

## **Cobranded Diplomacy: A Case Study of the British Council’s Branding of “Darwin Now” in Egypt**

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In the wake of September 11, 2001, cultural diplomacy has become increasingly important and dialogue-based initiatives have been used to improve understandings between the Muslim world and the West. In 2009, the British Council implemented the “Darwin Now” initiative in Egypt, in partnership with Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Although evolutionary theory is considered controversial in the Islamic world, “Darwin Now” generated mostly positive media coverage. This study uses a cobranding theoretical framework to examine how the British Council was able to avoid negative spillover effects. A single case study of the British Council’s “Darwin Now” 2009 campaign in Egypt was conducted and consisted of a content analysis and 36 in-depth interviews. The findings of this study conclude that it was possible to overcome negative spillover effects because of partnering with a high-profile national organization such as Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

*Keywords: cobranding, British Council, Egypt, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Darwin Now*

In 2009, the British Council launched “Darwin Now,” a global initiative that was designed to foster debate about evolution by celebrating Charles Darwin’s 200th birth anniversary and his work on the theory of evolution. “Darwin Now” was a major program that covered 50 different countries across North Africa, Europe, East Asia, America, and Latin America (Ipsos MORI, n.d.). The year-long program consisted of activities including workshops, an interactive website, and a mobile exhibition (Ipsos MORI, n.d.). The full program of activities was implemented in Egypt, which is the oldest overseas operation (British Council, n.d.), and consisted of wraparound activities such as faith and evolution debates, journalists’ training, and a mobile exhibition. The center piece of the global initiative was an international conference held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

In the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, the British Council aimed to challenge misconceptions related to Darwin and to stimulate cross-cultural conversation with Muslims around a highly controversial topic such as evolution. To achieve that, the Council engaged with different types of audiences such as Arab scholars and college students from universities across Egypt, including Al-Azhar University, a center for Sunni Islamic learning. Religious leaders were invited to participate in wraparound activities such as faith and evolution debates that took place before the conference. The media were another key target group, and science journalists participated in activities including a series of trainings and competitions. In

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terms of engaging with the general public, a mobile exhibition on the life and work of Charles Darwin toured the region and was held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina during the conference.

### Literature Review

The controversy surrounding Darwin's theory of evolution and Islam is embedded in a historical context (Elshakry, 2003; Remtulla, 1993). The theory was first introduced to the Middle East in 1876 by two Syrian journalists who translated it into Arabic (Elshakry, 2003; Remtulla, 1993). Muslim scholar Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was one of its strongest opponents and published "The Refutation of Materialists" in 1881 to generate Islamic "solidarity against the West" (Remtulla, 1993, p. 58). However, other 19th-century Muslim thinkers, such as the Syrian Husayn al-Jisr and the Egyptian Al-Azhar scholar Muhammed 'Abduh, believed that religion and science need not conflict and accepted Darwin's theory readily (Elshakry, 2003). In addition, Mahmud Shaltut, a late grand Shaykh of Al-Azhar (d. 1963) issued a "fatwa," an Islamic legal pronouncement by a religious expert, that the theory contradicts Qur'anic verses related to the creation of Adam (Ghaly, 2014).

In 2009, the British Council commissioned an international survey to gauge awareness of Charles Darwin and attitudes toward his theory of evolution. Ten countries were surveyed: Argentina, China, Egypt, Great Britain, India, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and the United States (Ipsos MORI, 2009). In terms of awareness of Charles Darwin, Egypt was the second lowest (38%). In response to the survey question "To what extent do you agree or disagree that enough scientific evidence exists to support Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution?", Egypt had the lowest "Agree" percentage (25%) and the highest "Disagree" percentage (63%). In response to a question in which respondents were provided with a range of different views and were asked, "Which of these comes closest to your own view?", Egypt had the lowest percentage (2%) of selecting "Life on earth, including human life, evolved over time as a result of natural selection, in which no God played a part." It also had the highest percentages (50%) of selecting "Life on earth, including human life, was created by a God and has always existed in its current form" (Ipsos MORI, 2009). This shows that Egyptians not only had the least awareness of the theory of evolution but they were also the least likely to support it or agree with it.

