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Experiencing Nation Brands:
A Comparative Analysis of Eight National Pavilions at Expo Shanghai 2010

By Jian Wang and Shaojing Sun

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Introduction

Country image is a key element in international affairs and nations strive to cultivate and maximize their image and reputational capital on the world stage. The quest for this soft side of power is now, more than ever, a global phenomenon.[1] One prime example of such "soft power" projection is the World Exposition, where countries utilize the physical space of national pavilion for image formulation and public engagement. Despite skepticism about the extension of marketing principles into realms of public good, countries have also begun applying the principles and practices of branding in managing their national image.[2] Such efforts have been amplified at the World Expo in recent decades, with countries taking up the mega-event as a platform for defining and delivering their "nation brands," in hopes of not only capturing the attention of an international audience but, more importantly, transforming foreign public's interest into understanding.

Indeed, despite the dizzying pace of globalization, few events grab much of any worldwide attention these days. One may count the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, and, to some extent, the World Expo. But unlike the others, the Expo is not a media event. It is instead best experienced in person; hence not much different from visiting a theme park or a county fair. In this study, we focus on Expo 2010 Shanghai, the first Expo held in a developing country and the most attended in Expo history. The study seeks to understand how Chinese visitors, comprising the vast majority of Expo attendance, experienced the branded space of national pavilions, and to discuss how pavilion experience may shape or re-shape visitor perception of the countries represented.

While there are important differences between product branding and nation branding, the logic and principles of branding can also be applied to country-image communication.[3] In the case of the

Expo, branding practices are clearly evident in the design of national pavilions as well as in discursive strategies concerning national image and collective identity. In the broader branding literature, there are several useful concepts that help to explain consumer brand perception and behavior (e.g., brand personality, brand relationship, brand community, brand experience).[4] Yet, little has been done to test and apply these concepts in the examination of nation-branding efforts; and this study is a modest effort to help advance the field in that direction.

In the current study, we use the construct of "brand experience" to investigate visitors' responses to select pavilions at the Shanghai Expo. According to Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, brand experience refers to sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli.[5] The national pavilions are constructed as a branded space not for commerce *per se*, but for winning the "hearts and minds" of a foreign public. They are in essence "experiential goods." We surveyed visitors at eight pavilions, including Brazil, India, Israel, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States, on the structural dimensions of "brand experience" at these pavilions. We also drew on interviews with pavilion representatives and observations based on site visits to the eight pavilions.

This investigation expands the conceptual range in the study of public diplomacy by examining a nation-branding event with a conceptual tool from general marketing. Through a comparative lens, the study goes beyond the prior analyses of nation-branding endeavors, based primarily on individual case examples.[6] It also adds to the existing literature on the global institution of the World Expo, which has focused on historical, cultural studies, with few efforts in assessing its impact.[7] In addition, specific to the Shanghai Expo, our analysis helps to broaden the current discussion on China's rise and its soft power implications from a singular focus on China's

"charm offensive" to a look at an interactive system of China being not only the sponsor but also the target of public diplomacy by other countries.[8] Finally, this study yields practical insights that organizers of future World Expositions or other similar events will find relevant and useful.

We begin with a discussion of the World Expo as a site for national image construction. We then set forth the concept of "brand experience" and examine its application in the nation-branding context. The next part focuses on analyzing the dimensions of nation-brand experience at the Shanghai Expo. We conclude by discussing both conceptual and practical implications of the study.

World Expo as a site for nation branding

International exhibitions have a long history, and the entity now called the World Exposition dates from 1851, when London hosted the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations." The World Expo (known then as "world's fair") is a mass event where countries come together to display and showcase technological innovations and national cultures to the broadest cross-section of society. It is, as Expo's governing body the Bureau International des Expositions proclaims, the "intersection of cultural diversity and innovation" and "a grand and common project, in the spirit of education and communication, which can help build trust and connect governments and civil society."[9] Conceived in the "Old World," the Expo had its heyday in the mid-to-late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Major industrialized nations, such as Britain, France, and later the United States, were the frequent hosts of the event, drawing broad enthusiasm among organizers and visitors alike. But the event had faded from popular imagination among Westerners in recent decades. With a record 246 participating countries and organizations as well as 73 million visitors, the Shanghai Expo, held from May 1, 2010 to October 31, 2010, became the largest such gathering in

Expo history. It thereby also renewed global interest in this historical institution.

The Expo is many things. The Shanghai Expo consisted of three core parts—exhibitions, events, and forums, of which exhibitions in the form of pavilions were the most visible and prominent. The pavilions included country pavilions, corporate pavilions, international organization pavilions, and themed pavilions. For this study, we focus on national pavilions as a venue for nation branding. Our analysis is premised on four key arguments.

