

Nation Branding: the impact of Surveillance on a country's reputation

*Nation Branding: o impacto da Vigilância
na reputação de um país*

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Abstract: Nation branding is collected efforts conducted by governments, occasionally in collaboration with private sector, local and/or international agents. This is to communicate in cooperation with local and international media providers a particular shiny image about the country in order to be perceived positively by other nations and foreign citizens, this is, with the aim of political, social, and economic prosperity as an outcome of the positive brand. This image and/or reputation of a nation can be influenced positively or negatively by communications, after all, it is often about communications and information management. While policy making is an action that governments make, in corporation with the nation in some countries, and while this process has a heavy weight in the scale of nation branding according to Simon Anholt, 2003, 2009, and 2011, the recent leaks over the past few years about some governments' activities in terms of surveillance and privacy in the nation have been under the spotlight. More and more attention has been given to the subject, especially after Snowden's leak of the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States, since then there have been some privacy concerns related to mass surveillance in some nations including, USA, Europe, UK, China, and other countries (Lyon, 2014). The paper explores how such activity could negatively affect a nation's reputable brand. This is by introducing mass surveillance concept and background, surveillance activities conducted by governments, and explore the given justifications of security, anti-crime, and terrorism, compare data and crime rate, and finally measure the credibility of the justification which in turn could positively or negatively influence a nation's brand and reputation.

Keywords: nation branding, county image, mass surveillance, governments' activities, nations' reputation

Resumo: A marca de um país compreende o conjunto de esforços realizado por governos, ocasionalmente em colaboração com o setor privado e agentes locais e/ou internacionais para comunicar uma imagem positiva sobre o país, a fim de ser percebida positivamente por outras nações e cidadãos estrangeiros, com o intuito da prosperidade política, social e económica. Embora a formulação de políticas seja uma ação que tem um peso importante na formulação da marca nacional (Anholt, 2003, 2009 e 2011), as fugas de informação recentes nos últimos anos, sobre as atividades de alguns governos em termos de vigilância e privacidade no país têm estado na mia da opinião pública mundial. Cada vez mais atenção tem sido dada ao assunto, especialmente após as revelações de Edward Snowden da National Security Agency (NSA) nos Estados Unidos e, desde então, tem havido muitas preocupações com a privacidade relacionadas com a vigilância em massa em alguns países, incluindo EUA, Europa, Reino Unido, China e outros (Lyon, 2014). Este artigo explora como tal atividade de vigilância massiva dos cidadãos pode afetar negativamente a marca e a reputação de um país. Com o conceito de vigilância em massa como plano de fundo, atividades de vigilância conduzidas por governos e a justificação dada de segurança, prevenção de crimes e terrorismo, foram comparados dados e taxas de criminalidade, de forma a medir a credibilidade dessas justificações que, por sua vez, podem influenciar positiva ou negativamente marca e reputação de uma nação.

Palavras-chave: branding territorial, imagem do país, vigilância em massa, controlo governamental, reputação do país

Introduction

Surveillance as a concept is defined as “systematic, routine, and focused attention to personal details for a given purpose such as management, influence, or entitlement” (Lyon, 2007, p. 2). When Snowden in June 2013 revealed the activities conducted by the United States Government — National Security Agency NSA agency in particular, together with the suspicious activities conducted by large corporations' surveillance operations, more and more attention has been paid to this subject (Lyon, 2014), in fact, Facebook the largest social media

platform has been charged multiple times of breaching trust and taking advantage of the users data for political, commercial, and social purposes. According to the Guardian newspaper Facebook was officially charged for conducting surveillance activities on users in 2018 (Caddwalladr & Harrison, 2018).

Snowden's leaks placed terms "bulk data" and "dragnet", "mass surveillance", "Big Data", and "state surveillance" under the international spotlight and privacy matters turned into an international case discussed by global media bodies with concerns from citizens from all over the world about privacy and freedom. As consequence, more and more studies have been conducted for privacy concerns including human rights organizations (Kathleen, 2016).

Furthermore, *Privacy International's* survey, "covering 47 countries, indicated that there had been an increase in surveillance and a decline in the performance of privacy safeguards, eight countries were rated as being 'endemic surveillance societies'. China, Malaysia and Russia scored lowest, followed jointly by Singapore and the United Kingdom, then jointly by Taiwan (Republic of China), Thailand and the United States (*Hosenball & Whitesides, 2013*).