In addition to the controversial nature of evolutionary theory, the British Council's attempt to conduct "Darwin Now" in Egypt was complicated by other factors. Hameed (2008) stated that Muslims oppose evolution because it poses a cultural threat, not because it contradicts the Qur'an. By the early 20th century, British imperialism had "embraced substantially more than half the Muslim peoples of the world" (Robinson, 2001, as cited in Majeed, 2013, p. 36), and because colonialism affected such a large proportion of the world's Muslims, Islam became "a self-conscious postcolonial faith" (Majeed, 2013, p. 36). The Islamist literature describes colonialism as a "cultural attack" whereby colonialists promoted secular values through official institutions to limit Islam's influence on the colonized (Haddad, 1999). The formal British colonization of Egypt took place in 1882 (Abul-Magd, 2010) and came to an end in 1952 (Vitalis, 1996).

As a British organization, the British Council could potentially suffer from a negative country-of-origin effect (COO; Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), which might lead the public to scrutinize its actions more closely than those of domestic organizations. This is especially true post September 11, after which the

relationship between the Islamic and the Western worlds was interpreted as a "civilizational and religious" clash (Iskandar, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, promoting "Darwin Now" in Egypt potentially posed a substantial risk to the British Council's reputation. Had the initiative been perceived as a "cultural attack," some of the potential negative consequences were boycotting the international conference and/or the wraparound activities, protesting in front of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and generating negative media coverage of the program and/or the British Council in Egypt.

In Egypt, the British Council cobranded "Darwin Now" with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, a national institution that is highly regarded by the public. According to Keel and Natarajan (2012), "cobranding is a brand alliance strategy in which two brands appear on a single product" (p. 296). As Leuthesser, Kohli, and Suri (2003) assert, "cobranding has the potential to achieve 'best of all worlds' synergy that capitalises on the unique strengths of each contributing brand (henceforth referred to as 'parent' brands)" (p. 36).

Although branding has become increasingly important in public diplomacy (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012), most public diplomacy studies have focused on public relations theories (Gilboa, 2008). This study extends cobranding theories to the field of public diplomacy, which would contribute to understanding how a public diplomacy actor's brand equity influences and is influenced by a new initiative. Such a perspective would provide a richer understanding of the conditions that affected the success of "Darwin Now" in Egypt. It would also contribute to the advancement of theories within public diplomacy scholarship. As Gilboa (2008) stated, "A major breakthrough could be achieved if public diplomacy research was expanded to other disciplines" (p. 75).

### ***Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Relations***

Traditional public diplomacy refers to "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies" (Tuch, 1990, p. 3). Cultural diplomacy relates to "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003, p. 1). Scholars have distinguished between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015; Melissen, 2005; Rivera, 2015). According to former diplomat Richard Arndt, cultural relations "grow naturally and organically, without government intervention," while cultural diplomacy involves national governments and formal diplomats and aims to advance national interests (as cited in Ang et al., 2015, p. 366).

Organizations such as the British Council believe that to gain the trust of foreign publics, cultural relations need to be distinguished clearly from cultural diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). Therefore, such organizations use the term cultural relations rather than cultural diplomacy to refer to their own activities (Melissen, 2005). This is because if one does not make such a distinction, and cultural relations become associated with political interests, their ability to promote trust will be compromised (Melissen, 2005). As a quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organization, the British Council has been able to build "its reputation as a credible and impartial actor" (Rivera, 2015, p. 34). As Rivera (2015) asserts, "This trust and credibility sit at the core of the British Council's long-term relationships with other peoples and countries around the world" (p. 34). Recognizing that such an approach enables effective engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, the

Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (U.S. Department of State, 2005) pointed out the need for the United States "to create an independent clearinghouse, in the manner of the British Council" (p. 18).

