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Nation Branding in the European Union: the role of Covid-19

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Abstract – This research examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Nation Branding of the European Union through the analysis of its digital diplomacy. On the one hand, the importance of public communication in the information age, the economic and political outcomes of image management and social media as a new strategic tool justify the social relevance of this paper. On the other hand, this work participates in the debate between the concepts of soft power, nation branding, public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. Moreover, if some research has been done in this field, its application to the supranational level and the impact of Covid-19 has not received much attention. Therefore, this research examines the following research question: To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic strengthen or weaken the EU's Nation Branding? Using data gathered from Twitter on the European External Action Service account from the 1st of December 2019 to the 19th of June 2020, this research provides a study of the European Union's approach to Nation Branding during the pandemic. The content analysis presents a classification of the Tweets according to the 4-D Model and the Dialogic Engagement categories. Results show (1) an increase in the number of tweets, (2) a majority of content aimed at informing the public on economic and political matters, (3) an increase of posts promoting European norms and values during Covid-19, and (4) an essentially one-way communication. The analysis suggests that the European Union adopts a coherent but essentially informative digital communication.

Keywords: National Brand, Image Management, Digital Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Public Relations, Soft Power, EEAS, Twitter, Social Media, Political Communication, Communication Management

1. Introduction

Concerned by the increasing spread of Covid-19, the World Health Organization – WHO – calls this disease a pandemic for the first time on the 11th of March 2020 (WHO, 2020; Gygax, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 383). This decision led to numerous public reactions. On the Twitter accounts of the different European institutions, one can observe messages advocating solidarity in times of health crisis. "The Coronavirus is a global crisis and requires cooperation (…)" the European Commission tweeted on the 12th of March 2020. This is but one example of how digitalization has impacted public communication. This paper explores this topic through the notions of public diplomacy, nation branding and digital communication during a crisis. Moreover, one can wonder about the role that the pandemic has played in the (re)shaping of the European Union's nation branding. More precisely, the research question guiding this paper is the following: *To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic strengthen or weaken the European Union's Nation Branding?*

The advent of the internet and the information age accentuate global interconnectedness (Olson, 2013, pp.219). On the one hand, globalization allowed to reduce communication barriers (Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.137; Semetko, 2009, pp.639). On the other hand, this phenomenon has made the world comparable to a big market (Anholt, 2007, pp.1). In this context, the reputation of a country, region or city plays a decisive role in its economic, social, political and cultural development (Anholt, 2007, pp.8-9). Nation Branding is a concept that meets these ideas of image and reputation management (Elmatzoglou, 2020, pp.329). Fan (2010, pp.6) defines it as « a process by which a nation's images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience ». Therefore, it is closely linked to the concept of public diplomacy. Introduced in 1965 by E.Gullion (Cotton, 2019, pp.52; Cull, 2013, pp.128; Lequesne, 2012, pp.9), it is defined as the national strategic communication with a global public to meet foreign policy objectives (Cotton, 2019, pp.52; Cull, 2013, pp.128). Therefore, digital diplomacy is public diplomacy on social media. This paper considers that public diplomacy is a sub-category of nation branding. Although public diplomacy acts with a foreign policy objective, it contributes to the development of a positive image of a place and thus serves the objectives of nation branding. Indeed, both notions are based on the development and management of an international reputation. However, crisis communication can alter a place's reputation (Gygax, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is considered in this paper as an atypical (Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.135) crisis requiring unprecedented internal and

external public communication (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 382). This research aims to shed light on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the nation branding of the European Union through the analysis of its digital diplomacy.

This research question is interesting to investigate for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it appears to be substantively relevant for two reasons. First, it seems that this research is interesting for political reasons. Indeed, this paper deals with the issue of managing the image of a place for attractiveness purposes. And as Wang & Roy (2021, pp.87) state "image is the basis of political legitimacy". Being interested in the raison d'être and the construction of the European identity contributes to the European project and its internal and external legitimacy (Van Ham, 2005, pp.125). Second, this research is important for socio-economic reasons. Indeed, the idea behind nation branding is the economic attractiveness resulting from adequate image management. Its management in times of crisis then determines future gains or losses for the population. On the other hand, it is theoretically relevant for two reasons. This research is part of the debate between public diplomacy and nation branding. More specifically, while these two concepts are increasingly attracting scholarly attention (Andreja, 2018, pp.45-50; Fan, 2010, pp.2; Gilboa, 2008, pp.67), the link between them seems vague and contradictory in the literature (Szondi, 2008, pp.14-30; Gilboa, 2008, pp.67). Therefore, this research participates to define the contours of those concepts. Moreover, this paper helps to fill two gaps. Firstly, while the impact of different types of a crisis on a place's nation branding has been studied (Manor & Crilley, 2018, pp.370; Avraham, 2009, pp.203; Pamment, Olofsson & Hjorth-Jenssen, 2017, pp.327; Olson, 2013, pp.223), little attention has been paid to Covid-19. Yet, this is a particular form of crisis and pandemic. Secondly, some studies have looked at the characteristics of the EU's nation branding and its problems (Van Ham, 2008, pp.136; Duke, 2013, pp.115; Ematzoglou, 2020, pp.328; Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.135). However, not a single study – to our knowledge – has explored the possibility that Covid-19 has impacted the EU's nation branding.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first section presents the theoretical background. In the first part, the links between the dependent variable and (1) public diplomacy, (2) digital diplomacy, (3) the European Union – EU – (4) crisis management and (5) the Covid-19 pandemic will be addressed. The second part underlines that studying the impact that Covid-19 has on the Nation Branding of the EU is interesting for at least two academic reasons. The third part presents and justifies the two hypotheses. The first claims that the EU's

communication before and during the first wave of Covid-19 differs substantially while the second states that the EU did not offer opportunities for dialogic engagement before, and even less during the pandemic. The second section aims to discuss the research design. The EU's public diplomacy is studied through the gathering of the European External Action Service's – EEAS - tweets from the 1st of December 2019 to the 18th of June 2020. The data is then classified according to the 4-D Model and the Dialogic Engagement categories. In what follows, the research question will be answered by using the content analysis research method. The third section will present the results. There is (1) an increase in the number of tweets, (2) a majority of content aimed at informing the public on economic and political matters, (3) an increase in the number of posts promoting European norms and values during covid-19, and (4) an essentially one-way communication. The last section aims to provide the interpretations and conclude the paper. By comparing the results before and during the pandemic, the coherent but essentially one-way communication can be interpreted as participating partially in an optimal nation branding at the European level. The conclusion highlights the limitations and contributions of the research.

2. Theoretical Framework

Part 1: Phenomena of interest

This first part aims to identify previous research concerned with nation branding. Five key subtopics have been identified. There are (1) public diplomacy, (2) digital diplomacy, (3) the European Union (4) crisis management and (5) the Covid-19 pandemic. It is structured as follows. For each element of interest, three explanatory elements are identified before specifying how this paper contributes to the scientific literature.

The first element of interest concerns the relation between nation branding and public diplomacy. Three factors were identified. These are the defining elements of nation branding and public diplomacy, the common characteristics and the differences between the two concepts.

In the scientific literature, there is a plurality of definitions of nation branding. However, they seem to include five similar characteristics. This concept (1) mixes different disciplines, (2) argues that places compete, (3) emphasizes the importance of having a positive image with a foreign population, and (4) involves both the public and private sector in the development and maintenance of this image (Elmatzoglou, 2020, pp.329; Pamment, Olofsson & Hjorth-Jenssen,

2017, pp.328; Anholt, 2007, pp.27-28). For this reason, this paper considers the notion of Nation Branding as defined by Fan (2010, pp.6): "a process by which a nation's images can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience". This concept is closely related to public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is defined as the strategic communication of a government in order to positively change the image of its country (Avraham, 2009, pp.203; Cotton, 2019, pp.52; Harris, 2013, pp.18; Jerdén & Al., 2021, pp.6). According to Lequesne (2012, pp.10), public diplomacy has four functions. There are (1) the broadcast of information to the society, (2) the sharing of information through media (3) the two-way communication and (4) the cultural exchanges.

