brand ambassador role are outlined and will be undertaken for the analysis of the role of people as citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. Finally, the section expands on the alignment of strategic communication as a concept that will enable to bring together the visions of the government and people on the role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador examined in this study.

3.1 CCO framework

CCO – communication constitutes organization – framework could be understood as "a collection of perspectives about grounding the role of communication in the ontology of organizations" (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010, p. 158). It rests upon the idea that communication cuts across the entire organization (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015). Organization emerges from the bottom up through continuous communication and sense-making (Taylor, 2009). Social interactions such as negotiation, storytelling, etc., that are based on communication create and sustain organization (Schall, 1983). Therefore, the organizations are fluid, or as Weick (1995) explained, they should not be perceived as something stable, constant, or objective. In the same vein, Anderson (2002) explained that nations are socially constructed or, as he called, "imagined communities". Nations as imagined communities are shaped through such everyday practices as reading newspapers (Anderson, 2002). So, communication processes underlie any type of organization, including the nation.

Embracing this crucial role of communication in the organization, the CCO framework views all the members of the organization as its communicators (Heide, von Platen, Simonsson, & Falkheimer, 2018). It is argued that

organizations are polyphonic or multivocal (Heide et al., 2018). The polyphony is explained as "each voice, each person is his or her centre of any organization" (Hazen, 1993, p. 16). Encouragement of different voices and cultivation of a variety of perspectives underlie good communication by the organization (Deetz, 1995). Given the polyphonic nature of the organization, it is argued that employees' involvement in the communication process is crucial for any organization: "Giving employees a voice in external media, organizations can instill pride, stimulate identification and potentially enhance commitment and ownership for corporate symbols and values" (Christensen et al., 2008, p. 210). In the case of the nation as an organization, its people can be seen as such important communicators.

3.2 Role theory

Role theory provides an understanding of the relationships in the organization and society (Turner, 2001). It deals with "social behavior at both the individual and collective levels" (Turner, 2001, p. 233).

The structural perspective of role theory (Merton, 1957; Newcomb, 1950) says that the role players are guided by the expectations that are internalized and further assessed based on their conformation to the expectations. It views roles as stable and grounded into the identity (Turner, 2001). On the other hand, the interactional perspective of role theory (Banton, 1965; Benne & Sheats, 1948) assumes that social interactions of players determine their roles, and therefore, the roles may emerge and alter spontaneously. Thus, interactional role theory provides a broader understanding of the role that could be socially influenced and played by different individuals (Turner, 2001).

Following the interactionist perspective, Turner (2001) developed three key components of role theory. First, role making means that individuals can modify roles and bring them to light (Turner, 2001). People shape their roles when interacting with others to adapt the role to those with whom they interact and to make this interaction more efficient (Mead, 1934). Therefore, role-making is the construction and reconstruction of the roles. The second component of role theory is role-taking. It presumes some familiarity with the role before taking it that could derive from the imagination of general concept of this role that can be

learned from culture, previous experience, or specified by the organization (Turner, 2001). The third component of role theory is role-playing, which is the enactment of the role by individuals: "Roles often can be put on and taken off like work clothes and play clothes" (Turner, 2001, p. 248). Therefore, role-taking and role-playing are very dynamic. To understand how the person takes up the role, Turner (2001) offered a theory of role-person merger. It is based on three principles that determine the merger between an individual and a role. First, we view ourselves as others view us. Second, we tend to identify strongly with the roles that give us autonomy and favorable assessment. Third, this is strongly dependent on the investment we put into the role.

3.2.1 Brand ambassador role

The brand ambassador role is about acting in the name of the brand (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). The main function of this role is to advance the interests of the brand, either the institution or state (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). In the corporate world, the role of brand ambassador belongs to employees, celebrities, and customers (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2008). In nation branding, it belongs to the official ambassador, sport, and cultural figures – and ordinary people may also perform this role without being formally assigned (Dinnie, 2015).

The brand ambassador role has different modalities, as shown in the framework of strategic communication roles of employees developed by Madsen and Verhoeven (2019). One of the modalities is the brand builder (Hatch & Schultz, 2003) that assumes people as the producers of the brand. Another is the brand advocate that includes attracting, retaining, and motivating (Simmons, 2009). Living the brand modality (Ind, 2001) specifically underlines the authenticity of brand delivery by an individual. Social media modality highlights credible communication (Dreher, 2014) and sharing official content (Opghenaffen & Claeys, 2017) by the brand ambassador. And the crisis communication modality features believable ambassadors and faith holders (Luoma-aho, 2015).

3.3 Alignment of strategic communication

Alignment of strategic communication is argued to be an important condition of the success of the organization (Volk & Zerfass, 2018). A conceptual framework explaining the alignment of strategic communication was developed by Volk and Zerfass (2018), and encompasses primary alignment between the communication strategy and the overall organizational strategy and secondary alignment between communication activities and communication strategy.

Primary alignment provides a formulation of communication strategies in close link to organizational strategy and mission to contribute to achieving the organizational goals (Falkheimer, Heide, Nothhaft, Platen, Simonsson, & Andersson, 2017). Secondary alignment includes integration between communication activities, vision, brands, identity, symbols, messages, and culture to achieve consistent communication among different actors (Volk & Zerfass, 2018). This approach emerged in the corporate branding as coherence between the strategic vision of the top management, beliefs, and culture of employees and the images held by external actors (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). In this regard, the concept of alignment is built around three pillars: vision, culture, and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

People-culture alignment is an additional layer in the conceptual framework for the alignment of strategic communication (Volk & Zerfass, 2018). It provides the employees' understanding of the organizational vision and their support for the communication activities to implement this vision, and the congruence between the individual values and behaviors with the organizational norms (Volk & Zerfass, 2018).

3.4 Reflections

This chapter has provided an overview of the theories that will be used for the analysis in this study. The CCO framework is adopted by this study to argue that the communication role in the nation belongs to people interacting with it and that the potential of people as communicators of the state should be nurtured for its efficient communication. Applying to this thesis the CCO perspective that is inherent in strategic communication places the study on the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats within the strategic communication research. Role theory allows to explore in-depth the construction, assumption, and enactment of

the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat and analyze the process of role-person merger. The brand ambassador role, namely the framework of strategic communication roles of employees, provides the theoretical underpinnings for exploring the perceptions of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat's role. The conceptual framework for the alignment of strategic communication as a relatively new and "open for discussion and empirical applications to test its usefulness" (Volk & Zerfass, 2018, p. 445) is used to investigate alignment between the role of nation ambassador perceived and enacted by people and envisioned by the state.

4 Methodology and Research Design

This chapter explains the qualitative methodology chosen for this study. It departs from the social constructionism tradition to explore the role of a nation brand ambassador. In this regard, the case study is taken as a research method meeting the criteria that determine case study as a preferred method for this particular research. The description of the case study follows. Then data collection, namely documentation and interviews, is described, and a model for data analysis is presented. It concludes with ethical considerations raised during the process of this study.

4.1 Social constructionism

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology grounded in the social constructionism tradition. The tradition claims that individuals together create a social reality through constant social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Social reality is constructed through the continuous sense-making process by the individuals "significantly mediated by the cognitive schema and societies" (Prasad, 2017, p. 14). Moreover, social constructionism seeks to question our taken-for-granted assumptions of the world and ourselves (Burr, 2003; Czarniawska, 2003). Following these, I argue that social constructionism is a relevant paradigm for this thesis. In particular, because the thesis explores the brand ambassador's role in relation to the nation while it is traditionally considered in relation to the corporations. The nation brand ambassador role could be seen as currently shaped and constructed in society with the influence of different actors.

By applying social constructionism to this study, I intend to explore the meanings given to the nation brand ambassador's role. As a researcher, the social constructivism lens will enable me to reflect upon different perceptions in this regard. Taking into account that construction of social reality can be interpreted from the different point of views (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008), this thesis

incorporates both the government and citizen perspectives with a pursuit to reconcile the meanings constructed upon the nation brand ambassador's role and contribute to developing its coherent conceptualization.

4.2 Case study

This research has been conducted as a case study. The case study was chosen as a research method since the thesis falls under its niche of "when how or why questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control" (Yin, 2018, p. 44). In particular, the thesis sets out to explore how the role of nation brand ambassador is perceived by those who are supposed to enact it and those who envision it. The case study is taken "as the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles" (Yin, 2018, p. 73) that in this research is expanding the understanding of the nation brand ambassador's role.

To be more precise, an embedded single-case study is conducted. The rationale for a single-case study is the common case that captures an everyday practice (Yin, 2018) that in this research is acting by people as nation brand ambassadors. The single-case study is embedded since it has units of analysis at more than one level – in other words, it includes units and subunits of analysis (Yin, 2018). In this study, these are the nation brand ambassador's role overall and within specific initiatives. The role of nation brand ambassador in Sweden is chosen for the case study since the Swedish initiatives in this regard are outstanding – recognized, for example, with the prestigious Grand Prix award at the Cannes Lions for *Curators of Sweden campaign* (Christensen, 2013). Sweden is also among the countries with the best image in the world according to Good Country Index (Cull & Anholt, 2020), Future Brands Country Index (Swedish Institute, 2019), and Country RepTrak (Valet, 2019).

Since it is recommended to bound any case study (Yin, 2018), this case study is focused on the role of nation brand ambassador under the auspices of the Swedish Institute. But it should be noted that this study is neither about the Swedish Institute as an institution in charge of nation brand ambassadorship nor about its initiatives in this regard – but rather about the role of nation brand ambassador envisioned by the Swedish Institute and performed by the participants

of its initiatives. This study is also bounded by a timeframe that starts from 2011 and continues until the end of 2020. This period was chosen to capture the digital aspect of the nation brand ambassador's role. 2011 was the year of launching *the Curators of Sweden campaign* that enabled individuals to assume the role of the nation brand ambassadors on Twitter @Sweden.

