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Pandemic Models and Image Management: South Korea's Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

While the world has seen pandemics in the past only few could have predicted the impact a new rapidly spreading pathogen would have on our lives. Since the beginning of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered societies across the globe, causing countries to close their borders, limit domestic movement and impose a variety of other restrictions, both on individuals and businesses. During the early months of the pandemic decisionmakers and medical professionals around the world were looking for the best practices to contain the spread of the virus. Frequent updates on successful cases and failures were reported by the international media and the outcomes keenly observed by the rest of the world. Amidst the search and constant flow of information, certain national governments came out with manuals and overviews on their approach on pandemic management. This was especially the case with the countries that had been relatively successful in their containment efforts. One of such countries was South Korea, which had managed to keep the domestic infection rates low while maintaining a relatively open society. Consequently, South Korea shared details on its methods through various platforms. This study argues that South Korea, much like other countries, framed both the pandemic and its solutions in a way that aided the promotion of its own model. Furthermore, the pandemic management-related communication was not conveyed to simply share operational details. Rather, it was simultaneously employed to further existing goals related to the management and elevation of Korea's national image, namely its existing nation branding and public diplomacy efforts, as well as economic aspirations. To support this hypothesis, this study analyses a variety of documents produced by the Korean government, primarily during the first full year of the pandemic in 2020.

Key words*: South Korea, public diplomacy, nation branding, COVID-19 pandemic, frame analysis*

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1 Introduction

What started as a local epidemic in China's city of Wuhan at the end of 2019 grew into a global-scale pandemic by the first quarter of 2020. The world, which had, for the most part, embraced the increasing interconnectedness and globalisation, was now at varying stages of local and even regional lockdowns. As most countries had not experienced a health crisis of this scale in decades, governments were looking outward for models to emulate in their own pandemic responses. Simultaneously, international press, various organisations and other actors were paying close attention to the developments of the crisis around the world. For the early success cases, countries that had been able to prevent the wider spread of the virus within their borders, this presented an opportunity to gain traction for their own style of pandemic management. After all, in addition to gaining validation and praise for matters like national healthcare and government functionality, the setting provided a chance to improve one's reputation and consequently increase one's relative soft power capability, both which are seen as important assets in today's international relations (Melissen, 2005b).

One of such countries was South Korea (hereafter Korea), which attracted international attention early on due to its early encounter with the virus, as well as the arguably successful measures that followed and helped to manage its spread. Historically, Korea has not been shy in sharing its own experiences and methods with others and has even modularised some of its previous success stories[1]. Also known for its developed public diplomacy and nation branding endeavours, the Korean government was sure to promote a 'Korean way' of fighting the pandemic. For example, a diplomatic campaign was launched under the Moon Jae-in administration to elevate Korea's image through its response to the crisis (Attias, 2020). Arguably, it is clear that Korea purposefully injected at least parts of its public diplomacy and nation branding agenda to the promotion of its pandemic response. Moreover, the desire to attach one's name to a 'success product' is not necessarily surprising, as it can provide a reverse country-of-origin effect and lead to improved perceptions through the association between the product and a country (Lee & Lockshin, 2012). However, it is not merely the improvement of one's reputation that drove countries like Korea to actively share their approach. In addition to image-related motivations, there are other possible interests vested in promoting one's own model as an effective crisis response, for example ones related to

[1] Korea has, for example, modularised its international development assistance under the slogan 'Saemaul Undong'. Similarly to Korea's COVID-19 response model, Saemaul Undong was an 'evidence-based' model used to differentiate Korea's development assistance from others (Doucette & Müller, 2016).

economic gains (Schwak, 2021). Arguably, this was also the case for Korea, which was illustrated by the billions of wons its government allocated to the exportation of the model (Ibid. p. 2). Of course, this was partly encouraged by the international interest and approval Korea's pandemic management had received. Despite some controversies, for example issues related to individuals' privacy, the international sentiment regarding Korea's pandemic management has been largely positive (Lee & Kim, 2021), setting an ideal environment for Korea to promote its approach. In fact, some countries approached Korea themselves, asking for support in their pandemic management (Schwak, 2021). This demand further demonstrates the external signals that confirmed the 'success' of Korea COVID-19 response and possibly further motivated the Korean government to proceed with the development and exportation of its model.

To share its methods with others, Korea has published a number of documents and articles related to its pandemic management. While Korea is certainly not the only country that has shared details about its pandemic measures, is, for example, the 240-page guide released by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs perhaps one of the most extensive documents regarding the topic. To compare, let us consider other countries that were able to keep their infection rates relatively low during the first year of the pandemic. According to Forbes (Koetsier, 2020), the safest countries in the world in terms of COVID-19 in 2020 were, along with Korea, Germany and New Zealand. Germany does have a guide 'Wie wir uns vor dem Coronavirus schützen können' (The Federal Government, 2022), however only its German version is available online, which limits its accessibility to others. The length of their other COVID-19-related publications vary from 2 to 8 pages. As for New Zealand, most of the documents related to their pandemic management are one-pagers and the information is primarily build within the website. Thus, in terms of its pandemic management materials, Korea does stand out in the volume and extent of its publications. Moreover, information about Korea's approach to COVID-19 was also shared via public speeches given by high-ranking officials in international conferences and events.

However, by no means is the aim of this research to claim that Korea is the only country to recognise and utilise its success in pandemic management. For example, New Zealand has branded its COVID-19 response using the slogan of 'Unite Against COVID-19', which connects national lore and references of Māori culture to its COVID-19 approach (New Zealand Government, 2022). On the contrary, New Zealand's approach further illustrates that there seems to be a connection between nation branding and public diplomacy efforts and

pandemic-time communication, especially when sharing own experiences with pandemic management. Moreover, attaching elements of country's image to its pandemic management raises questions about other possible objectives it may pursue through the promotional activities. As not much time has passed since the peak months of the pandemic, these matters remain (at least partly) unanswered. Based on these notion and the relative scarcity of existing research on pandemic-time image management, this research is guided by the following research question:

To what extent does the promotion of South Korea's model of pandemic management in 2020 portray similar themes to its recent public diplomacy and nation branding efforts?

To address the main research question more specifically, it is further divided into two sub-questions:

1) **How has the Korean government framed the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible solutions to the pandemic in its official communication?**

2) **Are there convergencies between the solutions proposed in Korea's pandemic-related materials and the focus points of Korea's pre-pandemic public diplomacy and nation branding efforts?**

By answering the above questions, this research aims to add to the existing literature on Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding, particularly in the context of a global health crisis. More specifically, it will address features the Korean government sought to highlight through the sharing of its pandemic response and the possible convergencies with Korea's existing image management. Importantly, although research on different phenomena during and after the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly growing, it is not yet overly saturated and there is arguably room to contribute to the discussing in a meaningful way. For example, while there is research on pandemic-time public diplomacy and nation branding in East Asia (e.g. see Lee & Kim, 2020; Lee, 2021; Wang, 2020), current literature barely mention the modularisation of pandemic management or its connections to country's existing public diplomacy and nation branding efforts (at least in the Korean context). Moreover, in terms of promoting one's own models, motivations beyond reputation and image have not been received much attention. Thus, this research aims to address these gaps while also contributing to the understanding of Korea's current image management efforts. After reading this thesis, the reader will hopefully have learned something new about Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding efforts during a global health crisis and the ways they may be

connected. Additionally, this research can also offer insights to soft power and health diplomacy literature.

The structure of this research proceeds as follows: after the introductory section, the second chapter provides a combined assessment on the theoretical background of this research as well as a literature review on nation branding, public diplomacy and other relevant concepts. The third chapter covers the Korean context of said practices. The following chapter explains the methodological choices and criteria related to data selection, as well as introduces the primary data. The penultimate chapter contains the data analysis and preliminary discussion on possible findings. The findings are discussed in more depth in the conclusive chapter, which also includes suggestions for further research on the topic.

2 Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter of the thesis is dedicated for laying down the theoretical framework for this research as well as covering some of the relevant literature. The primary concepts introduced here are nation branding and public diplomacy. Throughout the chapter basic ideas and developments of these concepts are presented, as well as the ways they have been employed so far in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a brief overview of health and disaster diplomacy is included to provide more background on diplomacy taking place in a specific, health or crisis-related, setting.

2.1 Nation branding

While nation branding as a term is relatively young, it is not, in essence, a new concept. Rather, the nation branding scholarship has organised literature on managing national image in the context of international relations under one umbrella term, and introduced more orderly, marketing-based approach of formulating and communicating that image to others. Nations have been conscious of how they are perceived by others for centuries and have consequently employed persuasion to pursue various agendas, such as political, economic and cultural ones (Kaneva, 2011: p. 117). However, in the past couple of decades the way governments practice image management has transformed from an ambiguous set of activities into a coordinated effort that draws from common marketing strategies and involves various actors. As Van Ham (2008: p. 128) notes: '*The emerging brand state is not a brand new state, but a political player that promotes itself more assertively than before'*. Theoretical framework for nation branding is not clear-cut, but certain ideas are prevalent in the existing literature. For example, the use of one's image and reputation as a tool to gain more power within the international community closely relates to the logics of *soft power* and *cooperative power*. These ideas are based on the notion that rather than the strength of one's army or economic standing it is the *attractiveness* of one's ideas that can aid the achievement of certain objectives, for example by getting others to agree on a system that supports those objectives (Nye, 2004: p. 56; van Ham, 2008). The importance of reputation is also discussed by Moisio (2008: p. 79), who connects the emergence of nation branding to a paradigmatic change in international relations, a change that is closely related to more overarching phenomena of neoliberalism and globalisation, most notably the conceptualisation of interests in terms of the market rather than the nation.

Background and current debates

There are various research articles, preceding nation branding literature, that discuss the role of nations' image in international relations and the process of communicating it to other countries (Kunczik, 1997: p. 2). To demonstrate, Szondi (2008: p. 4) describes the origins of nation branding as '*combinations of country-of-origin studies and from the interdisciplinary literature on national identity, which incorporates political, cultural, sociological and historical approaches to identity*'. Thus, there is an inherent inter-disciplinary nature to nation branding research and literature, and therefore it is not surprising that it has generated interest within areas like marketing, communications, and international relations.

Since the emergence of the term, which creation is often credited to branding consultant Simon Anholt, both the understanding and practice of nation branding have evolved significantly. Initially, nation branding literature largely focused on the operational side and much of the notable literature was generated by British marketing scholars and branding consultants to explain how to use nation branding. The main argument of the marketing-based literature states that it is necessary for a nation to brand itself in order to be a recognisable actor in global politics and stay 'relevant' in today's interconnected and fast-paced world (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2015; Olins, 2002). Dinnie (2015: p. 5), for example, defines nation branding as *'the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and* ***relevance*** *for all of its target audiences'* (bold font added). Since the early 2000's, increasing amount of literature has been produced under the concept (see Dinnie, 2015; Anholt, 2007; Kaneva, 2011; Fan, 2010). Most governments are also striving to have more conscious and coordinated nation branding efforts (Dinnie, 2015: p. 6).

Along with explanatory literature and applied research, some have provided more critical reviews on nation branding. Many academics outside the marketing research approach highlight nation branding's implications for democracy and question whether or not it is justifiable to utilise branding strategies for such a complicated entity (Kaneva, 2011; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011: p. 600). For example, Jordan (2014: p. 300) comments on the issue as follows: '*Nations are complex entities and nation branding as a practice strips them down to a simplified representation in a bid to enhance the marketability of a state*'. Also, some argue, that the commercial side of nation branding makes it a 'privatized version of foreign policy'

(Jansen, 2008). The advocates of nation branding, in turn, put the critique down to disciplinary differences. For instance, Olins (2002: p. 247), another influential consultant within the nation branding circles, suggests that academics' rejection of nation branding is primarily due to semantics, rather than the idea itself. He asserts that many scholars consider marketing strictly as part of the business realm, which is often (implicitly and explicitly) further linked to concepts such as capitalism and profit orientation, and are therefore void of sufficient intellectual, cultural and social content (Ibid. 246). However, as discussed in my undergraduate thesis (Eronen, 2020), some researchers point out that the critical notions of nation branding often discuss the role of the branding consultants themselves in the brand development process, as they directly make financial gains from the branding efforts of national governments (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011: p. 600). While the research produced by consultants does contain some of the key works of nation branding literature, they have an obvious motive to promote nation branding as an 'essential practice'. Additionally, outsourcing consultants to build a nation's brand raises some questions about accountability and responsibility over the 'finished' brand, as the creators will 'abandon the ship' after the project is done (Aronczyk, 2008: p. 48). It is questionable, whether hiring an outsider can actually result in a believable brand and there are some cases where citizens have rejected the 'end product'. Moreover, Fan (2010: p. 99) highlights that nation brand is never completely controlled by its constructers, a notion which is sometimes overlooked in the more positive research pieces on nation branding.

There is also critique towards nation branding as a body of literature. Despite the creation of a distinct term, the overall literature still holds many inconsistencies (Kaneva, 2011: p. 118). Nation branding as a concept contains some of the same elements as place branding and public diplomacy, and these ideas tend to overlap within the respective literatures. For example, Dinnie (2004) uses nation branding and place branding almost interchangeably in his article on place branding. The similarity between these concepts makes one question the originality of nation branding and whether the related terms are *too* similar to be considered distinct areas of research. Anholt (2008: p. 265) disputes the claim by arguing that, for example, place branding and nation branding *are* different, as nation branding, unlike place branding, does not have a single promotional goal or product that is being promoted. He also makes the connection between nation branding and public diplomacy, calling public diplomacy a 'sister field' of nation branding. Nonetheless, these terms are often used interchangeably as well. Some argue that compared to nation branding, public diplomacy has

a more positive connotation attached to it as it lacks the controversial marketing lingo and can therefore be more attractive to certain scholars and disciplines (Szondi, 2008: p. 30). Moreover, sometimes governments adopt one term over another to create distance between them and the previous administration. Another linked model is cultural diplomacy, which is also related to public diplomacy (Hong, 2014: p. 72). The similarity of these concepts create conceptual blurriness that is evident throughout the literature. Clearly, the literature is yet to establish more concrete lines amongst these related concepts and many are tempted to define them in a way that suits their specific purpose (Szondi, 2008: p. 1). There is also another explanation for the haziness: even though the main principles of nation branding are not new, the term itself and scholarly literature under it, are. Hao et al. (2019: p. 11) point out in their research that there are both conceptual ambiguity and lack of sound theoretical base to ground the current literature, which is understandably as it still is in its early stages.

Despite the criticism, marketing logics and branding *have* proved to be an interesting way to discuss and evaluate the way governments and quasigovernmental bodies communicate with others and pursue various political and economic goals. Also, governments themselves are allocating public funds towards nation branding by establishing separate departments and councils, and hiring external consultants to oversee branding activities, which indicates that they consider reputation and image management important. As showcased by the emergence of different branding literature, for example 'policy branding'[2] and 'philanthropic branding'[3], the topic keeps generating interest within the academic community as well. For example, a simple search through Google Scholar generates over 11,000 hits under 'nation branding' over the past five years.

Nation branding and the COVID-19 pandemic

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019, countries all over the world faced an unforeseen challenge, not just in terms of their national health and economy, but also in terms of reputation. After all, the efficiency or inefficiency of countries' pandemic management have been at the centre of global media attention since the early weeks of the pandemic. Soon after the virus had spread globally and the infection rates started soaring, it became evident that some of the most influential countries in the world were the ones struggling the most. Moreover, the ability (or inability) to effectively respond to the situation

[2] Example of branding used in policy-making in Canada, article by Bhuyan et al. (2017). Also see article by Browning (2018).
[3] Philanthropic branding discussed in the context of nation branding by Saifer (2021).

has impacted the national image of number of countries, at least short-term. This is evident when comparing the Global Soft Power Index, an annual take on nation brands, between the years 2020 and 2021. The Index even introduced a new metric for their 2021 ranking, which measures the perceived success or failure in the management of COVID-19 (see the figure on the next page).