Leonard, Small, and Rose (2005) mentioned that the British Council is perceived by its publics as being trustworthy. They contend that this is the result of two things: its independence from the government and its cultural activity. They argue that it was able to continue its operations in Egypt during the 1956 Suez Crisis for these same reasons. They also point out that this independence continues to be a major strength for the British Council in the Middle East, especially after the Iraq invasion. In recent years, the British Council's "operational independence" (Rivera, 2015, p. 7) from the government is being threatened as it is now expected to "explicitly advance national interests" (Rivera, 2015, p. 34).

### ***The Bibliotheca Alexandrina***

The modern-day Bibliotheca (Library of) Alexandrina was inaugurated in 2003 and is a reincarnation of the original Mouseion Academy that was established by the Ptolemaic dynasty around 280 B.C. (Philips, 2010; Rico, 2017). The Library of Alexandria was "an integral part of the Mouseion" (Philips, 2010, p. 2), and together they served as an academy for scholars, a research center, and a library (Philips, 2010; Rico, 2017). The original library had an estimated collection of 400,000 to 700,000 scrolls (Delia, 1992; Philips, 2010) and assumed the role of a major global center of learning "in the centuries since its creation and demise" (Philips, 2010, p. 1). Because there are numerous tales about the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, it is not possible to assign a specific date to its demise. However, "by the end of the 4th century AD, the Royal Library of the Museum and the library of the *Serapeum* were already myths from the distant past" (Rico, 2017, "Was the *Serapeum* Full of Books," para. 4).

The significance of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is due in part to its location. The historic city of Alexandria was established by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. (Lawler, 2007), and it became then the capital of Egypt under his successor, Ptolemy I Soter (Wasson, 2012). Throughout its history, Alexandria has been a special place where different cultures have coexisted and has inspired numerous literary works. As Starr (2005) asserts, "From its foundational narratives to contemporary nostalgia literature, Alexandria has been imagined as a cosmopolis, an urban space where peoples and cultures come into contact" (p. 217). For example, Laurence Durrell described it as "the capital of memory" in his renowned *Alexandria Quartet* (Durrell, 1957, as cited in Starr, 2005, p. 217).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Cobranded scholarship has become increasingly important in recent years (Helmig, Huber, & Leeflang, 2007). Cobranded research is mainly concerned with how the partners' brand equity gets linked to the new product (i.e., main effects; Leuthesser et al., 2003). This research also focuses on examining how the newly created product influences the brand equity of the partner brands (i.e., the spillover effect; Leuthesser et al., 2003). Spillover effects refer to how evaluations of a brand alliance affect subsequent evaluations of each of the partner brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998, p. 31). Previous research indicates that cobranded enables positive brand associations to transfer from one brand to another (Besharat, 2010, p. 1241). Musante (2000) conducted an experiment and examined the effect of brand alliances on brand

perceptions. His study indicated that a weak brand can enhance its image by partnering with a stronger brand. He also investigated "whether a negative rub-off effect from an alliance was a possibility" (p. 74). Although findings were mixed, they suggest that an established and familiar brand was "more resistant to change" (p. 74). Other studies show that when two brands are paired, this improves each parent brand's equity, "whether the brand partner is initially perceived as high or low in customer-based brand equity" (Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2004, p. 504). Scholars have also investigated how the newly created cobrand spills over to the brand equity of the partner brands. In addition, research indicates that a national brand that partners with a private unfamiliar brand does not suffer from negative spillover effects (Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000).