First, national self-representation aside, the Expo reflects the underlying landscape of international relations. The shifting dynamics in global political economy belies the Expo's 160-year history, from the days of Western colonialism and imperial outreach, to the bipolar world of the Cold War, to the contemporary multi-polar world characterized by the "rising of the rest," with China being one of the major emerging players. The early exhibitions were "imperial and national rituals…creating large interpretative communities of citizens, nation, and empire."[10] As a rising power then, the United States saw hosting a world's fair as an opportunity to "prove its technological and cultural prowess."[11] During the Cold War, world's fairs became another battleground where Europe and the United States sought to win popular support for capitalist ideology over communist ideology.[12]

Indeed, China's hosting of the event, especially on the heels of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, sent an unmistakable signal of the country's return to global prominence. For China, the Shanghai Expo was a nationalizing project to forge contemporary Chinese identity and to legitimize the rule and authority of the Chinese government amidst growing challenges at home and abroad. Our study, however, is not about how China advertised its ambition as a host nation. Rather, it addresses the other part of the two interlinked stories

of China's ascent—how other countries promoted themselves to China at the Expo. This is important, because the prospect of China being a global power depends as much on how the Chinese will come to view what's beyond the Middle Kingdom as on how other countries will choose to deal with its rise. As Martin Jacques has put it, the Chinese attitude toward difference will be a crucial factor in determining the outcome of its rise.[13] The Shanghai Expo brought the world to China's door-step, seeking to engage with the Chinese public through national pavilions. More than 70 million Chinese had the opportunity to sample the sights and sounds of varied cultures and societies on the fairgrounds.

Second, if the Olympics is a global tournament of sports, then the World Expo can be seen as that of cultures. While the evolving Expo is multifaceted, with an ever broadening array of players and stakeholders, national pavilions remain as its centerpiece and the participation of the general public as its core mission. The national pavilions are like temples of culture, and their narratives are more celebratory than reflective. Recent decades have witnessed dramatic increase in country participation in the Expo. The Hanover Expo in 2000 had set the previous record with 155 participant countries.

Third, as representation of cultures, a national pavilion at the Expo is a platform for countries to engage in public diplomacy. For visitors from the general public, the Expo experience has always been recreational as well as educational. This was somewhat humorously captured in the words of a visitor during the early years of the Expo: these exhibitions "amuse the public and draw strangers from all parts of the world; they provide incident for the thoughtless and food for the thoughtful."[14] Participant countries are keen to engage and impress visitors at their stylized pavilions. At the Hanover Expo, for instance, the single most important goal for national pavilions was to enhance their national image.[15] Although there is no available research on the motives of participation in the

Shanghai Expo, based on our field work and observations, building national image remained the central goal for participating countries, with communication objectives ranging from increasing awareness, to changing negative perception, to reinforcing positive country image.

This leads to our fourth argument; that a national pavilion in contemporary times is also a branded space. It is a built, themed environment that aims to craft, spatially and temporally, a positive, distinctive narrative and identity about a country.[16] As branded space, national pavilions are a constructed reality through use of "architecture, technology, and human performance" in hopes of stimulating and ultimately transforming visitors' experience into their understanding and even liking of the countries represented.[17] Like other branded environments in everyday life (e.g., theme parks, hotels, restaurants), these pavilions are "experiential goods." While the Expo experience is by and large leisurely and recreational, national pavilions are essentially a constructed reality for engaging a foreign public in the country's ideas and ideals, and the consumption process actualizes visitors' dual identities as citizen and as consumer.

Teeming with hundreds of pavilions and attractions on display, the Expo ground is decidedly a competitive and comparative place. The basic question facing participant countries is how they define and communicate messages that will not only differentiate their pavilions from the rest, but more importantly resonate with their visitors. Since pavilion experience has the potential of shaping or re-shaping visitor perception of the countries represented, we were interested in understanding what kinds of experiences Chinese visitors had at various country pavilions and what types of engagement tactics were effective for this occasion. A useful framework for such an investigation is the concept of "brand experience."

Nation-brand experience

Branding refers to the process of defining, delivering and maintaining the identification of an object, be it goods or services, issues or organizations, or people or places, to achieve differentiation, uptake, and relationship among its desired audiences. This enterprise encompasses three main sets of activities—brand definition, brand engagement, and brand management.[18] Needless to say, nations are not and certainly cannot be "brands" in the ordinary sense of a product brand. Nonetheless, given the competitive global landscape, the enduring significance of national identity and the crowded, symbol-ridden information environment, the concept and practice of branding is not only relevant but also crucial to effective communication of country image in global affairs.[19]

In the branding literature, several concepts have been developed to help us better understand the phenomenon of brands in daily life, including, for instance, brand personality, brand community, brand relationship, and brand experience.[20] Since pavilion visits are an experience of a branded space, we adopt the construct of "brand experience" as our study approach.