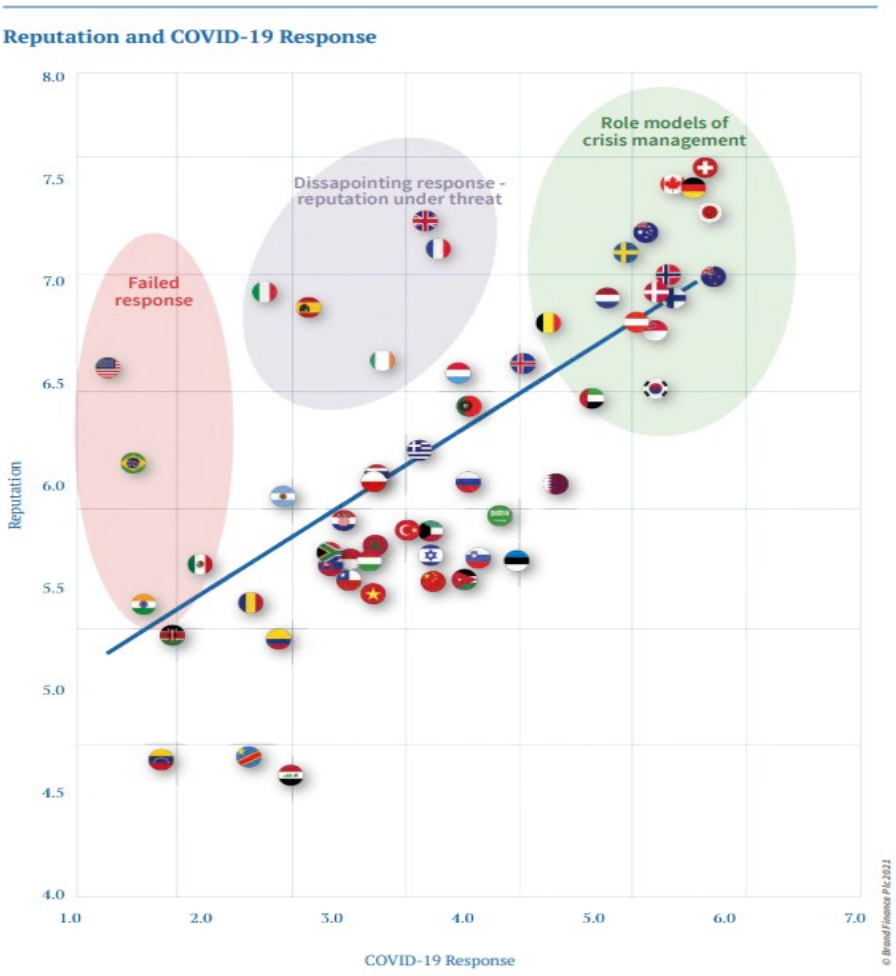


Figure 1. Reputation and COVID-19 response by Brand Finance Plc 2021.

For some countries, the report from 2021 showcases a clear negative impact of COVID-19 on their nation brand. Most notably, the U.S. had lost its leading position as the world's strongest nation brand and dropped to the 6th place. This was largely due to it ranking as one of the lowest countries for pandemic management. The negative response of both the public and media, domestically and abroad, mainly criticized President Trump's inability to acknowledge the severity of the virus at the start of the pandemic, which had left the U.S. poorly prepared to respond to its spread later on (Brand Finance, 2021: p. 44). Other countries, scoring previously at the top 20 on the strength of their nation brand, to score relatively low on their

COVID-19 response were Italy and the UK (Brand Finance, 2021: p. 111), both which had a considerable gap between the expectations and actual results of their pandemic management. In this sense, a strong nation brand and the expectations that followed might have made these countries worse off, as the gap between the expectations and reality was more drastic compared to some of the others.

For other countries, their successful pandemic management resulted in international praise and boosted their ranking on the 2021 Global Soft Power Index. These were, for example, Australia, Japan and New Zealand (Brand Finance, 2021: p. 111). Good COVID-19 management had a particularly positive affect on New Zealand's nation brand, making it the fastest-growing nation brand in the Index for the year 2021 (Brand Finance, 2021: p. 78).

Of course, a year's difference in the rankings portrays short-term developments in nation brands and only time will tell if failed or successful pandemic management has any long-term implications on countries' reputation. To demonstrate, the 'loser' of the 2021 index, the U.S., has reclaimed its leading position in the 2022 index. Similarly, New Zealand, the success story of COVID-19 response in 2021, has fallen back from place 16 close to its pre-pandemic ranking of 22 (21st in 2022). While these rankings lack in-depth analysis and do not assess the historical developments or future prospects of individual nation brands, they provide interesting insight to nation brands in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also a separate issue how different countries were consciously using the situation in their nation branding efforts, and consequently one of the queries of this research.

2.2 Public diplomacy

As discussed, public diplomacy is often connected and sometimes even interchangeably used with nation branding. However, as public diplomacy is a distinct concept it should also be considered separately from nation branding. After all, as a framework, it has more far-stretching history, albeit being still relatively young field of practice. It also offers additional viewpoints on the ways countries communicate and act among each other in order to improve or change their reputation or image.

Background

To understand the underlying logics of public diplomacy, it should be specified what is meant by 'diplomacy' in this context. Interestingly enough, only few scholars take time to clarify

what they mean by ‘diplomacy’ within the relevant literature, as well as in other diplomacy-related research (i.e. health diplomacy and disaster diplomacy). For the most part, most seem to operate within the basic understanding of diplomacy, which according to its textbook-definition stands as ‘international negotiations between officials to achieve foreign policy objectives without opting for war’ (Merriam-Webster, 2022). While perhaps grossly simplified for certain contexts, this understanding will also be adopted for this research.

The ‘negotiations’ mentioned in the definition have historically been concerned with matters of trade and security, however they have expanded over the years to cover other universal issues, like the environment and health (Kickbusch, 2013: p. 2). Moreover, while diplomatic negotiations still take place bilaterally between government officials, multilateral frameworks and organizations with various actors have emerged to take part in diplomatic discussions, especially on matters that affect nations on a global scale. Accordingly, the multilateral and quasigovernmental nature of modern-day diplomacy is also apparent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where diplomatic talks have occurred both bi- and multilaterally throughout the pandemic, including different stakeholders.

To understand public diplomacy in a specific context, it is useful to consider the function of public diplomacy in general. Traditionally, governments and scholars have understood public diplomacy as *government communication* that targets foreign audiences (Szondi, 2008: p. 6). Regarding national governments as major actors in public diplomacy is not surprising as much of the early literature has been produced after the First World War and during the Cold War, when states started more systematically to use public diplomacy as a tool to achieve their international goals (Gilboa, 2008: p. 5; Pamment, 2012: p. 2). The early literature takes a special focus on the American experience and some notions (e.g. focus on one-way communication) result in some scholars regarding public diplomacy as an extension of general propaganda practices of the era (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005). Consequently, the U.S.-centredness of the research has also spilled over to the newer literature on public diplomacy (Szondi, 2008). However, despite the skewed research focus of the literature, public diplomacy was never limited to the U.S. and is more than simply producing propaganda for foreign audiences, especially according to today’s understanding of the concept.

While many scholars still focus on communication produced by national governments meant to influence foreign audiences, the concept has evolved to also include domestic communication and other actors at the delivering end of the communication. Some include,

for example, nongovernmental organizations, multinational corporations and media institutions, as well as specialists and members of the general public (Pamment, 2012: 1). As with most concepts, the definition is likely to evolve further along with the changes in international relations landscape and communication and as scholarly understanding of the concept increases. While recognising the multitude of actors in modern public diplomacy, for the purposes of this research, the more traditional understanding of the concept is employed, as the focus is mainly on government-driven communication. After all, oftentimes it is the governments themselves that define the aim and execution of their public diplomacy efforts. However, the visibility of government as a source of communication varies, depending on the government and the specific aim of their campaign (Szondi, 2008: p. 12). In some cases, highlighting government as the initiator of public diplomacy activities is essential as they wish the possible positive outcomes of the communication to be directly connected to them. In others, especially ones concerning more sensitive issues, government's perceived role might be more muted.

Since the mid-1900's, there have been interrelated revolutions in three distinct areas that have shaped the public diplomacy literature: revolution in mass communication, politics, and international relations (Gilboa, 2008). More specifically, the emergence of global news networks and internet, move from autocracy to democracy, and prevalence of soft power in international politics have all shaped the practice of public diplomacy in the 21st century, resulting in the paradigm of 'New Public Diplomacy' (Pamment, 2012: p. 3). In addition to emerging megatrends, the landscape of international relations is dynamic and events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict are likely to influence public diplomacy and create new 'unconventional' ways of communication. One example of this are the public diplomacy efforts of China, which have generated a number of publications in recent years. China's robust public diplomacy efforts demonstrate that the use of public diplomacy is not limited to democratic countries, nor is democracy a prerequisite for the effective use of the practice. For example, the idea of the 'China Model', a unique public diplomacy strategy which incorporates elements like ideological leadership and cultural self-confidence has emerged among the older theories (Lee, 2021). Accordingly, Hartig (2014: p. 337) argues that it is important to examine non-US cases, especially to understand the developments of modern-day public diplomacy.

Similarly to nation branding, the concept of soft power is at the centre of public diplomacy. As noted by Melissen (2005a: p. 4), 'public diplomacy is one of soft power's key

instruments'. The relationship between soft power and public diplomacy is complex and soft power can be understood to be both instrumental to public diplomacy as well as one of the assets produced by successful public diplomacy efforts. As explained by Nye Jr. (2008: p. 95), soft power is not just influence but also one source of influence. Thus, governments use public diplomacy to influence other nations' view of them and may, when successful, accumulate more influence and leeway in international affairs.

Public diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic

Two and a half years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of studies have emerged to discuss public diplomacy efforts that have taken place during this global crisis. The scholarly interest towards this setup is not surprising as these have been truly unprecedented times: a global pandemic that, thanks to the frequency and speed of international travel, quickly spread to every continent. Moreover, due to modern technology, large number of people have been able to follow the developments of the situation, both in their relative home country as well as other countries across the globe. This has also produced a situation in which one can, with relative ease, scrutinize their government's COVID-19 measures and also compare them to those of other states. Meanwhile, governments and other actors have been looking for the 'best practice', balancing between restraining the virus and maintaining a functional national economy. On top of that, the prevailing global inequality has created an additional layer of moral dilemma, as some countries have been financially more capable of handling the crisis than others. These conditions of comparison, demand and uncertainty arguably create a fruitful ground for some governments to leverage the pandemic in their public diplomacy efforts.

As the pandemic unravelled, researchers of various disciplines found it a topical and compelling case study. Yet, how is a pandemic relevant for public diplomacy literature? The situation is well-captured by Wang (2020) in his article 'Public diplomacy in the age of pandemics', where he notes that during international crisis, 'public diplomacy provides collective linkages between national self-interest and the international common good'. In this case, 'international common good' refers to activities like traditional aid in form of provision of material aid and knowledge, whereas 'national self-interest' can include a number of matters. Most obviously, it means securing the health and safety of a country's own citizens first. Additionally, for some countries, this could mean new economic opportunities as demand for protective gear and vaccines have skyrocketed. For others, it has given a chance

to showcase effective pandemic management, which in turn can be linked to other positive factors like technological advancement, cohesive governance and good public-private relations.

The example case of China

Among the preliminary research on COVID-time public diplomacy, China is often use as an example. This is partly due to the continuum that some researches found in China's previous public diplomacy and the activities that have taken place during the pandemic (Lee, 2021; Suzuki & Yang, 2022). Also, as China has been one of the countries to produce their own vaccine for the virus, it has a clear asset to use in its public diplomacy efforts. Consequently, one can find hundreds of articles written under the term 'vaccine diplomacy' and China, albeit there is some research conducted on the topic even pre-pandemic[4].

While the COVID-19 pandemic is not the first time China has incorporated medical aid in its public diplomacy efforts, the scale and pace of the distribution of aid during this pandemic has arguably been larger and faster than before (Suzuki & Yang, 2022). As the global demand for a vaccine exceeded the capabilities and production capacity of many other countries, China had an opportunity to rise as one of the major distributors of its own, domestically developed, vaccine. Since possession of additional vaccines provided a clear material asset to the countries that had them, the pandemic proved to be more than a severe health crisis, at least from the perspective of public diplomacy. For example, according to Lee (2021), the race for vaccines created a soft power vacuum, which China, among other nations like the U.S., saw as a geopolitical opportunity.

China initially focused on commercial orders of its vaccine, after which it started donating them, however unevenly and in a bilateral manner (Suzuki & Yang, 2022: p. 9). In fact, the destination of China's vaccine aid, at least in the beginning, was consistent with its previous public diplomacy efforts in the realm of business activities and development aid, which dates all the way back to the mid-1990s (Lee, 2021). Indeed, the previously-mentioned linkage between common good and national self-interest is relevant when considering the selection of recipients for COVID-time aid. The pandemic has been an opportunity to showcase moral leadership, particularly for 'non-traditional' countries like China[5], as well as to promote

[4] For example, see article by Chattu and Knight (2019) on China's health diplomacy activities.
[5] Dr. Paltemaa and Dr. Aubie (2021) discuss the role of different actors and claims involved in China's pandemic-time humanitarian aid in The Nordic Asia Podcast episode '*Rethinking China's Humanitarian Diplomacy before and during Covid-19*'.

economic partnerships. To promote the ethical side of its efforts, China framed the vaccines as International Public Goods (IPGs) and handed out some of the largest donations to countries with limited access to vaccinees (Su et al., 2021). However, the 'benevolence' behind vaccine diplomacy should not be overemphasised, as it still includes a level of calculated aid provision and has partly fuelled vaccine inequality. Su and others (2021) also critique the narrative of diplomacy surrounding the vaccine donations, as it undermines the humanitarian significance of distributing the vaccine to those in need, rather than to old or prospective partners. Moreover, much like China, many countries initially focused on the commercial sale of the vaccine, which was undeniably driven by national self-interest and economic gains generated by companies, not by purely philanthropic motivations.

Government communication during the COVID-19

One of the factors affecting countries' reputation during the pandemic has also been their ability and willingness to provide accurate and transparent information, both for the international audience and the domestic public. In 2008, Nye Jr. (p. 100, 101) argued that in the information age, 'politics has become a contest of competitive credibility', where ability to persuade others through soft power requires national credibility, rather than money spent on campaigns. The notion of competitive credibility is certainly interesting in the context of COVID-19 and public diplomacy, and puts the international scramble of finding the cure or producing and communicating COVID-related information into a new light. For some countries, the pandemic has been a chance to demonstrate their high credibility to others and perhaps improve their previous standing. Of course, credibility has to be acquired through substance, like successful pandemic management. Moreover, credibility is also a matter of trust, which leads back to reputation and perception. It can also be argued that, in the context of the pandemic, some countries have acquired credibility based on their 'success' more effectively than others. In practice, this may translate into other countries going to them for health-related expertise and this improved credibility may carry over to post-pandemic times. Thus, improved credibility has potential to generate positive effects on areas like export of medical technology and medicine, or even increased visibility and influence in multilateral bodies related to global health and medical innovation.

However, increasing one's credibility through public diplomacy does not necessarily mean improving one's own credibility. Additionally, one's relative credibility can be improved by decreasing that of others. In their article on COVID-19 and misinformation, Vériter and her colleagues (2020: p. 575) note that the pandemic has been politicised by major powers and in

COVID-related information the line between public diplomacy and misinformation is sometimes blurry. For example, they note that while the donation of protective equipment to China by a number of European countries received little attention in international media, similar actions by China later on generated much attention (Ibid. 576). Moreover, while the attention for 'best practices' often turned to East Asia, the discourse surrounding Europe's response relayed a message of lack of solidarity or insufficient reaction. Although aid provision and other reputation-improving actions are hardly a zero-sum game, the relative effect of one country's public diplomacy efforts on the image of others should also be considered.

2.3 Disaster and health diplomacy

To provide further background for public diplomacy in the context of the COVID-19, it is useful to consider diplomacy literature related to healthcare and/or crisis situation. Two related yet distinct scholarships have emerged on these topic under the terms of 'health diplomacy' and 'disaster diplomacy'. Considering these frameworks together provides a more solid foundation for further parts of the research, as the COVID-19 pandemic can be regarded as a disaster, as well as a global health crisis.

Health Diplomacy

While a relatively young concept, the origins of health diplomacy are in the 19th and 20th centuries when modernising societies were faced with new health-related issues. Although the world had seen global health crisis before, the growing interconnectedness of national economies and increased inter-state travel arguably magnified the impact and reach of health-related issues. Naturally, with large-scale problems also large-scale measures were needed. While there had been international health-related cooperation before, with the post-war institutionalisation of international relations, a multilateral body of the World Health Organization (WHO) was created to provide a dedicated platform for international health negotiations.

Today, health diplomacy, or global health diplomacy, mainly accounts for literature that has emerged to research the insertion of international health cooperation to diplomacy (Kickbusch & Ivanova, 2012). Within the health diplomacy literature there are a variety of meanings attached to the term. To organize the existing scholarly work, Katz and her colleagues (2011) have grouped different research into three categories of health-related interactions: *core*

diplomacy, comprising of international formal negotiations between and among nations; *multistakeholder diplomacy*, which includes other non-leading actors besides nations; and *informal diplomacy*, which, in addition to the prior two, includes even wider set of actors, such as nongovernmental organizations, private companies and the public. Within each category, there are a number of ways of communication, for example multilateral treaties and agreements, global initiatives and humanitarian assistance. Thus, it should be noted that health diplomacy does not only take place between government officials within 'official' platforms, but can take variety of forms and include different stakeholders.

Moreover, global health has also become a question of foreign policy, affecting decision-making on a national level. This is reflected in the definition of global health diplomacy by Kickbuch et al. (2007), who describe it to be '*the process by which government, multilateral and civil society actors attempt to position health in foreign policy negotiations and to create new forms of global health governance*'. Similarly, Fazal (2020: p. 78) understands health diplomacy as *'international aid or cooperation meant to promote health or that uses health programming to promote non-health-related foreign aims'*. While health and national politics are reasonably related, for example in the context of national healthcare, and can increase or decrease the public's trust of state institutions, what is the connection between health and foreign policy? According to Labonté and Gagnon (2010: p. 3), there are three main concerns that connect foreign policy and health crisis (particularly epidemics): epidemic-associated national conflict can spill over and turn into a regional conflict; epidemic-associated poverty can be more prone to foster terrorist activity; and epidemic-associated conflict can create various economic costs globally. While all of these concerns are connected to states' self-interest, health-related foreign policy should include additional considerations to insure consistent and synergistic policy-making on global health governance (Ibid. 16).