This study is based on two conceptual models of cobranding. The first model was developed by Simonin and Ruth (1998) and is concerned with the relationship between brand familiarity and spillover effects of a cobrand. Results of testing such a model indicate that attitudes toward the brand alliance are affected by product fit, brand fit, and past brand attitudes. Partners that enjoy high familiarity contribute equally to the alliance, while partners with less brand familiarity make a lesser contribution to the alliance (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Brand familiarity also influences the extent to which spillover effects influence partner brands, so that less familiar brands get more affected by spillover effects compared with more familiar brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998).

A more recent model was developed by Helmig and colleagues (2007) that explains intentions to purchase cobranded products. Results from testing the model indicate that prior brand attitudes, brand fit, product fit, purchase attitudes, variety-seeking, brand consciousness, and product involvement had a positive effect on behavioral intentions to purchase cobranded products (p. 21).

### **Research Questions**

Cobranding scholarship is mainly concerned with how the brand equity of a parent brand influences and is influenced by perceptions of a cobrand. Therefore, this study needs to investigate the brand equity of both partner brands. Brand equity is "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand" and consists of five dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary assets such as trademarks and patents (Aaker, 1991, p. 27). The purpose of this study is to examine how the British Council branded "Darwin Now" in such a way to avoid negative spillover effects. This overall purpose is broken down into five research questions:

- RQ1: How are the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina perceived in Egypt? What type of associations does each brand generate?*
- RQ2: How is the fit between the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in terms of compatibility of their mission, line of activity, product/service offerings, and brand image perceived?*
- RQ3: Why did the British Council decide to cobrand the "Darwin Now" campaign together with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina?*

*RQ4: Do the "Darwin Now" media coverage or the Egyptian participants' feedback surveys include anything negative about the British Council Egypt and/or the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in relation to "Darwin Now"?*

*RQ5: How was the "Darwin Now" conference branded?*

### **Propositions**

The following theoretical proposition guided the data collection and analysis:

*P1: The British Council in Egypt has a high level of awareness and a positive brand image.*

*P2: Bibliotheca Alexandrina has a high level of awareness and a positive brand image.*

*P3: The two partner brands are perceived as being suited for collaboration for certain activities and projects (fit).*

*P4: Negative spillover effects were minimized as a result of partnering with a high-profile national brand.*

### **Methodology**

In this research, a single embedded case study of the British Council Egypt's "Darwin Now" 2009 campaign was conducted (Yin, 2012). A case study refers to "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). The "Darwin Now" case in Egypt was purposively selected as it fits Patton's (2002) definition of "extreme" cases, which "are information rich because they are unusual or special in some way, such as outstanding successes or notable failures" (p. 230). The main unit of analysis is the 2009 "Darwin Now" cobranded campaign in Egypt. Secondary units of analysis are the British Council Egypt's brand equity, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina's brand equity, the fit between the British Council Egypt's brand and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina's brand, and spillover effects.

There are two main sources from which data were collected: interviews and documented archival records. The latter consisted of media coverage, press releases, and participants' feedback surveys.

### ***In-depth Interviews***

In this study, 36 "focused" in-depth telephone interviews were conducted over a three-month period during the summer of 2015 (Yin, 1994, p. 84). An interview guide (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002) was developed, and questions were based on the theoretical framework and the research questions (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). It consisted of eight open-ended questions to which all respondent groups were asked to answer. Informants from the British Council, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and the media were asked an additional four questions relating to the "Darwin Now" partnership, its cobranding, and the spillover effects

resulting from it. In total, 15 females and 31 males whose ages ranged between 18 and 60 years were interviewed. Three interviews were Skype interviews and 32 were telephone interviews. One participant from the Bibliotheca Alexandrina responded to the interview questionnaire by e-mail. The sample consisted of five British Council representatives and three members of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. E-mails were sent to the directors of the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt, which included the Institutional Review Board and the informed consent form. The directors forwarded the e-mails to relevant staff, and those who expressed interest were recruited. The purpose of interviewing informants from the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was to develop insights regarding the "Darwin Now" cobranded campaign.

