

CONCEPTUALISING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN BROADCASTING THE NATION BRANDING

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the intersection between public relations (PR) practices and nation branding within the Malaysian broadcasting industry. Using the Malaysia Madani framework as a focal point, this study maps the role of public relations in promoting and shaping Malaysia's nation branding through televised media. The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to investigate how public relations officers in Malaysian broadcasting stations contribute to the promotion of nation branding narratives; (2) to map out the strategies and tools used by these PR officers to align broadcasting content with national identity frameworks such as Malaysia Madani; and (3) to assess the impact of these efforts on public perceptions of the Malaysian nation branding. The paper addresses a critical issue in the Malaysian broadcasting industry: the underexplored role of PR in strategically broadcasting and sustaining nation branding narratives. While existing literature on nation branding has primarily focused on economic or political dimensions, there is a dearth of research examining how PR in media institutions shapes public perceptions of the nation, mainly through structured narratives like Malaysia Madani.

Keywords: *Public relations, nation branding, broadcasting, Malaysia Madani, promotional culture*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of nation branding has received a lot of attention in recent years, especially in the context of globalization, where countries compete not only for political and economic influence, but also for cultural and ideological soft power. Nation branding is a strategic approach to influencing how a country is perceived both internationally and locally. Public relations (PR), a field dedicated to managing and disseminating an image, plays an important role in this process. Malaysia's nation branding effort has taken on new significance with the introduction of the Malaysia Madani framework, which emphasizes values such as inclusivity, sustainability, and good governance as the cornerstones of the national identity.

While much has been written about the economic and political aspects of nation branding, the intersection of public relations and broadcasting is largely unexplored.

Broadcasting, as a medium of mass communication, provides an effective platform for projecting the nation's identity to both domestic and international audiences. Within this context, public relations professionals in Malaysia's broadcasting industry are responsible for creating and promoting narratives that reflect the country's aspirations and values.

This paper investigates the role of public relations in broadcasting Malaysia's national branding, specifically using the Malaysia Madani framework. It looks at how public relations professionals in Malaysian television stations create and manage the narratives that shape the country's image. This research sheds light on the strategies, tools, and challenges encountered by public relations officers as they align broadcast content with national identity frameworks, and how these efforts influence public perception of Malaysia.

1. Title
Conceptualising The Role of Public Relations in Broadcasting the Nation Branding

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE(S)

- 1) To investigate how public relations officers in Malaysian broadcasting stations contribute to the promotion of nation branding narratives.
- (2) To map out the strategies and tools used by these PR officers to align broadcasting content with national identity frameworks such as Malaysia Madani; and
- (3) To assess the impact of these efforts on public perceptions of the Malaysian nation branding

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia Madani as a Nation Branding and PR Strategy

The Malaysia Madani initiative is a sophisticated national branding strategy, intricately weaving together public relations (PR) methodologies to craft and promote a distinct national identity. Drawing from Breuilly's interpretation of Benedict Anderson's (2006) theories on nationalism, the Malaysia Madani Framework emphasises how modern nation branding has evolved beyond traditional concepts rooted in citizenship, sovereignty, and democracy. Instead, it leverages PR, marketing, and cultural diplomacy to project a compelling image of Malaysia that is aligned with global trends.

Malaysia Madani operates as a strategic PR tool designed to create a unique identity for Malaysia and to position it as a nation that embraces inclusivity, respect, and sustainable development. This approach is crucial in differentiating Malaysia globally, making it more attractive to international stakeholders, including tourists, investors, and global consumers. The framework also draws upon

historical antecedents, such as the Satu Malaysia campaign and Islam Hadhari, which aimed to unify diverse ethnic groups and promote a balanced, inclusive society.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia Madani has been revived and redefined as a comprehensive national strategy. Originally conceived as part of an economic framework in 1995 and later evolving into a civil society concept in 1998, Malaysia Madani now embodies post-Islamism principles, reflecting a modern Islamic society's values in governance and development. The framework's emphasis on respect, inclusivity, and sustainable development addresses the needs of a modern, diverse Malaysia and enhances its branding value on the global stage.

In implementing Malaysia Madani, PR strategies foster a sense of national unity and identity that resonates locally and internationally. The initiative leverages PR tools to build trust between the government and its citizens, ensuring that the narrative of inclusivity and mutual respect is consistently communicated across all platforms. This consistent messaging is crucial in establishing Malaysia Madani as a symbol of national pride and a beacon of progressive governance.