To conclude, health diplomacy provides means to accomplish outcomes, both aspirational and pragmatic, that nations would not be likely to reach on their own in this globalised world (Katz et al., 2011). Furthermore, as the number of health actors from both public and private sectors has grown, so have the resources directed towards health assistance. For example, the total budget for the WHO from the year 2020 to 2021 was 5.84 billion US dollars, which is over a billion USD more than just few years back in 2016 and 2017 (WHO, 2022; WHO, 2015). Successful health diplomacy can facilitate the utilisation of these resources in a more systematic and organised way. Though international dialogue and planning, nations are arguably more well-prepared than ever to face and address global health challenges.

Disaster diplomacy

Similarly to health diplomacy, the literature under disaster diplomacy is fairly new. However, non-conflict disasters and related political activity have been researched together for decades, since the first half of the 20th century. More recently, the focus of disaster diplomacy scholars has shifted to interstate relations during disasters (Reinhardt & Lutmar, 2022: p. 3).

To dissect the meaning of 'disaster diplomacy', it is useful to first understand what is meant by a disaster. One definition is offered by Perry (2007), who states that disasters are disruptions to the society caused by *unplanned events*. Following this logic, it is difficult to account disasters as 'man-made' as, for example, wars or terrorist attacks are not spontaneous. Thus, if one is to adopt this understanding of a disaster, discussing diplomacy in the context of non-conflict disasters, like earthquakes and hurricanes (or a global pandemic), is more fitting. Of course this is not to say that conflicts and disasters are unrelated. On the contrary, some researchers find that conflicts and disasters share similar vulnerabilities and outcomes, such as insufficient infrastructure and poor health situation, which in turn codetermine their effects on the affected society (Reinhardt & Lutmar, 2022: p. 8). Consequently, disaster diplomacy research often puts the framework in the context of a disaster occurring in a pre-existing and ongoing conflict area. For example, in their case study on tsunami disaster diplomacy in Indonesia, Gaillard and his colleagues (2008: p. 523) discuss how disaster diplomacy can provide diplomatic momentum for peace talks in cases where the disaster hits a conflict zone. Similarly, Ker-Lindsay (2000: p. 230) examines disaster diplomacy in the context of the Greek-Turkish rapprochement of 1999, where he finds that disaster diplomacy was a process that enabled popular legitimisation of official diplomacy based on a shared interest.

In many cases, disaster diplomacy connects disaster-related aid and international relations, and assesses whether the former can be used to improve the latter (Yim et al., 2009; Kelman, 2006: p. 217). Indeed, in addition to the prevalence of conflict within disaster diplomacy literature, the framework inserts an element of cooperation into a disaster situation. For example, in his definition of the term, Kelman (2012: p. 4) explains that 'disaster diplomacy examines *how* and *why* disaster-related activities do and do not reduce conflict and induce cooperation'. Evidently, notions of both conflict and cooperation are central to disaster diplomacy. Cooperation here is not always the case of inter-state assistance but can also be

experiences drawn from own past experience that is shared with other nations. For example, improved disaster relief capabilities can be used to supplement diplomatic endeavours. One example of this is Japan, which has translated its experience with natural disasters to a more visible role in related regional bodies and initiatives (Futori, 2013). Going back to the definition of diplomacy as furthering one's foreign policy goals, it is not surprising that countries cooperating on disaster relief would seek to improve cooperation in other areas as well. Whether disaster-related cooperation and possible diplomatic gains are lasting will likely depend on various factors, for example the level and duration of cooperation, as well as the state of existing relations between the countries.

Health and disaster diplomacy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Considering some of the prevalent ideas within both health and disaster diplomacy literature, what can they offer when applied to the most recent pandemic?

The applicability of pandemic-time international relations to the framework of health diplomacy is clear. Due to its global nature, responding to a pandemic is arguably best done through international cooperation. Thus, it is also a logical premises for exercising health diplomacy, which by definition is centred around international health-related matters. However, as illustrated previously, pandemics can also promote foreign policy goals based on national self-interest (Fazal, 2020: p. 78). Pandemic-time health diplomacy can be used to further one's strategic interests, especially when done through bilateral health diplomacy (Ibid. 84). Moreover, some argue that, for example, China has been able to expand its strategic influence in different parts of the world, thus further intensifying the rivalry over influence between China and the U.S. (Gauttam et al., 2020). There is some evidence of this from the past epidemics. For example, after the SARS outbreak in 2003 China increased its bilateral health diplomacy efforts, partly to counter the international critique it had received during the outbreak and to improve its standing as a regional power on disease control. Arguably, similar trend of bilateral health diplomacy has also been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to China, also non-traditional aid providers like India have engaged in some form of health diplomacy (Javed & Chattu, 2020). Bilateral focus has had its downsides as it has been one of the causes of inequal aid distribution, especially when aid has been used primarily as a political tool to further, for example, economic relations. As for multilateral bodies like the WHO, their capacity to counter some of the downsides of health diplomacy or act as a watchdog over international health-related activities is limited and would require more contributions from the member countries (Brown & Ladwig, 2020).

As for disaster diplomacy, the pandemic, which certainly qualifies as a disaster, has resulted in cooperation between various countries around the world. While diplomatic activity surrounding the situation has been robust for the past two years, it is possible that the COVID-time cooperation reaps long-term diplomatic gains, even after the 'disaster' has died down. After all, considering the interconnectedness of today's world this is unlikely to be the last global crisis we will experience in the 21st century. Experience with the COVID-19 might also provide new insights for disaster diplomacy literature, which typically regards disasters as catalysts for short-term diplomacy, not long-term endeavours (Kickbusch & Liu, 2022). However, it should be noted that most diplomatic gains seem to be between countries that have either neutral or good relations to begin with. While many hoped that disaster diplomacy during COVID-19 could be used to improve relations between rival countries, there is not much evidence to support its effectiveness. For example, the pandemic had little to no positive effect on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and even the marginal cooperation during the beginning of the pandemic deflated soon (Lehrs, 2021). Thus, diplomatic gains around the COVID-19 might only be limited to certain premises.

3 South Korean context

This section of the thesis will provide more information on nation branding and public diplomacy in the context of South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea). The main focus will be on efforts conducted since the presidency of Lee Myung-bak up until the present administration in 2022. However, to better understand the current trajectory of Korea's image management it is worthwhile to consider the historical foundation they have been built upon. Thus, a brief overview of rebranding of the modernising, post-Korean War Korea is also provided. Identifying and discussing the prevalent paradigms in Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy from the 1960's to the COVID-19 pandemic times will provide a backdrop against which pandemic-time activities can be assessed in the data analysis section of the research. To provide preliminary context for the analysis, recently emerged literature on Korea's pandemic-time nation branding and public diplomacy is covered at the end of the chapter. However, the topic will be discussed in more detail later on.

3.1 Existing literature on Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy

To begin with, it should be noted that due to the general conceptual haziness surrounding both nation branding and public diplomacy literature (and perhaps also resulting from conscious choices made by researchers), publications discussing nation branding and public diplomacy in Korea often use the terms interchangeably (examples of this available for example in Choi & Kim, 2014; Ayhan, 2019; Lee, 2011). The conceptual inconsistency is a well-known weakness of the broader literature on the two concepts and thus not a surprising element. However, considering the aim and scope of this particular research, allocating time attempting to categorize separate efforts either as one or the other practice would take away from the main focus of this chapter, which is to provide background on the development of Korea's image management. Therefore, while recognising the inconsistencies within the existing research, both terms are employed as they appear in the literature (two sides of the same coin) and their further conceptualisation is left to a more appropriate research piece.

Overall, literature on Korea's nation branding in the 21st century is relatively extensive, considering that the practice in itself is not old. However, as Schwak (2020: p. 7) notes in her article, majority of the literature is non-critical and often does not adequately address contextual factors or certain interest groups that have shaped the branding efforts. For example, the commercial aspect of nation branding is sometimes overlooked when examining

Korea's image formation, even though the country has a long history of close public-private sector relationship, also within the realm of image management. Indeed, the alliance has played an important part in the formation of current nation brand and the success of certain phenomena, such as the Korean Wave. The public-private cooperation is also important in the context of the COVID-19 and the modularisation of Korea's pandemic management, and will be covered in more detail during the data analysis.

3.2 Nation branding and public diplomacy in modern Korea

Like many others countries, Korea has engaged in image management activities long before nation branding and public diplomacy, as they are practiced today, were developed. However, when it comes to more conscious and organised efforts, Korea is relatively new to the game. Today, Korea is among countries that have appointed quasigovernmental bodies for image management or employed industry professionals to help with the task. Yet, as the arena of international relations is dynamic and everchanging, building a national image is often more cyclical than a linear process. Thus, strategies related to image management often change throughout the years, for example along with administrative changes or due to major events and as the understanding of these practices matures and develops. Sometimes these shifts are apparent, sometimes more muted.

This gradual development and dynamism of image management practices can also be seen in the case of Korea. While resulting in occasional inconsistencies, the overall direction has led to positive results. For a number of public diplomacy and nation branding scholars, Korea is a classic example of a country that has benefitted from a conscious shifting of its image. This is partly due to the contrast of the 'old' and 'new' Korea, as the country has drastically transformed in the past few decades. As Korea has rapidly changed from a poverty-ridden nation into a wealthy middle power, a gap formed between its economic status and international perceptions (Schmuck, 2011: 102). Since middle powers primarily rely on soft power to pursue their goals in global politics (Laatikainen, 2006), importance of a good image, one of key tools of soft power, is crucial. Consequently, Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding efforts for the past decades have aimed to close the gap in perception and communicate the message of a new and modernised Korea to the international audience. Considering Korea's image today, they have arguably succeeded in the task.

Image management in post-Korean War Korea

When considering Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy activities today, it is important to recognise the historical experiences that have shaped it. A suitable starting point for examining the image management of modern Korea is the unofficial end of the Korean War, an event that brought Korea into the consciousness of a wider international audience and also marked the start of a new era in Korea's history.

Starting from the 1960's during the administration of President Park Chung-hee, post-war Korea was not only transformed into but also 'rebranded' as an industrialised, developed country. While Park's goal of reforming Korea as a developmental state took many forms, the overarching goal was to lift Korea among the 'modern' countries of the world (Schwak, 2016: p. 434). One clear prerequisite of this shift was economic development. To achieve growth and make Korea self-reliant President Park emphasised an export-oriented economy and branding strategy was primarily utilised to support and promote Korean export products (Lee, 2011: p. 9). Thus, image management was closely connected to economic goals and treated as a tool to better Korea's position in global markets. Also, while a dedicated quasigovernmental agency was created, among other things, to communicate a new image of Korean exports to the international audiences, the process was heavily top-down and kept at the highest levels of the government (Ibid. 10). Moreover, even though Korean products were reaching the markets, Korea was mainly associated with mediocre, low-value products (Lee & Lee, 2019: p. 128). However, at this time Korea's image was not at the top of the government's agenda.

Through the 1970's and 1980's government's focus moved to promoting heavy industries, which aligned better with the image of a newly industrialised Korea (Lee, 2011: p. 10). The shift also diffused some of the negative connotations associated with Korea and Korean products at the time. During the 1980's Korea further solidified its vision to become a 'science and technology-advanced country' (Ibid. 11). Arguably the vision has translated into a reality, as the perceptual link between Korea and science and technology industries is fairly strong to this day. Many would agree that Korea holds its place among the perceived leaders within today's telecommunication and automotive industries, being the birthplace of companies like Samsung and Hyundai.

Of course, economy is not the only component of national image formation and the process is also effected by country's foreign policy direction and regional status. For modernising Korea, both were heavily security-focused. In Korea's case, this was (and still is) obvious yet

unavoidable, as there has been no official peace accomplished between the two Koreas after the Korean War, leaving a level of persisting instability on the peninsula. Consequently, diplomatic efforts after the Korean War mainly focused on constructing and maintaining a security system supported by the United States and Japan (Kim, 2012: p. 537).

Understandably, Korea's image has suffered from the frequent association between Korea and the Korean War, as well as the mix-up of the two Koreas (Anholt, 2008). In terms of image management and formation, East Asia as a region also holds other challenges for Korea. Along with balancing inter-Korea relations, Korea is also located next to two powerful nations, Japan and China. Both countries are considerable economic powers and their images internationally recognised. While these geopolitical realities understandably play a major role in Korean foreign politics, they have also hindered the strengthening of Korea's image. Having neighbours with strong images, not just regionally but internationally, has made it difficult for Korea to differentiate itself. While Korea's economic rise has been internationally recognised and praised, its diplomatic 20th century policies were, for the most part, passive and non-creative (Cho, 2012: p. 283). It has taken both time and organised effort from the Korean government to develop the image further. Moreover, China's controversial reputation and Japan's relative decline in the recent decades have given Korea an opportunity to acquire a new role in the region. Additionally, internal events like Korea's eventual democratisation in the 1980's as well as changes in international order in the 1990's with the end of the Cold War created a new environment for Korea to reshape its image in.

The wake of Korea's image management can be placed at the end of the 20th century. For example, according to Schwak (2016: p. 428), more conscious nation branding efforts have taken place since the 1990's. This also marked the time most notable publication of nation branding literature as well as the 'new public diplomacy' research began to emerge, giving new-found academic substance and guidance for image management practices. Many elements developed in the 1990's are still a major part of Korea's image. For example, culture solidified its position as a key element in promoting Korea abroad (Choi, 2019: p. 12). While culture had been used in diplomatic missions in the past, for example through sending Korean sports delegations abroad and distributing cultural items to overseas embassies, its role had been relatively small. By the end of the 90's, culture had become a fundamental part of Korea's brand. Consequently, the use of culture in nation branding and public diplomacy is not uncommon for middle power countries (Lee & Kim, 2020: 5), partly due to its inherent connection to soft power. In addition to culture, Korea's successful democratisation was one

of the major sources of its growing soft power reserve (Lee, 2009). Korea also demonstrated its strengthened middle power identity by using an increasingly internationalist tone in its foreign and domestic politics, seeking to improve Korea's role outside its immediate surroundings and expand its alliances beyond the U.S. (O'Neil, 2015: p. 81).

Perhaps the most discussed outcome of Korean government's reorganised branding efforts was Hallyu, or the 'Korean Wave', which was the popularisation of Korean entertainment abroad at the turn of the millennium. While the phenomenon was strongest regionally, namely in China, Japan and Southeast Asian countries, it paved the way for Korean media to take on the Western markets. In addition to clear economic benefits that the rising popularity of Korean entertainment generated, it also increased the global awareness of Korea. The potential to use entertainment as part of Korea's nation brand and public diplomacy efforts was not missed by the government and it developed and supported selected cultural areas, such as the media industry (Kwon & Kim, 2014: p. 424). The efforts to boost Korean entertainment abroad were done as a shared project between the government, which supported the sector through policy, and the chaebol (Korean conglomerates), which did the same through investments (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008: p. 7). However, heavy reliance on cultural diplomacy also confined Korea's image within relatively narrow boundaries (Kim, 2012: p. 539). While economically benefiting from the export of Korean entertainment and generating interest towards Korea among its consumers, cultural focus was perhaps not the most effective way to pursue government's other goals, namely the promotion of Korea as a strong actor within the international order. Consequently, Korea has sought to strengthen other elements of its image throughout the 21st century.

Nation branding and public diplomacy during the Lee Myung-bak administration

By the 21st century, Korea had elevated itself among the wealthiest nations of the world. In the aftermath of the regional economic crisis of 1997 and the relative decline of the U.S. influence in East Asia due to its growing interests in the Middle East, Korea's regional position was also shifting. While traditional foreign policy themes, like maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, remained, Korea increasingly participated in international dialogue regarding various global issues (Choi, 2019: p. 13). Moreover, developments in communication technologies, growing interconnectedness and accelerated globalisation had altered the arena of international relations. For diplomacy, this meant that non-governmental

actors, like NGOs and individuals, had more sway than before and their voices louder than before (Cho, 2012: p. 276). Thus, governments could no longer practice image management without taking the public's input into consideration.

Predictably, prevailing global and regional trends as well as changing landscape of international relations also influenced nation branding and public diplomacy. Scholarship on the two concepts, albeit still young, was growing. As new ideas surrounding national image and its use in international relations developed further, number of governments, including Korea, adopted more strategic and organised their approach to image management efforts. Since its modernisation, Korea had been building up its role within the international community as a newly risen middle power. Middle powers, both traditional ones like Canada or Norway and emerging ones like Korea, often showcase similar behaviours, for example legitimising and stabilising actions to support the prevailing global order (Jordaan, 2003). Consequently, Korea also conducted such behaviour to further solidify its middle power position in the 21st century. To demonstrate its new global status, Korea hosted both large international events like the FIFA World Cup in 2002, G20 Summit Meeting in 2010 and the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF), and showcased more engaged membership behaviour in multilateral organisations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Schröter & Schwekendiek, 2015). Additionally, Korea was accepted as a member of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2010 (OECD, 2010). While the notion of 'middle' in middle power status indicates that a country is not among the 'top powers', Korea accepted and even embraced its position. Korea's acceptance of the middle power role is explained by Teo (2018: p. 231), who proposes that Korea understood 'middle' as being at the centre of the world stage and thus holding considerable influence on the activities of the global community. Considering the fast pace of its socioeconomic development and fairly recent experience in being an impoverished country, Korea could position itself truly in the middle of developing nations and more mature developed nations. Arguably, it has common ground with both and can thus act as a 'bridge' between the two, which is a relatively unique position within the international community.