Brand experience is defined as "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments."[21] The framework was developed to explicate the nature and dimensional structure of how consumers experience products and brands in a variety of settings. The brand experience scale, with 12 measurement items, is broken down into four dimensions: sensory (e.g., "This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses"), affective (e.g., "This brand induces feelings and sentiments"), intellectual (e.g., "I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand"), and behavioral (e.g.,

"I engage in physical actions and behaviors when I use this brand"). In addition to confirming the scale's validity and reliability, the researchers found that brand experience positively affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty.[22]

As pointed out earlier, the national pavilions at the Shanghai Expo were built with a message to convey. While some countries incorporated the general theme of this Expo―"Better City, Better Life"―into their pavilion narrative, many focused on their "nation brand." In this context, pavilion experience refers to visitors' subjective and behavioral responses evoked by nation-brand-related stimuli and communication inside the pavilion, including atmospherics (e.g., pavilion layout, lights, sound), exhibit displays (textual and visual displays, real objects), participatory devices, videos and movies, live performances and human interactions.[23] Our study surveyed visitors at eight country pavilions to find out which ones provided more compelling pavilion experience based on the brand experience framework. We proposed the following research questions:

RQ 1: To what extent, was visitor experience of national pavilions captured by the four dimensions of sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual?

RQ 2: How did the eight national pavilions compare along the brand experience dimensions?

With national pavilions being tasked with the goal of "winning the hearts and minds" of a foreign public, we also expected that the more a pavilion evoked various experience dimensions, the higher the overall evaluation of the pavilion by its visitors. We hence proposed one hypothesis for testing:

H1: Visitors' experiences affected their pavilion evaluation positively.

Method

The eight national pavilions in our sample were chosen based on considerations of geographic coverage, their roles in global relations, and the importance of their relationship with China.[24] All the sampled countries erected their own free-standing pavilions instead of sharing spaces with other countries in a joint pavilion. They generally represented the more sophisticated, lavish presentations than those by most other countries.

We conducted exit interviews at the pavilions in September 2010. For the purpose of this study, we interviewed Chinese visitors only, with 60 interviews per pavilion and a total of 480 respondents. We focused on adults, young to middle-age segments, and excluded older Chinese and kids. The instrument for the intercept interviews included brand experience, pavilion evaluation, demographics, and contextual information. For the brand experience part, we used Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello's scale, with modifications to reflect cultural and Expo conditions. After preliminary data analysis, we found that three items did not load clearly on the factor structure, and hence were removed from the final analysis. Such a removal was based on the researchers' further reading of the three items, and the conclusion that the meaning the items conveyed lacked clarity and focus in the context of the Expo. The brand evaluation measurement is based on a three-item, 1-7 Likert scale of "good/bad," "likeability" and "attractiveness."[25] The questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Chinese, and then translated back into English to ensure consistency. The Chinese version was tested with potential respondents for clarity and cultural appropriateness.

Thirty interviewers were recruited for the project. All of them were students enrolled in a master's program in communication at a leading university in Shanghai. As rewards for their assistance, they were given a complimentary one-day pass to the Expo and

offered priority access to two pavilions. Due to the relative large group of interviewers, we conducted a training session for them. One of the authors led the session on face-to-face interviewing. He introduced the principles of conducting standardized survey interviews, and demonstrated an exemplar interview case for group discussion. As such, interviewers could develop a better mastery of interviewing skills and interviewer-caused bias could be minimized. The interviews were evenly divided among the interviewers. The interviewees were given a small Expo merchandise item as a token of appreciation for their participation. Conducted in Mandarin and averaging ten minutes, the interviews were carried out on the same day, and the questionnaires were returned the second day for data processing.

In addition to the visitor survey, we interviewed representatives (e.g. pavilion director and media manager) from seven of the eight pavilions (except for India) on how each pavilion defined and communicated its nation-brand. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between June and August 2010 by one of the authors at the respective pavilions, lasting from 20 minutes to an hour. The purpose of the interviews was to help gain a better understanding of the pavilion goals and strategies. The researcher was also granted a familiarization tour of all eight pavilions.

Results

The respondent sample met the requirements set out for this study and the respondent profiles in the sample generally matched those of the overall visiting public for the Shanghai Expo. It was evenly divided by gender (male 49% and 51% female), mostly in the age bracket 21-50 (85%), mostly urban residents (84%), with a little over one third of them from Shanghai (36%) and about two thirds from rest of China (62%), highly educated (77% with college degrees or above), and with little international travel (72% never traveled abroad).

The queue time to get into the pavilions ranged from 36 minutes (South Africa) to 117 minutes (South Korea), averaging about an hour (62 minutes). The amount of time visitors spent inside the pavilions averaged half an hour (26 minutes), with South Korea having the longest time of visit (36 minutes) and South Africa the shortest (15 minutes).