One can see that these two concepts share common characteristics. Firstly, the development and management of a positive national image are at the heart of nation branding and public diplomacy (Pamment & Al., 2017, pp.328; Gilboa, 2008, pp.68; Jerdén & Al., 2021, pp.6; Manor, 2017, pp.311; Anholt, 2007, pp.8-9; Lee & Kim, 2021, pp.384). The 4D model is commonly used for comparative studies. It identifies four dimensions that a country's image has. These are the functional, normative, aesthetic and emotional dimensions (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015, pp.109, pp.115). Secondly, both concepts are soft power tools because they promote interests through attraction (Cotton, 2019, pp.55; Lequesne, 2022, pp.32; Fan, 2010, pp.4; Lee & Kim, 2021, pp.382; Bjola & Jiang, 2015, pp.74; Pamment & Al., 2017, pp.328; Semetko, 2009, pp.641; Gilboa, 2008, pp.61; Melissen, 2005, pp.3). J.Nye (2004, in Van Ham, 2008, pp.126) defines it as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. ... Soft power derives from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies." Therefore, both concepts are about influencing through a positive and consistent image (Fan, 2010, pp.6; Harris, pp.19). Thirdly, these two concepts imply communication with multiple stakeholders (Fan, 2010, pp.6; Lequesne, 2012, pp.9; Lequesne, 2022, pp.33; Gilboa, 2008, pp.62). They require both public and private actors to participate in this process through a two-way communication (Lequesne, 2012, pp.10; Manor, 2017, pp.310; Olson, 2013, pp.220; Gilboa, 2008, pp.65).

The concepts of nation branding and public diplomacy differ in two ways. First, they have two different objectives. While nation branding strategies have an economic objective, public diplomacy strategies aim at foreign policy (Andreja, 2018, pp.51; Pamment & Al., 2017, pp.328; Gilboa, 2008, pp.68; Harris, 2013, pp.18). Second, while nation branding and public

diplomacy involve both private and public actors, nation branding requires greater coordination between actors (Melissen, 2005, pp.22; Anholt, 2007, pp.26). Indeed, as a private actor, nation branding involves both individuals and companies, whereas public diplomacy is only aimed at individuals. This is why, as Szondi (2008, pp.14-30) points out, there are five ways of articulating nation branding and public diplomacy in the literature. They can be considered as two concepts that (1) are fundamentally different or (2) reflect exactly the same reality or (3) share some but not all characteristics or (4) consider nation branding as a subcategory of public diplomacy or (5) the other way around. This paper considers that public diplomacy is a sub-category of nation branding.

This paper contributes to the literature in the following way. As the concepts of nation branding and public diplomacy are relatively new (Fan, 2010, pp.2), there does not seem to be a consensus on their relationship. This research considers both nation branding and public diplomacy as soft power tools. Moreover, public diplomacy is interpreted as a subcategory of nation branding. Indeed, although they have different objectives, by serving its foreign policy purpose, public diplomacy serves the economic purpose of nation branding. Therefore, this paper focuses on the political dimension of nation branding, through the concept of public diplomacy.

The second element of interest concerns the notions of nation branding and public diplomacy in the digital age. The evolution of diplomacy with modernity, social media as a new strategic tool and the advantage and drawbacks of digital diplomacy on nation branding are the three explanatory factors discussed below.

The emergence of new technologies is changing diplomatic practice (Barrinha & Renard, 2017, pp.354). Potter (2002-2003, in Gilboa, 2008, pp.58) cited the following changes: the increased importance of public opinion, the rise of more intrusive and global media, increased global transparency, and the rise of a global culture leading to a reflexive desire to protect cultural diversity. New public diplomacy is then the adjustment of public diplomacy to this context of modernity (Olson, 2013, pp.220; Gilboa, 2008, pp.58; Manor, 2017, pp.309). In the literature, there is some confusion between the terms cyber diplomacy, diplomacy 2.0, public diplomacy 2.0, digital diplomacy, net diplomacy and social media diplomacy. These terms are used interchangeably (Manor, 2016, pp.1). For the sake of this paper, the following distinction is done. The first category – cyber diplomacy – refers to "the use of diplomatic

resources and the performance of diplomatic functions to secure national interests with regard to the cyberspace" (Barrinha & Renard, 2017, pp.355). Terms such as cyber diplomacy and diplomacy 2.0 are dealing with issues arising in cyberspace (Attatfa, Renaud & De Paoli, 2020, pp.61). Cybersecurity, cybercrime, confidence-building, internet freedom and internet governance are its main challenges. The second category – digital diplomacy – is "the use of new technologies and social media by diplomats, in the context of their traditional activities" (Barrinha & Renard, 2017, pp.356). Terms such as digital diplomacy, public diplomacy 2.0, net diplomacy and social media diplomacy fit into this second category. This paper is concerned with the latter. Therefore, digital diplomacy is interpreted here as public diplomacy on social media.

Social media can be understood as a new tool of communication. The Internet made it easier for politicians to communicate with the foreign public (Ingenhoff, Calamai, & Sevin, 2021, pp.1). Therefore, as Lequesne (2012, pp.10) notes, the nature of the information is unchanged. However, the way it is broadcast has evolved. There are certain characteristics of the way it communicates that are unique to it. First, the speed of communication is increasing (Cotton, 2019, pp.52; Lequesne 2012, pp.10). The facilitation of communication makes social media a new strategic political instrument (Harris, 2013, pp.17). To traditional mass media channels such as radio, television and newspapers (Manor, 2017, pp.309), social networks are added. Secondly, more actors are involved than in traditional diplomacy. The internet brings together different and diverse actors (Attatfa & Al., 2020, pp.61; Cull, 2013, pp.125; Barrinha & Renard, 2017, pp.355; DAŞLI, 2019, pp.243; Ingenhoff & Al., 2021, pp.1; Lequesne 2012, pp.10; Manor, 2016, pp.3). Third, there is a shift from one-way to two-way communication (Harris, 2013, pp.18; Cotton, 2019, pp.56; Manor, 2016, pp.3). Manor (2017, pp.309) refers to the paradigm shift from 'diffusion' to 'communication'. Moreover, communication is now said to be symmetrical (Cotton, 2019, pp.56). There is a willingness not only to discuss but also to respond with actions to the outcomes of the discussion. Social media not only facilitate communication but also allow individuals to interact, share and engage in discussions (Bjola & Jiang, 2015, pp.71). The engagement of different types of actors is therefore the innovative element of social networks. Taylor and Kent (2014, p.391) theorized engagement in public relations through the notion of dialogic engagement. They identify the following five required elements: (1) understanding the context and key issues up front; (2) demonstrating a positive view of stakeholders; (3) interacting outside of an immediate problem; (4) interacting on a

shared problem; and (5) recognizing the interdependence between actors and taking collaborative action.

The use of social networks as a tool of public diplomacy - digital diplomacy - represents a strategic advantage as well as risks for nation branding. On the one hand, it reinforces - or reduces - the nation branding of a place. Indeed, Harris (2013, pp.18) points out that "the use of social media has enabled political entities to engage in branding". Digital diplomacy is involved in the creation, evaluation and evolution of the nation's image (Andreja, 2018, pp.47; Avraham, 2009, pp.203). On the other hand, a loss of total control over the message can be seen. As Cull (2013, pp.137) points out, the use of social media for diplomatic purposes has only developed belatedly. The reason for this is that governments have risk-averse behaviour and digital messages are not completely controlled by countries (Ingenhoff &Al., 2021, pp.2). Indeed, digital diplomacy deals with an unpredictable online audience (Manor, 2016, pp.6).

In light of the above, this paper contributes to the literature in two ways. First, one can see a clear distinction between cyber diplomacy and digital diplomacy. By making this distinction and dealing only with digital diplomacy, this paper helps to clarify the contours of this new term. Secondly, the first element of interest has established that nation branding and public diplomacy are both soft power tools and that public diplomacy is a subcategory of nation branding. Digital diplomacy defined as public diplomacy on social media is then included in public diplomacy. Therefore, studying nation branding through this concept is a way to refine the field of research and add precision to the existing literature.