However, despite Korea's improved economic standing and increased engagement in international affairs, it was still experiencing image-related issues. For example in 2008, Anholt (p. 268) described Korea as a 'classic case' of holding a good reputation regionally,

while having a problematic image in the West. The disparity was mainly due to persisting issues, like the connection or confusion between Korean and its northern neighbour. Also, Korean products were still associated with the so-called 'Korea discount', which refers to the perceived poor quality of products made in Korea (Dinnie, 2009: p. 2). Choi and Kim (2014: p. 3) also argue that there was a lack of cultural openness and acceptance towards foreigners in Korea and Korean people lacked 'global citizenship', which set the country apart from some of the other developed nations. Even though globalisation had increased economic interconnectedness, Koreans' exposure to other cultures was still fairly marginal.

While nation branding consultants, such as Anholt, might have their own agendas when assessing weaknesses of a national image, the notion was taken seriously by the Korean government. To counter the negative (or at least outdated) image Korea allegedly held abroad, administration under President Lee Myung-bak sought to institutionalise Korea's nation branding. Management of Korea's image within different sectors was already done through several departments, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (Kim, 2012: p. 539). Following the FIFA World Cup in 2002, the government also created the National Image Committee, which was meant to work on improving Korea's global status (Choi, 2019: p. 14). However, under the Lee administration, the Committee was further developed into the Presidential Council on Nation Branding (PCNB), which was established at the beginning of 2009 as a separate quasigovernmental body appointed specifically to boost Korea's nation brand (Schmuck, 2011: p. 91).

To measure the outcomes of its branding efforts more effectively PCNB worked together with Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI) to create a new nation brand index model, Nation Brand Dual Octagon (Lee, 2010: p. 104). Arguably, the development of a new nation brand ranking system demonstrates that Korea did not only take nation branding seriously but also sought to become an influential actor and contributor within the nation branding practice itself. The government supported nation branding and public diplomacy efforts by creating a legal infrastructure, which culminated during the next administration in 2016, when Korea's first Public Diplomacy Act was introduced (Choi, 2019: p. 14). Furthermore, PCNB was not separated from the government, but it set strategies and guidelines, which effectively coordinated branding-related activities within the forementioned departments and ministries. In addition, Korean citizens were included in PCNB's activities (Choi & Kim, 2014: p. 8). For example, government conducted surveys on public awareness related to Korea's nation

branding. While the process was still coordinated top-down, inclusion of other stakeholders was aligned with a wider trend within nation branding and public diplomacy literature.

The creation of PCNB was a clear milestone for more organised image management efforts in Korea, as nation branding was made one of government's key policy agendas (Choi & Kim, 2014: p. 2, 6). The reorganised efforts expanded beyond the public sector. As with many other government-led projects in modern Korea, the elevation of Korea's nation brand was also taken up by commercial firms, thus done partly as a private-public endeavour. In fact, intensifying the public-private partnership in the context of nation branding was part of PCBN's core strategy (Ibid. 7). The combination has arguably been effective in improving Korea's image, especially through the culture approach.

Indeed, during the Lee administration Korea's nation branding strategy still held a heavy focus on the promotion of Korean culture. For example, the flagship of Korea's nation brand, the Korean Wave, was updated and expanded (Hong, 2014: p. 76). Due to technological advancements in Korea and elsewhere, the potential to reach wider audiences was higher than ever before. Consequently, the government employed technology, namely ICT infrastructure, to reach the global markets (Kwon & Kim, 2014: p. 428). The approach utilised Korea's advanced ICT infrastructure to first reach Korean audiences and then use the momentum to spread to the rest of the world. Perhaps the most successful case of the approach was Psy's *Gangnam Style*, which became an international phenomenon, primarily due to its initial popularity on the video service YouTube. Cultural approach also included exportation of more traditional cultural 'products' like taekwondo and involved strong government support of culture and tourism industries (Dinnie, 2009: p. 4). More traditional culture-related activities focused on the promotion of Korean language and writing system through the King Sejong Institutes (similar concept to China's Confucius Institutes), as well as enlisting places like traditional temples as the World Heritage sites of the UNESCO (Choi & Kim, 2014: p. 10).

In addition to promotion of culture, the megatrend of globalisation affected the configuration of Korea's image. The idea of globalised Korea manifested into a slogan of 'Global Korea' in 2009, with a core purpose to strengthen Korea's global role (O'Neil, 2015: p. 84). The initiative included, for example, international education policies to increase foreign nationals' understanding of Korea and enable more international students to study there (Ayhan et al., 2022: p. 874). This approach is not unique, as student mobility is widely used as a public diplomacy tool. However, in addition to educating outsiders about Korea, there was also an

explicit goal of ‘better treatment’ of foreigners and multicultural families living in Korea. Thus, part of the ‘Global Korea’ project focused on shifting Koreans’ mindsets to that of ‘global citizens’ (Dinnie, 2009), which included being more tolerant and accepting towards foreign residents and tourists.

Another element of the new ‘Global Korea’ was the increase in provision of external aid as well as sending more Korean volunteers abroad. Emphasising Korea’s global role and leadership through participation in aid provision was infused to Korea’s policy orientation (Choi & Kim, 2014: p. 9). To further demonstrate its growing responsibilities in development assistance as a ‘developed’ country, Korea joined the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2010 as the first former aid recipient (Doucette & Müller, 2016: p. 29). This position arguably provided Korea with new substance to incorporate in its public diplomacy and nation brand. For example, in its development assistance Korea drew from its past experiences and sought to form a model based on the development background that allegedly turned it from an aid recipient to an aid provider. In particular, a set of policies from the rural modernisation programme of the 1970’s, known as ‘Saemaul Undong’, were repurposed as a Korean model of development (Ibid. 30). Decisionmakers proposed that developing countries could experience economic growth similar to Korea if they employed the model. After all, Korea itself was a thriving evidence that it had worked, which, in turn, added to the credibility of the model. Of course, Korea’s own role as an advisor was essential as Saemaul Undong was a uniquely Korean model. Although the model was introduced during the previous administration, the Lee administration expanded Saemaul Undong’s promotion and incorporated sustainability-related elements to the programme. While there are a variety of issues and controversies related to the model, it demonstrates Korean government’s tendency to promote practices by ‘modularising’ its own experiences. While this is also done by other countries, the notion is important when considering Korea’s approach in the other areas of its public diplomacy efforts.

Korea’s nation branding and public diplomacy today

Over the past decades, Korea’s nation branding focus has moved from developmental state to ‘Global Korea’ (Schwak, 2016). Changes in focus have often been marked by the creation or reconfiguration of quasigovernmental bodies in charge of Korea’s image cultivation, as well as introduction of new related policies. While the main focus points have remained the same over the past couple of decades, each administration has slightly shifted Korea’s public

diplomacy and branding efforts to leave their own mark on the practice. This has been especially apparent during changes between conservative and liberal governments. For example, with the change of the Lee administration, the PCNB in its original form was disbanded. However, this is not to say that there is no continuity in the management of Korea's brand. Culture and technology, for instance, have maintained as key parts of Korea's image. Still, many administrations seek to add something new to the practice. For example, after the Lee administration, government under President Park Geun-hye sought to enhance Korea's competitiveness through innovation and creativity, consequently adopting a nation brand slogan of 'Creative Korea' in 2013 (Lee & Lee, 2019: p. 128).

Later during the Moon Jae-in administration, public diplomacy was exercised through the Committee on Public Diplomacy, which was chaired by the Foreign Minister and comprised of members from both public and private sectors, as well as members of civil society as observers (MOFA, 2017). Committee's main function was to draft a five-year plan for Korea's public diplomacy, essentially for the duration of Moon's presidency. During the first Committee meeting, prevailing focus points for public diplomacy between the years 2017 and 2021 included government cooperation on different levels, imperative role of the private sector and the public, and the continuous use of culture to promote Korea abroad. However, the initial emphasis on culture was later decreased in Committee's second meeting in 2018. Instead, technology and reinforcing Korea's image as 'advanced and future-oriented country' were highlighted (MOFA, 2018). Additionally, plans for targeted public diplomacy efforts in 'major countries' were introduced, the US, China and Japan singled out explicitly. The shift of focus from culture to technology carried on to the current administration's agenda. While this is not to say that culture is no longer an important part of Korea's public diplomacy, it seems that technology is positioned as the (aspirational) flagship of Korea's current image.

According to a press release by the Yoon Suk-yeol administration, the three main goals of Korea's current public diplomacy strategy are the promotion of national interest; enhancing Korea's standing as a scientific, technological and cultural powerhouse; and building a digital public diplomacy ecosystem (MOFA, 2022). As noted above, it is apparent that the new administration will continue to utilise the momentum Korea's cultural approach has created. After all, it is not coincidental that Korean entertainment has been able to enter the sphere of Western popular culture and even gain recognition and tangible 'results' in form of awards and ranking placements. Korean entertainment is no longer consumed by a niche segment but has reached wider international audiences, for example through TV series like *Squid Game*,

movies like *Parasite*, and performers like the boy group BTS. In many ways, the rise of Korean culture has been one of the greatest successes of Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy efforts. However, there is also an apparent desire to gain recognition within other fields as well. Based on the statement, the government will increasingly employ the latest technological innovations to foster its public diplomacy efforts. Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic might provide an unexpected avenue for that (Lee & Kim, 2020: p. 11). In terms of international relations, the current trajectory of Korea's image and desired role include many familiar themes, for example upholding peace in the Korean peninsula and strengthening regional cooperation (MOFA, 2022). The statement also mentions the promotion of an image that contributes to global values, signalling that Korea will continue to pursue a role as a proactive actor within the international community. Not only will Korea adhere to 'global values', but it will also contribute to them, providing its own input. Overall, while there seems to be no drastic changes in the explicit goals of Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy, there is a clear change of focus from culture to technology.

3.3 Image management in Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic

As discussed in the previous chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic offers a unique case study for examining public diplomacy and nation branding during an international crisis. Arguably, good pandemic management has provided countries a chance to showcase aspects like organised governance and ability to deliver targeted innovation, whereas poor management has made governments look inadequate and weak. Within the emerging literature and international news articles, Korea is often brough up as an example of a country that excelled in its COVID-19 measures. Fuelled by the positive feedback, Korea proceeded to incorporate pandemic management into its existing public diplomacy efforts. It also seems that the success has generated some concrete outcomes. For example, Lee and Kim (2021: p. 391) conducted a sentiment analysis on Korea and COVID-19 and found that there was an overall positive nation brand for Korea within that context, which supported the hypothesis that Korea's global image has improved during the pandemic. According to the study, others perceive Korea as a 'global health leader' and a model on how to cope with the virus. While this is tied to the context of COVID-19, the ability to develop functional system in a short period of time holds elements that are transferrable elsewhere.

The question is to what extent will the initial success in pandemic management influence Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding endeavours in the future. Arguably, much can be learned by looking at Korea's image management during the pandemic as an isolated case and this is also one of the objectives of this research. Moreover, while pandemic-time programmes like '3Ts strategy' might be most employable in an actual pandemic or epidemic situation, Korea's ability to produce technological innovation within healthcare and medicine industries is likely to play a part in its nation brand in the future. Additionally, even though activities related to pandemic management are not explicitly tied to the three main goals of Korea's current public diplomacy and nation branding agenda, the current trajectory contains elements which can quite effortlessly draw from the lessons learned during the pandemic.

Of course, there are also reasons why initial success in pandemic management might not be fully employed for improving Korea's image beyond this specific context. As Cull (2022: p. 19) notes, the strategy of promoting self as an exemplary model for pandemic management is easily watered if there are setbacks in, for example, country's infection rates. For Korea, the setbacks were not necessarily related to infection spikes, although it had moments of rising cases despite its 'diligent' efforts (Kang, 2020; McCurry & Kim, 2020). Rather, the methods central and local governments and involved health officials used to tract infected persons, including accessing various forms of personal data, have caused controversies over Korea's pandemic management (Park et al., 2020). Moreover, as details like path and means of transfer of the infected person were released, along with sex, nationality and age, speculations of their identity often circulated in local communities. In some cases the speculations could also include accusations of infidelity or result in information like personal details (e.g. photos and names of family members) being posted online (BBC, 2020). The accusations did not only affect the object of the speculations, but also local businesses they had allegedly visited were shunned, resulting in microeconomic losses (Ibid. 2129). Indeed, some critics say that linking national pride to containing the virus adds pressure to manage the situation at 'any means necessary' (Yi & Lee, 2020: p. 450). This could come at the expense of individual's rights to privacy, which arguably was the case in Korea.

Additionally, while Korea was undoubtedly one of the 'winners' of pandemic management during the first year of the crisis, the differences between countries and approaches diminished as time went on, and so did the public interest. Much like other countries, Korea ultimately experienced peaks in domestic infection rates despite its praised practices, resulting in economic hardship and loss of lives. Clearly, there was no perfect model that could entirely

guard from the impact of the virus, which partly devalues the use of set models for pandemic management. However, by analysing the government communication during the peak success of Korea's pandemic management this research aims to add to the wider understanding of the direction of Korea's current public diplomacy and nation branding.

4 Data and methodology

In this chapter, data selection and methodological choices made for the research are presented and discussed. Primary data selected for this research was gathered through internet (i.e. electronic data) based on its suspected relevance to the research topic. The selected set of data ended up including press statements, COVID-19 material, speeches, policy decisions and reports from multinational bodies. The process is explained in more detail further down the chapter. For chosen method, there were three main criteria: the suitability to analyse the selected data; the suitability to analyse the data in a way that could generate an answer to the main research question and sub-questions; and limitations (time, accessibility, personal skills and knowledge etc.). While recognising that there may be other ways to approach the dataset, method of choice for this research is document analysis, more specifically *frame analysis*, also including some features of thematic analysis, mostly in the form of inductively identifying themes within the employed texts (Guest et al., 2012).

The chapter is formed as follows: first section will discuss the data selection process and the selected data. Second part will introduce frame analysis and cover its strengths and weaknesses, both in general as well as within the context of this research. The actual data analysis process and findings will be covered in the subsequent chapters.

4.1 Primary data

The data selection process was guided by the gradual formation of the research questions as well as the overall scope of the research. As the main topics of this research are public diplomacy and nation branding, processes which are typically initiated and controlled by the government, the data of interest was government-generated communication, i.e. public documents. Furthermore, as the aim is to examine these practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, the main focus settled to documents related to the pandemic.

Focus on pandemic-time activities also naturally reduced the timeline to the duration of the pandemic. At the time of conducting this research, it has been nearly three years since the start of the pandemic. Currently in 2022, we are still living in a transitional time period, where many societies have started to go back to ‘normal’, yet the infection rates have not completely flattened. Some countries, such as China, have relatively recently imposed city-wide lockdowns in order to control the spread. Despite the ongoing nature of the situation, the years since the start of the pandemic in 2019 have provided perspective and understanding of

the different stages and the overall timeline of the pandemic. Guided by this perspective, the timeline of interest for this thesis was limited to the first full year of the pandemic, the year of 2020. As some time has already passed, there is a considerable amount of primary data available from this period. During the early months of COVID, many governments had to make decision with little to no prior experience in pandemic management, making the demand for different solutions high. Consequently, the setting gave an avenue for countries like Korea to leverage their early success in fighting the coronavirus, thus generating a plethora of documents on different approaches to managing COVID-19. As noted at the beginning of the research, this is not unique to just Korea, however it arguably possesses one of the most extensive pandemic guides published by a national government. Furthermore, due to the novelty of the situation, the pandemic has also been a keen topic of interest for researchers across various disciplines, thus generating a generous amount of early research.

Considering that the aim of this research is to analyse themes and frames Korean government put forward in its pandemic-time communication, the most suitable data is qualitative in nature. To ensure the credibility of the information, majority of the data was sourced from the official website of Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereby MOFA) or websites of other governmental bodies that were linked on MOFA's website (such as the official website of the government of Republic of Korea). More specifically, the search was conducted using the 'Press' section of the website to find press releases and speeches, as well as the designated section for Korea's public diplomacy functions. Within the sections, the content was filtered based on the timeframe of interest (year 2020) and using search terms 'public diplomacy' and its Korean equivalent, '공공외교' (gonggongoegyo[6]). As the primary goal is to examine communication Korean government has produced for external (i.e. non-Korean) audiences, most of the selected documents are in English. However, singular documents and websites written in Korean are included to add to the understanding of Korea's current (and explicit) public diplomacy and nation branding agenda in a way they are communicated to internal audiences. Ideally, interviews or questionnaires conducted with officials who are involved in pandemic-time communication would have provided a better triangulation for this research,

[6] Romanization used for Korean texts is the Revised Romanization system (see https://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1105108/ROMANIZATION_OF_KOREAN-__MOCT_for_ROK.pdf).

however, considering constraints (e.g. lack of relevant contacts and time), this was not a feasible option. Thus, the research primarily relies on documentary data.