As an embedded single-case study, this thesis looks into the nation brand ambassador's role under the auspices of the Swedish Institute since 2011 overall and specifically focuses on its two initiatives, *Curators of Sweden* and *Study in Sweden Digital Ambassadors*. Special attention is given to these initiatives since they were explicitly designed to engage people as nation brand ambassadors and utilized digital tools for this purpose.

4.2.1 Description of the case

Sweden has had a particular interest in public diplomacy and nation branding for several decades that has intensified since the 2000s (Pamment, 2011). In 1945 the Swedish Institute was established to promote Sweden's political, economic, and cultural relations with other countries (Glover, 2011a). Today Swedish Institute is the public agency in charge of promoting interest and trust in Sweden around the world. It is the key actor in charge of public diplomacy and nation branding at the operational level while the Riksdag and the Government of Sweden are at the political level (Pamment, 2011). Therefore, Swedish Institute undertakes the tasks assigned by the Riksdag and the government to develop the strategy and implements it independently. Swedish Institute has approximately 140 employees and offices in Stockholm and Paris (Swedish Institute, 2021d).

The vision of the Swedish Institute is to work towards a world where people together seek solutions to the global challenges of the future. By promoting a democratic, fair and sustainable global development, it supports the 2030 Agenda, an international initiative undertaken by the world's countries to lead the world towards a sustainable and fair future from 2016 until 2030 (Swedish Institute, 2021e). The work of the Swedish Institute is grounded in the brand platform of Sweden that outlines four core areas of communication about Sweden (society, innovation, creativity, and sustainability) and core Swedish values (innovative, open, caring, authentic) (Ministry for Foreign Affairs,

2017). The tasks of the Swedish Institute encompasses monitoring and analysis of Sweden's relevance in other countries; sharing narratives about Sweden, Swedish skills and experience; strengthening talents, opinion-formers, and decision-makers in other countries; and developing and maintaining networks for lasting international relations (Swedish Institute, 2021d).

The nation brand ambassadorship or citizen diplomacy is not explicitly pointed out in the work of the Swedish Institute but is rather implicit. For example, the Swedish Institute provides support for those who want to talk about Sweden (Swedish Institute, 2021b). People can find different materials, toolkits, and photos for this purpose on special digital platforms. Swedish Institute conducts Leadership Programmes for decision-makers and opinion-makers from partner countries (Swedish Institute, 2021c). These programmes potentially influence the participants to become brand ambassadors of Sweden. Swedish Institute also seeks to develop networks of people studying in Sweden that may contribute to enhancing Sweden's attractiveness (Swedish Institute, 2021a).

As mentioned before, two campaigns under the auspices of the Swedish Institute, *Curators of Sweden* and *Study in Sweden Digital Ambassadors*, are of specific attention in this research. *Curators of Sweden* is the project by Visit Sweden and the Swedish Institute that was conducted from 2011 to 2018 (Swedish Institute, 2018). It allowed individuals living in Sweden or Swedes living abroad to be in charge of the Swedish Twitter account [@Sweden](#), writing about their everyday life, hobbies, opinions, and answering questions about Sweden. The purpose of the project was to boost interest in Sweden abroad. In total, 356 people became the curators and tweeted around 200,000 tweets.

Study in Sweden Digital Ambassador is the programme by the Swedish Institute that has been operating since 2014 (Study in Sweden, 2021). It invites international students studying in Sweden to nominate themselves and, if selected, to become digital ambassadors who will share their experience on studying and living in Sweden. Digital ambassadors can share their experiences in the official Study in Sweden digital channels, the website blog, Instagram and YouTube. Their responsibilities also include responding to users' comments and answering questions received on specifically created e-mails. Digital ambassadors are required to commit a minimum of 20 hours a month and are provided with a small financial compensation. Up to 9 digital ambassadors are selected each year.

4.3 Data collection

It is recommended to use several sources of data in the case study (Yin, 2016). For this study, empirical data were obtained from the interviews and documentation. The interview is considered to be one of the most important sources of the case study (Yin, 2016). In this thesis, qualitative research interviews were conducted with the representatives of the Swedish Institute and the participants of the nation brand ambassador initiatives under the auspices of the Swedish Institute. Since qualitative interviewing provides an understanding of the everyday lived experience from the interviewees' perspective (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), the conducted interviews provided important information on the nation brand ambassador's role. Interviews were complemented with the documentation that is used in the case study to uphold evidence from other sources (Yin, 2016). Different materials were selected for this purpose, such as the reports of the Swedish Institute and content on its digital platforms.

By using multiple methods of data collection, this study triangulated data to ensure the accuracy of the research. Triangulation is an important part of a case study and means gathering multiple perceptions from multiple sources of data with further comparing them to clarify meaning (Flick, 2018). It is argued to be one of the best strategies to increase the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation helped to ensure the methodological rigor of this case study.

4.3.1 Interviews

Qualitative research interviews were conducted with the representatives of the Swedish Institute and the participants of the nation brand ambassador initiatives under the auspices of the Swedish Institute. It was decided to conduct interviews with these two groups to explore the vision of the public officials and the self-perceptions of the people on the nation brand ambassador's role and further to analyze them in relation to the strategic communication alignment.

For selecting interviewees for this study, I used purposeful and criterion sampling (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). I selected the representatives of the Swedish Institute who were in charge of the work that may be seen as connected with the nation brand ambassadors, namely the programmes for talents from other countries, the initiatives on communicating Sweden abroad, including *Curators of*

Sweden and Study in Sweden Digital Ambassador Programme in the first place. Five representatives of the Swedish Institute were interviewed.

Another group of interviewees was the participants of the Swedish Institute nation brand ambassador initiatives. Since special attention in this study is paid to such two initiatives, *Curators of Sweden* and *Study in Sweden Digital Ambassador Programme*, their participants were selected for the interview. Three persons, two participants of the *Curators of Sweden project* and one participant of the *Study in Sweden Digital Ambassador Programme* were interviewed.

In total, eight interviews were conducted for this study (see Appendix 1). Given the two groups of the interviewees selected, an interview guide with two sets of questions adjusted to each group was developed (see Appendix 2). I used open-ended questions to give the interviewees an opportunity to describe how they see the role of nation brand ambassadors, how this role is supported by the state, and what challenges exist in relation to the performance of this role. The interview guide helped to follow the common logic of the research, but it was used in a flexible manner with many follow-up questions asked in the course of the conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Each interview lasted about 40-50 minutes. All the interviews were conducted digitally and video recorded.

4.3.2 Documentation

Documents produced by the Swedish Institute and stories created by the participants of the Swedish Institute programmes became data sources for this study. In particular, the Swedish Institute annual reports of activities were accessed. Eight reports that were produced by the Swedish Institute starting from 2012 were reviewed in this study. Swedish Institute annual reports of activities are official documents submitted to the Government of Sweden – therefore, they are produced in Swedish. The reports were translated with the help of a machine translation tool Google Translate. The parts of reports which were found relevant for this study were double-checked with a native Swedish speaker to ensure their correct translation. It helped to ensure the correct meanings for a researcher. In the course of interviews, the Guidelines for curators of Sweden was obtained and included in the documentation.

Materials produced by the participants of the Swedish Institute programmes that were reviewed in this study are *Swedish Institute stories* and *Student blog*. *Swedish Institute stories* were produced for its website by the participants of the Swedish Institute programmes. Nine *Swedish Institute stories* were selected based on the relevance to the research topic. *Student blog* on Study in Sweden website is maintained by the digital ambassadors. Fourteen *Student blog* posts were selected based on the relevance to the research topic. The list of the documents used as data sources for this study is provided in Appendix 3.

4.4 Data analysis

As it is argued that the analysis formula of the case study is not fixed (Yin, 2016), this thesis combined several analytical propositions to come up with the analytical strategy for this case study. Based on Plowman's (1998) case study data analysis plan further refined by Levenshus (2010) and Yin's (2016) explanation building analytic technique, the analytical strategy is a multiple iterative process of the initial theoretical propositions, research findings, and further reflections.

The analytical model consists of six steps. First, I looked for key themes in the interviews and documentation. For this purpose, the data were put on separate spreadsheets: 1) interviews with SI representatives; 2) interviews with participants of SI nation brand ambassador's initiatives; 3) data from SI reports and digital platforms; 4) data produced by participants such as SI stories and Study in Sweden blog. Interviews with SI representatives and data from SI reports and digital platforms were linked and named "state vision". Interviews with the participants of SI nation brand ambassador's initiatives and data produced by participants such as SI stories and Study in Sweden blog were linked and named "people's vision". Second, I compared themes and issues identified within the "state vision" data. Third, I compared themes and issues identified within the "people's vision". Fourth, I compared the themes and issues between the "state vision" and "people's vision". Then, the patterns were outlined, and alternative explanations were checked to challenge the emerged patterns. Finally, the findings were linked back to and reflected upon the role theory, specifically the brand

ambassador's role, CCO perspective, and the alignment of strategic communication.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Given the in-depth interview procedure in this study, ethical considerations were taken with particular attention during all stages of the research process. From the onset, interviewees were informed via e-mail about the purpose, the process of the study, and further publication of its results. Their informed consent and voluntary participation were ensured (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The video recording of the interview was made only after receiving consent to it by the interviewee. It was agreed that participants might avoid answering specific questions if needed and withdraw from the research at any time if wished.