Moreover, Malaysia Madani strategically aligns with global PR practices by integrating cultural diplomacy, economic policy, and tourism promotion elements into a cohesive national image. By maintaining transparent and consistent communication with domestic and international audiences, the initiative enhances Malaysia's reputation and fosters long-term trust and credibility. This holistic approach to nation branding ensures that Malaysia Madani is not merely a slogan but a dynamic framework driving Malaysia's competitive edge in the global arena.

Anderson's (2006) concept of "Imagined Communities" critically explores nationalism, offering a historical and

comparative analysis of its origins and global spread. Anderson presents nations as 'imagined communities,' simultaneously factual and fictional entities, emerging during a particular historical period through the mechanisms of 'print capitalism.' (2016, p.645) This concept allowed individuals, especially those in specific social strata like the 'Creole pioneers,' to articulate and disseminate new nationalist perspectives. (2016, p.646) Originating in the United States, these perspectives underwent various transformations, adapting to different contexts and becoming integral to how national identities were conceived globally.

Despite Anderson's influential ideas, particularly the notion of print capitalism as a catalyst for nationalism, notable sociologists like Siniša Malešević (2013); Rogers Brubaker, (1992,1996, 2004) and Liah Greenfeld (1992) rarely reference his work. This lack of frequent citation suggests that while Anderson's framework provides valuable insights, it may not be seen as a comprehensive or dominant theory for understanding the historical development of nationalism. Nonetheless, Anderson's work remains significant for its profound impact on how nationalism's historical evolution is understood.

In contemporary times, nation branding has emerged as a strategic effort to craft a unique and authentic image for countries on the global stage. As Katja Valaskivi (2016) suggests in her book *Cool Nation: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*, this process involves deliberately shaping a country's image through cultural diplomacy, international marketing, and public relations. Unlike traditional notions of nationhood, rooted in political principles like citizenship, national sovereignty, and democracy, nation branding borrows its framework from marketing and public relations strategies. The goal is to stand out and build a global reputation of active engagement and success. Nation branding thus becomes a cross-

border activity influenced by media, socio-economic factors, and ideological contexts, aiming to bolster a country's competitiveness while accelerating its pace in global competition.

Nation branding is fundamentally a business-oriented concept driven by clear commercial objectives. It goes beyond creating meaning for the nation's citizens; it seeks to establish relevance for tourists, investors, and consumers. In Malaysia, the Madani approach exemplifies this application of nation branding. This strategy aims to craft a compelling national identity that resonates locally and globally, enhancing the nation's branding value and attractiveness. Previous campaigns like *Satu Malaysia*, which promoted national unity among diverse ethnic groups, and *Islam Hadhari*, which emphasised a progressive and holistic approach to governance based on Islamic principles, illustrate Malaysia's ongoing efforts to use nation branding to foster social cohesion and attract global interest.

However, the effectiveness of such campaigns is often contingent on the support of the public, leaders, governments, and political parties. The Malaysia Madani concept, introduced by Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister, is a recent example of a national branding initiative designed to reinforce positive values and drive the country's development. Initially proposed as part of an economic framework in 1995, Madani aimed to foster a civil society that values respect, inclusivity, and diversity. Following Anwar's election as Prime Minister in 2022, Madani was reinstated as a national framework, embodying post-Islamism principles and reflecting the evolution of Islamic societies in a modern context (Musa, 2023).

The Madani approach, emphasising respect, inclusivity, and good governance, represents hope for Malaysia's future. By promoting cooperation and transparency between the people and the government,

Madani aspires to create a society where every citizen, regardless of background, has the right to live in a sustainable environment. This approach also underscores the importance of equality and compassion, paving the way for a more inclusive and harmonious future.

The historical and cultural significance of the Madani approach is further enriched by its roots in the Madinah Charter, a social contract established by Prophet Muhammad in the city of Madinah (Kazemi, 2009). This charter, which valued plurality and established the rights and responsibilities of all citizens, offers a profound historical parallel to the principles underlying Malaysia Madani. Similar concepts of civil society can be seen in other regions, such as the Middle East, where rapid urbanisation, rising literacy rates, and increased use of electronic communication channels have fostered a growing demand for accountability and the rule of law (Kazemi, 2009).

While lacking a one-size-fits-all template, nation branding strategies generally involve conducting internal and external analyses, strategic planning, and implementation. These analyses are crucial for understanding a country's strengths, weaknesses, and global perceptions, which form the basis for developing precise branding strategies. Effective strategy formulation relies on setting clear, measurable goals, and tools like Ansoff's matrix can provide valuable insights into potential directions for development (Dinnie, 2015). The final phase of strategic implementation involves maintaining control, managing knowledge, adapting to change, and working relationships, all essential for successfully executing a nation branding strategy.