Theoretical background

1. What is Big Data?

According to David Lyon (2014), Big Data suggests that size is its key feature. Massive quantities of data about people and their activities are indeed generated by big data practices and many corporate and government bodies wish to capitalize on what is understood as the Big Data boom.

Sources of data may be "thought of under three main headings each of which may be applied in surveillance contexts: directed, automated, and volunteered". Data in general includes calls, CCTV cameras, online personal use (internet browsing history) and other personal and private information about citizens (Kitchin, 2014, p. 1).

While exploring the type and amount of data monitored and perceived, the questions raised are overwhelming with no moral or effective answers from Governments, which brings citizens to the clear question by Snowden about the previous practices; "what kind of society do we want?" (Lupton, 2013).

"Mass surveillance is the intricate surveillance of an entire or a substantial fraction of a population in order to monitor that group of citizens" (Greere, 2020). This activity is carried out by government administrations, agencies, and/or private organizations to monitor citizens' activities through audio and/or video and/or data tracking. Regardless of the type of regimes, different governments called 'democratic' and the ones that are

the opposite are conducting similar activities within “legal” frameworks (Greere, 2020).

Since 2007, and according to *Privacy International*, more and more countries have increased the use of surveillance confronting a failure in the performance of privacy policies; this is in comparison with the past years. Throughout the world’s cities and capitals, millions of cameras are being added rapidly in all areas, back in 2007, Greece had the best rank in comparison with around 50 countries including, USA, UK, China, Russia, Thailand, Singapore, and many others (2007).

Furthermore, in 2013, a special report was issued exploring internet surveillance operations by ‘*Reporters Without Borders*’, the report highlighted the “grave violations of freedom” due to invasive monitoring activities conducted by the governments to monitor its citizens’ activities through internet monitoring and other data collected of other forms, the initial list of citizens freedom violation included Syria, Bahrain, Vietnam, China, and Iran.

The American Civil Liberties Union issued an article in 2013 warning the Americans from “a dark future where our every move, our every transaction, our every communication, and eventually our every thought, is recorded, compiled, and stored away, ready to be examined and used against us by the authorities whenever they want”, the article warned American citizens that the activity of mass surveillance will slowly be eliminating and freedom and democracy in the country, putting the United States to the same level of dictatorships and countries that lack democracy and free speech, this is sadly with the help of “Big corporations willing to become extensions of the surveillance state” (Edwards, 2013).

According to Eck & Hatz (2020), state surveillance, and other acts of data gathering, information management, and processing of personal and private data are “distinct tactics that are components of a more general strategy, which we label information control. Information control tactics differ in how control is achieved, as well as in the types of information that are controlled. A government may use these tactics individually or in tandem, and it may change its strategy over time”.

“State surveillance can include the monitoring of online activity, location tracking via Bluetooth or Global Positioning System (GPS), tracking financial transactions, video surveillance, facial scans, and the collection of biometric data” (Eck & Hatz, 2020).

The justification for any Government towards the act of surveillance is always linked to “security” and “fighting or anti-terrorism”, the answer is clear and ‘reasonable’ especially for those who are “pro surveillance advocates” (Conniry, 2016, p. 23). However, is it the real reason? If it was, is it solid enough to invade the privacy of citizens and to transfer a free country such as the United States into a dictatorship? (Edwards, 2013) Furthermore, through his article “*The Most Surveilled Cities in The World*”, Mathew Keegan explored the most surveilled cities in the world where data exposed that nine cities in China and London in the UK are the most surveilled cities on the planet (2020). Keegan also added that the world will be covered by more than one billion cameras by 2021 (2020).

In 2011, Adam Moore highlighted the “just trust us” concept, questioning and requesting to balance the importance of security on one hand and citizens’ privacy on the other. Moore examined the US Government’s reasons to perform surveillance, this includes security matters, terrorism, and safety of citizens, at the same time, Moore also invited the officials in “power” to take citizens privacy on a similar scale of importance due to constitutional, moral, and legal concerns (pp. 146 — 148).