Taking into account that the research topic required sharing personal experience, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed for all participants. It was of particular importance since a part of interviewees constituted the employees of the public agency, and disclosure of their opinions might expose their positions. It was highlighted that only a researcher would have access to the video recordings and transcriptions of the interviews. The quotation of the interviewees in the thesis was guaranteed to be non-identifiable.

Particular attention in ethical considerations was paid to the "researcher-participant relationship" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 45). Intimacy and trust were established to build rapport and ensure openness during the interview. For this purpose, I shared my personal story that led me to conduct this research and expressed interest in the interviewees' work in relation to a researched topic. At the same time, I was constantly reflecting upon not transgressing individual boundaries and misusing established trust.

I hope that these ethical considerations ensured the integrity of this study and didn't affect its results.

5 Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents empirical findings and analysis of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. The role and its different modalities are discussed from both the government and people's perspectives. The findings show that the common perception exists and is realized in practice. The role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat is not always explicit in the formulations, but it is inherent in the public diplomacy of the state and aligned with its brand as well as between the government and people. The government practices are discussed to understand the strategies applied by the state to citizen diplomats/ nation brand ambassadors.

5.1 Role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat

In Sweden, the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat could be seen as a core element of its public diplomacy and nation branding. This role is not always explicitly used by the Swedish Institute and the participants of its initiatives. Thus, different titles are mentioned to describe the role, such as "intermediary", "communicator", "voice", "proxy", or "teacher". But there is an implicit understanding of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat by both the Swedish Institute and the participants of its initiatives. The findings of this study show that the perceptions of this role rest upon three core components – *soft empowerment of the nation, self-empowerment of the individual, and his/her autonomy*. First, nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are important sources of soft power. They can help to promote the country and its ideas. Second, this role could lead to the empowerment of not only the state but also the individuals that undertake it. In particular, it could help them to develop professionally and to contribute to tackling global issues. Third, autonomy is provided for the individuals with a pursuit of more efficient public diplomacy and nation branding activities.

5.1.1 Implicit vs. explicit nature

The role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat is rather implicitly understood than explicitly used in Sweden. This title is rarely used by the Swedish Institute in its documents. The exception is its usage in relation to Study in Sweden digital ambassadors that was mentioned a few times in the SI reports (2015; 2016). Another exception is the Global Swede initiative that awards prominent international students with a diploma to encourage them "to become ambassadors for a positive image of Sweden" (My translation), as mentioned in the early SI reports (2012, 2013). The student who was recently awarded shared that the Swedish Institute director addressed the awardees as "a vital part of this global puzzle" (Story 7). It shows that the Swedish Institute tends not to use the nation brand ambassador title explicitly. This was stressed by SI representative 1:

We don't really talk about nation brand ambassadors as such. We did it like ten years ago. We even had a project called Sweden ambassadors, referring to people being outside Sweden and giving them communication materials to talk about Sweden. It's not like an outspoken thing today.

SI representative 2 voiced concern about attributing this title directly due to the sensitivity of the role:

It's important for us to communicate in a way that will not compromise our scholarship holders and alumni when they return to their countries.

Trying to avoid explicit use of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat title, the Swedish Institute came up with disguised alternatives such as "friends" (SI representative 3), "future leaders" (SI representative 2), "actors for change" (SI report, 2015, p. 30), "active citizens" (SI report, 2015, p. 42), "intermediaries" (SI report, 2017, p. 16; SI report, 2018, p. 3), "communicators" (SI report, 2019, p. 15), and "Sweden's experts" (SI report, 2018, p. 17). But as was explained by SI representative 4, the Swedish Institute has a broad understanding of nation brand ambassadors:

Even if someone is not classified as an ambassador, he still has this role formally or informally. There is a bunch of different units throughout the SI that work with brand ambassadors in different ways. Maybe they don't use this term, but that's essentially the point of what we are doing.

Taking into account the arguments of some scholars – that public diplomacy and nation branding are just the new words for describing propaganda (Szondi, 2008) – the intention of the government not to use the title explicitly could be understood as a way to avoid criticism of its public diplomacy and nation branding. But in some circumstances, this title is openly used as, for example, in relation to Study in Sweden digital ambassadors that only reiterates that Sweden employs the concept of nation brand ambassador though not necessarily always explicitly.

The participants of the Swedish Institute initiatives also tend not to refer to themselves as nation brand ambassadors, except those who are explicitly called by the Swedish Institute as such. For example, SI participant 1 called himself in an interview "a proxy of Sweden", and SI participant 2 as "a teacher about Sweden" or "an expert of Swedish traditions". The titles "global leader" and "changemaker" are also often used in this regard (Story 1; Story 2). SI representative 1 describes his perception of it:

I thought of my week on Sweden's Twitter account as of me teaching people about Swedish habits and traditions. I didn't think of myself as an ambassador of my country. Since it was an official Twitter account of Sweden, I think that I was a nation brand ambassador though I didn't think of myself as such.

The plausible explanation of this could be found in the role theory that pointed out the importance of others to see the role of the individual so that he/she could see this role as such. Since the Swedish Institute tends to describe the role of nation brand ambassadors, people do the same. And when the Swedish Institute describes it explicitly, as in the case of Study in Sweden digital ambassadors, people also call themselves nation brand ambassadors as SI participant 3 did during the interview. Whether explicitly called nation brand ambassador or not, the participants do understand their role as such:

I was probably the right guy to market Sweden. I was just myself, and that was what they wanted. So, in a sense, I played along with a marketing campaign (SI participant 1).

So, the findings of this study show that regardless of using the nation brand ambassador term explicitly or implicitly by the Swedish Institute and by the participants of its initiatives, the understanding of this role as such exists at both the governmental and societal levels. This reinforces the theoretical propositions on the role of people as the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats voiced by the scholars (Dinnie, 2015; Sharp, 2001).

5.1.2 Soft empowerment

Nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats could be seen as powerful sources of the soft power of the nation. It was argued by Nye (2008, p. 108) that public diplomacy should take into account credibility, self-criticism, and the role of civil society to generate soft power. As this study found, people acting in the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats ensured the credibility and trust of Sweden, strengthening the brand of the country.

In particular, credibility is seen by the Swedish Institute as the main contribution and the reason for engaging people to act in the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. SI representative 3 explains:

I would like to stress that it's a very credible strategy to rely on our friends, nation brand ambassadors, or citizen diplomats, as you put it. Because whom do you trust more than your own people? If somebody like you said something about Sweden in Ukraine, they would rely on it much more than on the words of someone from the Swedish Institute.

It is also mentioned in the SI report (2019) that alumni, for example, due to their direct experiences of Sweden, are credible intermediaries. This is also the main incentive of the Swedish Institute to engage citizens and residents in the communication on its social media channels since "personal experience of people can ensure authenticity" (SI representative 5). In the pursuit of authenticity, the Swedish Institute invites people to share their positive and negative impressions of Sweden, as highlighted by several SI representatives. In particular, SI representative 3 says:

I value that Sweden digital ambassadors frankly convey their experience here in Sweden. It doesn't need to be positive all the time. I think we are more credible when we are really honest.

By supporting the importance of sharing adverse facts about Sweden, the Swedish Institute follows Nye's idea (2008) on recognizing self-criticism in public diplomacy for generating soft power of the state. Sweden is comfortable highlighting negative things related to its brand, such as the feeling of loneliness, exclusion, and darkness (SI representative 4).

The findings from the interviews and documentation show different examples of how nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats generate soft power. For instance, the teachers of the Swedish language that are recruited by the Swedish Institute to work abroad influence Swedish image and attract students (SI report, 2018). Swedes that share their personal experiences on Sweden's official social media channels "help with the possible misconceptions that people may have about Sweden" (SI representative 5). SI participant 2 thinks that he helped to promote the perception of Sweden as a country of democracy; SI participant 1 believes that he was "teaching the world about Sweden". SI representative 1 is convinced that the campaign showed how brave the country is and "walked the talk" of Sweden as a nation of freedom of speech and democracy. These examples reinforce Nye's (2010) argument that citizens acting beyond the country assist in promoting its image.

Along with the citizens, people having experiences of Sweden also contribute a lot to increasing the soft power of Sweden. For example, the alumni are expected to increase the visibility of Sweden and to pursue important issues in their countries (SI report, 2019). They contribute to the attractiveness of Sweden as a knowledge nation (SI report, 2015). One of the alumni shared that he helped the students in his country to open up Sweden (Story 2). The events organized by the alumni networks spread important knowledge that assisted in bringing a change in society (Story 3). The participants of the visiting programmes can facilitate the creation of foreign contact and do advocacy work (SI report, 2013). These support Eide's (1970) idea of the students as culture carriers who pass on experience in the host country back to their home country. Moreover, the role of

alumni in generating soft power is recognized by the foreign authorities: 95% of those surveyed believe that alumni are a resource in their work (SI report, 2017; 2018).

The above findings reiterate and further expand on the different ways in which citizen diplomats may act according to Sharp (2001), namely, advocating specific issues, transforming the policies, or acting as an autonomous agent. They build upon Nye's idea (2008) that civil society should be taken into account in public diplomacy to generate soft power by arguing that every member of society should be treated as important. This is grounded in the CCO perspective of viewing every organization member as its communicator (Heide et al., 2018). Thus, it is argued that the communication role in the nation belongs to people interacting with the state and is not limited to the government institutions. This argument reinforces the shift from government communication to public or peer-to-peer communication as a characteristic of new public diplomacy (Attias, 2012; Pamment, 2013).