Dinnie (2022) highlights the importance of integrating public relations with cultural diplomacy, economic policies, and tourism initiatives to create a cohesive national image. Rather than relying on public relations as a crisis management tool, governments

should incorporate these efforts into the broader strategy to build long-term trust and credibility. Consistent and transparent communication with both domestic and international audiences, coupled with regular engagement with stakeholders, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of a national branding strategy, ultimately improving a country's global standing.

Role of Broadcasting in Promoting Malaysia Madani

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and promoting national policies, a theme often emphasized in nation branding literature. Its capacity to disseminate information and influence public opinion makes it essential to the success of nation branding efforts. As Kamaruzzaman (2024) highlights, media platforms, particularly those aligned with the Malaysia Madani framework, are crucial in ensuring that the public receives accurate, relevant, and timely information about national initiatives. The dual role of media, both in educating the public about government policies and in promoting values that contribute to nation-building, underscores its significance in shaping national identity. For example, Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) has broadcasted over 2,245 Malaysia Madani-related materials through public service announcements, short videos, and promos, while TV Okey has produced 2,728 reports on the same framework.

In the context of Malaysia Madani—a comprehensive framework introduced by the Malaysian government to promote inclusivity, sustainability, and national development—the role of media extends far beyond mere information dissemination. Media outlets actively promote ethical values, self-management, and tolerance, which are essential to building a cohesive and prosperous society. As noted by Kamaruzzaman (2024), platforms such as television, radio, and digital media are instrumental in raising public awareness about

government policies related to education, health, and economic development, which directly impact the daily lives of Malaysian citizens. This highlights the media's role in translating complex policies into accessible narratives that foster public understanding and engagement.

Teo Nie Ching (2023) emphasizes that Malaysia's Communications and Digital Ministry (KKD) has intensified its efforts to enhance public comprehension of the Malaysia Madani concept through a multi-platform media approach. The ministry's initiatives, such as the "Kita MADANI" and "Jalinan Insan Wahana Aspirasi" programs, have successfully engaged hundreds of thousands of Malaysians. Additionally, the "Info on Wheels" broadcasts have reached over one million listeners, underscoring the media's capacity to influence public perception and understanding of Malaysia Madani.

Furthermore, traditional broadcasting outlets like RTM have played a crucial role in these efforts, with thousands of public service announcements (PSAs), short videos, and reports aired across multiple television and radio stations. These consistent media efforts ensure that the Malaysia Madani framework's core values—such as inclusivity, sustainability, and good governance—are widely promoted and understood by the public. Through this comprehensive media strategy, the Malaysian government demonstrates its commitment to using media as a tool for nation-building, aligning public perceptions with the goals of Malaysia Madani.

Malaysia Madani in relation to Promotional Culture

The Malaysia Madani framework, introduced by Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim in January 2023, provides a critical context for understanding the evolving role of public relations (PR) in nation branding, particularly in Malaysia's broadcasting industry. Malaysia

Madani provides a strategic vision based on six core values: sustainability, care and compassion, respect, innovation, prosperity, and trust (Bernama, 2023). These values play an important role in shaping national identity and serve as the foundation for the content and narratives that public relations professionals create in collaboration with media platforms. In the context of broadcasting, public relations officers play an important role in ensuring that these values are reflected in broadcast content, which promotes the national branding domestically and internationally.

Sustainability, a key component of the Malaysia Madani framework, goes beyond environmental concerns to include social sustainability. Public relations professionals in the broadcasting industry must incorporate this value by promoting narratives that emphasize long-term societal well-being, such as the sustainability of cultural, social, and economic systems. For example, PR strategies could focus on creating content that emphasizes Malaysia's commitment to sustainable development goals, reinforcing the country's image as forward-thinking and responsible.

Care and compassion are essential principles for creating a balanced and inclusive society, as envisioned by Malaysia Madani. Public relations practitioners are responsible for creating messages that convey these values through media campaigns, public service announcements (PSAs), and television programming. By promoting narratives that emphasize unity, social welfare, and compassion, public relations officers can help to improve public perception of Malaysia's efforts to create an equitable society.

Respect is another value that public relations campaigns should consistently emphasize. Public relations professionals in broadcasting must ensure that the narratives they spread reflect respect for Malaysia's diverse communities and cultures. This could include promoting content that celebrates

Malaysia's multicultural identity while positioning the country as a model of peaceful coexistence on a global scale. PR can help improve Malaysia's branding by portraying the country as respectful, tolerant, and harmonious.