The third element of interest concerns the study of nation branding at the European level. The literature shows how the application of nation branding to the European Union is suitable, describes EU nation branding, and presents the obstacles to EU nation branding.

The EU is not a nation but a community of member states (Van Ham, 2008, pp.136). However, scholars argue that applying the concept of nation branding to the European level is appropriate. As Elmatzoglou (2020, pp.327) states, the European Union is a supranational entity having some decision-making power. This characteristic requires some legitimacy that can - partially - be built through nation branding. Indeed, any territorial entity finds its interests in nation branding (Gilboa, 2008, pp.67). At the European level, it is a question of reinforcing its internal and external legitimacy by (1) building a sense of European belonging that goes beyond

the founding myth based on peace and (2) reinforcing European credibility and attractiveness vis-à-vis the world (Van Ham, 2005, pp.126). Therefore, the application of this concept to the European Union appears to be adequate.

Some academics have described the nation branding of the EU. The European Union has logos - i.e. flag, currency, European events, etc. -, shared values and history, and an original political style that makes it identifiable on the international scene (Van Ham, 2008, pp.136; Duke, 2013, pp.115). These contribute to the construction of its nation branding. According to Elmatzoglou (2020, pp.328), in recent years, the communication of the EU has shifted from communication campaigns focused on politicized issues to a branding strategy. The focus has then evolved to communicating the EU's positive achievements - i.e. EU investments, EU funding projects, regional policy, internal security, prosperity, and solidarity - in order to build a stronger identity and brand. However, EU branding is less about knowing about the EU and more about having a positive image of the EU (Van Ham, 2005, pp.126). Thus, it is an unfinished process lacking real raison d'être (Van Ham, 2008, pp. 137).

Three elements in the literature can be identified as obstacles to European nation branding. They are based on the idea that the lack of clarity of an internal European brand leads to confusion at the external level. The lack of a strong European identity leads to confusion by foreign populations between Europe as a continent and the European Union (Anholt, 2007, pp.115-116). Firstly, there is a large European diversity (Elmatzoglou, 2020, pp.331). The population of the European Union is culturally, economically and socially diverse. Second, there is a lack of a coherent message in the establishment of an image (Elmatzoglou, 2020, pp.329-331; Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.135; Duke, 2013, pp.116). The message transmitted by the European Union is not homogeneous among its institutions and even, in some cases, contradictory with its member states. Third, the EU's communication is essentially top-down. Although it attempts to move towards a more participatory model (Elmatzoglou, 2020, pp.326), it still does not meet the criteria of two-way and symmetrical communication (Duke, 2013, pp.116). According to Cotton (2019, pp.62), the EU's limited interactions can be explained by the dilemma between acting secretly - to have an efficient negotiation capacity - and being transparent - to serve political legitimacy.

The contribution of this paper to the scientific literature on nation branding at the European level is based on the following element. Although some scholars have focused on the

European level, one can observe that the supranational level has not received much attention and remains relatively limited. Studying at the European level, therefore, helps to fill this gap in the literature.

The fourth element of interest concerns the study of nation branding during a crisis. Defining the concept of crisis, the crisis communication management and the use of social media during a crisis are the three explanatory factors.

First, one can wonder about the definition of a crisis. The threat, surprise, and short response time are three elements defining the notion of crisis (Olson, 2013, pp.220). Parsons (1996, in Avraham, 2009, pp.203) distinguishes three types of crisis. There are (1) immediate crises, (2) emerging crises and (3) sustained crises. This paper is concerned with the third kind of crisis characterized by its long-lasting character.

Second, there are questions about managing communication in times of crisis. Olsson (2013) identifies three tasks to be fulfilled in communication crisis management. These are to make sense of the event, to address a target audience and to construct and disseminate a message. Scholars agree that a long-term communication strategy is required during a crisis for the management of the crisis as well as for (re)gaining its reputation. A long-term communication strategy required consistent, coherent and coordinated communication (Andreja, 2018, pp.51). Two elements explain why this type of communication is necessary in times of crisis. First, it is about sharing a shared sense of the event (Gygax, 2020). This element is essential in order to legitimize the actions put in place in crisis management and to ensure their proper implementation. Moreover, only a long-term strategy, consistent with the pre-crisis situation, will ensure the strengthening of identity. Second, the literature on nation branding in times of crisis emphasizes the need to restore a positive image. Lee & Kim (2021, pp. 384) speak of "repairing reputational damage". Avraham (2009, pp.205-209) identifies strategies to restore a country's positive image. There are (1) source-focused strategies; (2) message-focused strategies; (3) audience-focused strategies. This scholar also underlines how the internet can play a decisive role.

Third, the use of social media during a crisis appears to be essential. Cyberspace has some interesting features compared to traditional media such as being an alternative to media, targeting an audience or presenting the story as the sender of a message wanted (Avraham,

2009, pp.207). Social media can then be interpreted as a strategic crisis communication tool (Olson, 2013, pp.220). Indeed, it is an efficient line of communication in times of crisis (Harris, 2013, pp.24; Manor & Crilley, 2018, pp.386).

This paper contributes to the scientific literature on nation branding in times of crisis by studying a new type of crisis. Indeed, numerous studies have addressed public diplomacy in times of crisis or conflict (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 384). The contexts of war (Manor & Crilley, 2018, pp.370), long term conflict (Avraham, 2009, pp.203), refugee crisis (Pamment & Al., 2017, pp.327) and protests (Olson, 2013, pp.223) have already attracted the attention of scholars. However, nation branding of a place during a health crisis and more specifically a pandemic has very limited literature.

The fifth element of interest concerns the study of nation branding during the covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 as an atypical crisis, nation branding during Covid-19 and the EU's communication during Covid-19 are the three types of research shedding light on the topic of this paper.

First, Covid-19 is an atypical crisis (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 382; Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.135) requiring unprecedented communication. On the one hand, Covid-19 is a new challenge for diplomatic practices (Attatfa & Al., 2020, pp.61). Indeed, it is a crisis capable of halting all social, political, and economic activities (Gygax, 2020) with border closures, lockdowns, and social distancing (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp.382). As Wang (2020) states, public diplomacy has evolved with the pandemic. Digital capabilities and strategic thinking are now central issues. On the other hand, Covid-19 represents a new challenge regarding the image of a place. Indeed, by definition, it is a crisis. Therefore, there is an opportunity to gain a better reputation or lose its positive image through the communication of internal crisis management (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 384). Following the same logic, the influence of foreign discourse on the national brand image was studied. China used a double strategy. Indeed, it is a discourse of influence on its impeccable national management of the crisis and the criticism of the European management (Wang & Roy, 2021, pp. 87). It is therefore a strategy aimed at restoring the positive image of one country at the expense of the other.

Second, some authors have focused on establishing criteria for successful public diplomacy during the pandemic. Gygax (2020), Lee & Kim (2021, pp. 392) and Wang (2020)

all emphasize the importance of correspondence between the message to the actions taken; coordination between communication actors; international cooperation; and establishing a long-term strategy to build trust. To this, Gygax (2020) adds the creation of a shared feeling of the crisis to reinforce common values.

Third, few researchers have focused on the European issue. From the literature, it appears that the communication of the European Union during the Covid-19 crisis is characterized by two elements. These are the lack of communication and the lack of solidarity. First, it seems that the emergency - characterizing a crisis - did not prevent the EU to act but to communicate efficiently (Gygax, 2020). Second, Covid-19 reinforces European heterogeneity. Indeed, there is a lack of visible solidarity measures between member states. Therefore, one can observe a lack of unity (Gygax, 2020; Wang & Roy, 2021, pp.87).