Our first research question asked to what extent visitor experience at national pavilions was captured by subjective and behavioral responses to brand stimuli along the four dimensions of sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual, as originally proposed in the concept of brand experience. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to examine the goodness-of-fit of the measurement model for the brand experience items. AMOS version 18.0 was used for the structural modeling analysis.

Based on the typical cutoff criteria of model fit,[26] our results indicate that a second-order measurement model of brand experience fits the data satisfactorily. A graphical measurement model is presented in Figure 1. In general, brand experience can be classified into two categories—subjective experience and behavioral experience. The higher order factor "subjective experience" is further divided into three dimensions labeled as sensory, affective, and intellectual experience.

We then compared the pavilions along each of the four brand experience dimensions to find out which pavilions provided the strongest or weakest experience on any given dimension and overall (RQ2). Based on the mean scores for each brand experience dimension, UAE scored the highest on three of the dimensions (sensory, affective, and intellectual) and South Korea the highest on the behavioral dimension. India scored the lowest on the behavioral and affective dimensions, South Africa on the sensory dimension, and South Korea on the intellectual dimension. MANOVA was

employed to compare visitors' brand experience across the eight pavilions (Table 1). Post-hoc comparison shows that UAE and Spain scored higher on the "sensory" dimension, with significant difference between them and other pavilions. UAE and Spain also scored higher on "affective," with significant difference between UAE and other pavilions. Korea was rated the highest on the "behavioral" experience, but with little significant difference, whereas UAE was rated the highest on the "intellectual" experience, with significant difference.

For the evaluation of the overall pavilion, we used three measurement items of "good-bad," "like-dislike," and "attractive-not attractive." The mean scores show that UAE received the highest scores on all three measures, closely followed by Spain; while South Africa the lowest, followed by India and Brazil. The MANOVA test indicates that differences were significant between the highest scores pavilions (UAE and Spain) and the rest of the pavilions.

We further examined the relationship between brand experience and visitors' overall evaluation of the pavilion. Correlation analysis showed that overall evaluation was highly positively related to sensory experience ($r = .684$, $p < .001$), affective experience ($r = .705$, $p < .001$), and intellectual experience ($r = .649$, $p < .001$). Behavioral experience was only moderately related to overall evaluation ($r = .459$, $p < .001$). So, sensory, affective and intellectual experiences contributed more to overall evaluation as opposed to behavioral experience. On the whole, our hypothesis was supported.

How do we, then, account for the varying pavilion experiences reported by Chinese visitors? What specifically did UAE, and to some extent Spain, do right in delivering a compelling nation-brand experience? And what might be the lessons learned from the Shanghai Expo for nation-branding efforts at future Expos? To address these questions, in the next part of the discussion, we draw on the concept

of "strategic narrative" as related to nation-brand storytelling, and our observations based on site visits and interviews with pavilion representatives.

Nation branding as strategic narrative

The concept of "strategic narrative" contends that effective narrative is a function of successfully managing the relationship between credibility (or believability) and defamiliarization (or novelty) within a given orienting context. Credibility is to convince the audience that the story is plausible, whereas defamiliarization is to bring about different ways of viewing things.[27] Most important, as Barry and Elmes explained, "these arenas form a kind of dialectic: extremely credible narratives tend toward the mundanely familiar; whereas highly defamiliarizing narratives often lack credibility (or at least when first introduced)."[28]

In the context of the Expo, the dynamics between these two aspects of storytelling of a nation brand through the medium of a pavilion is manifested by how the nation-brand is defined (i.e., the official version of the "content" of a country brand) and how the pavilion engages with visitors (i.e., the "expressions" of a country brand). The "orienting context" of the Expo, which sets limits on nation-brand definition and communication, includes factors such as visitors' prior awareness and perception of the country represented by the pavilion, their expectations of fun and excitement for the Expo occasion and the crowded environment of the fairgrounds. For instance, among the eight pavilions we studied, some countries (e.g., South Korea) were far more familiar to Chinese visitors than others (e.g., UAE). The Expo was promoted to the Chinese public as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the world without leaving the country. For the vast majority of the Chinese visitors who had never traveled overseas before (72% for our sample), the novel experience of getting a glimpse of foreign countries at Expo pavilions was a

powerful motivator. Moreover, with the vast number of visitors to the Expo, their experience took place in a crowded, transient space. These contextual characteristics privileged certain ways of communication and engagement.

Working from this framework, we contend that UAE and Spain, arguably the "winners" in this contest of nation branding, achieved a more effective balance between "credibility" and "defamiliarization" in the content and expression of their respective nation-brand narratives than did South Africa and India. As such, these four pavilions provided us with a comparative vantage point to discuss how "strategic narrative" can be achieved through the branded space of a national pavilion. We now first compare the pavilions on the aspect of nation-brand definition and then address their nation-brand engagement approaches. We end by discussing the somewhat special case of the Korean pavilion, rated the least intellectually compelling despite the higher ratings on the other experiential dimensions, including the highest score on the behavioral dimension.

