

Evaluating the Effectiveness of China's Reputation Management in the World Expo 2010

Shanghai

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Abstract

The World Expo 2010 Shanghai, hosted by China two years after the Beijing Olympics Games, has become the top international mega-event in this country of that year. This grand event has attained great prominence in international news coverage, which would be a perfect opportunity for Chinese government to manage country reputation, build nation image, and promote public diplomacy. Given this background, the present study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of China's reputation management in the Expo 2010 in terms of the media coverage as a predictor, by conducting a content analysis on the international media coverage and the Expo's official subsidized news materials.

Keywords: Expo Shanghai, country reputation, international news coverage

Evaluating China's Reputation Management Effectiveness in World Expo 2010

The World Expo 2010 Shanghai, hosted by China two years after the Beijing Olympics Games, was the top 1 international mega-event in this country of that year. It owns the reputation to "an Olympic festival of economy, technology and culture" (Xu, 2011, p. 73). Since 1851 when the Great Exhibition of Industries of All Nations was held in London, the World Expositions have served as an important platform to communicate concepts and achievements in economy, science, technology, and culture in the international arena. During these events, corporations, organizations and countries display their historical experience and fortune, exchange innovative ideas and inspirations, make contributions to the solution of global issues and look to the future (Yamada, 2007). Being the first emergent economic force to hold this grand international gathering, China was offered the wonderful opportunity not only of attracting huge overseas investments into urban markets, but also of cross-culture dialogues to refine or re-define the country identity, brand national image, promote public diplomacy, and manage the country reputation.

The World Expo 2010 Shanghai China has attained great prominence in various media from different foreign countries. The statistics from Jianjun Wang, the vice secretary of the Public Diplomacy Division of Shanghai, showed that the amount of foreign media's news coverage on the exposition exceeded seven times that of the Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan. There were more than 2,300 foreign journalists registered for the exposition, while over 21,700 person-trips of registered foreign media were attracted to the Expo site during the six months. The average person-trip of foreign media in the Expo site was over 50 per day (Wang, 2010).

Meanwhile, foreign media also realized the significance of World Expo 2010 Shanghai, exerting considerable manpower and media coverage into reporting the grand event in China from their perspectives. Editorial of *Lianhe Zaobao* (May 1st, 2010) from Singapore pointed out that among the 7,000 attendees in the opening ceremony, 700 of them were journalists. Most importantly, 70% of the 700 journalists were from foreign media. That not only manifested how the host had put a high value on foreign media, but also showed how foreign media had paid close attention to the importance and significance of the World Expo 2010 Shanghai China.

Accordingly, the Chinese government and the Public Diplomacy Division have devoted a great deal of time and many resources into the World Expo 2010 Shanghai so as to grab the golden opportunity to carry out public diplomacy and brand. Expo ambassador Zhou Hanmin declared in an interview that, "What is public diplomacy? It is quite simple. There are two objectives in attracting other countries to attend the exhibition. One is to let more people know us. The other is to let people like us" (as cited in Wang, 2008, p. 264). Serving for their goal, the Division for Public Diplomacy has planned and implemented responsive communication strategy to actively subsidize news clues and materials to the foreign media as well as effectively guiding their reports.

It took the Public Diplomacy Division of Shanghai three years to build a project for interviewing channel, which covering eight channels and 85 interviewing sites, in order to provide valuable news agendas and clues. There were also various news releases and materials being recommended to foreign journalists regularly. The IBC (International Broadcasting Center), which was located in the Expo site, was another effective source to affect the

communication contents in the international media by offering public television news resources and materials to both foreign and domestic media. In addition, the online news center and Expo Online was launched to adapt to the communication feature in web era and western journalism by ensuring the high timeliness and transparency of the information for foreign journalists, which became an effective supplemental resource for the Expo reporting.