Perhaps the most significant document used in this research is a handbook provided on the MOFA's website under the section 'Korea's Response to COVID-19'. The section in itself is important for the data gathering process as it provides a plethora of information on Korea's COVID-19 policies and overall strategy. Arguably, the most extensive information can be found in a handbook titled '*All about Korea's Response to COVID-19*'. Published in October 2020 by the Republic of Korea, the 240-page document provides an overview of Korea's COVID-19 strategy, written primarily in English. Below is the introduction of the guide as written on the website (including typos):

'All about Korea's Response to COVID-19 comprehensively outlines Korea's endeavors against COVID-19 from its outbreak in late January to the end of September 2020. We hope that it may serve as a source of reference for the international commmunity. The compilation captures our whole-of-government deliberations and the constant precess of enhancing and fine-tuning our measures in line with the evolving situation.' (MOFA, 2020a)

As stated in the introduction, the document has been drafted as a 'source of reference' for the international community. While it is not clearly outlined what is meant by 'the international community', potential target audience includes both 'official' actors, such as governments and health officials of other countries, as well as nongovernmental organisations and individuals. It is good to note that a similar audience is often the target of countries' public diplomacy and nation branding efforts as well.

In addition to the guide, there are other MOFA-generated publications that are used to analyse possible convergencies between pandemic-related activities and Korea's recent public diplomacy and nation branding efforts. For example, during the first full year of the pandemic in June 15th 2020, the Korean government published a statement titled '*Post COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Policy'* (MOFA, 2020b). In the statement, Korea introduces its 'TRUST campaign', which is '*to promote ROK's responses to COVID-19 based on the principles of transparency, openness and democracy*' and '*sending global messages emphasizing the necessity of solidarity and cooperation*'. The publication includes additional material and provides links for readers to familiarise themselves with Korea's pandemic strategy. MOFA's goals for pandemic-time public diplomacy are also outlined in the document, along with five distinct policies to achieve its goals. The statement is inherently important to this study as it

explicitly outlines Korea's initial public diplomacy goals during the pandemic. This and similar documents clearly demonstrate how Korea did not forget its image management activities during the pandemic but rather regarded it as a partial opportunity to strengthen and add to its efforts. This particular statement can also be used to compare the between-stage of Korea's pre- and post-pandemic public diplomacy and nation branding objectives.

Besides the two above-mentioned documents, similar shorter statements are employed for the data analysis to better understand Korea's pandemic-time image management. Most notably, a number of press releases related to public diplomacy (and published by MOFA within 2020) are included. The statements are analysed as their original Korean versions. For sufficient triangulation, a number of speeches delivered by relevant high-ranking officials (e.g. President and Foreign Minister) are included in the analysis. Majority of the selected speeches are given to an international audience, as they are more likely to reflect the message Korea aims to convey through the promotion of its pandemic measures. As some of the speeches are in Korean, unofficial translations provided by the Korean government are employed. In addition to governmental documents, Korea International Cooperation Agency's (KOICA) Annual Report from 2020 is utilised to examine Korea's foreign aid during the pandemic, as well as data from organisations like The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Overall, 25 pieces of data were selected for the analysis.

4.2 Frame analysis

While searching and selecting appropriate data to address the research questions, there was also the process of selecting a suitable method to use for the data analysis. As the data of interest comprises of official documents, the overall research is qualitative in nature and has clearly defined context (the pandemic), a form of document analysis seemed most applicable (Stake, 1995). While being suitable for this specific research, additional advantages of document analysis include efficiency, availability and cost-effectiveness (Bowen, 2009: p. 31). Considering the timeframe and resources available for a Master-level thesis, these were important considerations to maintain the project's feasibility.

Among the different types of document analysis, frame analysis was chosen to dissect the content of the documents. While not the originator of the framing concept itself, this form of analysis was first proposed by Goffman in 1974 in his book '*Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience'*. The main components of his conception of frame analysis rely on

two existential prerequisites: individuals share social situations with other individuals and these individuals lack dully reliable information about the other party (Persson, 2018: p. 49). These prerequisites transform into two knowledge-related issues: defining the forementioned situation and gathering social information about others whom the situations are shared with. As frame analysis addresses construction of meaning and the actors involved in the process, it inherently relies on a constructivist understanding of the world (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018: p. 109). Furthermore, as the beginning stage of the pandemic was characterised by conflicting information and uncertainty, it arguably presented a good opportunity for different parties to present and promote their own frames of the situation.

Frames

Perhaps the most important component of the frame analysis are the frames. Frames, as defined by Vliegenthart & van Zoonen (2011: p. 112) are *'part of a collective struggle over meaning that takes place through a multiplicity of media and interpersonal communication'* and which *'draws from a range of resources, among which are news media and personal experience, and works out differently for particular individuals, groups and institutions'*.

According to the above understanding, frames play a part in 'struggle over meaning'. Thus, within a frame exists or is created a specific meaning for an event, topic or phenomenon (Persson, 2018: p. 52). Almost as a physical frame, they accentuate certain things while excluding others. In the current Information Age, where volume and sources of information are vast and frequency of new information rapid, having the ability to give meaning to events arguably also provides a better chance to justify or portray own actions in a desired way. However, frames and their creators are not always clearcut and there can be multiple frames simultaneously or a single frame can extend to other actors and singular events involved in a situation (Ibid. 53). Of course, there are also competing frames that attempt to promote their meaning over others. Ultimately, prevailing frames influence the way people 'make sense' of events and phenomena.

Entman (1993) provides more specific functions for frames, defining four ways they can be used by the communicator: to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies. In the end, 'successful' framing results in giving a phenomenon its dominant meaning, accepted by most people. However, in the case of this research, the aim is to examine the way Korean government frames the COVID-19 pandemic in their communication, rather than to measure whether their frames have been accepted by the

audience. However, there is already data available to attempt the latter, for example the sentiment analysis done by Lee and Kim (2020) in their research on Korea's pandemic-time public diplomacy, which suggests that Korea has been fairly successful in creating a positive image of itself in the context of the pandemic.

Framing process

For defining the framing process itself, another definition by Vliegenthart & van Zoonen is utilised. According to their research of the literature, framing process consists of '*outcomes of social interactions between political and media actors and environments that are for the greater part routinized and tapping into common sense*' (2011: p. 107). Here, the communicators are defined as 'political, media actors and environments' and the framing process as 'outcomes'. Persson (2018: p. 78) also offers a description of framing in social interactions, calling it 'the art of managing impressions'. Thus, a simplified understanding of the framing process considers it merely as application of frames to a certain situation through different communication platforms. As this basic concept of framing is sufficient for the purposes of this research it is employed to avoid misplaced scrutiny over definitions and conceptual shortcomings of the overall practice.

Considering that governments had limited control over the developments of the pandemic itself, framing the crisis became arguable one of the only meaningful ways to control the situation and its grand narrative. As the first months of COVID-19 were marked by confusion and constant yet insufficient information, framing both the pandemic and related pandemic management efforts adequately was understandably one of the top priorities for many governments. This setting is particularly relevant in the context of pandemic management guides, as it suggest an embedded purpose besides being purely an operational manual to others.

4.3 Data analysis process

After determining and collecting relevant data and deciding on the method of analysis, the analysis process itself could begin. To aid the process, NVivo, a software for qualitative content analysis, was utilised. However, the software was used only after the preliminary analysis (i.e. skimming) of the data. The extraction of possible frames within the main set of data (i.e. guide on Korea's COVID-19 response, MOFA publications, public speeches, 2020 Annual Report by KOICA) was mostly done inductively, meaning that there were no

predetermined frames set prior to the analysis. However, after the initial skimming of the documents, some key words were selected to focus on specific sections of text during the software-aided analysis. These included ‘Korea’ and ‘global’ (international was also used due to the close semantic proximity to global). The words were selected based on their relevance to the overall research focus and their relatedness to the main research question. As the main actor of interest is Korea, more specifically the Korean government, and the primary target of their communication the international or global audience, focusing on these sections enabled a more focused analysis. However, this method was only fully applied to the documents ‘All about Korea’s response to COVID-19’ and ‘2020 Annual Report’, which were the most extensive texts among the selected data set (240 pages and 138 pages respectively). Other documents were analysed without using this technique.

Before considering possible frames within the text, documents were coded based on emerging themes. Preselected themes of ‘Korea’ and ‘international/global community’ acted as the two main categories. Throughout the analysis process, a number of subthemes were identified under both primary themes. The labelling of the subthemes was mostly done intuitively and the labels were shifted around (e.g. merged or divided) during the process as new reoccurring themes were identified. However, it should be noted that as with the choice of method, other researchers might have generated or labelled the subthemes differently and the decisions made here reflected the personal choices made for this specific research. Ultimately, the subthemes under ‘Korea’ included ‘central-local government cooperation’, ‘exceptionalism’, ‘innovation and technology’, ‘knowledge sharing’, ‘Korean model’, ‘leadership’, ‘past experience’, ‘public-private sector cooperation’ and ‘the public’. As for ‘global/international community’, detected subthemes were ‘abiding to international rules/values’, ‘external validation’, ‘negative outside factors’, ‘accommodating foreigners’, ‘bilateral cooperation’ and ‘international cooperation’. While not every subtheme is separately discussed in the data analysis section, recognising reoccurring and prevalent themes ultimately aided in understanding how different actors and situations were portrayed in the documents. Consequently, some of the initial themes were further expanded into frames and subframes. The primary frames were ‘situation or context’, ‘solution’ and ‘reference to authority’, followed by a subframe of ‘effects’. After considering the findings against the theoretical background, grounding literature and research questions guiding this thesis (i.e. the possible similarity of pandemic-time and pre-pandemic image management), both the themes and frames were used to form different sections of the following analysis chapter. Moreover, to

illustrate the prevalence of specific themes and key topics, quotes from the selected documents were employed throughout the data analysis section. Within the quotes, some words were boldened as part of the analysis process to highlight the use of certain key words.

5 Data analysis

This chapter includes data analysis, where primary data and findings in relation to the research questions are assessed. The overall research is guided by the following research question:

To what extent does the promotion of South Korea's model of pandemic management in 2020 portray similar themes to its recent public diplomacy and nation branding efforts?

The question is further divided into two sub-questions, which also form the main sections of this chapter:

1) How has Korean government framed the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible solutions to the pandemic in its official communication?

2) Are there convergencies between the solutions proposed in Korea's pandemic-related materials and the focus points of Korea's pre-pandemic public diplomacy and nation branding efforts?

As for the chapter structure, framing of the situation (pandemic) and its solution is discussed first, after which possible connections to Korea's recent public diplomacy and nation branding focus are explored.

Driven by the above questions, this research aims to explore whether aspects of Korea's recent (mostly pre-pandemic) image management agenda have spilled over to its pandemic management-related communication. Arguably, the uncertainty and instability created by the pandemic shook some of the persisting hierarchies, especially in terms of getting one's opinions acknowledged within the international community. Such a setting can provide an improved platform for countries to gain visibility for their actions and advance their objectives, especially when presented together with pandemic management methods. Moreover, in the context of health diplomacy, a health crisis can provide an opportunity to accomplish aspirational and pragmatic goals that might not, in other settings, be possible (Katz et al., 2011). With these prerequisites in mind, the below analysis is conducted to shed more light onto Korea's actions during the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.1 Korean government's framing of the COVID-19 pandemic

The first section of the chapter will discuss the first sub-question: 'How has Korean government framed the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible solutions to the pandemic in its

official communication?'. In addition to the frames directly related to the research question, framing of Korea is also explored due to its relevance to the framing of the solution.

Framing the situation

In order for Korea to effectively promote its own response to the pandemic, framing the prevailing situation accordingly was essential. Arguably this was also necessary for domestic reasons and outside of the context of global health diplomacy, as the pandemic was also a serious national health crisis. Predictably, describing the situation was done early on in Korea's guide 'All about Korea's Response to COVID-19':

'In the early days of 2020, few could have predicted that our lives would be upended by a ***novel*** *pathogen that eventually evolved into a pandemic of* ***global scale****, claiming a devastating number of lives, and yielding multifaceted,* ***long-term repercussions****, perhaps permanently changing our entire way of life.'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 2)

The starting paragraph summarises the key frames Korea uses when describing the pandemic (as seen in the below figure): novelty, its shared nature, and long-term impact.

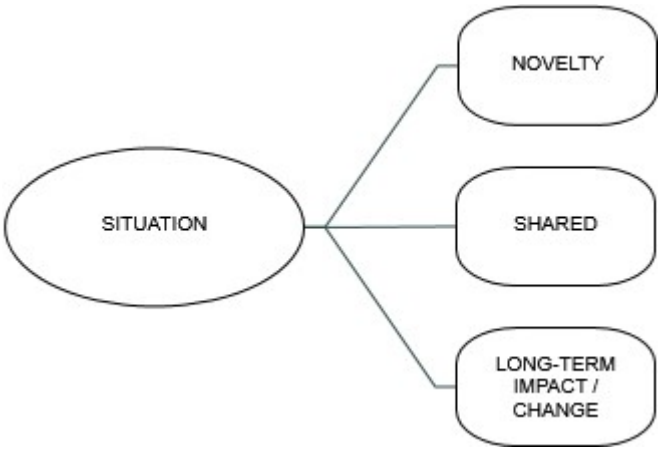


Figure 2. Frames of the situation.

However, the overall rhetoric used in the documents when describing the pandemic is not drastically different from that of the wider international community. Similarly to organisations like the United Nations (hereafter the UN) and its global health-focused agency, the WHO, Korea describes the virus as 'novel' and points out how unprepared countries were to deal with the situation. Furthermore, there are notions hinting at the pandemic's long-term impact and possible permanent change resulting from it, and how the effects will potentially

alter ‘our entire way of life’. Similar assertions are made in other official publications, for example KOICA’s annual report (2021: p. 3), which predicts that ‘pandemics will continue to recur in the future, unless the fundamental cause is rooted out’. However, while the pandemic is considered as a serious crisis and descriptions of it are sombre, it is crucial to note that amongst it there are also implications of a solution.

The tentative steps of hinting towards a solution to the crisis start with the descriptions of its shared nature. This frame is emphasised across the documents:

‘*One of the many lessons coronavirus has taught humanity is that **no one** is safe until **everyone** is safe*.’ President Moon Jae-in at Jeju Forum 2020 (Republic of Korea, 2020c)

‘*The year 2020 caught the world with **global** crisis*.’ 2020 KOICA Annual Report (KOICA, 2021)

‘*The outbreak has not only disrupted the **global mobility** of people and goods across borders, eroding the **web of distribution networks**, but also spread panic, fear and distrust, prompting many to turn insular. In many ways, the impact of COVID-19 has served as a powerful reminder of just how **interconnected** yet vulnerable we are.’* All about Korea’s Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 2)

The notions presented in the communication point out that the pandemic has affected countries worldwide, making the issue a concern of the entirety of the international community. After all, this has not been the case with similar, yet smaller-scale epidemics like the SARS or MERS, which remained largely regional. The assertation effectively foreshadows one of Korea’s main solution frames, cooperation. Moreover, the severity of the situation is made clear by pointing at shared vulnerabilities and increasing ‘insularity’ of certain countries. The frequent suggestions of threat or at least instability to the existing international order and globalised world effectively form the overarching frame of crisis, which is an expected frame for a pandemic. Again, framing the pandemic as a global crisis is a generic frame used by the majority of international community, including Korea. In addition to adopting the crisis frame, Korea’s portrayal of the pandemic outlines the affected parties and functions (e.g. global mobility of people and goods), i.e. defining the victims of the situation, which is useful for defining the solution later on. The frame is enforced partly through government publications and COVID guides, partly through high-profile individuals, like the President Moon. The following example is a snippet from his speech at the G20 2020 Extraordinary Virtual Leaders’ Summit in March 2020 (Republic of Korea, 2020b):

'*The effects of COVID-19 have posed a serious threat to* ***global healthcare systems****, and have severely contracted* ***the global real economy*** *and* ***financial markets****.'*

Similar remarks were made by Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kang Kyung-wha a month earlier at the High-level Segment 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council (MOFA, 2020):

'*I am deeply concerned at incidents of xenophobia and hatred,* ***discriminatory immigration controls*** *and* ***arbitrary repatriation programs*** *against* ***individuals*** *from the affected countries.'*

As explained in the prior chapter, framing the situation and issues related to it provides a foundation for the framer to propose solutions that are fit to target those specific issues. Indeed, 'defining problems, making moral judgements, and supporting remedies' is what frames are used for by definition (Matthes, 2009: p. 350). Thus, it is not surprising that the highlighted issues are often followed by curated solutions. By defining the problem, Korea sets an ideal base for the presentation of its own solution.

Framing the solution

Despite the bleak descriptions of the pandemic (i.e. the situation), it is also made clear that there is a solution to the crisis. Certainly, proposing its own solutions to the issue is one of the main purpose of Korea's COVID-19 guide and much of its other communication related to the crisis. Before going into detail of the concrete aspects of its pandemic management, the COVID-19 guide provides broader solution-oriented statements linked to the initial framing of the pandemic:

'*As different parts of the world experiment with different policy combinations, the crisis has triggered calls for* ***global solidarity****. We firmly believe that safety for all can only be achieved by* ***pooling resources, knowledge*** *and* ***lessons learned***.' (All about Korea's Response to COVID-19, 2020: p. 2-3)

'*We may have been unprepared at its [COVID-19] arrival, but* ***we do have the power to change its course****. Korea's efforts to initiate and engage in more* ***vigorous international cooperation*** *will continue. In* ***sharing our experience*** *and* ***learning from others****, we hope to* ***identify best practices*** *and emerge from the crisis as a more alert, more interconnected and better prepared world for the next global public health challenge.'* (All about Korea's Response to COVID-19, 2020: p. 3)

Throughout the documents, as well as in the above passages from the guide, Korea's solution to the pandemic is firmly framed around cooperation at different levels. Moreover, calls for 'global solidarity' and 'vigorous international cooperation' relate to a more general frame of responsibility, which is a prevailing frame surrounding 'the solution'. The role of cooperation and responsibility in Korea's pandemic management are discussed in further detail in later parts of the chapter.