Defining nation brands

While the overarching goal of the Expo's national pavilions is to win the "hearts and minds" of a foreign public and, in this particular case, of the Chinese public, countries set up their pavilions with more specific objectives in mind. Among the eight countries we studied, their communication intentions included creating awareness (UAE), re-shaping perception (Israel, South Africa), broadening perception (Brazil, India), and reinforcing positive perception (South Korea, Spain, USA) (Table 2). The options for shaping a nation's story inside the pavilion are literally endless, from focusing on a select few issues to providing a panoramic view of the country. The desire to show a broad picture of one's country in this type of international event is understandable, since there is less risk of being accused of giving short shrift to the multi-faceted society one represents; not

to mention the various special interests involved in putting together the displays. On the other hand, a singular focus is likely to be more effective in sharpening visitor impression, and especially to help amplify the distinction of the country and the pavilion on the fairgrounds. This is important in light of visitors' limited attention span at the Expo, as they move from one pavilion to another to maximize the number of "countries" they can visit.

In the case of UAE, the Chinese public had little prior knowledge of the country. "In fact, we had a blank sheet," said Peter Vine, a key advisor to the UAE pavilion. "We know we had a huge mountain to climb in terms of perception knowledge of UAE."[29] In defining its nation brand, UAE pursued a focused messaging strategy (i.e., the story of development) in contrast to a diffused approach as in the case of India, whose pavilion covered everything from science and technology to culture and society. The positioning of the UAE pavilion highlighted its country image without tapping much into the general theme of the Shanghai Expo. As told through its pavilion, UAE's national story of development, from poverty to prosperity, appeared to resonate well with its Chinese visitors, because the narrative paralleled that of China's own experience of economic reform over the last several decades.

With the theme of "From the city of our parents to the city of our children," the Spanish pavilion aimed to showcase its national image under the broad rubric of the Expo theme of "Better City, Better Life." It was done through the concept of a journey through time, with three main exhibition halls of "Origins," "Cities," and "Children." Unlike UAE, Spain enjoys high awareness in China. Such familiarity also begets certain strongly-held stereotypical images of the country. Nations often seek to use events like the Expo to counter existing, and especially negative, stereotypes. However, Spain didn't shy away from these stereotypical representations of the country, such as bull fighting, Picasso, soccer and flamenco

dance, all featured as part of the presentation in the first hall of the pavilion to convey the defining characteristics of the country. But in the second and third hall, it ventured into new ways of story-telling about the country. As Pedro Molina, the communication director of the Spanish pavilion, explained, "Another thing is that the Expo is a competition. You have to show impressive scenes to surprise people. If not, people would forget about you very easy and very quickly."[30] For Spain, the main novelty of the pavilion was the electronically animated giant baby named "Miguelin" in the third hall, which not only conveyed the country's vision of the future but also provided delightful surprises for visitors.

As noted earlier, the national story presented by the Indian pavilion was far more encompassing than either UAE or Spain (Table 2). As a result, it seemed to lack a strong focal point. Visitors were most likely overwhelmed by the wealth of information given the broad range of topics the pavilion covered, and consequently under-read India's brand story as a whole. South Africa, on the other hand, was among the countries which sought to counter prevailing negative perceptions of the country. As its pavilion director Vika M. Khumalo put it, the main thrust was "changing the general negative perceptions about South Africa and Africa in general. And create a space where people look at South Africa as one of those countries that is as good as any other countries in the world."[31] Therefore, South Africa rejected stereotypes by presenting and highlighting aspects of the country lesser known by the foreign public. Its Expo presentation was an integral part of a concerted global branding effort underscored by the theme "Rise of a Modern Economy – Ka Nako!" Yet, according to our visit survey, the pavilion did not seem to succeed in evoking interest or curiosity about the country among its Chinese visitors. Based on our observations, given that stereotypes form the basis of our expectations in a communicative context, a good use of them (as in the case of Spain) can effectively create visitor engagement, whereas simply presenting visitors with the

unfamiliar or the unknown may alienate the audience, thus missing even the opportunity to make a connection, which was probably the case of South Africa.

Communicating nation brands

Nation-brand messaging and positioning aside, most central to the success of the UAE pavilion and, to some extent, Spain, is the employment of a succession of cutting-edge, high-impact cinematic presentations that delivered thrilling, immersive experiences for their visitors. As our study findings have shown, multi-sensory stimulation was a key differentiator in presenting a nation brand at the Expo. This could very well be a function of visitor expectations of fun and excitement on the Expo ground. The main attraction at the UAE pavilion was a three-act film presentation. Act I, titled "In the blink of an eye," featured a conversation between a nine-year Emirati boy and his grandfather. The film took a classic cinematic approach, using the voice of the grandfather, to narrate the story of UAE's passage of development. Visitors then moved on to the next hall for Act II - "Meeting the Emiratis" – which featured Emiratis from different walks of life sharing stories of their professional lives in video clips projected on various columns. Visitors could sit around any of the columns to watch the videos. In the third act, an IMAX presentation titled "Dream journey," the boy from Act I took a Chinese girl of similar age on a tour of UAE. Overall, the cinematography in Act I and Act III was dazzling and beautiful—from deserts and oceans, to modern cityscape and cultural landmarks. The two lead characters in Act III were animated figures but were seamlessly integrated into live-action film. The soundtrack featuring contemporary Arab music was exuberant and joyful.