2. Examples of Government Surveillance

2.1. China

On March second, 2021, The Center of Security and Emerging Technology published a paper on China’s latest surveillance program called “Sharp Eyes”, the program is aimed to monitor 100% of China’s population (*Gershgorn, 2021, p. 2*). *Greshgorn described the project’s background; it was launched in 2016 by the Government with the aim to have a full surveillance on its citizens by 2021, it is claimed that the project has reached its target. Furthermore, the data collected on Chinese citizens is not only from CCTV cameras, but also internet data, and other audio and visual data as a part of the whole “security” plan by the government to monitor the community. On the other hand, the clarification of why China has the highest number of cameras on the planet along with the most developed artificial intelligence software is due to the lack of number of police in Chinese towns, having almost “300 officers to every million citizens” therefore, the need for this program is severe to maintain security.*

*The article also described the future expansion of this five years plan to similar new one stating that more power and control will be given to governments through this program, China’s next five-year plan, which covers 2021 to 2025, places specific emphasis on giving social governance to local municipalities via the grid system, as well as building out even more security projects, to strengthen construction of the prevention and control system for public security. “This means the future of China’s surveillance apparatus likely looks a lot like Sharp Eyes: More power and social control given to local governments, so neighbors watch neighbors” (*Gershgorn, 2021, p. 4*).*

It is not surprising to know that the so called ‘police state’ conducts surveillance and spying activity on its citizens. Amongst other elements such as regime style and other policies internally China loses advanced positions in the nation brand rank despite being the world’s manufacturer and economy playground of the entire world, this is on top of not having a powerful weapon (media), which is controlled by its competitor USA. The United States is always highlighting China’s internal policies in a negative coverage, which in turn affects the Chinese global brand.

2.2. The United States of America

According to Conniry (2016, p. 4) “legislative acts and measures regarding US surveillance can be dated as far back on the country’s conception but took dramatic turns in the early 20th century in the advent of communication advancements and the onset of the two World Wars”. Focusing on the post 9/11 era and what happened inside the United States from mass surveillance acts, it was noticeable that the surveillance operations and the cooperation on gathering data between public agencies and government administrations have risen post the most famous attack in the century, these operations were conducted under the cover of security and anti-terrorism, especially after the war in both Afghanistan and Iraq, all types of surveillance, data collection, monitoring, email and phone calls wires/spying and other acts were committed (Conniry, 2016, p. 9). This, until date, has divided the nation into “pro surveillance advocates” and “anti-surveillance advocates” in the country, while the government is passing more laws to legalize the surveillance operations (Conniry, 2016).

While using all its global media arms and tools to promote itself as the land of freedom and the nation that respects human rights the most on this planet, adding to that its efforts to point out non-democratic activities conducted by other Governments such as Iran, Russia, China, and many others, the United States Government showed no difference in invading its citizens privacy similarly to nations that are called in US Media dictatorships. Such activities made different media and community segments internally criticize this act against the US Government, however, until date, no ‘serious’ action was made to prevent or stop surveillance and privacy invasion against US citizens, in fact, the procedure is expanding further. Such reputation has influenced the position of the United States globally in the eyes of people who believe in freedom and who come from backgrounds of respecting human rights and privacy.

While nation branding relies heavily on communications, and while the United States has access to and/or control over global media, more and more activists and communities are discovering that USA brand is gaining negative influence through the hypocrite action of pointing out surveillance activities other governments are conducting while using the excuse of anti-terrorism or security to validate its action.

3. The Pro-Surveillance Perspective

While the argument is on one hand exposing an act that is invasive by governments and affecting society’s freedom, Governments justified the mass surveillance activity as a procedure to fight crime, increase safety measurements, and fight terrorism.

One way to evaluate the ‘efforts’ in this case shall be evaluating the ‘level of security’ in the countries that have surveillance the most, how much surveillance cameras have helped to

prevent crime, fight terrorism, and defend society especially those societies that had privacy invasion issues.

Different global sources including global indexes were explored in order to evaluate the safety and security of nations. The most surveilled countries in the world China and UK did not appear in the top 10 safest cities in the world, the safest Chinese city Wuxi appeared on the table in the 14th rank. London, the 3rd most surveilled city on the planet according to Edwards in 2020 was in the 73rd rank according to statistics from UN on safety and security index, and *Hudsons security index*.

“*Hudson’s Index UK* collects data from United Nation Office on Drugs and Crimes, regional police department statistics, Security risk & Political risk Index, World Risk Index by United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human, and Global Peace Index” (2020).

This leads to a suggestion that perhaps the use of surveillance and data monitoring either did not achieve its target, or, that these activities are inefficient enough, this is due to the incompatible rank in terms of security and safety globally.

As a result, the theory arguing that the surveillance is changing democracies such as UK, USA, Europe and many other countries into dictatorships shall be relevant as a result of the current outcome, the questioning of the ‘real reason’ behind these monitoring procedures by governments is driving more individuals, organizations, and agencies to question the sincerity and efficiency.