According to Yang, Shin, Le, & Wrigley's (2008) research, the value of country reputation can be examined from many perspectives such as public diplomacy and nation branding. In the study, Yang et al. (2008) developed a measuring model based on Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow's CRI (2005), which defined the multidimensions to measure the country reputation. Using Yang et al. (2008)' multidimensional model as the measurement here, the present study attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the country reputation management by China in the World Expo Shanghai 2010, in terms of a coherence analysis on China's country reputation in the contents of the event in international media coverage and materials subsidized by the Expo official news center. As the country reputation are becoming more and more crucial in the competition of the soft power in the global age and gaining importance in China's agenda of public diplomacy, the World Expo 2010 Shanghai, then, serves as a perfect case to study China's effectiveness in country reputation management under the context of international communication, which will contribute to the research and practicing field of international public relations of China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Country Reputation in International Public Relations

The country reputation is increasingly gaining interest as a topic for the practice and research in the field of international public relations, although the field of identity and reputation research is mainly focused on companies and a corporate logic (Passow et al., 2005). It was until very recently that the term “reputation” was applied into the international public relations regarding to companies rather than countries, which has been seen as a strategic concept emphasizing long-term impressions of the corporation based on its corporate images and actions (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). Passow et al. (2005) defined “reputation” as the stakeholders’ images of the country over time, and regarded the identity as the back stone of reputation. In today’s global age, the country reputation has been a crucial part for a nation’s soft power and international public relations. As a result, a country, just like a corporation or other large entity, has to manage its reputation actively and effectively so as to retain favorable national image and gain advantages in the global competition (Yang et al., 2008).

We can examine the value of country reputation from various perspectives. First, in terms of public diplomacy, as an effective way to improve a country’s soft power, country reputation management can be considered to manage the nation’s attractiveness and appealing to the foreign audiences (Yang et al., 2008). While from the research field of nation branding, Anholt (2002, 2007) noted that it is equivalent for both a country and a company to build and maintain a favorable reputation in order to further impact the attitudes and purchasing behaviors of consumers towards products or brands made in the country.

In response to rising and urgent need and the great value of country reputation management in global public relations, researchers have begun to explore the concepts of

country reputation, set out instrument to measure the concept, and develop strategic framework for effective national reputation management (e.g., Fehlmann, Grahlow, Lutz, Passow, and Schierscher, 2002; Passow et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2008). In the United States, especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, country reputation has been paid high attention by more and more scholars, who have studied country reputation in terms of strategic public diplomacy (e.g., Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005), effective nation building (e.g., Taylor & Kent, 2006) and nation branding (e.g., Anholt, 2002, 2007).

Measurement of Country Reputation

The Harris–Fombrun Reputation Quotient (RQ; Fombrun & Gardberg, 2000; Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000) was a validated instrument designed and widely used for the measurement of corporate reputations. Given the challenge that there was no standardized generic scale proprietarily used as survey instruments to study country reputation, the Liechtenstein study (Fehlmann et al., 2002) made the very first step for researchers to design a new, generic instrument to measure country reputations.

Based on the RQ, the Principality of Liechtenstein, in collaboration with Charles J. Fombrun and the Reputation Institution, developed an adapted version of survey instrument suitable for measuring country reputations, which was termed as the “Fombrun-RI Country Reputation Index” (CRI; Fehlmann et al., 2002). Similar to the original RQ, CRI is composed of 20 attributes, which can be grouped in six dimensions for data analysis purposes including:

1. Emotional appeal: How much the country is respected, liked, and trusted;
2. Physical appeal: Perceptions of the country's appearance, education level of residents,

and infrastructure such as roads, housing, services, health care, and communications;

3. Financial appeal: Perceptions of the country's friendliness and openness of the markets, developed level of industrialization, competitiveness, profitability, growth prospects, and risk of investment;

4. Leadership appeal: How well the country manages the leadership, communicates an appealing vision of the country, and brands the leaders;

5. Cultural appeal: How well the country retains the diversity, historic heritage, and entertaining factors in the culture;

6. Social appeal: Perceptions of the country's promises and fulfillment in responsibility related to global community, good causes, and environmental policies (Passow et al., 2005).

Employing the indices and dimensions of CRI in a country reputation audit, on one hand, we can rate the 20 individual reputation items in six dimensions; on the other hand, the items act as the drivers of the overall reputation, which have "the strongest influence on the countries" (Passow et al., 2005, p. 313). Thus, by evaluate the specific reputation items separately, we can obtain information on the six dimensional measures as well as which specific aspects drive the overall reputation for a country.

Yang et al. (2008) add the political appeal as a new dimension to the CRI, considering the specific context of the government relationship between South Korea and the American public, in a study aiming to assess South Korea's reputation as viewed by Americans, which is the country's most strategic foreign public. The new dimension was demonstrated as following:

7. Political appeal: "Perceptions of the country's political status such as internal relationships, democracy, and stable political environments" (Yang et al., 2008, p. 425).