In contrast to the striking display of visual and sound effects in the UAE pavilion, the South African pavilion, relying primarily on textual displays and exhibits, paled in terms of sensory experience.

Although the Indian pavilion featured a hi-tech holographic presentation at the center stage of the pavilion, it lacked the quality of a spectacle as in the cases of UAE and Spain. IMAX presentations were also the main feature at some of the other pavilions we studied (e.g., Brazil, Israel, USA), but the techniques were not as novel or varied.

Moreover, the timed presentations provided a more directed experience by programming what visitors would see and for how long. For UAE and Spain, such a linear narrative approach helped to ensure message exposure. For Act I of its presentation, UAE created two separate theaters, each housing only 70 visitors. This was, according to UAE's consultant Peter Vine, to "bring them closer to the screen, to have a little bit more of a closer environment for them to feel more about the grandfather telling the story."[32] The main feature of the USA pavilion, for instance, was also a sequence of three short films; but unlike the UAE pavilion, each presentation was shown to 400-500 people at one time in a large venue. The spatial experience created by UAE was more intimate and captivating; hence effectively delivering the country's message.

In comparison, Indian and South African pavilions embodied a self-paced approach by leaving choice of direction to the visitor. While visitors had the freedom to spend as much (or little) time as they wanted to in any part of the pavilion, many seemed to have chosen a walk-through of the pavilion, without taking the time to attend to or reflect on much content detail.

The Korean case

Among the eight pavilions we studied, South Korea was rated as providing the least "intellectual" experience, but scored the highest on the behavioral dimension. It was a "high-involvement" pavilion that allowed for plenty interactive opportunities through touch

screens, interactive exhibits and other kinds of visitor participation devices. Yet, visitor behavioral involvement in this case didn't contribute much to the overall pavilion evaluation.

The Korean pavilion was also comprehensive in terms of the range of communication approaches employed inside the pavilion to deliver the message "Your friend, Korea" to its visitors, including interactive technologies, video walls, live-action film (with animation), stage performance, and human interaction through Chinese-speaking Korean guides. Its film presentation capitalized on the "Korean Wave," featuring Korean pop stars also well known in China.

We argue that one of the contextual factors of visitors' prior country awareness could be a major factor in Chinese visitors' seemingly underwhelming response to the otherwise well-conceived Korean pavilion. The Chinese visitors might find the pavilion presentation and message "mundanely familiar," given Korea's geographic and cultural proximity to China and the high awareness of the country among the Chinese public. Moreover, visitors to the Expo might be looking for more passive entertainment than active participation. This may explain why high behavioral involvement as demonstrated in the Korean pavilion was not a brand-experience differentiator.

Conclusion

While the Expo is billed as a global gathering, it remains primarily a local event. This was particularly true of the Shanghai Expo, with more than 90% of the visitors coming from China. Therefore it is all the more meaningful to discuss the Expo from the perspectives and experiences of the locals. In this study, viewing national pavilions as branded spaces and pavilion visits as "experiential goods," we analyzed Chinese visitors' pavilion experience by applying and testing the construct of "brand experience" in the nation-branding context.

Our study provides support for the general "brand experience" framework through the case of branded space at the World Expo. It is interesting to note that among the four dimensions of brand experience: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioral, in regards to the Expo's national pavilions, behavioral experience does not contribute as much to the overall brand experience compared to the other dimensions. Our results also indicate that, with sensory stimulation and dramatic resonance, the UAE pavilion was the most successful in presenting its national image at the Shanghai Expo. It serves as a revealing case of "strategic narrative" in nation-brand storytelling by achieving an even balance between "credibility" and "novelty" through its content and expressions. Most important, this was accomplished with an adept grasp of the contextual dynamics of the Shanghai Expo. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the UAE pavilion made a distinctive, positive impact on the image of the country among the Chinese public.