When it comes to nation branding the competencies rely heavily on different aspects including the communications in the nation itself and external communications about this specific nation. According to Simon Anholt one of the major aspects for a good nation brand is internal policies and procedures that create confidence in the system (Anholt, 2009). However, with the current unjustified privacy invading activities conducted by most governments, the “system” is becoming controversial (Edwards, 2013).

4. Nation Branding

Before we start in the theory and background of nation branding, one question could clarify the concept for the reader, in terms of a country’s reputation.

What is the impression that comes to the mind when reading or hearing about these countries: Syria, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, UAE, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Mali, China, and Russia? On the other hand, what is the first idea that comes to the mind when reading or hearing about Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, Germany, Finland, and previously USA and UK? Whether the impression is negative or positive, it is important to highlight that the different perceptions built mentally while reading these questions are a consequence of a long-term

branding, communication, news, theory, political, social, and economic events, efforts, and operations conducted over the past few years.

It is argued academically and historically that nations have always had “brands”, “images”, and or “reputations”, even before the formal birth of the term nation branding (Olins, 2002). It is believed that the current practices of nation branding are only a logical continuation of a historical and long-standing process (Anholt & Hildreth, 2004).

Whether the nation has built its own brand, developed purposely, or formed by local or foreign source such as word of mouth, trade, travel, international media, and or history, the nation’s brand or image “concept” has always been there since the beginning of history (Loo & Davies, 2006, p. 198).

Simon Anholt, being the pioneer of this field, argued at different places (Anholt, 2007, 2009), that the nation branding concept can be used to achieve national competitiveness through developing and increasing the nation brand equity, all they need to do is aligning their efforts to improve the identity and image of the nation through the application of strategic management.

4.1. Internal Policy Making (Government’s internal procedures in the nation)

Simon Anholt defined nation branding as “the systematic process of aligning the actions, behaviors, investments, innovations and communications of a country around a clear strategy for achieving a strengthened competitive identity”; Anholt arguably gives the majority of value in nation branding on policy making and internal practices (2011, p. 12). According to Stahlberg and Bolin (2016), if the nation is constructed as a collective community in relation to political legitimacy and citizenship, it becomes a competitive brand in a challenging global economy today. Kungman (1996) remarked that there is a “crucial different” between large organizations or a company, and a nation, therefore, the weight of policy and or communication is still arguable between the researchers. Furthermore, Nye (2004) also believed that the Soviet Union had a great deal of soft power and reputation, however, it all declined due to its brutal internal policies

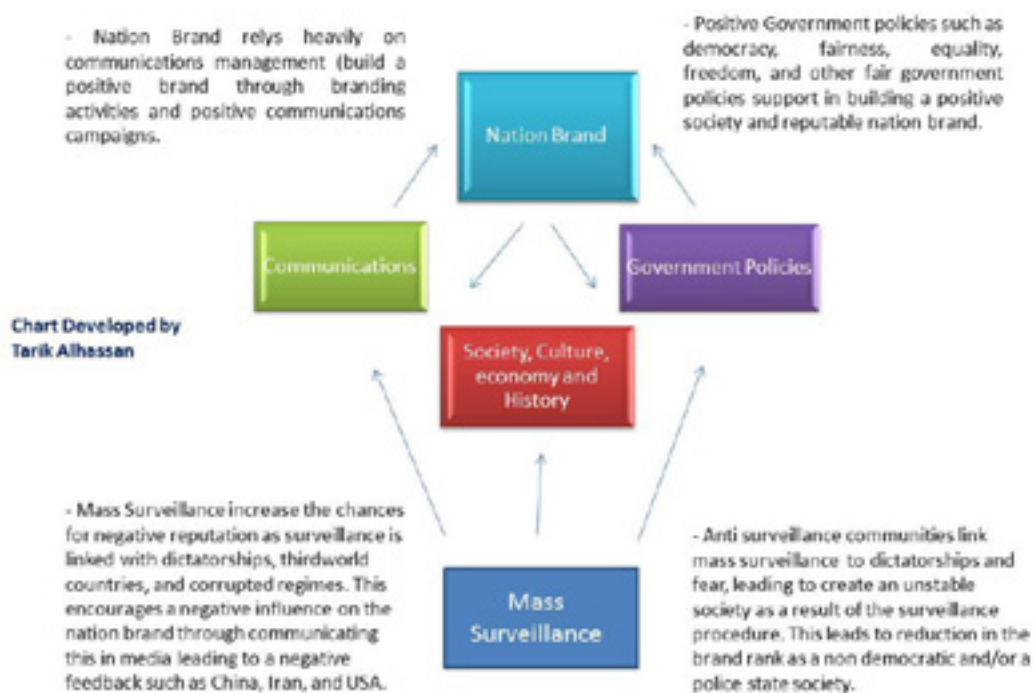
4.2. Policy Making versus Communications power on shaping nation’s brand:

Although some authors’ trend is pro-policy making for a better nation brand such as Simon Anholt, Bolin, and Sahlberg and others, there are, on the other hand, authors such as Kotler, Gudjonsson, that believe in the importance of communications. According to Gudjonsson (2005), the definition of nation branding is concerned with image promotion and

image promotion is identified as the ultimate goal. The same author believes that nation branding occurs when a government or a private company uses its power to persuade whoever has the ability to change a nation’s image. The “persuasion” is through communication tools to “alter” the image of a nation and or change the perspective, stereotype, or impression about a particular nation positively, this is with the ambition of achieving political, financial, and or political objectives According to O’shaughnessy (2000), some are cautious to see the applicability of nations as brands when it is “commonly accepted”.

4.3. How Would Mass Surveillance Influence a Nation’s Brand?

The relationship can be determined through the following chart, the information on mass surveillance and nation branding main pillars (communications + government policies) have been collected, studied, and analyzed, and potentially, the following relationship is found:



In the case of a nation having a negative reputation due to unethical practices by governments including tightening freedom, surveillance, spying on citizens, dictatorships, corruption, and or extreme cases when governments kill their own citizens due to freedom of speech, this can create a negative word of mouth, negative communications, and indeed it is a result of a negative government policy, in this case the outcome is not positive.

The example of the United States in terms of its way of promoting itself as the land of freedom and respect for humanity is no longer valid after Snowden's leaks. While the United States publicly criticizes nations such as Iran, China, and Russia for oppressing citizens and deprivation of freedom, the United States did lose a lot of credibility internally and externally due to its lack of sincerity.

According to *The Cato Institute* (2020) the United States and the UK didn't make it in top 10 nations of human freedom rank in the past years. Therefore, having the US, UK, and other European countries in low ranks when it comes to freedom, democracy, and or human rights, this automatically reduces the "soft power" mentioned earlier as a gain of a 'positive nation brand', the US shall no longer point a finger at China, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and / or any other government in issues related to these subjects when they are not reputable in the field.

Conclusion

Mass surveillance practices by governments (democratic or dictatorships) have massively increased over the past few years, some were conducted secretly in governments claiming to be democratic (UK and USA) and this was exposed through the famous Snowden's leaks. Other practices are so openly announced by governments creating full nation surveillance programs such as the Sharp Eyes Program in China. While 'security' is the usual answer for such activities, and this answer is supported by pro-surveillance advocates, others find it invasive and an unacceptable exercise in democratic countries giving an impression that these democracies are turning into police states, as a result, losing a lot of its credibility as a nation and therefore lose an advance location due to the reputation of these acts.

The point of conducting efforts of having a good nation brand is to successfully gain soft power, international investors, skilled immigrants, tourists, and many other benefits (Kungman, 1999). When the country starts to have a reputation of oppression or governments with negative reputation, this shall negatively influence the efforts to shine as a good brand.

Although the subject does not have any theory to support this link, however, the link between both can be tracked in the policy making and communications segments. Communications and policy making seem to be the main pillars in nation branding, governments with spying, surveillance, and monitoring, and or any other term given to this practice seem to gain negative reputation, when this reputation is linked to a country, this also shall reduce the appeal about that country in terms of visitors, tourists, investors, and / or skilled immigrants. Iran, North Korea, and China for instance are famous for their surveillance activities; as a result, this was reflected on the brand North Korea, Iran or China.

An American colleague found this topic interesting in terms of the relationship between surveillance and nation branding and voluntarily shared her experience while

visiting North Korea, stating that although seeing surveillance cameras is normal in Europe, however, the way and the amount of cameras in North Korea in public and private spots gave an impression of a “police state” and this definitely would stop her from visiting the country again and would rather to volunteer to teach English in other countries where feeling safer and “less monitored”.

Again, the relationship might not be a solid cause and effect type however communicating such information about countries would play a huge role in nation or place branding. When tourists visit a city and they find it welcoming, safe, and free, a recommendation will be made to their social network with an advice to visit this city; the same will happen when the experience is negative, North Korea case mentioned earlier can be a relevant example for countries aiming to recruit tourists, investors, talented immigrants and these are some of the main gains for a good nation brand along with other political and economic influence.

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