Strategic Communication for Country Reputation Management

Besides the presenting of CRI as the generic new instrument, Fehlmann et al. (2002) also outline a strategic framework for effective country reputation management, which was referred as the Country Reputation Cockpit (hereinafter referred to as "CRI"). Essentially, the CRC model can be concluded as a three-stage process, during which the government first diagnoses the country's current state by carrying out a coherence analysis between self perceptions and external perceptions on the nation's reputation, following by designing the desired future state, and ends up with managing a smooth and successful transition from the current to the future state (Passow et al., 2005). Thus, with a combination of the CRI and CRC methodology, governments can transform measurement data into practical reputation management actions.

Shed light by Fehlmann et al's three-stage framework for effective country reputation management, our present study, then, is of great importance to the explore effective strategies for China's reputation management. We could consider China's reputation management in World Expo 2010 Shanghai to be one extensive and typical case study on the current state, as the first step in increasing China's reputation, during which we should get to know well about the current perceptions of country reputation among foreign publics, what the government has done and what has not been done yet, as well as the effectiveness of the efforts China has already exerted in the country reputation management. Only based on the first step can be move forward to

find a way to transit the current state to the future prospect.

Additionally, Yang et al. (2008) summarized previous research and pointed out that various routes could form the country reputation, including personal experience and second-hand experience. Therefore, World Expo 2010 Shanghai as the international cultural meta-event would be a perfect platform for personal participation and experience, which could build and revise foreign visitors' perception of China's reputation. Also, the foreign media coverage of the exposition, which served as second-hand experience, would be perfect subject to conduct a content analysis in terms of evaluating China's effectiveness of country reputation management in the event.

Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Soft Power in China

In the increasingly globalized world, the equivalence of hard power and soft power has been recognized by China, and thus Chinese government has paid more and more attention to the public diplomacy. The peaceful rise policy, as one of China's main public diplomacy strategies, has sought to supplement the traditional use of hard power with soft power (Wang, 2008). In the soft rise of China, although several factors like economy, traditional culture and politics has restrained the government to demonstrate a limited understanding of public diplomacy, "this has not prevented China from becoming a skilled public diplomacy player" (p. 257).

The term "Public diplomacy" is a foreign concept imported into China, while external propaganda manifested the Chinese way to advocate Chinese achievements and promote the country's image to the world (Su, 2008). Su (2008) also argued that the propaganda system is of strong power in China, while Chinese public diplomacy is relatively weak and fledgling under

the strictly controlled media and propaganda system of the government. However, the Chinese government is increasingly gaining conscious of public diplomacy in recent years, marking by the creation of the Chinese news spokesmen system in 1983 and the establishment of the Division for Public Diplomacy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Lu, 2004). For a long time, public diplomacy has been mixed with public affairs, and under the close impact of politics, while there are several common misconceptions in China's international image, which have produced several paradoxes in Westerners' perceptions towards China (Loo & Davies, 2006). For example, Westerners seem to like Chinese history and culture but not the contemporary China since it connects with politics, the Chinese government, and the Communist Party too much.

Under the controversial context, yet China does have some advantages to make use of in the public diplomacy, as Su (2008) summarized. First, as the increasing in investments from foreign stakeholders, both the personal and second-hand experience have been provided for foreign publics as routes to form perceptions on China's reputation and image. Second, the centralization of the power in China to some extent could be an effective way to make optimal use of the manpower, financial and media resources to reach the goal in public diplomacy. The hosting of the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 would be considered as another advantage for China to carry out public diplomacy and promote the China Brand.

The challenges for China in the public diplomacy are also obvious. First, there is an urgent need for reformation in the system and department settings of public diplomacy to

improve the executive effectiveness. The language and cultural gap is another obstacle on the way of China's public diplomacy. To target western stakeholders, Chinese government has to adapt the Chinese way into the western's concepts, since the most of world's news is dominated by the western ideology and the English-language media (Wang, 2008).

Media Coverage as Predictors of International Communication Efforts

It is also notable that China had great space to be improved in terms of making use of the media resources, as people from other countries are more likely to depend on the news media to get information about other nations than personal experience, which was regarded as the second-hand route to form country reputation (Lee, 2007; Yang et al., 2008).