This study offers implications for research on the topic of nation branding and public diplomacy. Future research should continue to look into conceptual tools in the general branding literature and to examine them in the context of nation branding. This comparative analysis also yields practical insights for organizers of future Expos. In defining one's nation-brand story, our results seem to suggest that, despite the argument, and sometimes even the imperative, for showing a broader picture of the society one represents, focused messaging works more effectively than a diffused approach. As illustrated in the cases of Spain and South Africa, stereotypes can (and probably should) be productively harnessed to draw the audience into the story rather than being entirely rejected. Moreover, sensory stimulation seems paramount in an event like the Expo to capture visitors' attention and interest. It is also crucial to provide delightful surprises that are dramatically relevant (e.g., the giant "baby" at the Spanish Pavilion). This is particularly important for countries that enjoy high awareness and familiarity among their

audiences. Yet underlying all of this is the implicit knowledge of achieving a strategic balance between "familiarity" and "novelty" in both the content and expressions of a nation-brand.

Several limitations need to be noted here. First, we employed the existing concept of "brand experience" to study nation branding. However, indicators of the concept could be different from the four dimensions as identified in the marketing literature. Particularly, in the Chinese context and with regard to an event like the Expo, it merits more scholarly attention to further study into capturing and measuring such experiences. Second, visitors' pavilion experiences may be fleeting and temporary. The effects of such experiences could be short-term or long-lasting. Our research design did not capture the various effects completely, particularly long-term ones. Future research can and should look into the effects of national pavilions from both short- and long-term perspectives. Third, nation branding is a complex process. The World Expo does not influence national brands in an isolated and independent manner. Future research should explore and examine other contextual factors (e.g. international relations, other promotional and engagement programs) and how they relate to the focal nation-branding event.

Appendix

Figure 1: "Brand Experience" Measurement Model
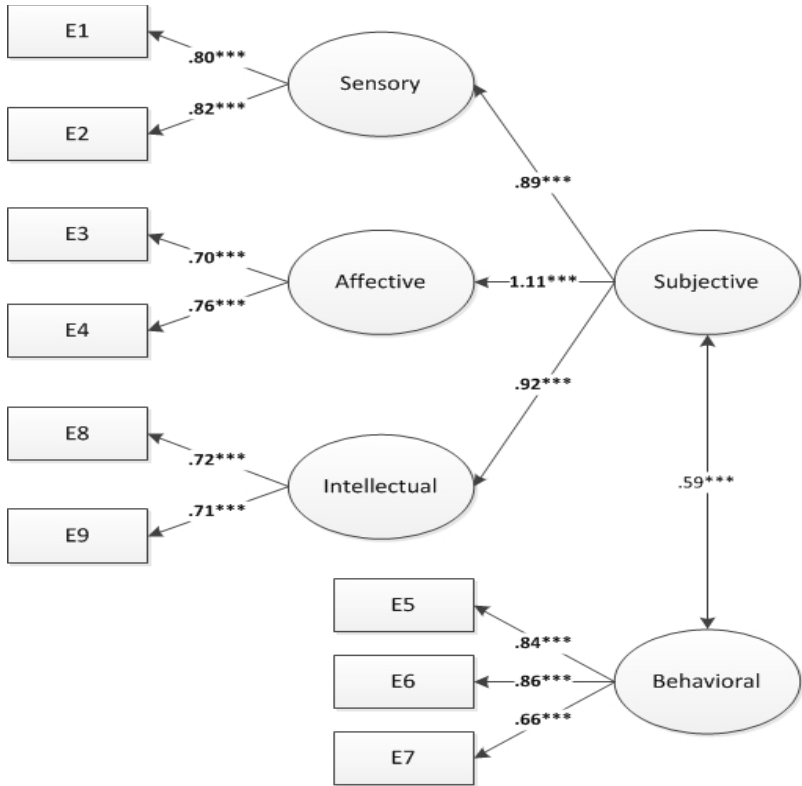
Model Fit

	χ^2	df	$\dfrac{\chi^2}{df}$	SRMR	GFI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Measure Model	96.7	23	4.204	.0351	.956	.965	.964	.082
Ideal Value			<5	<.05	>.95	>.95	>.95	<.08

Table 1: Results of MANOVA for Pavilion Brand Experience

Compare Group	M. D.	95% CI	
		LL	UL
Sensory			
AE / BR	0.76**	0.15	1.36
AE / KR	0.68*	0.08	1.29
AE / IN	1.00***	0.39	1.60
AE / ZA	1.30***	0.69	1.91
ES / BR	0.69**	0.09	1.30
ES / IN	0.93***	0.32	1.54
ES / KR	0.62*	0.01	1.22
ES / ZA	1.23***	0.63	1.84
IL / ZA	0.85***	0.24	1.46
KR / ZA	0.62*	0.01	1.22
US / ZA	0.79**	0.19	1.40
Affective			
AE / BR	0.78**	0.17	1.38
AE / IN	1.20***	0.60	1.80
AE / KR	0.89***	0.29	1.50
AE / US	0.64*	0.04	1.25
AE / ZA	1.09***	0.49	1.70
ES / IN	0.90***	0.30	1.51
ES / ZA	0.79**	0.19	1.40
IL / IN	0.65*	0.05	1.25
Behavior			
BR / IN	0.75*	0.06	1.44
KR / IL	0.69*	0.00	1.39
KR / IN	1.07***	0.38	1.77
Intellectual			
AE / BR	0.97***	0.38	1.55
AE / IN	0.96***	0.37	1.55
AE / KR	1.19***	0.60	1.78
AE / US	0.85***	0.26	1.44
AE / ZA	1.16***	0.57	1.75
ES / KR	0.61*	0.02	1.20
IL / KR	0.61*	0.02	1.20
Wilks' $^{\lambda}$		.624***	