Eight members of the media were also interviewed, all of whom either had a role in "Darwin Now" or wrote a news story about it. All the media participants were Egyptian nationals, and four of them specialized in science. The media were interviewed to reveal their reactions, understandings, and associations related to "Darwin Now," the British Council, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. In addition, 20 members of the general public participated in the research and were identified and approached through personal contacts. This target group is a key one for the British Council, are identified as T3s, and consist of those who use paid services, such as English language courses, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, or International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). Participants were of middle to upper middle socioeconomic classes, as those have the appropriate level of knowledge about both the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The main function of the interview was to reveal the participants' reactions, understandings, and associations related to the British Council, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

#### ***Documentation/Archival Records***

A content analysis was conducted to investigate how the British Council was able to brand the "Darwin Now" conference in Egypt, and also to examine whether the "Darwin Now" media coverage and the Egyptian participants' feedback surveys include anything negative about the British Council Egypt and/or the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

The British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt were approached to provide the "Darwin Now" media coverage report, clippings, press releases, and participants' feedback surveys of the "Darwin Now" conference. The British Council provided the media coverage report for the Near East and North Africa region, 171 participants' feedback survey comments of the "Darwin Now" conference, and one of the press releases. Fifty-one of those comments were excluded as they related to non-Egyptian participants, and the remaining 120 were included. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina provided four different press releases and 25 of the news stories generated in Egyptian media. An online search was conducted to retrieve the remaining stories, and 12 additional ones were found. A total of 37 stories were included in the content analysis, two in English, the rest in Arabic.

#### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was conducted in parallel with data collection (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2013). Analysis of the empirical data was guided by the propositions of Simonin and Ruth (1998) and Helmig and associates' (2007) cobranding models and consisted of brand equity of the British Council, brand equity

of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, fit, and spillover effects, which constituted the predetermined codes. Empirical data was compared with the predetermined codes and was used to support or reject the theoretical propositions. This data analysis process is called "pattern-matching" (Yin, 2012, p. 16). As a first step, the data derived from interviews were coded according to the theoretical propositions. In addition, codes that emerged inductively from empirical data that did not fit the predetermined codes were also developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards, 1993).

A content analysis was conducted, and data derived from news stories, press releases, and feedback surveys were examined and compared with predetermined codes. Empirical data mostly did not fit under the predetermined codes, as the main purpose of the content analysis was to examine spillover effects. A codebook was developed and consisted of 19 codes that were comprehensive and mutually exclusive: medium (news story, press release, participants' feedback), British Council positive mentions, British Council negative mentions, Bibliotheca Alexandrina positive mentions, Bibliotheca Alexandrina negative mentions, the order in which the organizations were mentioned, evolution (positive, negative, neutral), story's frame (science, religion, balanced), Arabic names mentioned, non-Arabic names mentioned, British Council overall (positive, negative, neutral), Bibliotheca Alexandrina overall (positive, negative, neutral), global project, international conference, academics/scientists, evolution and religion, controversial, Dr. mentioned, and space for debate. The SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the data collected. An independent Arabic/English bilingual coder was trained to evaluate the validity of the categories. A randomly selected sample of 17 that included news stories, press releases, and participants' feedback was coded by the main coder for the study and the independent coder to determine intercoder reliability. Krippendorff's alpha values were calculated for each of the variables using ReCal, and values ranged between 0.76 and 0.83.

## **Results**

### ***Brand Equity***

The first research question in this study relates to brand equity of the partner brands and asks how the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina are perceived in Egypt and what type of associations each brand generates.

#### *The British Council*

The British Council in Egypt was mostly associated with English-language teaching, cultural activities, capacity building opportunities, and the library that closed a few years back. As one member of the public said,

What I know about it is that it builds cultural relations between Egypt and the United Kingdom, however its main activity is English language teaching. If someone is not able to afford the British Council, they either go to the Armed Forces Institute or to the American University in Cairo (AUC). But the quality of teachers at those two places is not consistent, so in order to ensure quality, you go to the British Council.