Studying nation branding during the covid-19 crisis is interesting for the following reason. Being a recent and even ongoing phenomenon, few scholars have focused on this field of research. Indeed, while China's public diplomacy (Jerdén, Rühlig, Seaman & Turcsányi, 2021, pp.7), South Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding (Lee & Kim, 2021, pp. 385) and the United States' public diplomacy (Wang, 2020) during the pandemic have been studied, not a single study - to our knowledge - has explored the possibility that Covid-19 had an impact on the EU's nation branding. Moreover, this topic seems all the more relevant to study during a pandemic. In this regard, Lee & Kim (2021) state that "in pandemics, public health outcomes are not the only variables at play. National brands and country influence are also at play.".

Part 2: Academic relevance

This second part aims to recall the contributions of this paper to the scientific literature. The literature presented in *part 1* has underlined some gaps and debates in the scientific discourse. Therefore, the question of the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic strengthens or weakens the EU's national brand is relevant for at least two reasons.

First, this research is part of some conceptual debates. The first element of interest underlined the debate between nation branding and public diplomacy. There is no consensus about their relationship. This paper considers that by serving its foreign policy goal, public diplomacy serves the economic goal of nation branding. Therefore, public diplomacy is a sub-category of nation branding. The second element of interest identified some semantic confusion

in the understanding of digital diplomacy. Moreover, it presented how nation branding, public diplomacy and digital diplomacy are intertwined. It appears that digital diplomacy is a sub-category of public diplomacy which itself is a sub-category of nation branding. Therefore, this research participates to define the contours of concepts.

Second, this research helps to fill some gaps in the scientific literature. The third element of interest showed that the supranational level has not received much attention when it comes to nation branding. It is then a matter of adopting a new level of analysis. If nation branding has been studied in times of different crises, the pandemic crisis literature remains limited, demonstrating the fourth element of interest. Studying a new type of crisis can be then interesting. Moreover, as the fifth element of interest indicates, the Covid-19 is a special type of pandemic that appears to be relevant to the analysis. However, no study - to our knowledge - has explored the possibility that Covid-19 had an impact on the EU's nation branding. Therefore, this research participates with some originality to the scientific literature by analyzing a special context and an understudied level of analysis.

Part 3: Causal Mechanism

This third part aims to present two hypotheses based on the theories presented in *part 1*. They both shed light on the impact that Covid-19 has had on the European Union's Nation Branding.

The first hypothesis is based on the three following ideas. Firstly, one can argue that there is a lack of communication from the institutions during the pandemic. This is due to the position of the European Union. Indeed, the treaties do not grant the Union competence in health matters (Coron & Sauviat, 2020, pp.91). Secondly, it can also be argued that there is a lack of consistency in the message that the EU provides (Wodak, 2021, pp.346). Member states are only loosely coordinated in their management of the crisis. Adopting a single message at the EU level could therefore be interpreted as taking a stand. Thirdly, the pandemic accentuates socio-economic gaps. Therefore, the crisis tends to widen identity gaps between the Member States. Faced with an increasingly heterogeneous audience, the EU then adapts its discourse. These three elements do not contribute to the construction of coherent content between the pre-crisis and the crisis. However, the literature considers this element as a key element of nation branding. Therefore, the first hypothesis is the following: The EU's communication before and during the first wave of Covid-19 differ substantially.

The second hypothesis is based on the two following ideas. Firstly, one can argue that the EU is risk-averse. By definition, digital diplomacy implies the loss of full control over the message sent. Indeed, it requires a two-way and symmetrical communication between the sender and the receivers of the message. Secondly, the European Union can be considered as an organization with problems related to bureaucracy. Therefore, it is a change-resistant organization. For this reason, the adaptation of diplomatic practice to the digital age is slow. If institutions are equipped with new digital tools, they do not necessarily adapt to their good practices. That is why, they act more according to the criteria of traditional diplomacy than digital diplomacy on social networks. These two elements justify the idea that EU communication is essentially top-down. It is essentially informative, and it does not offer opportunities for individual to engage in a discussion. One could expect the Covid-19 crisis to reinforce this phenomenon. One might therefore expect to observe even less two-way communication and even more asymmetrical communication between the period preceding the crisis and the crisis itself. Therefore, the second hypothesis is the following: The EU did not offer opportunities for dialogic engagement before, and even less during the pandemic.

3. Research Design

The objective of this second section is to present, describe, and justify the methodology used to study the impact of Covid-19 on the nation branding of the European Union. In order to test the two hypotheses, this paper studies the European External Action Service – EEAS – Twitter account from the 1st of December 2019 to the 19th of June 2020. Therefore, below are presented successively the case study, the data collection and the methodology.

First, this paper studies the nation branding of the European Union using the European External Action Service – EEAS – as a single case study. It is therefore a small n design. This institution was created by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 (de Carvalho & Al., 2016, pp.21; Duke, 2013, pp.113) and was formally established on the 1st of January 2011 (European Union External Action, 2021). This diplomatic service aims to bring coherence and efficiency to the European Union's foreign policy (de Carvalho & Al., 2016, pp.25; European Union, 2022).

Three elements justify the added value of the literature on studying the EEAS. First, it is a relatively new institution. Although there are some studies on the EEAS, the literature seems relatively limited. Therefore, this study provides new explanatory and analytical elements. Second, it is a service that is - historically - at the intersection between different institutions.

Indeed, the High Representative takes over the diplomatic functions previously performed by the Secretary-General of the Council, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commissioner for External Relations (Duke, 2013, pp.118). Third, the EEAS takes on the main role of coordinating and disseminating key messages of the EU's external action (Duke, 2013, pp.5). Therefore, it can be understood as a source of new public diplomacy and, more generally, of nation branding. Because of time and money constraints, only one institution can be analyzed in this paper. That is the reason why choosing the EEAS makes sense regarding the three elements mentioned above.

The relevance of the EEAS on social media can be justified as follow. As Duke (2013, pp. 6) states "the EEAS recognized the rising importance of social media and has accordingly established accounts." Indeed, this department has had a Twitter account since October 2009. It follows 1,003 accounts and is followed by 413.3k people (Twitter, 2022). Based on the analysis of the last 3,200 tweets of the EEAS account, more than 6 tweets per day are posted (Vicinitas, 2022). That is the reason why it seems that the EEAS has an active Twitter account and that it is used to meet the strategic objectives of digital diplomacy. Studying the nation branding of the European Union through the analysis of the EEAS Twitter account is therefore very appropriate.

Second, the data used for the analysis came from the European External Action Service's Twitter account from the 1st of December 2019 to the 19th of June 2020. Below are presented justifications for the choice of the use of social media, the use of Twitter and the time frame.

The use of social media as a data source is explained as follows. Scholars believe that the technological revolution has made the mastery of social media indispensable in the establishment and maintenance of a nation branding (Manor, 2017, pp.308). This is because they reduce barriers of time and space (Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar, 2021, pp.137; DAŞLI, 2019, pp.249; Semetko, 2009, pp.639), facilitate the transmission of information (Andreja, 2018, pp.47; Cotton, 2019, pp.52; Harris, 2013, pp.24) and allow a two-way communication (Harris, 2013, pp.23; Bjola & Jiang, 2015, pp.88).

More specifically, scholars consider that using the Twitter platform is appropriate because it has interesting features for scientific research. On the one hand, it is a social network that allows to observe both the content of the communication and the relationships between users

(Ingenhoff & Al., 2021, pp.3). Indeed, each tweet is described by its characters, comments, likes and retweets. On the other hand, different studies use Twitter to study the practice of public diplomacy and place branding (Ingenhoff & Al., 2021, pp.3; Harris, 2013, pp.24). As Tuñón-Navarro & Carral-Vilar (2021, pp.138) state "The characteristics of Twitter, have made it the preferred social network for debate, political communication and for the social and scientific research, as well". For this paper, 548 Tweets from the official account of the EEAS - @eu_eeas - were collected by hand.