Note. M. D. = Mean Difference; CI = confidence interval;
LL = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

AE = United Arab Emirates; BR = Brazil; ES = Spain; IL = Israel;
IN = India; KR = Republic of Korea; US = United States;
ZA = South Africa.

*p< .01.**p< .05.***p< .001.

Table 2: Nation-brand Communication Goals and Approaches at Select Pavilions

Country	Communication Goal	Theme/core message	Main Communication Features
Brazil	Broaden country image	"Pulsing Cities: Feel the Life of Brazilian Cities"	• Panoramic, widescreen films • Films on giant, curved screens • Interactive kiosks
India	Convey comprehensive view of India	"Unity in Diversity" – showcases cultural heritage, faith, language, technological innovations, and urban-rural interfaces	• 360-degree holographic projection • Live performances at amphitheater • Exhibits and displays
Israel	Re-shape country perception	"Innovation for Better Life"	• 8 ½-minute film on large screen on technological innovations by Israel • 3-dimensional TV screens • 30-meter mural depicting Israel • Chinese-speaking Israeli guides
South Africa	Re-shape country perception	"Rise of a Modern Economy – Ke Nako!"	• Displays and exhibits • Patio resembling traditional village
South Korea	Reinforce friendly image	"Friendly City, Colorful Life"; "Your Friend, Korea"	• Multimedia presentation of live action film, animation, and stage performance in the form of a musical • Interactive exhibits and screens • Large graphic panels • 3D screens • Chinese-speaking Korean guides

Spain	Reinforce positive image	"From the City of Our Parents to the City of Our Children"	• Immersive, cinematic presentation • Live performance • Video walls of various sizes and shapes • Electronically animated giant baby named Miguel
United Arab Emirates	Create awareness	"Power of Dreams"; presents UAE's story of development	• 3 film presentations with different approaches: -classic approach in 1st film -video columns for 2nd film -3rd film also includes animation, holographic presentation • Displays and exhibits
United States	Reinforce positive image	"Rise to the Challenge"; presents the US as a place of opportunity, diversity, and community-building for the better	• 3 IMAX films, one of which 4D • American student ambassadors • Corporate displays and exhibits

Endnotes

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3. See Jian Wang, "The Power and Limits of Branding in National Image Communication in Global Society," *Journal of International Communication* 14, no. 2 (2008): 9-24.

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11. Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1.

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17. Lukas, *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nation, and Self*, 8.

18. Wang, "The Power and Limits of Branding in National Image Communication in Global Society."

19. Ibid.

20. See note #4 for references.

21. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, "Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty," 53.

22. Ibid., 60.

23. The experience is, in other words, immediate (as opposed to "lived" or memory), collective (rather than private), and corporeal (instead of mediated).

24. We wanted to include Russia in the sample. Although the pavilion representative showed interest, we were unable to make the necessary logistics arrangement in time for the study.

25. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, "Brand Experience: What Is It? How Is It Measured? Does It Affect Loyalty," 62.

26. Over the past decades, there has been a large body of research and debate on the cutoff criteria of fit indices for assessing model fit. See, for instance, Li-tze Hu and Peter Bentler, "Cutoff Criteria for Fit Indexes in Covariance Structure Analysis: Conventional Criteria Versus New Alternatives," *Structural Equation Modeling* 6 (1999): 1-55; Rex Kline, *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling* (New York, NY: Guilford, 2005); John Loehlin, *Latent Variable Models: An Introduction to Factor, Path, and Structural Analysis* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998). Among a range of fit indices, the following were those often reported in published research: the Chi-square, comparative fit index (CFI), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the goodness of

fit index (GFI), and the incremental index of fit (IFI). Researchers tend to agree that it is not advisable to rely on one fit index to assess the model fit. Instead, using a combination of different fit indices may be more reliable. Because Chi-square is sensitive to sample size, x^2/df is recommended and the ideal cutoff is 5. Kline recommended the following cutoff criteria for good model fit: SRMR < .10, CFI > .90, GFI > .90, IFI > .90, RMSEA< .08. Hu and Bentler suggested that a strict rule with SRMR < .08 and RMSEA < .06 would result in a lower type II error rate of model rejection.

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29. Interview, August 23, 2010.

30. Interview, June 29, 2010.

31. Interview, June 3, 2010.

32. Interview, August 23, 2010.

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