Kunczik (1997) also supported this argument, by saying that "the mass media influence the way a country's people form their images of the people and governments of other countries, because it is the mass media that disseminate the greater part of the information about foreign countries" (p. 7). Lee (2007) conducted a content analysis of US newspaper and Television news coverage of 97 countries, and found that the public relations of other countries' governments is a significant predictor of these countries intensity and nature of the media coverage of other countries. Therefore, based on extant research, we determine to employ the international news coverage of World Expo 2010 Shanghai as a predictor of the effectiveness of China's reputation management in the expo, along with a coherence analysis compared with the output of China's official media subsidized news materials.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To evaluate the effectiveness of China's reputation management in World Expo 2010

Shanghai, the current study measures the country reputation in both media coverage from foreign media and subsidized news materials from the Expo official news center in the Yang et al (2008)'s seven dimensions, considering the political factor plays an important role in Westerners' perception on the image of China. We then employ the coherence analysis to examine the coherence and gap between the contents from two news resources, so as to assess the effectiveness of the government's international public relations efforts in the mega-event. Thus, based on the review of the extant literature, this study asks:

RQ1: How effective was China's country reputation management in the World Expo 2010 Shanghai by comparing contents of the event in international news coverage and the Expo's official subsidized news materials?

To answer RQ1 as the general research question, supports would come from the answers to the following research questions in seven dimensional measures of the country reputation proposed by Yang et al. (2008):

RQ2: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the emotional appeal?

RQ3: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the physical appeal?

RQ4: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the financial

appeal?

RQ5: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the leadership appeal?

RQ6: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the cultural appeal?

RQ7: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the social appeal?

RQ8: What are the coherence and gap between the news coverage from foreign media and subsidized materials from the Expo official news center in terms of China's the political appeal?

METHODOLOGY

To answer our research questions, we will conduct a content analysis on both the international news coverage and subsidized official materials of the World Expo 2010 Shanghai, and then a coherence analysis will be employed to find out the coherence and gap exist between the contents from the two media sources. After having the results for RQ2-RQ8, we then attempt to answer the general research question RQ1 to evaluate the effectiveness of China's reputation management during the exposition in seven dimensions based on the coherence between international news coverage and Chinese media subsidizes.

Media Sample

Considering Americans are China's most strategic foreign public in terms of country reputation, and the long-time hegemony of the United States in the international news flow, we select U.S. as the target country for China, and we are going to choose the most influential media vehicles from the United States to form our media sample. In this way, we can avoid the different traits of and China's different relationships with different countries act as intervene in our measurement, which would result in biases in the research.

To analyze the contents of the World Expo 2010 Shanghai in international media coverage, two major U.S. newspapers (the New York Times and the Washington Post) and four major broadcast networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN) during the exposition will be analyzed. Although these news outlets are not selected by probability sampling, they are widely considered as "major sources of international news in the US in terms of the amount and depth of coverage" (Lee, 2007, p. 160). For measuring the output of the Expo official news center, we will analyze the subsidized news materials available in the online news center of the Expo official site, including both videos and news releases.

Data Sets

To examine the contents from U.S. media, each news coverage, no matter television news or print news, will serve as the unit of analysis for this study. Articles on the Expo 2010 Shanghai China, will be retrieved from the general news sections using the full texts of newspaper articles provided by the Lexis-Nexis database, while the broadcasting news reports will use the story summaries of broadcast news stories provided by the Vanderbilt University

National Television Archives, which is the most widely used databases for news content study in the mass communication discipline. The stories are retrieved by using “expo 2010 shanghai china” as the search words appearing in the title and body of the newspaper articles or broadcasting stories. We will manually check with each article and story to rule out those containing the keywords but not focus on the event. The rest of the articles and stories will compose our data set for the content analysis on international news coverage. Similarly, to analysis the output of Expo official news center, we will first watch each video and write down a summary for the contents, thus each print or video material available on the online news center will serve as the unit of analysis. And the materials targeting specifically for countries other than U.S. and could barely have any impact related to U.S. will be ruled out.