Proposing cooperation as a solution does not only make sense in the context of the situation, but it also supports related actions like knowledge sharing and the role of international organisations. Again, 'lessons learned' is mentioned as one of the means to achieve 'safety for all', which consequently provides a logical setting for the promotion of the 'Korean way' of pandemic management. The promotion of a 'Korean model' of pandemic management is not only done through the guide, but also through speeches given by high-ranking official, such as the President Moon (remark made at the G20 2020 Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit in 2020):

'*Korea remains committed to continuously improving and refining quarantine measures and seeks to* ***share our successful response model*** *with the international community.'* (Republic of Korea, 2020b)

Furthermore, Korean government does not attempt to remove or mute Korea from its model. On the contrary, the approach includes brand names the 'K-quarantine' (Ministry of Economic and Finance, 2020) and 'K-Walk Through' (MOFA, 2020a), some which the Korean Intellectual Property Office has even filed a patent for.

While the notion of safety entails managing the spread of the virus through certain restrictions (e.g. quarantines and partial travel bans), maintaining 'openness' is another key feature in Korea's solution. Extensive lockdowns and closing of borders, while recognised as an alternative solution, are presented as an undesirable option in the COVID-19 guide:

'*— but also spread panic, fear and distrust, prompting many to turn insular.'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 2)

'*Keeping society and borders open has entailed a tremendous amount of work for the government at central and local levels. But this has helped us* ***avoid the pains and devastating socio-economic consequences of lockdowns****, as many countries have experienced.'* (Ibid. 226)

Again, President Moon echoes the frame in his speech at the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2020 (published by Yonhap News Agency as provided by the Presidential Office of Korea):

'*Like a tsunami that follows an earthquake, economic aftershocks are sweeping us.* ***Border shutdowns*** *and* ***atrophied exchanges*** *of people and goods make the global economic recovery harder.'*

Similar notion is made by Korea's Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang at the Aspen Security Forum (MOFA, 2020d):

'*We have worked hard to keep our borders open to travelers to and from each other. This is quite an exception in these times of* ***border closures*** *and* ***denial of entry of foreigners****.'*

Discreet discrediting of the alternatives is used to support Korea's own solution, particularly its argument for upholding at least some degree of cross-border openness. Reference to lockdowns and closed boarders does not only indirectly refer to countries like China, whose model of pandemic management has also sparked global interest, but also a fellow middle power country, Australia. In this sense, Korea's communication targeted competing frames of the solution, rather than specific countries. However, the solution frame around openness and movement was often accompanied by hints of it not being 'an easy way out'. While allowing international movement was partly a matter of alleviating pandemic's negative economic impacts to Korea's economy, did it also highlighted the 'tremendous amount of work' Korean government had put into its pandemic management and was, at least partially, a testimony to its success. After all, not all countries were ready or able to allow such movement, and as Minister Kang noted, Korea's approach was 'quite an exception' compared to that of others. In Korea's model, the ability to control the infection rates was one of the perquisites for cross-border travel, as illustrated by the different levels of Korea's National Infectious Disease Risk Alert System introduced in the COVID guide (MOFA, 2020a: p. 28). Higher the level, more mobility-related restrictions were put in place. However, even the highest alertness level did not explicitly forbit international travel. Ultimately, these statements implied the difficulty and intricacy of Korea's solution, which was, however, made attainable through its 'knowledge sharing' activities and the 'Korean model'.

Framing Korea

In addition to the situation and solution frames, also frames related to the main actor, Korea, are relevant. After all, one way to increase the appeal of Korea's solution to the crisis was done through the framing of Korea itself. As the documents specifically provide information about Korea's pandemic management and response, frames related to Korea are extension of the solution frame. Moreover, the portrayal of Korea in the documents as well as in official speeches keenly relate to pandemic-time nation branding and public diplomacy efforts, as they contribute to the image Korea wished to project to the international audience.

Early on in the guide it is made clear that Korea, due to its close proximity to China, was one of the first countries to be affected by the virus:

'***Korea was one of the first countries*** *to be hit by COVID-19. We witnessed explosions in the number of cases in late February, latter part of August and early September—'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 2)

While this unavoidably took away Korea's opportunity to learn about the virus through observing others, it also provided Korea more visibility as one of the pioneers of pandemic management. However, despite the talks of novelty of the situation, Korea is not completely novice to epidemic management, which is highlighted on several occasions:

'*Guided by our* ***past experiences*** *with infectious diseases such as MERS and SARS –'*(Ibid. 2)

'Korea's response to COVID-19 has been shaped in part by ***lessons learned*** *from its response to similar emerging infectious diseases in the past.'* (Ibid. 218)

'*– continued to improve its system based on* ***existing knowledge*** *and the* ***lessons learned*** *from past epidemics –*' (Ibid. 229)

Evidently, despite the initial descriptions of novelty and shared experience, repeated references are made to Korea's past experience with similar outbreaks. The narrative implies that Korea has special knowledge, adding to the credibility of its approach. Not only is credibility related to trust and reputation, but it is also arguably one of the key elements when building one's soft power capacity (Nye Jr., 2008). While framing the situation as unique but shared, Korea positioned itself to have relevant and 'special' experience, both due to prior epidemics as well as its early encounter with the virus. Basing models off of 'lessons learned' in the past is not new to Korea and similar approach is well illustrated by its development programme Saemaul Undong, which was mentioned in earlier chapters. Similarly to its

development model, it is implied that Korea has an edge in pandemic management compared to most of the other countries. This degree of alleged exceptionalism is also one of the frames used to define Korea and provides a foundation upon which other elements are built upon.

Guide to Korea's COVID-10 response is also utilised in framing the Korean people. Their active participation is presented as the enabler of Korea's boarder mandate of openness:

'*The Korean people have **actively participated** in social distancing, which has enabled effective infection control without the outright shutdown of facilities or a movement ban.*' (MOFA, 2020a: p. 23)

The sentiment is taken even further by President Moon in his speech that was delivered for the 73rd World Health Assembly in 2020 (published by The Korean Herald in 2020 based on an unofficial translation provided by the Presidential Office):

'*The Korean people displayed **the highest form of civic virtues** to practice the spirit of 'freedom for all' and voluntarily participated in quarantine efforts*.'

'*In that moment of crisis and challenge the Korean people made a **bold decision**. We took our own individual freedoms and turned it to an even greater freedom -- freedom for all.*'

Even though much of the credit for Korea's success in pandemic management is given to the government and other 'official' institutions, are the efforts of the Korean people also praised in multiple forms of official communication. Moreover, the prior examples arguably create a perception of people having agency over pandemic management, when in reality many activities were government-controlled and regulated.

Moreover, emphasis on 'voluntary participation' is congested and there are several contradicting examples. For example, as illustrated in the background chapter, Korea has received criticism on its infection tracing methods, which some see as potential breach of individuals' privacy. Also, there were legal consequences for not abiding the COVID-19 guidelines, varying from fines to a prison sentence (Kim, 2020), Thus, the compliance was not merely based on voluntary action. Additionally, the fear of being shunned by the local community in case of an infection was arguably one driver of people's active participation in pandemic management measures. The topic of cooperation between the Korean government and the public will be explored further in the later part of the chapter.

On various occasions, Korea's approach is also linked to 'universal values' such as freedom and democracy. This frame is especially apparent in public speeches given by high-ranking officials:

'In order to win a complete victory over the pandemic, Korea is now committed to practicing ***universal values*** *of humanity and standing united with the world in* ***stronger solidarity*** *and cooperation.'* President Moon at Jeju Forum (Republic of Korea, 2020c)

'*The answer to overcoming COVID-19 is not far from us. It lies in returning to the spirit of the UN Charter, that is believing in* ***universal values*** *of humankind, and it lies in marching toward a more inclusive world through multilateral action*.' President Moon at the 75th Session of UN General Assembly (Yonhap News Agency, 2020)

'*We need to guard not only against the spread of the virus, but also fear, discrimination and isolation – all of which may strain our* ***core values*** *of free and open democracy*.' 2nd Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Lee Taeho at a foreign press briefing in March 2020 (MOFA, 2020e)

Repeated references to universal and shared values align with the internationalist tone Korea has adopted in the past decades (O'Neil, 2015). It also demonstrates conformity and membership to the prevailing value and norm regime dictated by the UN and its most powerful members. For Korea, joining such large international organisations was not given. After applying for the UN membership in 1949, Korea spent over 40 years as a non-member before gaining its membership in 1991. Some argue that being left outside of one of the most influential multinational organisations resulted in a 'national trauma' (Jonsson, 2017). Consequently, Korea's entrance to the UN and other similar organisations solidified its middle power status, raised its position within the international community and ultimately improved its image worldwide (Ibid. 343). Both the symbolic and concrete significance of the membership may partly explain the frequent use of the 'universal values' frame in Korea's COVID-related communication, as it illustrates Korea's continuing commitment to these organisations. While subscribing to the language used in such high-level settings is not surprising, it further illustrates Korea's deep-set desire to be fully recognised as one of their members. Additionally, the general commitment to the prevailing system of rules and norms is arguably the principle source of international soft power (Gallarotti, 2011), thus an integral part of making the solution attractive to most members of the global community.

5.2 Korea's COVID-19 response and image management

The analysis of different frames Korea used in its pandemic-time 'knowledge sharing' documents provides a solid foundation to approach the second sub-question regarding the convergencies between Korea's pandemic-related materials and its recent public diplomacy and nation branding efforts. As noted in the previous section, Korea's framing of the pandemic largely followed the general narrative, highlighting its novelty, universality and possible long-term impact. As for the solution, the key frame evolved around cooperation at different levels, as well as responsibility. Finally, frames related to Korea itself highlighted past experience, a level of alleged exceptionalism, the qualities of Korean people and Korea's commitment to shared values. In the following section, these findings regarding the frames are utilised to consider their possible meanings in the context of Korea's image management (i.e. nation branding and public diplomacy). During the analysis process, existing research on Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy was used as a guideline and the documents and other data were further analysed to discover dominant themes within them. Unsurprisingly, the document 'Post COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Policy' (MOFA, 2020b) also provided valuable insight to the possible connections and, together with the frames, provides a starting point for further analysis:

'*The Ministry will employ **public diplomacy** to consolidate ROK's image as a **model** for promoting democracy, leveraging its advanced information and communications technology, developed civil society, and the acclaimed COVID-19 response principles manifested by transparency, openness, and democracy*.'

Some of the themes discussed below seem to closely relate to the prevailing themes in Korea's current image management efforts, which were covered in more detail in the background chapter. These include global, regional and public-private cooperation and citizen engagement, as well as technology and innovation. Additionally, other themes, such as treatment of foreigners, can be connected to previous efforts, like the nation brand of 'Global Korea' and previous administrations' attempts to portray Korea as an international and tolerant country. However, there are also themes that have no clear connection to the typical building blocks of Korea's image, like the intergovernmental cooperation within Korea. Similarly, some key elements, like culture, have a relatively small role. Clearly, Korea's communication over its pandemic management is not completely identical to its image management. Moreso, it seems that COVID-19-related communication is used to support the

aspects of nation branding and public diplomacy that best fit the context of a health crisis. However, certain focus points, such as the treatment of foreigners, are arguably disproportionate to the reality of Korea's COVID-19 measures. It is indeed these disparities and inconsistencies that hint at possible additional agendas Korean government aimed to push forward through its pandemic-related communication and by sharing its approach.

5.2.1 Technology and innovation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the main components of Korea's COVID-19 response is the use of technology and innovation. This is also where the promotion of Korea's approach to pandemic management has a clear convergence to its current public diplomacy objectives. For example, Korea's basic plan on public diplomacy (2018) for the duration of Moon Jae-in's presidency stated that implementing 'state-of-the-art' ICT technologies in public diplomacy should be explored further. Moreover, measures to utilise communication technologies to improve Korea's reputation have been part of its public diplomacy paradigm for a decade, for example through the concept of 'Total and Complex Diplomacy' (Park & Lim, 2014). More recently, promotion of 'interactive digital public diplomacy' was mentioned as one of the policy goals of Korea's post-pandemic public diplomacy view (MOFA, 2020b).

Indeed, technological innovation and digitalisation have been an important part of the image of modern Korea. Many would argue rightfully so, as the country is home to market leaders like Samsung or Hyundai (Kinsey & Chung, 2013). Also, for many years Korea has been ranked as one of the global leaders in terms of internet connectivity and speed, as well as smartphone ownership and social media usage (Robertson, 2018). Thus, by utilising technology in its pandemic response Korea is partly just drawing from its existing capabilities. Some examples of the ways this is communicated in the COVID-19 guide can be seen below:

'*Moreover, Korea's **digitalized healthcare** system played a significant role in the nation's response to the pandemic.'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 221)

'*Thus, major countries have conducted analyses to predict the spread of the virus under various circumstances by using **scientific and technological data** and utilized the results in policy decision-making. Korea has also undertaken this type of research to foresee the spread of the virus based on information using **ICT technologies**.'* (Ibid. 221)

The notion is repeated by Korean officials:

'*As you have just heard, we have mobilized not only our **scientific** and **technological** resources, but delved into our **innovative tools** as well*.' Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Lee Taeho at a foreign press briefing in March (MOFA, 2020e)

Not only that, it is made clear in the guide that Korea's technological advancement will remain a priority in the future:

'*In preparation for the post-COVID-19 era, the Korean government will innovate the industrial and economic structures by improving relevant regulations and systems and actively utilizing **digital technologies** such as big data.'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 186)

Based on the international recognition and relatively strong association between technology and Korea, many would argue that the work of portraying Korea as technologically advanced country has already been done. However, Korea is still to fully utilise technological innovation in its public diplomacy. Partly, this is due to the conservative organisational structures and the difficulties in integrating Korea to the global digital environment (Robertson, 2018: p. 679). Considering that improving the utilisation of technology in public diplomacy remains at the forefront of Korea's agenda, it seems that the Korean government has also recognised the room for improvement. Seemingly, the focus also carries over to related activities, such as the promotion of 'the Korean way' of pandemic management. By making technology and innovation one of the key building blocks of its approach, Korea arguably aims to attach said areas even closer to its nation brand and the overall perception of Korea. Moreover, globally improved image of Korean technology is bound to have economic implications as well.

5.2.2 Foreigners in Korea

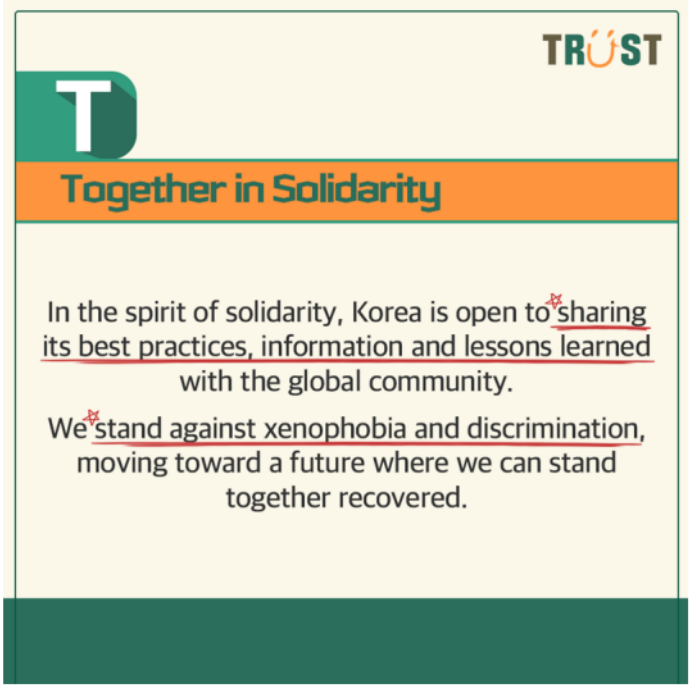
Another, perhaps even more far-stretching goal of Korea's public diplomacy is transforming Koreans into 'global citizens' and turning Korea more global. Consequently, the notion was also visible in Korea's pandemic-time communication. On general level, the goal was pursued through the mandate of maintaining openness despite the pandemic. More specifically, the image of 'Global Korea' was upheld through the explicit focus on the treatment of foreigners in Korea. Indeed, one of the themes repeated throughout the communication, especially in Korea's COVID-19 guide, is Korea-based foreigners. There are multiple examples on the ways Korean government highlighted its efforts to accommodate foreign nationals living in Korea during the pandemic:

'As COVID-19 began to spread rapidly from the end of January, there was an urgent need to provide ***non-Koreans*** *with guidance on how to respond to infectious diseases and which measures should be taken.'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 99)

*'The government actively promoted COVID-19 prevention measures through the Relay Campaign to overcome COVID-19 led by the "****Korea Immigration and Integration Program (KIIP) Mentoring Volunteers****" and the Thanks-To-You Challenge. This campaign helped contribute to containing the spread of the infectious disease through* ***the immigrant network*** *run by the immigration offices and services across the nation.'* (Ibid. 103)

'*Recognizing that* ***international students*** *should be protected by the government in a pandemic situation just as domestic students, the Korean government took measures to protect the health and safety of international students in Korea.'* (Ibid. 160)

The sentiment was also repeated in the TRUST campaign's 2.0 version, where T represented 'together in solidarity', stating that Korea stands against xenophobia and discrimination (see picture below).