The Tweets collected correspond to messages posted from the 1st of December 2019 to the 19th of June 2020 by the official account of the EEAS. Two periods must be distinguished. It is the pre-pandemic period and the first wave of Covid-19 in Europe. The first period is that of the situation preceding the first wave of Covid-19. The second period is the period corresponding to the first wave of Covid-19 in Europe. The first wave was selected because, being the first, it seems to correspond as closely as possible to the notion of a crisis as defined in section 1. For the sake of comparability, each of the two periods is made up of 100 days, either preceding or following the announcement of WHO considering Covid-19 as a pandemic, on the 11th of March 2020. In addition, the 1st of December 2019 corresponds to the day Josep Borrell Fontelles has become the High Representative of the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2019). This means that both before and during the first wave of the pandemic he held this position. Studying the communication of a single political figure thus allows controlling for other variables. Therefore, the first period runs from the 1st of December 2019 to the 10th of March 2020 and the second period runs from the 11th of March 2020 to the 19th of June 2020. There are 235 tweets preceding the WHO announcement and 313 tweets following the announcement.

Third, the method used to test the two hypotheses is hypothetico deductive. It is a mixed-methods, including tools from quantitative as well as qualitative analysis. Two moments of analysis must be distinguished. The first moment is a content analysis of the collected tweets while the second moment is a comparative analysis between before and during the pandemic.

The first moment of analysis aims at coding the tweets according to the categories defined by the 4D theory and the dialogic engagement theory. First, the 4D model defines four categories that the image of a place can have. These are categories (1) functional, (2) normative, (3) aesthetic, and (4) emotional. The first category includes all the tweets dealing with

economic, political and educational systems. The second category includes tweets referring to norms, values, and social responsibility of the EU. The third category is the ones related to tourism, entertainment, or cultural activities. The fourth category includes tweets that refer to feelings with words such as "love", "hate", "like", and "adore". This categorization aims at making the content of the tweets comparable. Second, the dialogic engagement model defines four components. These are (1) demonstrate a positive regard for the publics' input, experiences and needs; (2) interact with the aim of relationship-building rather than problem-solving; (3) seek the advice of the public on issues of common concern; and (4) recognize the interdependence between the organizations and the public and develop collaborative action for the good of the community and society. The first category includes tweets for which EEAS retweeted the content of a private user. Retweeting content from an international organization, an EU institution or the High Representative accounts does not fall into this category. The second category includes tweets for which the EEAS invites its follower to converse about a topic not problem-oriented. The third category includes tweets for which the EEAS invites its follower to converse about a problem-oriented topic. The fourth category includes tweets where the EEAS offers opportunities for collaborative action. If a tweet does not fit into any of these four categories, it will be coded in category 0. The category 0 includes tweets essentially informative, implying a one-way communication. This second categorization aims at making the type of communication identifiable and comparable.

The second moment of analysis aims to compare the results obtained during the content analysis between the pre-pandemic period and the first wave of covid-19. The comparison between these two periods will make it possible to reject or not the two hypotheses.

4. Findings

This section aims to present the findings. In order to answer the research question, 548 posts from the EEAS' official Twitter account have been analyzed. The period before Covid-19 – period 1 - contains 235 tweets while 313 tweets have been posted during the first wave of Covid-19 – period 2. Below are the results for (1) the general data, (2) the content analysis according to the 4D model, and (3) the content analysis according to the dialogic engagement model. For all of those three elements, there is a presentation of the results for the total period analyzed, for period 1 and period 2.

Part 1: General data

First, describing the key component of a Twitter post seems to be important. Indeed, each tweet is described by its text message, its number of replies, its number of retweets and its number of likes. The text message is the object of the content analysis of the second and third part. The replies, retweets and likes are described in this first part. Table 1, Graph 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Graph 2 in the Appendix – section 1 – summarize the results of the general data presented below.

From the 1st of December 2019 to the 19th of June 2020, the EEAS has posted 548 tweets. This corresponds to more than 2 posts per day, on average. However, while some days no content is posted, a maximum of 13 tweets per day has been recorded. Users interact mainly with likes. The range of the number of likes per tweet is {3, 12500}. As can be seen, all EEAS posts received at least three likes from Twitter users. The average number of likes is 107.1 with a standard deviation of 706.5 and a median of 36.5. Retweets are the second most used option by users. A total of 21126 retweets were recorded between December 2019 and June 2020. This corresponds to an average of 38.6 and a median of 22. The range of the number of retweets per tweet is {0, 942}. Not all tweets involve retweets. However, on the 9th of May 2020, a tweet promoting European solidarity in the context of EU day registered 942 retweets. Replies are the least used instrument. In total 2682 replies were registered. The range of the number of replies per tweet is {0, 177}, with a mean of 4.9 and a standard deviation of 12.

In the 100 days prior to Covid-19, the EEAS posted 235 times. This corresponds to approximately 2 tweets per day. With respect to user interactions with the EEAS, several points should be made. First, users tend to use likes more than retweets and comments. Indeed, for the first period, a total of 16189 likes were recorded against 9987 retweets and 1534 replies. Each tweet has a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 601 likes, with a median of 42. Second, the range of the number of replies per tweet is {0, 177}, with a mean of 6.5 and a standard deviation of 14.6. The tweet with the most replies is about the environmental issue. Third, posts are retweeted between 0 and 297 times. This corresponds to an average of 42.5 with a standard deviation of 46 and a median of 26.

During the first wave of Covid-19, approximately 3 tweets per day were posted by the EEAS for a total of 313 tweets. On the 3rd of May 2020, the EEAS tweeted 13 times about press freedom. However, during this period, there are 9 days in which no tweets have been posted.

In total, 1148 replies, 11139 retweets, and 42517 likes were recorded during this period 2. The tweet on the 9th of May 2020, about EU day and promoting European solidarity is the tweet that records the most retweets – 942 - and likes - 12500. However, there are other tweets measuring only 3 likes or other tweets measuring only 1 retweet.

Part 2: 4D Model

Second, the content analysis according to the 4D model has the following results. Table 5, Graph 3 and Graph 4 in the Appendix – section 2 – summarize the results of the 4D model presented below.

After an analysis of 548 tweets about the EEAS across the four dimensions of country image, it became clear that the functional category dominated, followed by the normative category, then aesthetic and finally emotional. Three hundred thirty-five posts refer to functional topics such as the high representative activities, international relations or actions against Covid-19. One hundred ninety-nine tweets refer to solidarity, human rights or gender equality in the normative dimension. Fourteen of the studied posts concentrate on topics of the aesthetic dimension, such as sport, music and celebrations. There are no posts containing words that indicated fascination, for the emotional dimension.

During the first period, 66% of the tweets refer to the functional dimension. One hundred fifty-four tweets dealt with the organization of the EU itself. There is 33% of the tweets about the normative dimension. There are 4 tweets, corresponding to 2% of the total tweet for period 1, dealing with the aesthetic dimension. Finally, zero tweets are about the emotional dimension.

During the second period, 58% of the tweets refer to the functional dimension against 39% to the normative dimension, 3% to the aesthetic dimension and 0% to the emotional dimension. This corresponds to respectively 181 tweets about the global socio-economic context, 122 tweets about norms and values, 10 tweets about cultural activities and none about feelings.

Part 3: Dialogic engagement Model

Third, the content analysis according to the dialogic engagement model has the following results. Table 6, Table 7 and Graph 5 in the Appendix – section 3 – summarize the results of the dialogic engagement model presented below.

Over the two periods as a whole, there are only 12 tweets engaging the EEAS in a two-way communication with its audience. This represents 2.2% of the tweets posted from December to June. Therefore, 97.8% of the tweets are mainly informative in nature and do not aim to involve any interaction. Of the 12 tweets involving user interaction, the EEAS did not retweet any user messages. Only one tweet refers to a collaborative action between the sender and receiver of the message. This is the tweet from 21 December 2019 referring to volunteering for a humanitarian project. The two categories inviting users to converse were the most popular. Four tweets were categorized in the not problem-oriented category and 7 tweets in the problem-oriented category. The category of an invitation to converse about a topic not problem-oriented thus corresponds to 33% of the tweets subject to two-way communication but only 0.7% of all tweets from 1 December 2019 to 19 June 2020. The category relating to an invitation to converse about a problem-oriented topic corresponds to 58% of the tweets subject to a two-way communication but only 1.28% of all the tweets from 1 December 2019 to 19 June 2020.