5.1.3 Self-empowerment

Besides contributing to the soft power of the state, the role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors empowers the individuals who perform it. SI representative 2 explains that the participants of the Swedish Institute initiatives should feel empowered by assuming to play a role like this. It can help them to build connections for the professional career (SI representative 2), give publicity and the feeling of honor (SI representative 5), strengthen the ability to be active citizens (SI report, 2015) and contribute to addressing the global challenges (SI representative 3).

Empowerment was identified by Wassler, Wang, & Hung (2021) as what people want to feel in the nation branding process. The findings of this study show how the participants of the Swedish Institute initiatives feel empowered. For example, the Study in Sweden digital ambassador explains that it helped him to reach his full potential at the personal and professional levels and to contribute to the development of society. SI participant 1 mentions that his name appeared in the famous international media and describes the entire experience as a stepping stone in his early career. SI participant 2 shares that this helped him to build his

own brand as an expert of the Swedish traditions. One of the scholarship holders believes:

Having the tag of the Swedish Institute Network for Future Global Leaders along your name opens the opportunity whenever you knock on the doors of some of the brightest and busiest leaders (Story 4).

These findings further contribute to the argument by Gannon et al. (2018) that working as a student ambassador bolsters future successes of the students and the argument by Kantek et al. (2021) that being a culture carrier helps to develop the leadership potential of the individual. The findings also support the argument by Wassler, Wang, and Hung (2021) that empowerment positively affects the intention of people to act as nation brand ambassadors. One scholarship holder explains that anybody who wants to make changes for his country and society should build himself with the Swedish Institute (Story 5).

The performance of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat then could be seen as mutually beneficial for both the government and the individual. As was elaborated before, the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats could be seen as the source of soft power. The mutual benefits were described in a very tangible example by SI representative 5:

We tag this guy, and he gets many followers; he tags us, and we got new followers that would never think of following the country on Instagram.

5.1.4 Autonomy

The role of citizen diplomat/nation brand ambassador is to a big extent autonomous under the auspices of the Swedish Institute. SI representative 2 explains that the participants should have strong ownership of this role and don't feel that it's imposed on them. Freedom of speech was identified in this study as a fundamental principle that ensures this autonomy. SI representative 3 says:

The bottom line is that you are free to express what you wish, including negative aspects about Sweden.

Students are encouraged to create content about everything they find important, whether it's positive or negative (SI representative 4). This principle of freedom is also stated in the Guidelines for the Curators of Sweden: "We want you to keep being you, nothing else. In other words, go on as usual". The rule was kept even when the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden was annoyed with some posts on the official Twitter account @Sweden (SI representative 1). When the person tweeted and meddled in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or mentioned an artistic work depicting Mohammed as a dog, they continued to run the account (SI representative 1).

The freedom of the curators of Sweden even includes the right to block the users in the exceptional circumstances when the users are "trolls" (Guidelines). Such incident happened when the Curator of Sweden, who was an online security expert, blocked 14 000 Twitter accounts interacting with @Sweden since they were suspected of being right-wing extremists or neo-Nazi followers (The Local, 2017). Though according to the Guidelines, the Swedish Institute unblocks all previously blocked users before each new week, it decided not to this time but changed the opinion when faced the criticism that among blocked users were the members of the Swedish parliament, the Israeli ambassador to Sweden and some journalists. This situation demonstrates how difficult it is to manage the principle of freedom in the modern polarized media landscape. SI representative 1 thinks that it would be much riskier to do the same project on Twitter now. In this light, the argument by Dinnie (2015) that social media is a key tool for nation brand ambassadors receives a more nuanced understanding, namely, that the social media platforms carry a lot of challenges in and for the work of nation brand ambassadors.

The participants of the Swedish Insitute initiatives confirm that they have autonomy in performing their role. SI participant 1 was convinced that nobody was controlling what he tweeted. He says:

You could throw yourself as a bomb in there [Twitter account @Sweden] and do whatever you wanted with it. There were no limits to what I could do. At least that how I perceived it. I could change the communication of the @Sweden account.

The Swedish Institute wants people to feel more ownership because then they will create better content, as SI representative 4 explains in relation to digital ambassadors. Since autonomy is an essential condition for a person-role merger (Turner, 2001), recognizing and providing autonomy for people in their role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors may facilitate them to take and play this role. The existence of this connection is pointed out by SI representative 3:

We decided to give the alumni different possibilities, and they choose their own path. As a result, we saw a significant increase in the activities.

But the level of autonomy is an open question. SI representative 2 explains that the Swedish Institute tries to find a striking balance between nurturing the motivation of people and not infringing on their ownership of the role of nation brand ambassador. For example, the alumni networks abroad are expected to be "self-sustaining" and "self-motivating" (SI representative 2). At the same time, they are provided with training on how to manage the networks in a transparent way as the Swedish organizations do (SI representative 3). The digital ambassadors are allowed to publish blog posts without prior approval (SI representative 4). But in some cases, they could be steered:

Since Sweden has a different approach to managing the Covid-19 pandemic than the rest of the world, our supervisor has to make sure that we do not say anything that might cause some controversy or could spark any unnecessary conversation (SI participant 3).

Interestingly, the provision of autonomy for nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats is often connected with the lack of resources by the Swedish Institute. For example, it was one of the main reasons for giving more autonomy to alumni networks (SI representative 3) and not monitoring on a constant basis the tweets of the Curators of @Sweden (SI representative 1). The lower level of autonomy also seems to be connected with the resource management rationale. For example, the outlines for YouTube videos created by the digital ambassadors are subject to approval beforehand "to make sure that they are producing content that is a good use of their time because they don't get that many chances to create videos" (SI representative 4). Therefore, the autonomy of the role of nation brand

ambassadors/citizen diplomats derives in the first place from the practical logic of the Swedish Institute. Even the reliance on nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats follows this logic as seen from the explanation of SI representative 3 that as a small country, Sweden needs nation brand ambassadors.

5.2 Modalities of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat

This study found several modalities of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. They deepen further concepts existing in the literature and link them stronger to the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. *Living the brand* is the modality of the role that makes the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats authentic representatives of the brand of Sweden. They don't only promote democracy and sustainability, but they embody these principles and pursue in their life. *Brand multiplier* modality ensures the further conveying of the brand to others. The nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats share their personal experiences of Sweden with people abroad. *Changemaker* modality goes beyond the promotion of the brand to address the brand and the issues it propagates. The nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden undertake sustainability as their mission. *Brand builder* modality makes people the co-creators of the brand. The brand of Sweden is created together with its nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats.

5.2.1 Living the brand

People in their performance of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of Sweden live the brand of the country. It is the expectation of the Swedish Institute and the experience of the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. Several SI representatives underline the importance of providing the opportunity to the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats to share their real experience of Sweden. SI representative 5 explains that the audience will trust more what real people say than what the Swedish Institute tells. Therefore, Sweden launched on its social media the option of Swedes answering the questions of the foreigners (SI representative 5). Another example is the posting

on the official Instagram account of Sweden of the content about the country created by ordinary people such as Liam Kalevi. Having become famous on TikTok for creative sketches about Sweden, he was invited by the Swedish Institute to share his sketches on the official account of Sweden (SI representative 5). The Swedish Institute also encourages the Study in Sweden digital ambassadors to share their actual experience of Sweden, including negative things such as darkness, and loneliness. SI representative 5 explains that they are comfortable with highlighting negative things relating to the nation brand. People are invited to share their personal stories, not the stories of Sweden when communicating on the official social media channels of the country. The idea of the Swedish Institute is that by sharing their own stories, people will share the brand of the country. As SI participant 1 explains:

I was supposed to represent myself as a Swede and through that representation show that Sweden consists of many different people who have different interests, lifestyles, identities. The central feeling was just being myself, and that might be an illustration of democracy in Sweden.

The Swedish Institute made the decision to put the official @Sweden Twitter account in the hands of people with a pursuit of showing democracy in practice. As SI representative 1 says, "to walk the talk". The idea of this initiative is to illustrate that the freedom of expression is not just a concept but a conviction in Sweden explained (SI report, 2012).

The above examples show that Sweden tries to pursue the authenticity of its brand. Ind (2007) argues that authenticity is crucial for building trust with the employees of the brand and its consumers and underlies living the brand by them. Therefore, I argue that authenticity is crucial for the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats to live the brand of the country. In the case of Sweden, the ability to express themselves by the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats enables them to live the brand of the country. SI participant 1 shares how he posted everything on the official Twitter account of Sweden as he would post in his personal account and thus, enacted democracy. SI participant 2 says that he introduced himself as "an expert in Swedish traditions and habits" because he has been exploring them for more than ten years. One of the international students shares the experience of starting "to cook like a Swede" (Story 8). Many

SI scholarship holders say that they started to act in a sustainable way. One of them describes having "a Swedish way of life now" because he decided to become vegetarian since it's healthier and more sustainable (Story 9). Another says that he will apply the sustainability practices learned in Sweden to his own organization when he comes back home (Story 6). So, the sustainability inherent in the brand of Sweden became "popular ideas that people live by" that is argued by Varga (2013, p. 829) to be the goal of nation branding.

Overall, the findings of this study show that the Swedish Institute seeks the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats to share their true experiences of Sweden and thus, contribute to the authenticity of the brand. Whatever their experiences are, it is recognized by the Swedish Institute as a part of the country's brand. So, the nation brand ambassadors are invited to live the brand, and they do it. As Varga conceptualizes it (2013, p. 836): "to act and think in ways that are well suited to the general contours of the national brand". Thus, this study argues that the concept of living the brand is one of the modalities of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat.