Coding Process

The country reputation manifested in both the U.S. news coverage and the Expo's official subsidized materials will be measured in seven dimensions posited by Yang et al. (2008) including emotional appeal, physical appeal, financial appeal, leadership appeal, cultural appeal, social appeal, and political appeal. Each dimension will be operationalized into several items of descriptive statement. We will employ 23 measurement items in total, which come from the revision on Fehlmann et al. (2002)'s CRI -item and Yang et al. (2008)'s CRI Index. Our 23-item includes:

1. Emotional appeal: China is respected; China is liked; China is trusted;
2. Physical appeal: China is a beautiful place; China has well-educated residents; China has a good infrastructure of roads, housing, services, health care, and communications;

3. Financial appeal: China is an inviting place to do business; China has a well-developed industrial sector; China is a low tax country; China is a safe place in which to invest;

4. Leadership appeal: China has charismatic leaders; China communicates an appealing vision of the country; China is well managed; China upholds international laws;

5. Cultural appeal: China is socially and culturally diverse; China has a rich historical past; China offers enjoyable entertainment activities;

6. Social appeal: China supports good causes; China is a responsible member of the global community; China supports responsible environmental policies;

7. Political appeal: China maintains good international relationships; China is a democratic country; China maintains a stable political environment.

Two coders will be assigned to the coding process. To analysis the international news coverage, they will identify and file articles and stories under the 23 items of seven clusters. One news coverage that covers two or more than two dimensions will be categorized into different dimensions at the same time. Then the coders will rate each item by the overall tone of the news coverage as: 0 = negative; 1 = neutral; 2 = positive. The tone of the news will be identified by the combination of adjectives, adverbs showed up in the contents and the coders' overall interpretations of the entire news coverage.

On the other hand, to examine the Expo official subsidized news materials, the coders will identify and categorize each print or video materials under the 23 items and then count for the amount for news coverage on each item so as to measure the efforts made by China into the

country reputation management in the Expo 2010. Intercoder reliability for the China's reputation in U.S. news coverage will be assessed by using Scott's Pi statistic that assesses agreement in the ratings of two coders. Twenty percent of total articles and stories will be assessed for intercoder reliability.

Data Analysis

All the data we collected in the coding will be input into SPSS. We will conduct a coherence analysis to examine the causality between the Expo official news center's efforts and China's reputations in U.S. news coverage under the 23 items of seven dimensions. For example, there might be coherence in our results between China's large amounts of news materials promoting China's responsible environmental policies, which is a item belongs to the cluster of social appeal, and high rating of China's reputation regarding the same item in U.S. news coverage. There might also be a gap showed by the high rating for "China is a democratic country", which is an item of China's political appeal, and the limited efforts made by China showed by the amount of the related news materials. We will summarize our findings and use descriptive statements implicated by the statistics analysis to support each finding.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, we conduct a content analysis on the contents of the Expo 2010 Shanghai from the U.S. news coverage and the Expo's official subsidized news materials to examine the effectiveness of China's country reputation management in the exposition. We adapt a 23-item of country reputation in seven dimensions to measure the country reputation in international media coverage from the CRI model (Fehlmann et al., 2002) and Yang et al.'s

18-item index. A coherence analysis is conducted to explore the potential causality between China's efforts and its country reputation in international media coverage.

There are several limitations in this study. First of all, considering control the biases might be caused by nation traits and nation relations, the international media sample is selected from only one target country – the United States. Future analysis could be conducted on other or diverse countries' media coverage, such as European countries, which are also influential in media power as well as important target audiences for China. Second, the existed nation image of China in U.S. and the relationships between U.S. and China has not been taken into consideration in our measurement. Future study can include these national factors as variables into the research design to explore their roles as intervene. Also, we examine the effectiveness of China's country reputation management only in the predictors of media coverage, which means the findings cannot be generalized to other aspects of country reputation management.

In addition, we employ the quantitative analysis in the research. Given the comprehensive aspects and nature of country reputation management and international news, there are several issues in considering the validity of the data analysis. Because of the limitation of time and labor in this study, we don't have chance to design a mix method that combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis in our research, which might be a solution to improve both the reliability and validity of our findings.

Theoretical and practical implications for this research are notable. While China has increasing awareness of the importance of public diplomacy and the controversial issues keep surrounding the national image of China, which might threaten China's reputation in the global

age, little has been done to explore China's reputation management in the field of international public relations. Thus, by assessing the effectiveness of China's reputation management in the Expo 2010, we will contribute to the research field of international relations, as well as offering insights for developing responsive communication strategies to transit from the current state to the desired future state.

Also, the international news flow is gaining more and more researchers' interests in the international communication. Measuring country reputation in the predictor of international news coverage in our study may contribute the study in this area. Moreover, the World Expo, as a mega-event, is claimed to be a perfect event-oriented approach for manage media relations in the international communication. The case study of the World Expo 2010 Shanghai, then, would be a valuable asset to rich the research field of international public relations.

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