During the first analysis period, seven tweets were recorded as involving two-way communication, compared to 228 tweets involving one-way communication. Of these 7 tweets, no private user retweets were recorded. Only one tweet about a collaborative action between the public and the institution could be raised. This corresponds to only 14.3% of the two-way communication tweets and 0.4% of the total number of tweets in period 1. The vast majority of the tweets involving a two-way communication - 85.7% - are about invitations to converse about a certain topic. While only one tweet posts on a not problem-oriented topic, five tweets post on a problem-oriented topic. The tweet of 4 January 2020 about the Blue Book internship is the only tweet asking the community about their interest, curiosity and motivation for European affairs – category 2. The tweets involving an issue during this first period are successively about support for refugees, access to electricity in Tanzania and the Sahel issue.

In the second analysis period, three hundred and eight tweets are one-way communication, compared to five of two-way communication. Therefore, only 1.6% of the tweets in this period involve an interaction between users and the EEAS. There are no private

user retweets and no tweets where the EEAS offers an opportunity(ies) for collective action. Invitations to converse about a non-problem oriented topic are in the majority. Indeed, they represent 60% of the tweets involving a two-way communication during the period from the 11th of March 2020 to the 19th of June 2020. However, this corresponds to only 0.9% of all tweets in this period. 2 These three tweets are about EU day and the EU website. Tweets about a problem-oriented issue represent 40% of the tweets involving a two-way communication during the period from the 11th of March 2020 to the 19th of June 2020. This corresponds to only 0.6% of all tweets in this period. 2. These two tweets are about disinformation.

5. Discussion

This section aims to present an interpretation of the data, based on the theory from the literature review, before concluding this research. To investigate the extent to which Covid-19 has impacted the nation branding of the European Union, two hypotheses were outlined. This part discusses the results concerning the theory in order to reject or not these hypotheses. It is organized as follows. For each of the hypotheses, a comparison between the two periods of analysis is made. This allows to compare the results with the theory before concluding whether or not each hypothesis is rejected. Finally, an answer to the research question is provided.

The first hypothesis states that the EEAS communication differs substantially between the period before the first wave of Covid-19 - period 1 - and the period corresponding to the first wave of Covid-19 - period 2.

On the one hand, the theory was that the European Union did not communicate enough during the pandemic. However, the overall data collected in the content analysis shows that there is an increase in the total number of tweets posted between period 1 and period 2. Graph 1 describes these results. During the first wave of Covid-19, the EEAS tweeted 78 additional times. The Covid-19 crisis thus seems to have reinforced the role of digital diplomacy.

Graph 1
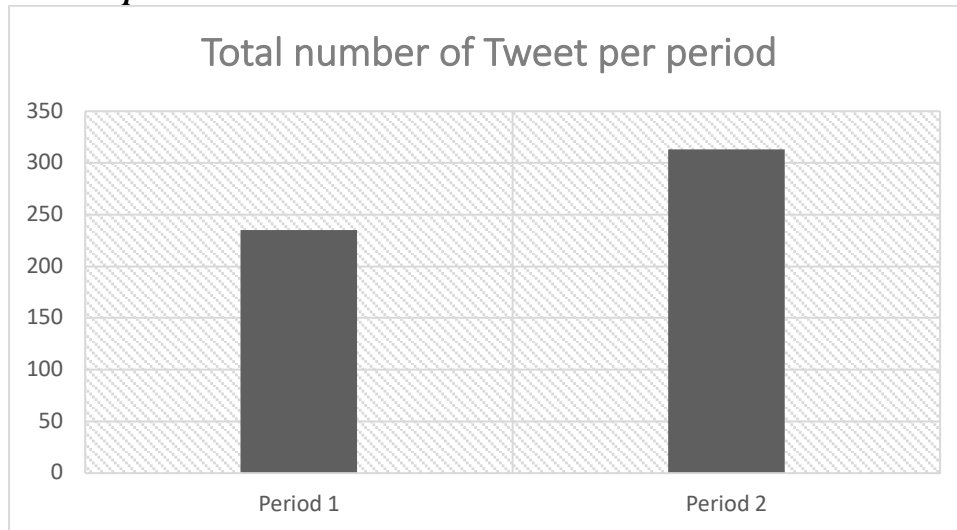
On the other hand, the theory was that the European Union did not communicate coherently and consistently. However, the content analysis according to the 4D model shows a relative consistency in the messages posted on Twitter between period 1 and period 2. Graph 3 and Graph 4 describe those results. One can observe stability in the type of content posted on Twitter with a large majority of the functional dimension. The EEAS mainly wants to inform users about the political and economic context. There is an increase of 7 percentage points in the normative category between periods 1 and 2. This slight increase in the normative dimension can be interpreted as the need to strengthen intra-European unity and solidarity in times of crisis. This corresponds to what the literature recommends in terms of nation branding. Indeed, the message communicated in terms of norms and values reinforces the internal and external legitimacy of a place by having a shared sense of the event and strengthening identity. The results obtained are in line with this phenomenon. The aesthetic dimension is not very present for each period, at 2% and 3% respectively. The emotional dimension is absent for each period.
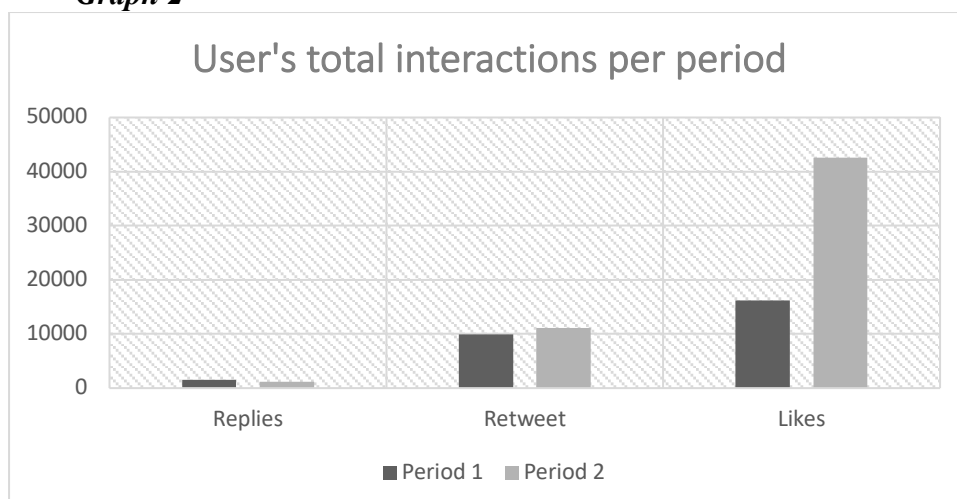
Graph 3
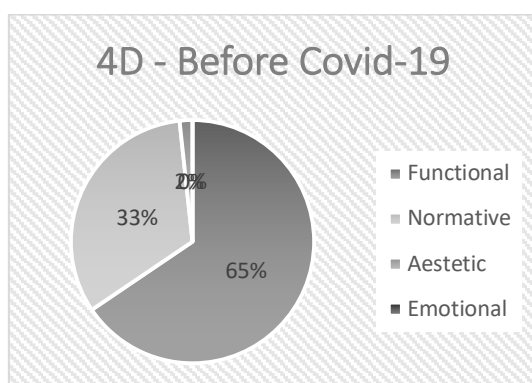
Graph 4
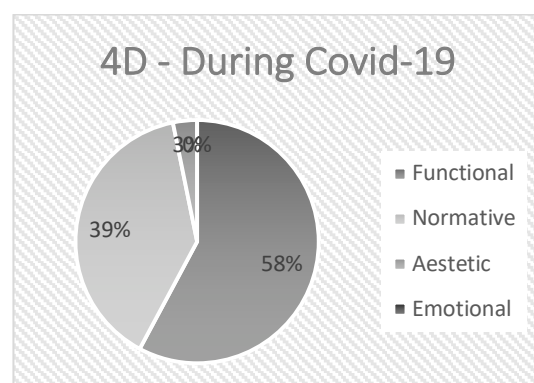
That is the reason why the content analysis according to the 4Ds allows to reject the first hypothesis. The results show that the EU did adopt a communication consistent with the pre-crisis situation. The analysis of the EEAS Twitter account according to the 4D model, therefore, implies that Covid-19 had - by strengthening digital communication, adopting a coherent message and insisting on the norms of unity and solidarity - a positive impact on the European Union's nation branding.