5.2.2 Brand multiplier

People in their performance of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of Sweden don't only become influenced by the brand of the country, but they convey it further. This is the expectation by the Swedish Institute in work with the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats, which is fulfilled by them. For example, the Swedish Institute sees the alumni networks and SI lecturers abroad as the intermediaries of the Swedish experiences (SI report, 2017). International students and researchers are important for passing on Swedish experience, values, and competencies (SI report, 2015). This follows the argument by Lima (2007) that exchange studies ensure the multiplier effect of public diplomacy activities. One of the important benefits of it, as SI representative 3 explains, is that the SI fellows and alumni convey the information which is relevant for their counterparts. SI representative 4 says that it's the only strategy to give the specific information that the target audience desires.

The alumni of the Swedish Institute confirm they act as the brand multipliers of Sweden. One of them shares how he helps prospective students

from his country to learn more about Sweden (Story 2). Another says he couldn't stop talking about Sweden to his friends when he came back home (Story 10). Study in Sweden digital ambassador shares of her plan to cook Swedish food for her family at home (Story 8). And one of the leadership programme participants mentions of the intention to apply sustainability practices in his organization at home with the expectation that his friends will follow him (Story 6). So, when the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden go back to their home, many of them share their experiences of the country with others. It reinforces the argument by Aronczyk (2008) that the brand ambassadors carry the "microbes" of the brand and "infect" those with whom they contact.

The Swedish Institute also expects people to share its social media content on their personal profiles. This ensures a multiplier effect since the friends of those people can see the posts of the Swedish Institute. For this purpose, the Swedish Institute tries to create shareable content. SI representative 5 states that they managed to make the post on Swedish Finns Day, which many people shared and tagged their Finnish friends living in Sweden. People also like to share on their personal accounts the SI content where they are featured (SI representative 5). These follow the recent studies on social media as a multiplier tool (Santillán-Vásquez, 2016) and reiterate the argument by Samuel-Azran (2018) that social media is an efficient tool of citizen diplomacy. I argue that social media help the nation brand ambassadors to be brand multipliers.

The findings of this study show that the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden act as the brand multipliers by sharing their experience of the country with other people. This supports the argument by Pamment (2008) that the actors of nation branding are all the brand multipliers. But at the same time, these findings differ from the conclusion made by Rehmet and Dinnie (2013, p. 36), where talking about *the Berlin citizen ambassador programme*, the authors stated that "ambassadors appeared to function in the role of a receiver rather than in the desired role of a message sender". As explored by Rehmet and Dinnie (2013), it was connected with the unclarity of how to share information and which information was worthy of sharing. The different results of this study, namely, acting by the nation brand ambassadors as message senders, may be explained by the strategy of alignment pursued by the Swedish Institute that is presented further in this chapter.

5.2.1 Changemaker

The role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of Sweden includes making changes. People are expected to promote and make changes globally and thus, contribute to promoting the brand of Sweden. With this pursuit, Sweden builds relationships with the individuals able to influence their societies in a sustainable direction that opens the doors for Sweden abroad (SI report, 2019). The objective of the Swedish Institute is to find and support the actors for changes (SI report, 2015). The Swedish Institute expects that alumni will pursue important issues in their countries (SI report, 2019). The SI report (2018) states that alumni activities indicate the commitment of the former SI fellows to create dialogue around important issues when they return to their home countries. SI representative 2 explains the role of nation brand ambassador in relation to this modality of changemaker:

If you want to play this role [nation brand ambassador], you should want to play it sincerely because you believe you want to make a difference for your own sake and for your country's sake, not for Sweden's sake.

So, the vision of the Swedish Institute on the role of the nation brand ambassador entails this broader role of policy ambassador as Porto de Oliveira (2020) recently conceptualized. It goes beyond promoting the brand to address the vision of the brand that, in the case of Sweden, is a sustainable future.

The incentive to make changes globally and in their own countries is reiterated by the participants of the SI programmes. Many of them describe their experience in Sweden as a step to become a changemaker. One of the scholarship holders says:

The Swedish Institute has equipped me, and till today continues to support me with all that I could have needed to take on the real-world challenges (Story 3).

The participants of the SI programmes see their experience in Sweden and being part of the SI Network for Future global leaders as the opportunity "to address the global issues from their own perspectives" (Story 5). One of them describes it as getting the purpose of his life "to make the world a better place" (Story 3).

Another says that he became "a global citizen" and aspires to contribute to global solutions (Story 4). The opportunity to make changes is also mentioned by SI participant 1 in relation to the communication of Sweden and in a broader sense of political changes though the latter wasn't the goal that he decided to pursue.

The findings of this study show that the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of Sweden is closely connected with the role of the changemaker. Recalling the call by Pamment (2013, p. 136) for the public diplomacy actors to do more in support of international challenges instead of "promoting the self-image", this strategy of Sweden could be seen as promoting the self-image by supporting the international challenges. And this study argues that the role of changemaker or "policy ambassadors" as put by Porto de Oliveira (2020), is the modality of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat and thus, could be placed in the fields of nation branding and public diplomacy.

5.2.4 Brand builder

People in their performance of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat of Sweden participate in the building of the brand of the country. It is stated in the SI report (2014, p. 3) that "the story of today's Sweden is developed in dialogue with SI's target groups abroad" (My translation). For instance, the international students are the co-creators of the message about Sweden (SI report, 2015). They are in charge of the official Study in Sweden social media channels. Swedish citizens are also important co-creators of the brand of their country. One of the examples mentioned by SI representative 1 is the fashion bloggers with whom the Swedish Institute decided to cooperate and who took over the Instagram stories of Sweden during the Fashion Week in Stockholm. Another example is the posting of the videos made by the TikTok blogger Liam Kalevi on the Instagram account of Sweden (SI representative 5). The Swedish Institute used the content about Sweden in the creative interpretation of an ordinary person and thus, allowed the co-construction of the brand of the country on its social media. In *the Curators of Sweden campaign*, all the curators were the brand builders of the country. One of them explains that he could change the Twitter account of @Sweden with the pictures of trivia about the country with more unusual and interesting content.

The finding of this study that the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden are its brand builders supports the concept of the negotiated brand by Gregory (2007), according to which the brand is constantly developed together with the stakeholders. The finding on the use of social media by Sweden in this regard reinforces the argument by Dinnie (2013) on the role of digitalization in the emergence of consumer-generated content. This study exemplifies the prediction by Dinnie (2013) that the states have the potential to utilize social media and engage people in the co-creation of their brand as corporate organizations. Therefore, I argue that the concept of the brand builder is applicable to nation branding and the nation brand ambassadors are the brand builders.

5.3 Strategic alignment of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat

This study shows that the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat is strategically aligned in two aspects. First, there is an alignment between the performance of the role and the vision of Sweden's brand. Second, the understanding of the role is aligned between the SI representatives and the participants of the Swedish Institute initiatives. Based on the analysis of the work of the Swedish Institute with nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats, several strategies were outlined as the strategies of strategic alignment of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. The Swedish Institute uses *nurturing* as a strategy to attract people to undertake the role. *Rewarding* is used to encourage people in the performance of this role. *Guidance* is seen as a strategy that enables people to perform the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats.

5.3.1 People-culture alignment

There is a substantial alignment between the vision of the brand of Sweden and the performance of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. Several SI representatives expressed that they saw this alignment. For example, when the

@Sweden Twitter account was monitored in relation to the themes and topics covered by the curators, it was a big surprise that the tweets were strongly aligned with the strategy of Sweden's brand since the curators were not instructed on what to tweet (SI representative 1). This alignment between the brand and nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats could be assumed as inherent in the national, collective, or imagined identity that is argued by Varga (2014) to be the core of the nation brand identity embodied by the citizens. The participants of *the Curators of Sweden campaign* were the citizens who were instructed to be themselves (Guidelines). SI participant 1 confirms it:

I wasn't supposed to be Sweden. I was supposed to be myself. I was expected to be what I was.

While the alignment of citizens as nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats with the brand of Sweden could be forged through the shared national identity, the alignment of the foreigners in this role is more challenging since they carry their own national identity. The results of this study show that the foreigners living in Sweden mold their identity with the Swedish one. One of the scholarship holders describes, "I have a Swedish way of life now" (Story 9); another says, "I have never thought that I would cook like a Swede" (Story 8). Many students who come to study in Sweden note that they start to feel at home and build their Swedish family (Story 11; Story 12). One student shares that he feels being "in the right place" (Story 10). So, the foreigners join the imagined community (Anderson, 2002) of Sweden. The imagined community is socially constructed (Anderson, 2002), and the Swedish Institute recognizes that the foreigners co-construct it or, in other words, co-construct the brand of Sweden:

The story of Sweden is developed in dialogue with the Swedish Institute target groups (SI report, 2015, p. 3; My translation).

SI representative 5 says that Sweden developed its brand together with people, namely, the students and the representatives of the Swedish embassies. He argues that, therefore, the brand of Sweden resonates very well with people. The resonance also exists with the values that Sweden shares and the topics it communicates (SI representative 2). One of the scholarship holders confirms that

the values he acquired in Sweden are valid to his own country (Story 4). Understanding of the Swedish values is expected from the Study in Sweden digital ambassadors, and therefore, the selection process is based on this criterium:

We hire ambassadors that are in line with our brand as people. We want to get those people who we think are good representatives for the brand (SI representative 4).