Picture 1. TRUST 2.0. *Source: MOFA, 2020.*

However, in addition to examining the issue as reinforcement of existing trajectory, it is also useful to consider this 'sharing of best practices' as an opportunity for Korea to address some

of the alleged ‘weaknesses’ of its image. While the Korean government and number of nongovernmental organisations have, through policy and supporting programmes, encouraged Korea-bound immigration, the social reality is yet to reflect cultural democracy (Kim, 2011). Efforts to add cultural acceptance often remain surface-level and reinforce paternalistic policies, as culture is often treated as a commodity form through public displays and exhibitions (Ibid. 1601). Moreover, many ethnic minorities are still marginalised and discriminatory actions towards them have been a persisting issue in Korea for years (Yang, 2019). For example, noncitizens living in Korea often find difficulties in receiving adequate loans or credit cards from banks and are sometimes excluded from perks like the elderly discount on public transport (Wagner, 2009). One of the enduring issues is Korea’s legal framework, as it seems that judicial gaps in various areas allow differential treatment of foreign citizens. Moreover, many government-led initiatives are geared towards marriage migrants and their children, rather than the wider population of different foreign noncitizens residing in Korea (Kim, 2011). The distorted focus has led to inconsistent policy making, which fails to target the foreign population as a whole.

Despite the government’s attempt to reinforce an image of a multicultural and tolerant Korea through highlighting the different ways foreigners were taken into consideration throughout its pandemic response, the matter remains complex. One example is government’s mask policy at the beginning of the pandemic. The topic is briefly mentioned in the COVID-19 guide as follows:

‘—in order to effectively supply masks to ***non-Koreans*** *staying in Korea, the Korean government supported the development of the Mask Supply System for Foreigners—'* (MOFA, 2020a: p. 102)

While claiming effectiveness, some argue that the mask rationing system, particularly during the first waves of COVID (between February and July of 2020), clearly deprioritised foreign nationals residing in Korea (Lee et al., 2021). For example, to be eligible to purchase masks, foreigners had to present both a National Health Insurance Card and an Alien Registration Card, which automatically excluded more than million people living in Korea, such as short-term migrant workers and some international students. Moreover, compared to Koreans, the steps to acquire masks as a foreigner, even when possessing both of the forementioned documents, were complicated and rigid, requiring presentation of physical documents rather than using a digital system available to Korean citizens. Such issues were not confined to the initial months of the pandemic and similar divergencies transpired later on with other

pandemic-related measures. For example, I witnessed first-hand the discriminatory nature of Korea's QR code system. The system connected to people's coronavirus vaccine records and was required when entering most public facilities. For many foreign exchange students and other short-term immigrants, the system was unavailable for weeks as it required registering the identity number from the Alien Registration Card, which many did not yet possess. Additionally, foreigners faced more severe consequences for breaking COVID measures and could, for example, be fined double the amount compared to Korean citizens or serve a jail sentence three times longer (Kim, 2020; MOFA, 2020a: p. 109).

There were also differences between different municipalities in terms of the inclusiveness of their pandemic measures. Enabled by the relative autonomy of local governments, some had differentiated the allocation of benefits depending on one's citizenship status. For example, governments of Seoul City and Gyeonggi Province received complaints through the National Human Rights Commission due to the lack of support for foreigners and immigrants during the initial months of the pandemic (Shin, 2021). In Gyeonggi, the provincial government decided to exclude foreigners from their emergency benefit plan because checking their financial status was 'too difficult'. This was due to a feature that was built within the registration system itself, which operated based on registration numbers that were not always accessible to foreigners. The case effectively illustrates how social security systems are often not optimised for foreign nationals. The discrepancy can easily lead to discriminatory actions and leave noncitizens more vulnerable, especially during a national crisis.

In addition to inconsistencies in policies, there was general suspicion among Koreans, for example that foreigners would manipulate the system to obtain extra masks to send to their home countries (Ko, 2020). While increased xenophobia during the pandemic is not restricted to Korea alone, is the contrast between government communication and reality evident. Even though the importance of aiding foreigners along with its 'own people' is recognised by the Korean government, the differentiated approach partly reflects the persisting distinction between 'us' and 'them' when it comes to Korean nationals and foreigners. As illustrated by the mask distribution policy and QR code requirement, in reality Korea's approach often prioritised its own citizens over foreigners. Thus, it can be argued that the guide's special focus on foreigners was partly performative and driven by Korea's nation branding and public diplomacy interests, rather than accurately portrayed the reality of implementing differentiated measures based on nationality or citizenship. Moreover, the early hiccups that left many foreign nationals in a disadvantaged position at the beginning of the pandemic hint

at a deeper issue. Evidently, there are still many bureaucratic and structural disparities that hinder the integration of foreigners to the Korean society. While this is more of a universal issue, it puts Korea's foreigner-focused approach into a questionable light.

5.2.3 Cooperation

As mentioned in the first section, one of the carrying themes within the solution frame was the notion of cooperation. Among the mentions of cooperation, four different groups were identified: international community, private and public sectors, central and local governments and public and the civil society.

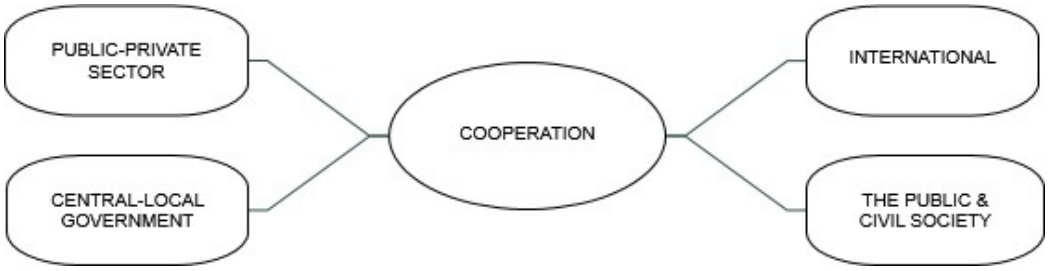


Figure 1. Levels of cooperation.

International cooperation

To 'strengthen and promote international solidarity and cooperation' is named as one of the explicit public diplomacy goals of Korea in the document 'Post COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Policy' (MOFA, 2020b). Thus, it is not surprising that international cooperation is the overarching solution Korea proposes to fighting the pandemic. While working together has been advocated by other countries as well, proposing cooperation as a solution to international problems and relying on multilateral institutions is typical behaviour for middle power countries (Robertson, 2007: p. 152). As Korea maintained its active role in various international quasigovernmental bodies throughout the pandemic and has more than accepted its middle power status, it is not surprising that international collaboration is also advocated throughout the guide. To demonstrate Korea's active role in the international community, the guide mentions a number of international events Korea's highest officials have participated in 2020. These include, for example, WHO World Health Assembly, G20 Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit and the Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit (MOFA, 2020a: p. 205). In addition to participating in international meetings, Korea has directed some of its COVID-

related aid to international organizations, albeit some are due to its pre-existing aid provision commitments.

Most references to cooperation are general, addressing the whole of the international community. Throughout the guide there are elements that are likely to resonate with both developed and developing countries. Moreover, Korea's contributions to international community through humanitarian aid are made clear. For example, by the end of September of 2020 Korea had provided aid to 109 different countries and pledged to provide 100 million USD to assist other countries with their fight against the pandemic (p. 209). In the end, the actual contributions were five times higher, amounting to almost half a billion USD (OECD, 2022). Again, role of international organisations was especially emphasised: '*The Korean government, while doing its best to extend bilateral assistance, is taking steps to provide assistance through* ***multilateral organizations***—' All about Korea's Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 210).

According to OECD report (2022), Korea provided 557 million USD of gross bilateral official development assistance (ODA) as its COVID-19 response in 2020, which represented nearly third of Korea's total gross bilateral ODA that year. In addition, there were contributions made through multilateral systems. Overall, Korea's ODA grew 20.7% due to increase in both bilateral loans and contributions to multilateral organisations (OECD, 2022). The recipient countries of bilateral aid were mainly developing countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. According to records of OCHA (2020), aid was also provided to countries like China and North Korea.

Below is a list of Korea's top 10 aid recipients in 2020.

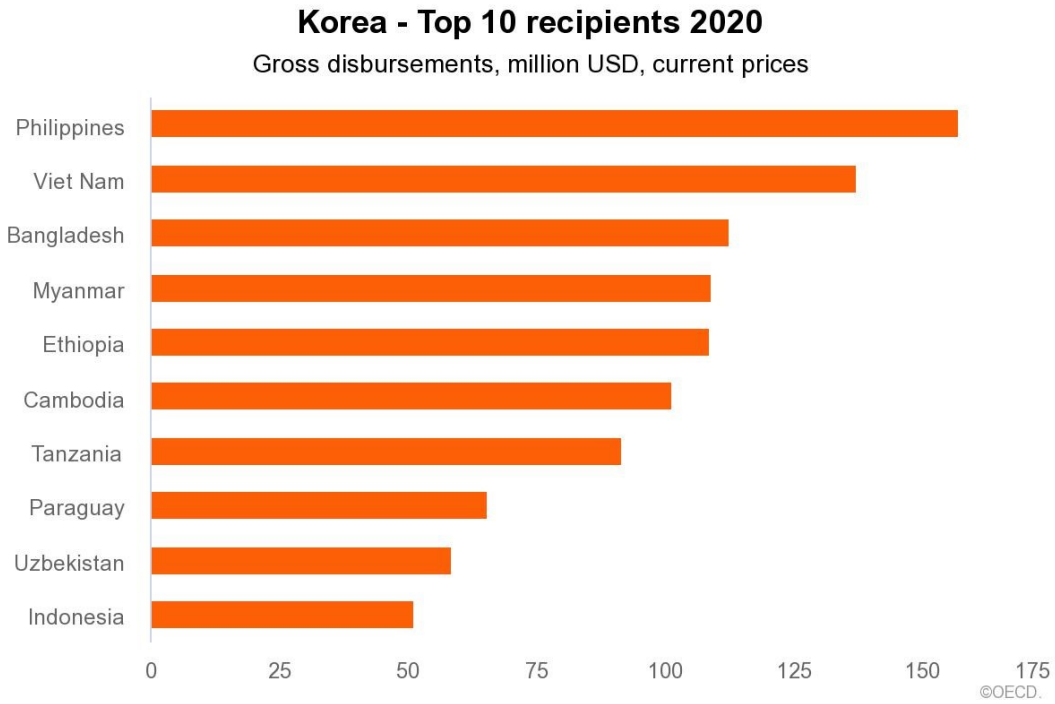


Figure 4. Korea's top 10 aid recipients in 2020. *Source: OECD, 2022.*

While the above order does not necessarily reveal which countries received most aid for COVID-19 specifically, did Korea's foreign aid in 2020 include COVID-19 response assistance according to 2020 KOICA Annual Report (KOICA, 2021). Moreso, the figure provides a general idea of Korea's aid allocation during that year, which may also have implications regarding its COVID-19 aid distribution. In practice, Korea's COVID-19-related aid was not provided only through humanitarian aid, but also, for example, as 'project type cooperation' and 'public/private partnership' (KOICA, 2020). Additionally, even though the listed countries were undoubtedly devastated by the pandemic and perhaps lacked the resources available to more developed countries, the list of recipients does not correlate with factors such as the highest infection or mortality rates (Statista, 2022). In fact, it was countries like the United States, United Kingdom and France that experienced the highest rates in both

mortality and infection during 2020 (Mathieu et al., 2020). Moreso, the recipients reflect Korea's past donor behaviour patterns. For instance, according to KOICA (2022), all of the above-listed aid recipients are also among Korea's core partner countries.

Although the documents advocate humanitarian assistance, and sentiments like 'global solidarity' is often mentioned, is much of its content targeted towards other developed countries. For example, in the context of vaccines, there is an implied expectations of developed countries to contribute towards the international efforts of vaccine development, whereas developing countries are mention with the fair distribution of doses. The following passage is by President Moon Jae-in during the UN General Assembly: '*—through global funding, we should facilitate the advance purchase of sufficient doses of vaccines for international organizations to ensure that developing countries can also share the benefits.'* (Yonhap News Agency, 2020). Consequently, the notion of responsibility is often repeated. For example, in Korea's 'TRUST' campaign, which is one of the key campaigns within Korea's pandemic response and promoted through various platforms, the letter R stands for it (MOFA, 2020a).

In addition to material or monetary aid, knowledge sharing was one of the proposed solutions and a frequently mentioned method of cooperation. Of course, COVID-19 guide itself is a demonstration of Korea's own knowledge sharing efforts. To facilitate the flow of information, Korean government organised online seminars and panels to discuss pandemic-related topics, which contained some dialogue, however mostly explaining its own approach (Ibid. 212).

Public-private cooperation

'*The systematic cooperation among the central government, local governments, and* ***the private sector****, ultimately laid a foundation for Korea's predictable and effective response to COVID-19*.' All about Korea's Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 39)

Another prevalent form of cooperation mentioned in the documents is the cooperation between public and private sectors. Close public-private relations is nothing new to Korea and thus it is not surprising that it was also utilised for pandemic management. While there are references about its necessity on an international level, most accounts are concerned with domestic activity. Private sector actors vary from technology and medical companies to airlines, telecommunication providers and educational institutions. According to the guide, reasoning behind the public-private sector partnerships is primarily the utilisation of resources

and capabilities: companies can offer their technology and facilities, as well as use their know-how to innovate new ways to improve Korea's pandemic management, while enjoying government's support.

'*The government rapidly transferred COVID-19 testing technology to* ***the private sector*** *and requested manufacturers to produce high-quality testing kits*.' (Ibid. 36)

'*The Korean government collected telecommunications data for a public research purpose from* ***private companies****—.'* (Ibid. 221)

The rhetoric was also apparent in President Moon's remarks during his meeting with Korean business leaders in February 2020 (Republic of Korea, 2020a):

'*Now is the time for the Government and* ***business community*** *to pull together in order to minimize the damage from the COVID-19 outbreak and make efforts to revive the economic recovery*.'

In the same speech President Moon encourages companies to proceed with the investments they had planned pre-pandemic and vows to boost the economy with new public-private sector projects. Indeed, in addition to improving Korea's pandemic management capabilities, the cooperation with the private sector also carried some economic interest for the government. After all, global demand for protective equipment and testing kits was high as many countries lacked the productive capacity and were thus unable to match the demand. While Korea initially struggled with the domestic demand of facemasks, exports from its medical and pharmaceutical sectors increased over 23 percent in 2020 (Stangarone, 2021). Also, the patenting of pandemic-related innovations, for example the walk-through testing system, suggests that it was not merely goodwill that drove Korea's COVID-19-related activities. Of course, any economic gains Korea might have made in relation to the pandemic should be considered against the micro- and macroeconomic decline experienced all over the world. Overall, the pandemic was economically devastating for Korea, negatively impacting monetary flow from foreign investments and decreasing domestic demand (He & Wang, 2022).

'*Going forward, the Korean government will collect ideas and opinions of experts from the* ***private sector*** *and widely reflect them in setting its policy direction for international standardization of Korea's response to COVID-19 and drawing up detailed plans accordingly. This* ***public-private partnership*** *is in line with the direction that the Korean*

government has taken throughout its fight against COVID-19.' All About Korea's Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 236)

As suggested in the above paragraph, Korean government considers the public-private partnership as an important part of the 'international standardization' of Korea's COVID-19 response. Similarly to technology, public-private cooperation is also another clear link to Korea's broader public diplomacy agenda. In the past, the collaboration between the two sectors has been instrumental in modularising Korea's public diplomacy, for example into a phenomenon like the Korean Wave (Choi & Kim, 2014) or exporting Korean food products, for instance under the slogan of 'K-health foods' (Koe, 2020). Indeed, the five-year public diplomacy plan drafted at the beginning of Moon Jae-in's presidency in 2017 explicitly stated the use of public diplomacy capabilities of the private sector as one of its objectives (MOFA, 2017). The goal was detectable in Korea's pandemic-time public diplomacy, albeit the focus was mainly on healthcare-related fields. Consequently, the sentiment was repeated in four of MOFA's public diplomacy-related press releases in 2020, which is nearly half of that year's communication on public diplomacy, as well as its plan for post-pandemic public diplomacy (MOFA, 2020b). Moreover, MOFA's press release from November of 2020 discusses the outcomes of the Post-COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Forum (organised by Korea), one of them being the possible establishment of a regional public-private health cooperation platform in Asia. The statement and the meeting itself further demonstrate Korea's attempts to become a leading figure for regional health cooperation, and where possible, to insert Korean companies to the equation. Translating experience to a more visible role in regional bodies is not unheard of and similar behaviour has been demonstrated in the past by Japan through its disaster diplomacy (Futori, 2013). However, the inclusion of one's domestic private sector adds an additional economic layer to these efforts.