The second hypothesis states that the European Union has not provided opportunities for dialogic engagement and that the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced this phenomenon. One could then expect to observe low results for both periods and a slight decrease between the period before the first wave of Covid-19 - period 1 - and the period corresponding to the first wave of Covid-19 - period 2.

First, the general data provide some information that deserve to be discussed. Indeed, they provide information about the potential for interaction between users and the EEAS. Graph 2 summarizes those results. First, for both periods considered, likes are the preferred option for users to interact both before and during the first wave of Covid-19. Second, compared to period 1, period 2 has the most retweets and likes. Replies and retweets seem to be relatively constant. Period 1 records the most replies with its tweet about climate change on the 29th of January 2020. However, the option that users prefer - likes - has more than doubled between period 1 and period 2. One can thus conclude that users increase their interactions with the EEAS in period 2. Therefore, there is more desire for interactions from users during the first wave of Covid-19 than during the pre-pandemic period.

Graph 2

Second, the content analysis according to the dialogic engagement model provides information about the interaction of the EEAS with the users. Graph 5 summarizes those results. First, over the two periods, a large majority of the tweets can be categorized as involving one-way communication. In both period 1 and period 2, the EEAS mostly adopts top-down communication. Second, one can see that there is even less two-way communication during the first wave of Covid-19 than during the period before. This can be interpreted as the fear of losing full control of the message, reinforced by the context of crisis. Third, among the tweets allowing two-way communication, the EEAS prefers to invite users to discuss - categories 2[1] and 3[2] - more than to show a positive view towards the public - category 1[3] - or to propose collaborative actions - category 4[4]. Finally, while period 1 registers more tweets inviting discussion about problem-oriented topics, period 2 concentrates on non-problem-oriented topics.

Graph 5
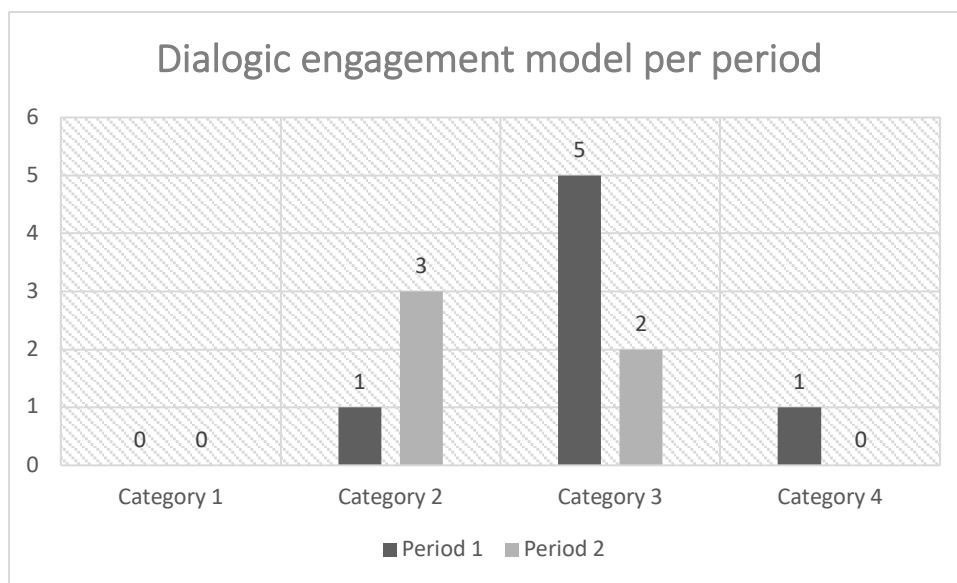
The content analysis according to the dialogic engagement model does not allow to reject this second hypothesis. On the one hand, there is indeed a demand from users for more communication and interaction. On the other hand, the EEAS remains in a dynamic essentially of information dissemination. It provides little room for interaction and therefore for the co-construction of a national image.

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[1] Category 2: Tweets for which the EEAS interacts with the aim of relationship building rather than problem solving
[2] Category 3: Tweets for which the EEAS seeks the advice of publics on issues of common concern
[3] Category 1: Tweets for which the EEAS demonstrates a positive regard for publics' input, experiences and needs
[4] Category 4: Tweets where the EEAS offers opportunities for collaborative action

The content analysis has shed light on certain elements of the impact of Covid-19 on the nation branding of the European Union. The conclusion is nuanced. Indeed, there is a consistent and coherent communication. The EEAS' analysis shows that the European Union has gradually adapted to digital public diplomacy by providing a message capable of reinforcing its nation branding. However, the communication remains essentially informative and does not allow for a co-construction of the national image. The EEAS does not seem to adapt to digital diplomacy good practices. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis seems to have set back the two-way communication and the discussion of problematic issues. This does not contribute to the construction of an optimal nation branding for the European Union.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to investigate the following research question: To what extent has the Covid-19 pandemic strengthened or weakened the brand image of the European Union? Therefore, it was a matter of analyzing the brand image of the EU through its digital diplomacy, before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results and their discussion have shown that the conclusion has to be balanced. Indeed, if the EU seem to adopt a long-term communication strategy, there is still a lack of a two-way and a symmetrical communication. In this last part, the relevance of this research is recalled below before presenting the limitations of this paper.

Throughout this paper, elements supporting the relevance of the research question and the study have been presented. First, it has been underlined that it is substantively relevant for two reasons. The political reason is the following. The question of the national/place image is indispensable to study because it is the foundation of all legitimacy. Studying the construction of the European identity contributes to the European project by reinforcing its internal and external legitimacy. The socio-economic reason is the following. The management of the national image is done in order to increase the economic attractiveness. Building a positive image of a place then helps to attract new investors. Second, it is academically relevant for at least two reasons. On the one hand, this research is part of the debate between the notions of nation branding, public diplomacy and digital diplomacy. On the other hand, this paper has made it possible to - partially - fill two gaps in the literature. Indeed, both the supranational level and the context of the Covid-19 pandemic lacked attention from scholars. Third, the two-stage methodology - content analysis and comparative analysis of 548 tweets from the EEAS Twitter account - shed light on the process at work before and during the first wave of Covid-19. On the one hand, this is an original way of explaining the purpose of the research. On the

other hand, it is the most suitable and consistent way to study the research question. Therefore, one can argue that this paper does indeed participate in the scientific literature.

Finally, in order to conclude this paper, it seems important to highlight three categories of limitations of this research. Each of them corresponds to new opportunities of studies on the topic of this paper. First, two elements regarding the data collection must be clarified. The data was manually encoded. This implies potential encoding errors. The data were also encoded a posteriori. Therefore, they do not consider potentially deleted tweets. Using a computerized coding system would reduce - if not eliminate - those issues. Second, there are two points to note about the case of study. Due to time and cost constraints, only one institution could be analyzed in this paper. The second phase of the analysis - the comparison - then compared the EEAS to itself over two time periods. Studying more European institutions and comparing them seems to be an interesting area to investigate for future research. Third, the methodology has two limitations. The first phase of analysis consists of content analysis. By definition, as the researcher codes his data into categories, there is a slight subjectivity. Moreover, some tweets fit into several categories. They are not mutually exclusive. However, the categories do not allow to account for this phenomenon. The main element of the tweet is then the one that takes precedence for the categorization. Therefore, it may prove beneficial to continue the work on the impact of the Covid-19 on the brand image of the European Union by adopting different types of methodologies. These three elements show that although this paper contributes to the literature on nation branding at the European Union level, there are still other facets of the phenomenon to investigate.