The resonance of the themes that Sweden promotes is another aspect that facilitates the alignment of the foreigners with the role of Swedish nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. The existence of this alignment is confirmed in the SI report (2019). Namely, the activities of the SI Network for Future Global Leaders are in line with the themes promoted by Sweden. These themes are the global issues that became the core of the public diplomacy of Sweden. The participants of the SI Network for Future Global Leaders see the network as a platform "to address global issues from their own perspectives" (Story 5). SI representative 3 explains:

We like the alumni to address global challenges. Because those are the challenges that we all share, and Sweden is a part of that.

So, Sweden chose global issues as a framework for cooperation with the participants of its programmes. It may be interpreted as following the call to public diplomacy actors by Pamment (2013, p. 136) for doing "more in support of international challenges" instead of "promoting the self-image". At the same time, it should be noted that Sweden capitalizes on addressing global issues by strengthening its brand of a sustainable, innovative, open, and democratic country. For instance, its commitment to promote democracy found the realization in the social media strategy of the Swedish Institute. *The Curators of Sweden* is an epitomizing campaign in this regard which demonstrated that Sweden was ready to hand in its official Twitter account to ordinary people who could tweet whatever they wanted. The campaign generated a lot of positive coverage on the international media. So, while giving the voice to people on the @Sweden Twitter account could be argued as an exemplification and promotion of democracy by

Sweden, it is for sure a good marketing of Sweden as a country of democracy. SI participant 1 shares:

I think that they [the Swedish Institute] chose me because I could make the account [Twitter account of Sweden] look entirely uncontrollable and unpredictable. And they wanted to create such a perception. I was a safe but not insecure pick because I was not political at that time. So, I was probably the right guy to market Sweden.

Regardless of promoting democracy or the image of Sweden as a country of democracy, the participants of the campaign indeed aligned with it. As explained before, this alignment is based on the opportunity of staying yourself and thus, expressing the nation brand identity of Sweden.

Along with shared imagined identity based on common values and topics, the alignment of people as nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats is also grounded in the common goals. Swedish Institute highlights that there should be an alignment between what it wants to achieve and what nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats seek to achieve (SI representative 2). Following the findings presented in the previous section that the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden contributes to the soft power of Sweden and elevate the performers in the personal and professional dimensions, both parties benefit from the role that could be seen as a common denominator for their goals.

Overall, the findings of this study on sharing the vision, values, themes, and goals between Sweden and nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats illustrate the existence of the people-culture strategic alignment of communication (Volk & Zerfass, 2018) concerning the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. Performing the role of the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats, people engage in the nation branding process of "shaping collective identity" (Varga, 2013, p. 841) or, in other words, the brand of Sweden.

5.3.2 Nurturing as an alignment strategy

Sweden chose building relationships with people as a strategy of its public diplomacy. It is stated in the SI report (2017) that the development of

relationships between individuals and countries is crucial. It was also reiterated by several SI representatives to be the center of its work, namely "to forge long-term relationships with people" (SI representative 2). Notably, these answers followed the question of what the place of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats is in the entire public diplomacy of the Swedish Institute. It was clarified by SI representative 4, who explained that building of personal connections is important for becoming ambassadors. There are several examples that support this thought. For instance, the activities for alumni aim to maintain relationships between Sweden and them as leaders in their countries (SI report, 2015). Good long-term relationships are recognized as significant for cooperation with the teachers of Swedish language working abroad as "Swedish experts" who influence the image of Sweden (SI report, 2018, p. 17). Following these findings, it could be argued that relationship building that is recognized as a core dimension of public diplomacy (Nye, 2008; Storie, 2017) is also central to the work with the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats in Sweden. It seems entirely reasonable since nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are a part of public diplomacy. The Swedish Institute is nurturing relationships with potential nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats in different ways. For example, SI representative 2 says:

Providing scholarships to come to Sweden is a way of nurturing possibilities to acquire new knowledge, to build new connections for your professional career, and for long-term relationships between Sweden and the person that will have a prominent career in his country.

The Swedish Institute also supports alumni. The active members of the alumni networks are invited to Sweden twice a year to reconnect with it (SI representative 3). Different activities are organized for fellows and alumni to develop them as leaders and actors of change (SI report, 2018). One of the participants of the Network for Future Global Leaders says that it inspired him to work harder for sustainability (Story 13). This shows that nurturing applied by the Swedish Institute bears the expected results.

The important role of each scholar as a part of the network is "highly emphasized and nurtured through participation in various workshops" (Story 1). SI participant 3 shares:

We have team building, recreational, personal/professional development activities that keep us motivated and encourage us to do our job. There are invited speakers who are well known for their crafts, and they inspire us to be better.

Nurturing of the relationships with the potential nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats also happens beyond the auspices of the Swedish Institute. For instance, international students mention their experience of being invited to dinner by a Swedish couple or having a very supportive landlord and professors who literally became their Swedish family (Story 11). These examples show that the nurturing and, thus, the alignment of the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats doesn't take place only at the organizational level but at the societal level.

Overall, the findings of this study on nurturing by Sweden the relationships with people illustrate the creation of a supportive environment for them to become nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. Following the Mazzei and Ravazzani's (2015) argument that a supportive environment is a foundation of brand consistent behavior, this study argues that nurturing is an alignment strategy of the role of nation brand ambassador.

5.3.3 Rewarding as an alignment strategy

The Swedish Institute tends to reward the participants of its initiatives. These rewards are given in a very open form, such as the Global Swede award or the financial compensation, or a more latent form such as an invitation of the alumni to the Swedish embassy. Financial compensation is provided for performing the role of Study in Sweden digital ambassador that is assumed by the Swedish Institute to be a job that requires 20 hours per month of work. The small financial compensation was also mentioned by several SI representatives in relation to people participating in the content creation for the Swedish Institute on its social media. Some examples that can be mentioned here are: the fashion bloggers who were invited to take over the Instagram stories of the Sweden account (SI representative 1) or the young TikTok blogger Liam Kalevi who was asked to post some of his TikTok style videos about Sweden on Sweden Instagram account and to create some other videos on its request (SI representative 5). So, the

financial reward for people acting as the ambassadors of Sweden seems to be a strategy used by the Swedish Institute in some cases. This is not in conflict with the idea of the nation ambassadors/citizen diplomats to be a volunteer job as argued by Magu (2008), who explored it in relation to Peace Corps that also have small financial compensation for their job.

Since the amount of the compensation is not openly disclosed by the Swedish Institute, it's hard to assess whether being a nation brand ambassador is just modestly rewarded or substantially funded. But regardless of the amount of the compensation, the financial reward seems to be only additional motivation to perform the role of the nation brand ambassador. For example, SI participant 3 mentioned it as one of the perks, among others, such as an opportunity of travelling or personal and professional development that Study in Sweden digital ambassadors have. Looking back at the findings by Rehmet and Dinnie (2013) – that there are many benefit-driven motivations such as business advantages that people pursue in the role of nation brand ambassador – the financial compensation could be seen as one of such motivations in particular.

Besides the financial rewards, the Swedish Institute provides symbolic rewards. The Global Swede award is the brightest example in this regard. It is awarded to the international students studying in Sweden to encourage them "to become the ambassadors for the positive image of Sweden" (SI report, 2015, p. 40; My translation). This award creates a special feeling and a bond with Sweden as one of the awardees described her experience (Story 7). Another form of symbolic reward is the invitation of the alumni to the Swedish embassies in their countries. SI representative 3 explains:

We want the embassies to be engaged with alumni because this is the way to reassure them that they are doing a good job and appreciate what they are doing. We know that alumni appreciate being invited to the embassy and meeting the ambassador.

SI participant 1 reiterated the feeling of appreciation by the Swedish Institute for his work as a nation brand ambassador. He even said that he was encouraged to keep up posting when people started to unfollow the @Sweden Twitter account. However, it is worth mentioning that the Swedish Institute's appreciation may be limited in some cases but exclusively due to the lack of time. For example, SI

representative 2 shares how alumni wanted SI officials to attend their events on Plastic Free Week, but they couldn't do it on the weekend as they also had to spend some time with their families. This evidence signifies certain limits inherent in the professional culture of Sweden.

Overall, the strategy of rewarding the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats either in the material or symbolic form by the Swedish Institute seems to encourage people to perform this role and thus align with it. This alignment is based on the feeling of the role being appreciated, which is argued by Turner (2002) to be one of the core principles of the person-role merger. Therefore, this study argues that rewarding is an alignment strategy of the role of nation brand ambassador.

5.3.4 Guidance as an alignment strategy

The Swedish Institute guides the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. It doesn't control them but gives them a path and freedom in the performance of the role. This guidance is provided in different forms. One of them is training. For example, the training on managing the network in a transparent way is provided to the alumni networks with the expectations that they will handle it as the Swedish organizations do (SI representative 3). Professional workshops on storytelling and creating video content on YouTube are organized for Study in Sweden digital ambassadors (SI representative 4). The Swedish Institute does coaching for the digital ambassadors as well as training on team building. According to SI participant 3, these activities keep Study in Sweden digital ambassadors motivated and encourage them to perform their role. This further supports the argument by Ind (2007) that training is essential for aligning people with the values of the brand.

Another form of guidance is the provision by the Swedish Institute of the guidelines for the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats that help them to communicate about Sweden. The bottom line is that the Swedish Institute needs to convey the correct information about Sweden and expects that the nation brand ambassadors won't twist it (SI representative 1). The Swedish Institute also provides SI fellows and alumni the opportunity to have constant access to news

about Sweden in English through a free subscription to the Swedish English language media outlet Local (SI report, 2015).