Even though the British Council in Egypt is associated with colonialism, it is perceived to be apolitical and does not represent British government or British foreign policy. As one journalist mentioned,

The British Council stands for commitment, innovation, English culture, and science. I specifically mention English and not British culture because if I say "British" then it becomes more political. However, it is able to separate culture from politics and provides you with a package of choices and options. That's why its activities add value and involve commitment from both sides: ours and the British Council's.

Based on the data collected from in-depth interviews, the empirical theme relating to brand equity of the British Council match the theoretical proposition that posits that the British Council in Egypt has a high level of awareness and a positive brand image.

#### *The Bibliotheca Alexandrina*

In general, many respondents referred to the way in which the building of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is designed and the history of the ancient library. One member of the public responded, "Architecture, history of Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, and a great collection of books such as science, engineering, and arts. It is also located in the great city of Alexandria."

The Bibliotheca Alexandrina for most Egyptian participants who are members of the general public represents a source of national pride, as it reminds them of a time when Alexandria was a global cultural hub. Their views were not necessarily based on personal experience, as many have never used its services. As one of the participants responded,

It is one of the things that I'm very proud of in Egypt. I visited there once and perhaps I did not spend enough time there, as I had very little time to spare, but I always hear about seminars that take place there. In addition, my friends told me it has a large book collection that is very special.

Although the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is not a government agency, informants from the media and the British Council mentioned that at the time that "Darwin Now" took place, it was a very influential organization nationally and regionally. Some of them explained that since its head is equivalent to a minister in the Egyptian government, it can influence the media. A few of them pointed out that its reputation has somewhat suffered after the 2011 uprising because of its close ties with the Mubarak regime. Based on the evidence collected from in-depth interviews, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has a high level of awareness and a positive brand image especially among the general public in Egypt. Therefore, the second proposition is supported.

#### **Brand Fit**

The second research question in this study relates to the fit between the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Participants believed that both organizations delivered high-quality cultural and educational programming, also facilitated knowledge sharing. In terms of mission, interview participants

found that the two organizations are similar in certain aspects, but different in others, as emphasized by one member of the public: "I believe that both organizations share similar values: spreading knowledge, providing access to information, and preserving cultural heritage. But their goal is different: The British Council is much more focused on education and school education than the Bibliotheca Alexandrina." The evidence from in-depth interviews matches the theoretical proposition that posits that the two partner brands are perceived as suited for collaboration for certain activities and projects (fit). Therefore, the third proposition is supported.

### ***Partner's Significance***

The third research question in this study asks why the British Council decided to cobrand "Darwin Now" together with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. From the perspective of the British Council, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is a partner that has credibility in Egypt and one that is internationally recognized. Informants emphasized the importance of partnering with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to avoid public skepticism. One member of the British Council said "it would have been seen as the UK imposing instead of seeing that science and knowledge is a global pursuit." Also, having the Bibliotheca Alexandrina as a partner implied that "Darwin Now" was officially endorsed. One member of the British Council pointed out,

At that time, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina had official credibility, was a big venue, and was government funded. It is very important for a very large, controversial conference that an Egyptian partner is on board: a government-funded organization that comes directly from the president's office. The event happening at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is symbolic that the people of Egypt believe that this is important to discuss.

Several informants from the media and the British Council mentioned that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has very strong connections with the media, which finds it a credible national organization. The level of influence of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was reflected in the results of the content analysis. The order in which the partner organizations were mentioned in news stories and press releases (1 = Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2 = British Council) would indicate which organization gets more weight. As shown in Table 1, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was mentioned first in 76.2% of the cases, whereas the British Council was mentioned first in 9.5% of the cases ( $n = 42$ ). In the remaining 14.3% of the cases, both partners were not mentioned together. In most news stories and press releases, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was included in the headline as the venue for the "Darwin Now" conference, given priority over the British Council, the owner of the project.