The Malaysia Madani framework's emphasis on **innovation** has far-reaching implications for the public relations industry and national branding. Public relations officers are responsible for not only promoting innovation across the country, but also for using innovative PR strategies to engage with a wide range of audiences. In broadcasting, this may entail incorporating new media technologies, such as digital platforms and interactive content, to ensure that Malaysia's forward-thinking and innovative initiatives reach a worldwide audience.

Prosperity in the Malaysia Madani framework emphasizes inclusive growth, allowing all members of society to thrive. Public relations professionals in the broadcasting industry are responsible for promoting Malaysia's image as a prosperous and inclusive country. This entails creating content that emphasizes national accomplishments in fields such as education, healthcare, and economic development. PR campaigns can also highlight the success stories of Malaysians from various backgrounds, reinforcing the idea that Malaysia is a land of opportunity for everyone.

Finally, **trust** is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable society, as well as for practicing public relations. Trust is the foundation of effective public relations, as audiences must believe in the credibility and integrity of the messages they receive. PR officers in broadcasting can build trust by ensuring that the content they promote is transparent, authentic, and consistent with Malaysia Madani's values. They contribute not only to the nation's branding, but also to the overarching goal of increasing social cohesion and public trust in national institutions.

The Malaysia Madani framework emphasizes sustainability, care, compassion, respect, innovation, prosperity, and trust in public relations. It emphasizes long-term societal well-being, such as the sustainability of cultural, social, and economic systems. Public relations professionals should create narratives thru broadcasting that emphasize Malaysia's commitment to sustainable development goals, promoting Malaysia's image as forward-thinking and responsible. Public Relations in Broadcasting should also convey Malaysia's values through media campaigns, public service announcements, and television programming, promoting unity, social welfare, and compassion. They should also promote Malaysia's multicultural identity and position the country as a model of peaceful coexistence. The framework also emphasizes innovation, promoting Malaysia's image as a prosperous and inclusive country through content highlighting national accomplishments and success stories. Trust is crucial for effective public relations, and PR officers can build it by promoting transparent, authentic content consistent with Malaysia Madani's values.

Public Perception on Malaysia Madani

Nation branding refers to countries' strategic efforts to promote their identities and gain favourable perceptions from both domestic and international audiences (Anholt, 2007). Public relations (PR) are critical to this process because it shapes narratives that communicate a nation's values and aspirations (Wang, 2018). According to Grunig et al. (2002), effective public relations require two-way communication that fosters relationships between organizations and their audiences, which is critical for influencing public attitudes toward national branding initiatives.

Media plays an important role in the nation branding process, significantly influencing public perceptions (Moffitt, 2014). Various media platforms—television, radio, and digital

outlets—help disseminate information about national policies and branding efforts (Kamaruzzaman, 2024). For example, Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) has aired numerous programs about the Malaysia Madani framework, which aims to promote values like inclusivity and sustainability (Teo, 2023). These media narratives not only inform but also shape the public's perception and opinions of the national branding.

In Malaysia, public perception of national branding is influenced by sociopolitical factors like ethnic diversity and historical legacies. The Malaysia Madani framework, introduced by Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim, aims to change public perceptions of the government and its policies through ethical governance and national unity. Effective public relations efforts can increase public trust and engagement with national initiatives. Public perception is assessed using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, with surveys and interviews being used to evaluate the effectiveness of public relations campaigns in shaping national identities. Effective public awareness campaigns through media channels can positively impact public perception of nation branding efforts. However, challenges such as misinformation, cultural diversity, and competing narratives can hinder effective communication. PR professionals must navigate the complexities of a multicultural society to foster a strong national identity.

METHODOLOGY

Critical Literature Review Approach

This study employs a critical literature review methodology to analyse and synthesise existing research at the intersection of public relations (PR), broadcasting and nation branding. The review aims to identify key themes, gaps, and critical perspectives within these fields to provide a comprehensive understanding of a critical issue in the Malaysian broadcasting

industry: the underexplored role of PR in strategically broadcasting and sustaining nation branding narratives

Selection Criteria

A systematic approach was adopted to select relevant literature to ensure a robust and focused review. The selection criteria included:

- **Relevance to Key Themes:** Articles, books, and reports were chosen based on their focus on PR roles, broadcasting, and nation branding.
- **Scholarly Rigor:** Only peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and published reports with high academic credibility were considered.
- **Temporal Range:** The review primarily focused on literature published between 2000 and 2023 to capture contemporary discussions, with some foundational works from earlier years included for historical context.
- **Geographical Scope:** Although the primary focus is Malaysia, the review also considered global literature to contextualise the findings within broader trends and theories.