The Study in Sweden digital ambassadors are provided with a brand manual and handbook. SI representative 4 explains that the Swedish Institute does it with the expectation that it will help the nation brand ambassadors to understand the brand values of Sweden. SI participant 3 says:

SI has provided us with a handbook of what the brand is all about and how things work as a whole. It also includes all our roles as digital ambassadors and how we communicate within and outside the programme.

While the guidelines for the digital ambassadors directly concern the brand of Sweden, the guidelines for the curators of Sweden are rather general instructions without mentioning the brand of Sweden since the main idea of the @Sweden Twitter initiative was to allow people to be themselves (Guidelines). This initiative serves as an example of providing the platform for the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats that enable them to promote Sweden. The opportunity to talk on the official social media channels of Sweden is often well met by the people since they feel honored by it, as SI representative 5 believes. SI participant 2 confirmed that this experience was enjoyable for him.

Providing the tools for the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats that they can use when talking about Sweden is the focus of the Swedish Institute. SI representative 3 explains:

We don't tell digital ambassadors what to tell other people about Sweden, but we give them the tools and possibility to convey their experience of Sweden.

The Swedish Institute developed a platform where people can access different materials about Sweden such as posters, social media cards, interesting facts, images, videos, presentation templates, etc. Several SI representatives mention this platform as an essential tool in work with the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. Providing different materials for the former

participants of SI programmes is stated in the SI report (2019, p. 4) as an important aspect of work since these participants are "the promoters of Sweden".

The Swedish Institute also tries to produce content on social media that could be interesting for people to share on their profiles. For example, SI representative 1 mentions how the Swedish Institute made a creative post on the Day of Swedish Finns, and many people shared it and tagged their friends from Finland living in Sweden. That became a massive success in the communication by Swedish Institute on social media.

This study identified that the Swedish Institute guides the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats in different ways. Rehmet and Dinnie (2013) found that the lack of guidance may lead to frustration by the nation brand ambassadors. Following this, the results of this study may be interpreted as helping the nation brand ambassadors to avoid frustration and to perform their role. Thus, I argue that guidance is an alignment strategy of the role of nation brand ambassador.

6 Conclusions

This chapter resumes the findings of this study with a concluding discussion. It emphasizes the contributions of research to theoretical and practical fields and suggests further prospective studies on the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat.

6.1 Concluding discussion

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. While this role exists at the practical level and has many theoretical underpinnings, it lacks the conceptualization from the strategic communication perspective. By applying the CCO framework (Heide et al., 2018), this thesis placed the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat within the field of strategic communication. The findings of this study showed that the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are a substantial part of the public diplomacy of Sweden. By recognizing the role of people as the communicators of the country, Sweden pursues the strategic communication approach in its policy. The role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat is understood in Sweden both implicitly and explicitly. While some people are openly called as such, for instance, Study in Sweden digital ambassadors, others may not hold this title but still perform the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat such as Swedish teachers abroad, Curators of @Sweden Twitter account or alumni of SI Network for Future Global Leaders. Such practice of Sweden mirrored the theoretical field in this regard, which is full of different conceptualizations.

At the same time, the findings of the study significantly illuminated the understanding of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. It was identified that the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are a source of the soft power of Sweden. It further built upon Nye's idea (2008) that civil society is an important actor in public diplomacy. It was also found that the role of nation

brand ambassador/citizen diplomat empowers individuals who undertake it. So, this thesis expanded some previous studies (Gannon et al., 2018; Kantek et al., 2021) in this regard and shifted the focus from the state perspective of the role, which is traditionally taken, to the people perspective. Altogether, this study leads to conclude that the role of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat is mutually beneficial for the state and people and is a strategic asset that should be taken into account by the governments. Another dimension of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat found in the study is autonomy which is seen in Sweden as a condition of facilitating the performance of the role. It may also be viewed as a possibility to distance the role from the negative connotations with propaganda which is quite often attributed to public diplomacy. However, it doesn't help to distance the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat from the marketing efforts in Sweden, as the findings showed. This signifies the logic of the postmodernist society being deeply entrenched in commercial culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Overall, the study found that the government and people's perceptions of the role mostly coincided in three identified dimensions – *soft empowerment of the nation*, *self-empowerment of the individuals*, and *autonomy*. This added up to the conceptualization of the role and laid the ground for its comprehensive theorization.

The understanding of the role was expanded through the identification of its several modalities. The modalities of *living the brand* and *building of the brand*, grounded in corporate branding, found their strong presence in the role of nation brand ambassador in Sweden. In this regard, the idea of the nation as an imagined community by Anderson (2002) received a subtle newer relevance in respect of nation branding and public diplomacy. *The brand multiplier* is another modality of the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat found in this study. It reinforced the idea by Dinnie (2013) that word of mouth is a powerful instrument to influence the people's perceptions of the state's image. This research also featured a relatively new aspect in nation branding and public diplomacy that is *change-making*. As was pointed out by Pamment (2013), public diplomacy of the states is preoccupied with the self-image, but instead, it should tackle the international challenges. Public diplomacy of Sweden could be seen as moving towards this direction by using, for instance, nation brand ambassadors as changemakers. Regardless of Sweden's intention, this finding presents the

possibility for the country to pursue a different strategy in public diplomacy and nation branding that is built around global issues.

This global framework was also seen as a foundation for the strategic alignment of communication in this study. Addressing the global challenges serves as a common vision shared by people who pursue the role of the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats of Sweden. Therefore, instead of coordination or control attributed to propaganda, the strategic alignment of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat in Sweden is achieved through *nurturing, rewarding, and guidance*. This signifies the use by the government of soft power in its work with the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. Following this and the findings mentioned above, it can be concluded that nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats are both the products and producers of the soft power of the state.

6.2 Contributions of this research

This research provided several contributions at both theoretical and practical levels. First, by providing evidence of people actively pursuing the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats, this case study strengthened the theoretical relevance of the CCO framework. As Heide et al. (2018) argued of the vital role of all organization members as communicators, this study contributed to it by amplifying the role of people as the voice of the nation. While the CCO perspective was earlier applied to different organizations such the companies, municipalities, governments, this case study provided a unique example of its application to the nation as imagined (Andersen, 2002) and fluid (Weick, 1995) organization. Thus, it expanded the applicability of the CCO framework.

The application of the CCO framework to this study helped to link public diplomacy and nation branding to the strategic communication field. This showed that strategic communication is not some abstract or illusional concept as tended to be perceived by many scholars so far (Heide et al., 2018) but consists of very practical components, such as nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats in this case. Moreover, it helped to go beyond the public relations that invaded strategic communication (Heide et al., 2018) to further integrate other fields such as international relations. At the same time, it elevated the role of nation brand

ambassadors/citizen diplomats in public diplomacy and nation branding of the state by showing that people are a strategic asset of the state that can help to build its soft power. Therefore, as a practical contribution, this study recommends the states pay closer attention to people as the actors of public diplomacy and utilize their potential. The thesis also invites people to consider performing the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats since it may be highly beneficial for them in terms of self-empowerment.

This study contributed to a better theoretical and practical understanding of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat and to the field of citizen diplomacy as such. By exploring the perceptions of both the government and people on the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat, this research ensured a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. By applying the theory of strategic alignment of communication, the study found that the shared vision and values are fundamental in the performance of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. Thus, I argue that the concept of the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 2002) is relevant in nation branding, and members of this imagined community are nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats.

At the same time, this thesis contributed to the theory of strategic alignment of communication by suggesting the strategies of alignment of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. These strategies may help public diplomacy practitioners in their work with the potential nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats.

The study embraced digitalization that enabled to update the conceptualization of the role of nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats and demonstrated that digital diplomacy and public diplomacy are becoming more inextricably intertwined today. It also brought to the surface the risks posed in this regard, namely, the polarization in social media that put under question the usage of social media as the tools for the performance of the role though Dinnie (2013) argued that social media would be crucial in this regard in the future.

As a case study, it discussed several examples from public diplomacy of Sweden, such as *Curators of Sweden* and *Study in Sweden digital ambassadors projects*, which are unique government-driven practices of work with the nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats that other countries may emulate. This

research reinforced that citizen diplomats are primary actors in the public diplomacy of Sweden, as was earlier pointed out by Pamment (2013). Thus, following the call by Samuel-Azran et al. (2018) for more case studies in citizen diplomacy, this case study further contributed to citizen diplomacy as a research field. It also illustrated how the argument by Pamment (2013, p. 136) that the states should "do more in support of international challenges" instead of "promoting the self-image" is transformed by Sweden in practice into the promotion of the self-image by supporting international challenges. This can serve as a role model for other states on how to combine their international commitments to tackle global issues and their pursuit for self-promotion.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

This case study identified a very illuminating feature of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomacy which is a mutual empowerment of the state and individuals that undertake the role. This could be further explored and tested in a quantitative study since it has strategic importance for the governments in their efforts to encourage people to become nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats. In particular, the forms of self-empowerment such as providing new skills, getting publicity, etc., found in this research could be further explored in a quantitative study to better understand the benefits for and possible motivations of people to engage in the role.

Another component of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat that could be further studied is autonomy. The findings of this study showed that autonomy is very important for the performance of the role according to both the government and people perspectives. At the same time, it was found the government uses guidance as a strategy to help people in the performance of this role. Taking into account the findings of the previous study that people want some guidance in the performance of the role of nation brand ambassador (Rehmet & Dinnie, 2013), it should be explored what balance between the guidance and autonomy may best facilitate the role.

This case study also outlined several strategies of the alignment of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat that could be explored in relation to their applicability at a broader level and in other countries.