***Table 1. Descriptives of Order of Mentions.***

	Order of mentions	
	Frequency	Percentage
Bibliotheca Alexandrina first	32	76.2
British Council first	4	9.5
Missing	6	14.3
Total	42	100

*Note.*  $n = 42$

Another indication of the importance of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to "Darwin Now" is the extent to which it was mentioned in the media alongside the British Council. I conducted an evaluation of the correlation between mentions of both partners in news stories and press releases. I computed a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and found a positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .405$ ,  $n = 42$ ,  $p = .008$ . Increases in positive mentions of the British Council correlated with increases in positive mentions of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. This suggests most press releases and news stories mentioned both partner brands.

While most of the informants agreed that partnering with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was a critical element for the success of the project, some of them touched on the significance of the city of Alexandria, which had a glorious past symbolic of tolerance and multiculturalism. An informant from the British Council mentioned,

Let's do the conference in a city where cultures cross. It's a great city which brings together Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, a crossroads city that has the venue the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. That is meant to be a recreation of the ancient library: a repository of the ancient world.

The fourth proposition in this study posits that negative spillover effects were minimized as a result of partnering with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The empirical theme of partner significance emerged as a result of evidence collected from in-depth interviews, news stories, press releases, and participants' feedback. The empirical theme reflects the level of influence and credibility of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina that helped prevent negative spillover effects. Therefore, the fourth proposition is supported.

### ***Spillover Effects***

The fourth research question in this study asks whether "Darwin Now" media coverage or the participants' feedback surveys include anything negative about the partner brands.

### ***Positive Versus Negative Mentions***

To evaluate spillover effects, a count of the number of times each of the partner brands was mentioned in news stories, press releases, and feedback surveys was conducted. Descriptive statistics outlined in Table 2 indicate that positive mentions of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina had the highest frequency, 47, representing 29% of the cases, followed by positive mentions of the British Council, 43, representing 26.5% of the cases. A paired-samples  $t$  test compared the number of positive mentions of the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in news stories, press releases, and attendees' feedback. There was a significant difference in the number of positive mentions of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina ( $M = .65$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and the British Council ( $M = .50$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ),  $t(162) = -2.26$ ,  $p = .025$ . These results suggest that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has a positive effect on the number of mentions.

**Table 2. Descriptives of Content Analysis Categories.**

Object	Frequency	Percentage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Bibliotheca Alexandrina positive mentions	47	29	.65	1.23
British Council positive mentions	43	26.5	.50	1.10
International conference	36	22.2	.45	.98
Scientists/Academics	41	25.3	.92	2.32
Controversial	33	20.4	.28	.65
Evolution and religion	43	26.5	.44	1.24
Space for debate	35	21.6	.25	0.58
Dr./ Professor	28	17.3	.69	2.00
Arabic names	26	16	.34	1.27
Non-Arabic names	21	13	.53	1.85
Global project	16	9.9	.14	.48

Note. *n* = 162

An additional variable helped measure spillover effects in media stories and participants' feedback survey: British Council overall/Bibliotheca Alexandrina overall (positive, negative, and neutral). This variable evaluated the overall tone and qualified it as either positive, negative, or neutral. As indicated in Table 3, British Council overall had 42 positive and one neutral, while the Bibliotheca Alexandrina overall had 47 positive and no negative or neutral ones. These results suggest that the Bibliotheca Alexandrina was more resistant to negative spillover effects than the British Council.