Cooperation between central and local government

'*Another lesson learnt was the importance of effective cooperation between* ***central*** *and* ***local governments****, as the latter are the ones at the forefront of ground operations for epidemic control.*' All about Korea's Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 27)

In addition to previous forms of cooperation, Korea's COVID-19 guide strongly highlights the importance of smooth cooperation between central and local governments. In the guide, the coordinated efforts are coined under a slogan of 'Whole-of-Government Approach', which was practices across Korea's pandemic management efforts. The approach does not

only include actors from central and local governments, but also from academia and private sector and is arguably a central element in Korea's pandemic response. To facilitate local-central communication, the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure (CDSC) Headquarters Meeting was arranged daily (Ibid. 31). The meetings were, at least in the beginning, chaired by the Prime Minister and comprised of relevant ministries from the central government along with decision-makers from major cities and all of the provinces. According to the guide, the daily communication enabled activities like problem identification, monitoring the implementation of measures and the effective allocation of resources:

'*This daily conversation at the highest level between the* ***central and local governments*** *has been crucial to identifying problems and blockages and finding solutions, and ensuring that the solutions are implemented and adjusted as needed. With this approach, the Korean government was able to effectively utilize and allocate resources around the country.'* (Ibid. 31)

Applauding the cooperation between the two was, on one hand, a nod to local governments on their efforts, as well as another testimony of the effectiveness of central government's coordination capabilities. One example of the efficiency of Korea's intergovernmental cooperation were the successfully held general elections for the National Assembly. Not only did this demonstrate the overall effectiveness of Korea's approach (allegedly not a single COVID case was reported due to voting) but it also showcased how Korea was able 'to protect their [people's] right to vote in political elections' (Ibid. 137). As pointed out in the guide, the occasion generated a considerable amount of international attention, which is unsurprising considering that many other countries opted for postponing their elections. Korea's undisputable success in pandemic-time election management is likely to be a model for others in the future, particularly in case of another pandemic.

Additionally, good information capacity of the Korean government and combination of centralisation and decentralisation, especially in the field of public healthcare, further facilitated intergovernmental cooperation during the pandemic (Mao, 2021). Smooth flow of accurate and timely information was particularly crucial at the beginning of the pandemic, and authoritarian countries like China, with highly centralised systems, struggled due to delayed and modified reporting from local health officials (Ibid. 317). By emphasising the effectiveness of intergovernmental collaboration, Korea also re-enforced its image as a democratised country. Indeed, in addition to cooperation, notion of transparency, both

between private and public institutions, international community and the public is repeated throughout Korea's pandemic-related communication, for example in the TRUST campaign.

While the connection between cooperation of central and local governments and Korea's image management is perhaps not as obvious as with some of the other detected themes, it is not entirely arbitrary. After all, local governments are among the actors contributing to Korea's public diplomacy efforts (Park, 2020). For example, local government representatives attend meetings of the Committee on Public Diplomacy as observers. Even though the direction of Korea's image management is set by the central government, municipalities have an opportunity to get their voices heard through an official platform. Their role is also recognised in government's 'Post COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Policy' view (MOFA, 2020b):

'*It [Korean government] will also promote economic, cultural and people to people exchanges between local governments by supporting their public diplomacy activities*.'

This policy goal also keenly relates to the next theme, the government's cooperation with the public and the so-called 'grassroots public diplomacy'.

Cooperation with the public and civil society

Finally, the fourth type of cooperation promoted in Korea's pandemic response is the cooperation between the government and the public. While the role of the public was briefly covered in the section on framing Korea, is the topic repeated throughout the documents, thus worthy of its own separate section. Here, the public does not only refer to individual people, but to various actors within civil society, such as NGOs.

'*As **the public** continues to respond to and voluntarily participate in the government's various measures, the spread of the disease is gradually coming under control—'* All about Korea's Response to COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a: p. 111)

'*The **Korean people** protected their own safety by protecting that of neighbors*.' President Moon at the 75th Session of UN General Assembly (Yonhap News Agency, 2020)

'*Our approach in dealing with this new disease has been **people-centered** from the very beginning*.' Minister of Foreign Affairs Kang to the Human Rights Council (MOFA, 2020c)

Behind actors like ‘public’, ‘people’ and ‘government’, ‘participation’ and ‘efforts’ were frequently used words across the 40 references in 14 separate documents under the coded theme of ‘the public’ (see Figure 5).

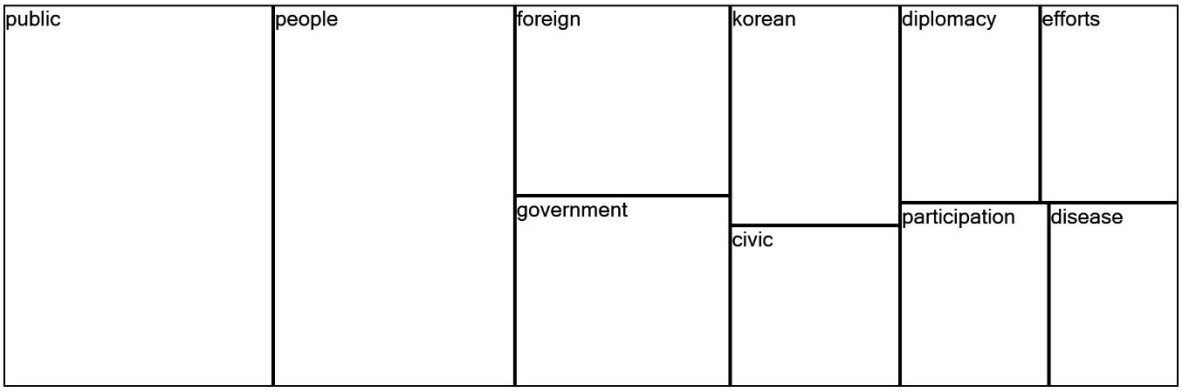


Figure 2. Tree map of the theme ‘the public’.

Moreover, words related to participation include ‘active’ and ‘engagement’. In addition, statements related to the public’s cooperation were often tied to its voluntary nature. The connection was particularly apparent in the COVID-19 guide:

‘*As the public continues to respond to and **voluntarily** participate in the government’s various measures, the spread of the disease is gradually coming under control—*' (MOFA, 2020a: p. 111)

‘*The public **voluntarily** refrained from travel right after the outbreak—*' (Ibid. 117)

‘*Public participation has also materialized into civic activism nationwide in the form of **volunteering** for response efforts in the hard-hit areas—'* (Ibid. 228)

The public is also often mentioned in public speeches by Korean politicians:

‘*Second, the high level of public trust and civic awareness that has resulted in widespread **voluntary** self-quarantine and other preventive measures, like “social distancing,” is effectively slowing the spread of the outbreak*.’ 2nd Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Lee Taeho at foreign press briefing (MOFA, 2020e)

‘*The time is never right for complacency, yet preemptive and transparent quarantine measures, combined with the public's **voluntary** and democratic participation in such efforts,*

are bringing gradual stability.' President Moon at the G20 2020 Extraordinary Virtual Leaders' Summit (Republic of Korea, 2020b)

Some credit citizen participation to Korea's social and cultural norms, which foster cooperative and collective behaviour (Jeong & Kim, 2021). While the Korean government did not enforce full-on lockdowns, there certainly were consequences, both formal and informal, for not following the COVID-19 measures. For example, Koreans who violated quarantine regulations could face fines up to 10 million won or one year in prison (Kim, 2020). In addition, Koreans' active participation may have had some connections to the stigmatisation of coronavirus patients. Fear of becoming a target of social shunning in case of testing positive was not groundless, as many tried to identify the infected through the information that was made available on the Ministry of Health and Welfare website (BBC, 2020). Thus, the claim of voluntary participation is problematic. Strong emphasis on compliance is also partly watered by the high-profile cases where COVID-19 measures were largely overlooked, resulting in higher infection rates. One example of this was the case of an infected individual attending religious services in the city of Daegu, which lead to other infections and ultimately doubled Korea's coronavirus cases in just one day (Gregory, 2020). Not only did the incident result in a city-wide lockdown in Daegu but it also attracted media attention around the world. While the incident is mentioned in Korea's pandemic guide and effectively used as an example of the government's ability to react promptly to infection hotspots, does it simultaneously illustrate how among Koreans, much like in other countries, there were people who did not follow the guidelines. Indeed, the reasons for emphasising Koreans' active and voluntary participation are manifold. For example, as citizen participation is presented as one of the enablers of Korea's pandemic management strategy, it is implied that the Korean government managed to build its response without using drastic measures on its people. It also certainly contrasts Korea's approach to that of, for example, China, which relied on more coercive measures. However, first and foremost it highlights the virtues of the Korean people who effectively represent Korea as a whole. Thus, it is not far-fetched to consider this, at least partly, as an endeavour to improve one aspect of Korea's image. However, it would be misleading to suggest that Koreans widely disagreed with the government's approach. For instance, a study by Kye and Hwang (2020) suggests that social trust towards the central and local governments generally improved in Korea during the pandemic.

As for the civil society, cooperation included both internal and external activities. In terms of internal cooperation, the pandemic is not the first time Korean government has relied on

NGOs' support in a crisis situation and similar cooperation took place, for example, after the Asian economic crisis (Hundt, 2015). Consequently, outsourcing certain functions through the civil society was also employed during COVID. While many civil society organisations experienced operational difficulties during the pandemic, they supported the 'blind spots' of the government actions, namely by serving more vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and the disabled (Jeong and Kim, 2021). Moreover, many volunteer centres participated in pandemic management activities, such as distributing food and supporting people in quarantine. Cooperation between the Korean government and the civil society was not only employed for public policy implementation but also in its formation. For example, civil society representatives were included in expert meetings and online platforms were created to engage participants from different parts of the civil society in policy formation (Jeong & Kim, 2021).

For external cooperation, many examples are presented throughout KOICA's Annual Report:

'*In 2020, in a bid to promote sustainable development leaving no one behind, the Agency worked out the Road Map for Cooperation with* ***Civil Society*** *to pursue the enhancement of the social safety net in recipient countries through partnerships with* ***Korean civil society*** *and of its own capacity based on partnerships with civil society in those countries*.' (KOICA, 2021: p. 9)

'*To fight against COVID-19, KOICA introduced the 'COVID-19 emergency aid' programs in a way that harnesses experiences of* ***civic groups*** *which conduct local matching programs, and local partnership.'* (Ibid. 97)

Of course, in the context of KOICA the cooperation is related to international development and Korea acts as a coordinator of cooperation taking place outside of its borders. The connection between overseas development programmes and the civil society is not new, but rather a continuation of an existing policy course:

'*As a part of the 2019 policy implementation of* ***government-civil society partnership*** *in the international development cooperation sector–* ' (Ibid. 97)

The link between the government-civil society cooperation and public diplomacy is not ambiguous. During the Lee Myung-bak administration, a non-profit group was created to represent civil citizens and raise awareness of public diplomacy within the Korean population (Istad, 2016). Furthermore, Korea's Public Diplomacy Act explicitly outlines the importance

of forming ‘social consensus’ and promoting people’s participation in public diplomacy (MOFA, 2016). More recently, the Korean government declared ‘grassroot public diplomacy’ and ‘people-to-people exchanges’ as ways to support its public diplomacy activities during post-COVID times (MOFA, 2020b). However, decreasing the top-down nature of nation branding and public diplomacy is not a Korean trend, but rather part of a wider change within the image management paradigm (Cull, 2010).

While much of the government-generated COVID-19 materials involved more straight-forward nation branding activities (e.g. referring to the virtues of the Korean people), there are some instances where the people were more directly engaged. For example, the ‘Stay Strong’ campaign mentioned in the COVID-19 guide called for both Korean people and the global community to participate in an online movement to ‘encourage resilience’ (MOFA, 2020a: p. 134). The use of hashtags and tagging friends on social media posts connected the attendees and, at least in theory, provided an avenue for people-to-people communication. In addition to Korean citizens, the government also utilised Korea-based immigrants in the ‘Thanks To You Challenge’ (Ibid. 103). While the primary objective of the campaign was to spread information within the different immigration networks in Korea, were the volunteers also more likely to have connections to other foreign nationals outside Korea. Thus, intentional or not, the campaign increased the external visibility of Korea’s response, at least to some extent. The use of these campaigns is also consistent with Korea’s previous attempts to stimulate foreign engagement and two-way communication through public diplomacy efforts implemented via information networks (Park & Lim, 2014).

6 Findings and conclusion

The starting point of this research rested on the observation that some countries were inserting aspects of public diplomacy and nation branding within the promotion of their pandemic management. Their knowledge sharing did not only contain neutral guidelines on measures, but also assertations and implications related to the country's unique set of strengths. The selected country of interest, Korea, provided a particularly suitable study on the topic, as the history of its nation branding and public diplomacy is well-researched, and it was among the countries that widely promoted their own pandemic management approach. With this foundation, this research aimed to explore the possible connections between the COVID-19 pandemic and Korea's image management. More specifically, it sought to identify the ways Korean government included its prevailing nation branding and public diplomacy themes within the promotion of its pandemic model. While these topics are likely to generate an increasing amount of research in the future, there are gaps in the current understanding (e.g. exploration of converging themes), which this research consequently aimed to address.

To answer the main research question, this research argues that the themes portrayed in the promotion of Korea's pandemic management model during the year 2020 do contain many of the similar themes depicted in its public diplomacy and nation branding efforts. This argument is supported by addressing the two sub-questions in the below sections.

To answer the first sub-question, this research argues that the Korean government's framing of the pandemic largely followed the general frames used by the majority of the international community. This includes an overarching crisis frame, which is further divided into situational frames that describe the pandemic's novelty, shared nature and long-term impact. However, the situational frames were used in a way that provided a logical background for Korea to propose its own solutions later on. This layout is especially apparent in official speeches, which often followed a problem-solution structure, describing a reality where the suggested measures 'made sense'. Furthermore, the primary use of a commonly employed frame puts Korea 'in the same boat' with the others, however, the slight emphasis on certain aspects of the pandemic connect the situation to Korea's solutions.

As for the framing of the solution, Korea's often-repeated frames of cooperation and responsibility are fairly general, again prevalent in the wider pandemic-related communication. However, the more specific frames regarding the *how* of the solution arguably put Korea in a relatively favourable position. For example, the emphasis on its past

experiences and early encounter with the virus provided it with a level of credibility as a pandemic expert. Moreover, some key aspects of its approach, like the existing technological infrastructure, cannot be easily emulated, at least without Korea's guidance. Another example is the call for openness and cross-border movement. Through the framing of the situation, the importance of maintaining openness is stressed repeatedly. However, there are several accounts stating how difficult it is to achieve in reality, yet Korea had somehow managed to do it. Again, the framing made looking to Korea for advice a logical step for others. Based on these observations, this research argues that the Korean government's framing of both the situation (pandemic) and the solution implicitly positioned Korea in a way that made it a crucial partner for other countries and actors.

In terms of the second sub-question, this research argues that there are clear similarities between the solutions and measures introduced in Korea's pandemic materials and communication, and its previous nation branding and public diplomacy efforts. Not only that, some themes detected during the data analysis are arguably the same as the key features of Korea's recent image management. Themes with the most obvious convergencies include technology and innovation, different forms of cooperation and engagement, and foreign nationals within Korea. This is not to say that Korea's pandemic response was solely built based on its public diplomacy or nation branding. Rather, the way certain topics and features were portrayed in its communication followed the same strategic guidelines Korea had set for its image management in the past few years. To expand further, this research argues that Korean government employed the promotion of its pandemic management to not only share valuable information with others but also to further its own public diplomacy objectives. Moreover, the modularisation of the 'Korean response' and patenting of pandemic-time innovations suggests that the government did not see the pandemic merely as a crisis, but also as an opportunity with possible long-term implications. For example, the patenting of certain innovations and close cooperation with the domestic private sector imply that the promotion of Korea's COVID-19 response also held clear economic interests for the country. Furthermore, by making the approach clearly Korean, its use would also improve Korea's visibility, and possibly its image and reputation. Additionally, attaching notions of international norms and values into the 'Korean' model of pandemic management further solidified Korea's image as a internationalised middle power that shared and promoted the values of the wider international community. While certain activities, for example hosting the Post-COVID-19 Public Diplomacy Forum on increasing regional health cooperation in Asia

indicate that Korea is also looking to further its role as a regional health leader, this research found that the main focus of its pandemic-time public diplomacy was directed toward promoting Korea's other interests, often ones with underlying economic implications.

These arguments can hopefully add to the understanding of pandemic-time public diplomacy, particularly in the Korean context. In terms of the wider theoretical framework used to ground this research, the above arguments provide a glimpse to concepts like soft power, competitive credibility and middle power behaviour during a global health crisis. Of course, this research focused on a single country and rested heavily on its unique features. Thus, the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to apply to other countries and their pandemic-time behaviour.

For future research, looking further into individual themes (e.g. public-private cooperation, technology and innovation, foreigners in Korea) could provide more in-depth knowledge about their gradual development as part of Korea's public diplomacy and nation branding agenda. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, gaining insight from Korean officials involved in the creation of the 'Korean model' of pandemic management, perhaps through a structured or semi-structured interview, would add to the understanding of the creation process of these models. Also, more thorough analysis on the role of the private sector actors in Korea's pandemic response, both home and abroad, would be a worthwhile topic to address. Finally, a similar study done on other countries' pandemic responses could reveal whether the approach adopted by the Korean government was also done elsewhere.

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