Data Sources

The literature was sourced from a variety of academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, and SAGE Journals. Search terms included "public relations," "broadcasting," "nation branding," "Malaysia Madani," and "media and nation branding."

Analysis Process

The analysis involved several stages:

1. **Thematic Coding:** The literature was first organised thematically, focusing on recurring topics such as the role of PR in nation branding, the strategic use of broadcasting for nation-building, and

the impact of media in promoting national identity frameworks like Malaysia Madani.

2. **Critical Evaluation:** Each piece of literature was critically evaluated to assess its contribution to the field, highlighting its strengths and limitations. Special attention was given to how these works addressed or neglected the intersections of PR, broadcasting, and nation branding.
3. **Comparative Synthesis:** The themes identified were compared across different studies to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps. This process allowed for synthesising diverse perspectives and identifying underexplored areas in the literature.
4. **Contextual Application:** Finally, the review applied the synthesised insights to the context of Malaysian public relations and nation branding, exploring how global theories and findings resonate or diverge from the Malaysian experience.

Reflexivity and Bias Consideration

Given the critical nature of this literature review, reflexivity was integral to the research process. The researcher remained aware of their positionality, especially considering their academic background in media studies and the potential influence of personal biases on interpreting the literature. Efforts were made to objectively approach the literature while acknowledging the inherent subjectivity in critical analysis. Where possible, conflicting viewpoints were presented to offer a balanced perspective.

Limitations

This critical literature review is subject to several limitations. First, the focus on English-language sources may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages. Second,

reliance on academic databases might have overlooked important industry reports or grey literature that could offer additional insights. Lastly, the review is constrained by the available literature up to 2023, and emerging research trends may not be fully captured. Despite these limitations, the review provides a comprehensive and critical examination of the intersections of PR, broadcasting, and nation branding, offering valuable insights for future research and practice.

DISCUSSION

The media's responsibility in shaping the narrative around Malaysia Madani is aligned with the broader goals of nation branding, where the portrayal of national identity and values is crucial for both domestic and international perceptions. Kamaruzzaman (2024) highlights the importance of upholding media integrity and ensuring that the information shared with the public is not only accurate but also beneficial for societal progress. This reflects the strategic role of PR professionals in media institutions, as they work to align broadcast content with national identity frameworks, such as Malaysia Madani, and promote a positive nation branding. In other words, public relations plays a crucial role in shaping and promoting a nation's identity, particularly within the Malaysia Madani framework. PR officers in Malaysia's broadcasting sector are uniquely positioned to align content with the values of Malaysia Madani. However, there is a lack of focus on PR's proactive role in nation branding within Malaysian broadcasting. PR professionals can strategically curate narratives that reinforce national identity, especially in a country with diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

By leveraging various media platforms, PR officers in Malaysia can significantly contribute to the nation branding efforts by

strategically framing narratives that reflect the country's aspirations under the Malaysia Madani framework. This approach aligns with previous scholarship, which emphasizes the media's role in constructing national identities and influencing public perception (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2021). The ability of media professionals to craft and promote narratives that resonate with the public is key to the success of any nation branding campaign. Broadcasting, particularly television and radio, remains a powerful medium for disseminating national policies and promoting cultural identity. The extensive broadcasting of Malaysia Madani-related content by media outlets like Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) demonstrates the government's reliance on media to instil national values. However, there is a need for more critical engagement with how these media outlets curate and frame national policies.

The alignment of broadcasting content with national identity frameworks presents both opportunities and challenges. The impact of broadcasting on public perception of Malaysia Madani remains underexplored in existing literature. The study also reveals how Malaysian PR and broadcasting efforts compare to global practices in nation branding. Ethical considerations are necessary to navigate the challenges of inclusivity, authenticity, and ethics in managing nation branding narratives.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual study emphasizes the critical intersection of public relations, broadcasting, and nation branding in the context of Malaysia Madani. Using a critical literature review methodology, it reveals the critical role that media plays in shaping public perceptions and promoting national values. While significant progress has been made in disseminating information about the Malaysia Madani framework, challenges remain in ensuring that

these narratives accurately reflect Malaysia's diverse society. Future research should delve deeper into the ethical implications of media practices, as well as effective strategies for aligning public relations efforts with Malaysia Madani's goals of inclusivity and sustainability. Finally, a collaborative approach between PR practitioners and media outlets is essential for fostering a cohesive national identity and promoting the nation's central values of Malaysia Madani.

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