It is also worthy of focusing attention in future research on the digitalization of the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat. While this study reiterated the importance of social media for the performance of the role of nation brand ambassador as was argued before (Dinnie, 2013; Samuel-Azran et al., 2018), it pointed out the risks of these tools due to high polarization on social media. In particular, it is related to one social media – Twitter. Therefore, it would be interesting to explore other social media platforms to understand which of them, if at all, can be safe and efficient tools for nation brand ambassadors/citizen diplomats.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of interviewees

Referred in text	Interviewee
SI representative 1	Curators of Sweden manager; director of Department for International Relations; talent attraction manager;
SI representative 2	Study in Sweden digital ambassadors manager; social media manager
SI representative 3	
SI representative 4	
SI representative 5	
SI participant 1	Curator of Sweden; Curator of Sweden; Study in Sweden digital ambassador
SI participant 2	
SI participant 3	

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

Briefing

Hi, I am so glad that you agreed to talk with me for my research. I will just briefly paint you a picture of what it is about.

It is about the role of citizen diplomats/nation brand ambassadors. Sweden, in particular, the practice by and under auspices of the Swedish Institute, is explored. Among the examples of this role in Sweden are Study in Sweden Digital Ambassadors programme (people studying in Sweden official chosen for this role), Curators of Sweden (ordinary people were allowed to post on official Swedish Twitter account). But in fact, every person that talks about Sweden could be seen as a citizen diplomat/ nation brand ambassador of Sweden. The objective of this study is to explore how the state perceives the role of nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat, how people perceive it and whether it's strategically aligned.

Don't you mind if I record our interview? This data will be accessed only by me and used in the thesis in non-identifiable way.

Ice braking

I want to share with you my personal story that drove me to do this research. In my country Ukraine I worked in public diplomacy within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and we even launched prototype of the Swedish Institute, the Ukrainian Institute. I wrote master's thesis about public diplomacy of Ukraine. And then my explorative mind brought me to Sweden thanks to Swedish Institute Visby Programme (scholarship programme between Sweden and Ukraine, Russia and other Soviet Union countries). And here I experienced myself the role as nation brand ambassador of two countries Ukraine and Sweden. I represent my country in my daily interactions in Sweden and I translate what I experience here back to my country. I even launched my YouTube channel for this. So, I definitely feel that I am nation brand ambassador and even with a double representation.

Interview questions (for SI representatives)

1. How would you describe the SI vision on the role of nation brand ambassador?
Whom do you see as nation brand ambassadors?
2. How would you describe the tasks of the role of nation brand ambassador? Let's list five main.
3. How does the Swedish institute see the influence of digitilization on the role of nation brand ambassador? How do you embrace it?
4. Citizen diplomacy is the part of public diplomacy of SI? Which part is that? Did it change over the last ten years?
5. How do Swedish Institute nurture the nation brand ambassadors? Could you bring up some examples please? Does Sweden try to educate people on the role of nation brand ambassador? It's really interesting, could you please tell more about it?
6. If people get engaged in certain citizen diplomacy activities do you navigate them or they act at their own discretion? Are there any briefings, instructions, guidelines? Could it be possible to have look at the examples of them?
7. Do you give them feedback on how they act? Could you tell more details?
8. Do you think that performance by people as nation brand ambassadors conform to the brand of Sweden and perception of sweden in the world?
9. Do you remember if SI experienced some challenges in engaging people to act as nation brand ambassadors? Maybe some lessons learned from certain initiatives?

Interview questions (for SI participants)

1. Have you ever felt that you are the nation brand ambassador/citizen diplomat? Could you please, describe that?
2. Do you remember when you acted as a nation brand ambassador? Could you please describe it?
3. What did you feel at that moment?
4. Do you feel that you invested a lot in acting that role? Could you explain what you mean by that?
5. What motivates you to perform this role?
6. How would you describe your role as nation brand ambassador for yourself?
7. Do you think that other people understand that you act as nation brand ambassador of Sweden?

8. What tasks do you think the role of nation brand ambassador involves?
9. What is the role of digital tools for you today in performing the role of nation brand ambassador?
10. Do you feel that Swedish Institute support / encourage you to act as nation brand ambassador? How?
11. When you get engaged in certain citizen diplomacy activities did you get some advice, guidelines, any other support by SI? Could you bring up the examples, please?
12. Did you face any challenges in acting as nation brand ambassador? Could you please describe them?
13. How do you think Swedish institute assess your performance? Do you receive any feedback from them? Do you think it conforms to their expectations?
14. Do you think that your performance as nation brand ambassador conforms to the brand of Sweden and perception of Sweden in the world?

Round-up

Thank you so much for your enriching answers. Maybe you would like to share anything else that I haven't mentioned?

Appendix 3. Documentary data sources

Referred in text	Type of document	Title	Link
Story 1	SI story	The SI scholarship opportunity is one that never stops giving	https://si.se/en/the-si-scholarship-opportunity-is-one-that-never-stops-giving/
Story 2	SI story	Moving to Sweden to pursue my master's degree was probably the most defining experience of my life	https://si.se/en/moving-to-sweden-to-pursue-my-masters-degree/
Story 3	SI story	The SI scholarship has changed my life in ways that I could never have imagined	https://si.se/en/the-si-scholarship-has-changed-my-life-in-ways-that-i-could-never-have-imagined/
Story 4	SI story	The biggest opportunity that came with SI scholarship is the chance I had to reflect on my perspectives and prejudices	https://si.se/en/the-biggest-opportunity-that-came-with-si-scholarship-is-the-chance-i-had-to-reflect-on-my-perspectives-and-prejudices
Story 5	SI story	If you want to make a change for your people, build yourself with the Swedish Institute	https://si.se/en/if-you-want-to-make-a-change-for-your-people-build-yourself-with-the-swedish-institute/
Story 6	SI story	I really think that the direction for sustainability is a circular economy	https://si.se/en/i-really-think-that-the-direction-for-sustainability-is-a-circular-economy/
Story 7	Student blog	Looking to the horizon! – Global Swede 2018	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/05/20/looking-horizon-global-swede-2018/
Story 8	Student blog	How I cooked like a Swede with a student budget	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/10/18/how-i-cooked-like-a-swede-with-a-student-budget/

Story 9	Student blog	My Swedish way of life: Sweden changed my life	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2020/03/29/my-swedish-way-of-life-sweden-change-my-life/
Story 10	Student blog	No doubts! let's go back to Sweden	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2019/10/08/no-doubts-lets-go-back-to-sweden/
Story 11	Student blog	Fears of living in Sweden: My experience after a year in Gothenburg	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2020/12/18/fears-of-living-in-sweden-my-experience-after-a-year-in-gothenburg/
Story 12	Student blog	Almost A Year in Review: Being an International Student	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/06/07/review-being-an-international-student/
Story 13	Student blog	Graduated from 'Future Leaders Global' 2018!	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/05/21/graduated/
–	Student blog	My Sweden Story	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/09/05/my-sweden-story/
–	Student blog	How Swedes are – or tales from random Swedes I've met	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2019/03/10/how-swedes-are-or-tales-from-random-swedes-ive-met/
–	Student blog	How to become a Study in Sweden Digital Ambassador: My experience	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2019/07/06/how-to-become-a-study-in-sweden-digital-ambassador-my-experience
–	Student blog	Sustainability in Sweden	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2018/06/25/sustainability-in-sweden/
–	Student blog	Dare to care – Sustainability for dummies	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2019/11/19/dare-to-care-sustainability-for-dummies/
–	Student blog	How to become Swedish?	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2020/02/02/how-to-become-swedish/
–	Student blog	First year studying in Sweden: Swedish Institute Scholarship holders testimonials	https://studyinsweden.se/blogs/2020/08/20/first-year-studying-in-sweden-swedish-

			institute-scholarship-holders-testimonials/
–	SI story	Education in Sweden has given me new perspectives, broadened my horizons and strengthened my beliefs for the better future	https://si.se/en/education-in-sweden-has-given-me-new-perspectives-broadened-my-horizons-and-strengthened-my-beliefs-for-the-better-future/
–	SI story	A platform to obtain dream jobs and this opens a lot of doors for an individual that I couldn't imagine opening	https://si.se/en/a-platform-to-obtain-dream-jobs-and-this-opens-a-lot-of-doors-for-an-individual-that-i-couldnt-imagine-opening/
–	SI story	This scholarship is not only about an opportunity for academic studies, but it also enhances my professional and leadership skills	https://si.se/en/this-scholarship-is-not-only-about-an-opportunity-for-academic-studies-but-it-also-enhances-my-professional-and-leadership-skills/
SI report, 2012	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2012	https://si.se/app/uploads/2017/10/arsredovisning-2012.pdf
SI report, 2013	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2013	https://si.se/app/uploads/2017/10/svenska-institutets-arsredovisning-2013.pdf
SI report, 2014	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2014	https://si.se/app/uploads/2017/10/si-arsredovisning-2014_light.pdf
SI report, 2015	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2015	https://si.se/app/uploads/2017/10/svenska-institutets-arsredovisning-2015.pdf
SI report, 2016	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2016	https://si.se/app/uploads/2017/10/svenska-institutets-arsredovisning_2016.pdf
SI report,	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2017	https://si.se/app/uploads/2018/02/

2017			si_arsredovisning_2017.pdf
SI report, 2018	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2018	https://si.se/app/uploads/2019/02/sis_arsredovisning_2018.pdf
SI report, 2019	Report	Swedish Institute annual report 2019	https://si.se/app/uploads/2020/02/svenska-institutets-arsredovisning-2019.pdf
Guidelines	Document	Guidelines for the Curators of Sweden	Personally obtained