

Name of the student:	Mathilde de Meester
Title of the thesis:	Nation Branding in the European Union
Reviewer:	Eliška Tomalová (Charles University, Prague)

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The author has chosen a relevant and very up to date topic linking different areas of diplomatic practice (including very new and innovative diplomatic methods) in a specific – pandemic context. She has focused on EU branding strategies that constitute a minority research area, as most studies are devoted to public diplomacy and nation branding of state actors.

The research objective is quite ambitious, but clearly defined. The main goal of the thesis is to answer the research question: „To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic strenghten or weaken the EU´s Nation Branding?“ (p. 2).

The literature review shows a very good knowledge the author has about the existing academic literauture on public diplomacy, nation branding, cyber and digital diplomacy, and crisis management.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

From the methodological perspective, the thesis represents a case study. The author´s approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods, the research design is specified in a relevant section (p.13). De Meester works with two main hypotheses relevant for the EEAS communication on social media and connects their activities to the branding strategy of the EU during and outside the pandemic situation.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

In her conclusion, the author connects the findings to the hypotheses and outlines also them main limitations of the research (errors in coding, theoretical relevance – p.24). The limitations are very relevant (I do appreciate the academic honesty), at the same time, they open new ways how to approach the topic in future research.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

From the formal point of views, the thesis meets the academic criteria. The language is appopriate, the text is pleasant to read, citation style is properly used.

The layout is correct, however, I do consider some paragraphs (three lines) too short for an academic text, the text would appear more balanced with comparable size of different paragraphs.

The text does also contain many relevant graphs that help to visualize the findings.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis covers all the issues presented in the introductory part. The research question is clearly defined, the research design is logical and appropriate.

The main strong points of the thesis are:

- The thesis connects different theoretical debates on diplomatic trends and practices and offers some relevant clarifications on concepts such as digital and cyber diplomacy and their relation to public diplomacy and nation branding
- It does also bring new insights on strategic communication tools and methods of the EU (as a specific example of IO) in times of crisis, this is an understudied area of diplomacy
- The focus on Twitter helps to understand better the specificities of this social media in external communication as part of image building strategies

The weaker elements are as follows:

- The thesis is reffering to adequate amount of literature from different areas of diplomatic studies, but the connection to the research is often reductive and shows some shortcuts – for instance on EU diplomatic style and tradition (p.14) and public diplomacy being a subcategory of nation branding (p.12).
- The thesis deals in its empirical part mainly with EEAS, this is rather a case study on EEAS than a study of EU nation branding – that should be clearly stated in the title and research question.
- The link between the case itself – EEAS twitter communication – is not clearly connected to existing academic literature on strategic communication.

Grade (A-F)	C (7,5)
Date	Signature
26/06/2022	