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8. Appendix

Section 1 – General data

Table 1 *– Descriptive statistics of the EEAS' number of tweets per day*

	Total	**Average**	**Standard deviation**	**Median**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Period 1	235	2.3	2	2	0	9
Period 2	313	3.1	2.6	2	0	13
Total	548	2.7	2.3	2	0	13

Graph 1
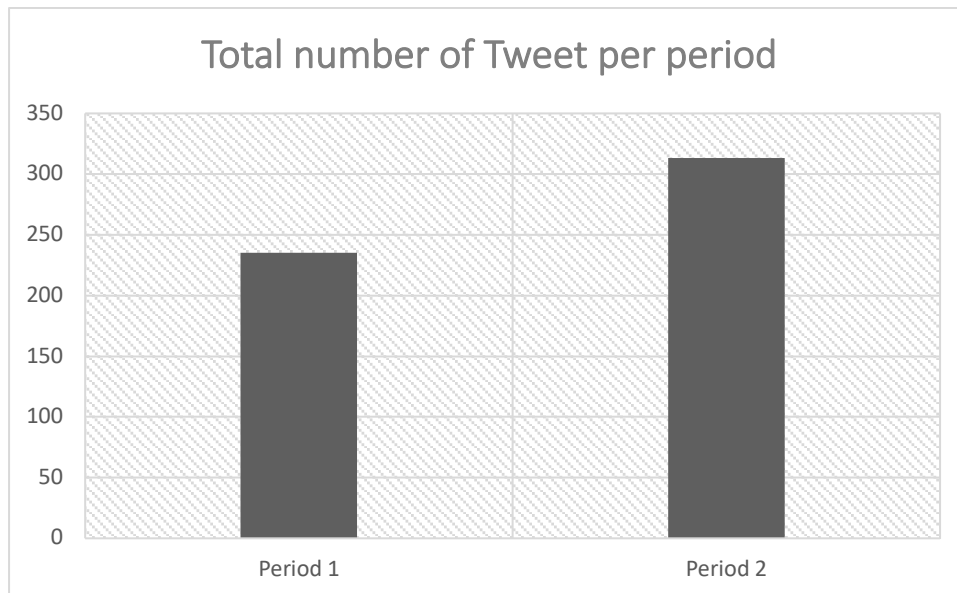
Table 2 *– Descriptive statistics of the EEAS' number of replies per tweet*

|	**Total**	**Average**	**Standard deviation**	**Median**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Period 1	1534	6.5	14.6	3	0	177
Period 2	1148	3.7	9.3	2	0	142
Total	2682	4.9	12	2	0	177

Table 3 – *Descriptive statistics of the EEAS' number of retweets per tweet*

	Total	Average	Standard deviation	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Period 1	9987	42.5	46	26	0	297
Period 2	11139	35.6	77.2	19	1	942
Total	21126	38.6	65.7	22	0	942

Table 4 – *Descriptive statistics of the EEAS' number of likes per tweet*

	Total	Average	Standard deviation	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Period 1	16189	68.9	84.9	42	4	601
Period 2	42517	135.8	931.5	33	3	12500
Total	58706	107.1	706.5	36.5	3	12500

Graph 2
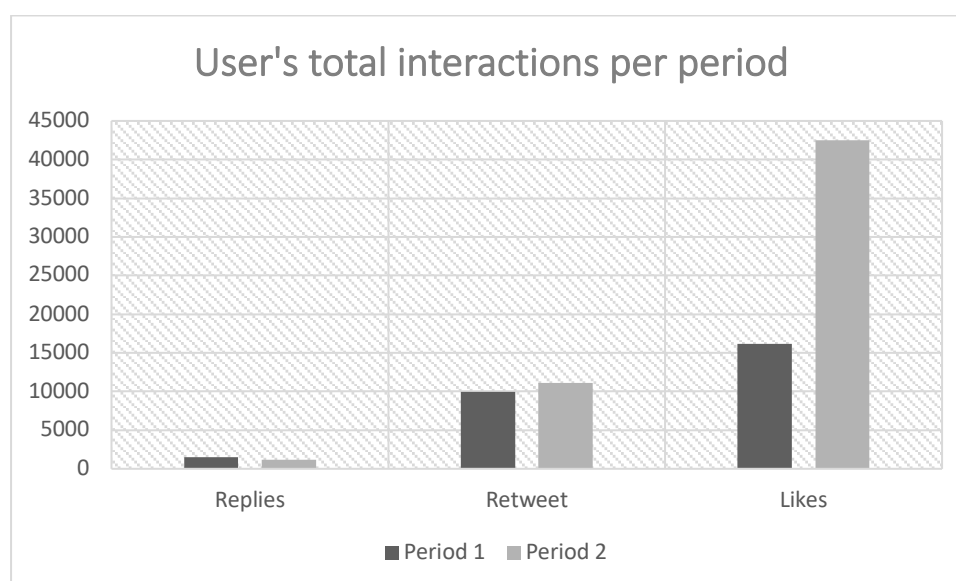
Section 2 - The 4D model

Table 5 - *4D model across time*					
	Functional	**Normative**	**Aesthetic**	**Emotional**	**Total**
Period 1	154	77	4	0	235
Period 2	181	122	10	0	313
Total	335	119	14	0	548

Graph 3
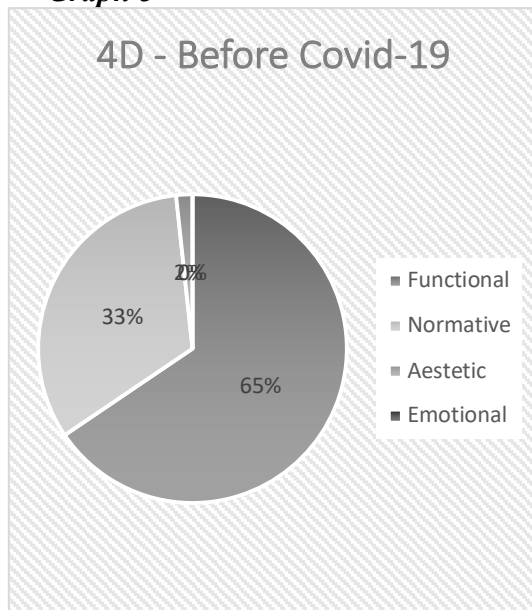
Graph 4
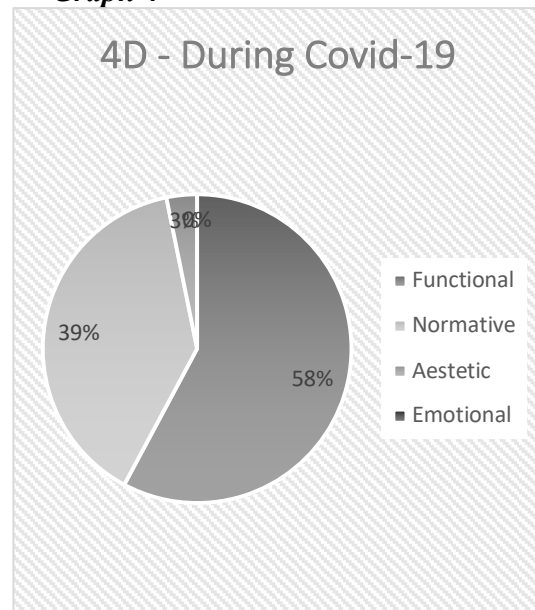
Section 3 - The dialogic engagement model

Table 6 *– Type of communication across time*

	One-way	**Two-way**
Period 1	228	7
Period 2	308	5
Total	536	12

Table 7 *– Dialogic engagement model across time*

	Category 1	**Category 2**	**Category 3**	**Category 4**
Period 1	0	1	5	1
Period 2	0	3	2	0
Total	0	4	7	1

Graph 5