**Table 3. Descriptives of Spillover Effects.**

	Frequency (%)			
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Bibliotheca Alexandrina overall	47 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	47 (100)
British Council overall	42 (98)	0 (0)	1 (2)	43 (100)
Evolution	46 (67)	10 (14)	13 (19)	69 (100)

Note. *n* = 162

### **Evolution**

There were no negative comments in participants' feedback survey about either partner brand. Also, all the news stories examined were positive about both partners, except for one story that was neutral about the British Council. As evolution is a highly controversial topic, we measured attitudes about it in the content analysis data (positive = 1, negative = 2, neutral = 3) to further examine potential negative comments or publicity. As shown in Table 4, evolution had 46 positive mentions, 10 negative, and 13 neutral. These results indicate that negative comments were directed toward the topic of the conference rather than at the partner brands. Also, compared with news stories in which agenda setting applies, participants could express their thoughts freely in the feedback surveys and some of the comments about evolutionary theory were very negative. For example, one of the participants said, "I like the British Council, but I do not agree with evolution."

### *The Media*

To better understand spillover effects, informants from the media were asked whether there were any negative news stories, and if there were not, then how this could be explained. A member of the media said, "the British Council and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina have an extremely positive image. Such an image was 50% of the success; the other 50% was the way the project was presented and means of persuasion used." Informants also pointed out that media consultations and training were key element for the success of the project.

### **Branding**

The fifth research question asks how the "Darwin Now" conference was branded.

#### *A Scientific Conference*

Content analysis findings show that "Darwin Now" conference was primarily branded as an international scientific one. As indicated in Table 4, the most frequently occurring words and phrases in news stories and press releases included the phrase international conference, appearing in 36 (85.7%) of the cases, scientist/academic in 35 (83.3%) of the cases, and Dr./professor in 28 (67%) of the cases.

**Table 4. Descriptives of Frequently Occurring Topics in News Stories and Press Releases.**

Object	Frequency	Percentage	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
International conference	36	85.7	1.74	1.21
Scientists/academics	35	83.3	3.40	3.53
Controversial	33	78.6	1.07	.89
Evolution and religion	32	76.2	1.43	2.11
Space for debate	29	69	.83	0.85
Dr./professor	28	67	2.67	3.22
Arabic names	26	61.9	1.31	2.25
Non-Arabic names	21	50	2.05	3.21
Global project	16	38.1	.52	.83

Note. *n* = 42

Evidence from in-depth interviews further supported these results. Some media informants pointed out that evolution was not considered problematic, as it was considered from a purely scientific point of view. Emphasizing that Darwin's evolution is a scientific endeavor, and avoiding narratives about its clash with religion was a strategic decision, according to other the informants from the media and the British Council.

#### *An Egyptian/British Initiative*

Content analysis of news stories and press releases shows that they included a balance of Arabic and non-Arabic names. Those are names of mostly conference speakers who were a combination of Egyptian, Arabic, and international scholars. In addition, there were Arabic names of top-level Bibliotheca

Alexandrina officials who were frequently quoted. Arabic names had a frequency of 25 and a mean of 1.00, whereas non-Arabic names had a frequency of 20 and a mean of 1.85. I conducted a paired-samples *t* test to compare the number of Arabic and non-Arabic names mentioned in news stories and press releases. There was a significant difference in the number of Arabic names ( $M = 1.00, SD = 1.02$ ) and non-Arabic names ( $M = 1.85, SD = 2.99$ ),  $t(40) = -2.23, p = .032$ .

### *Space for Debate*

Results of the content analysis indicate that space for debate was one of the most frequently occurring words. It was emphasized in news stories and press releases as an opportunity being offered to participants and young researchers during the conference. As shown in Table 4, it appeared in 29 (69%) of the cases.

A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the effect of media (news stories, attendees' feedback, press releases) on space for debate (see Table 5). There was a significant effect of media on space for debate at the  $p < .005$  level,  $F(2, 159) = 40.81, p = .000$ . Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for attendees' feedback ( $M = .058, SD = .24$ ) was significantly different from news stories ( $M = .84, SD = .90$ ) and from press releases ( $M = .80, SD = .45$ ). However, press releases did not significantly differ from news stories. Taken together, these results suggest that both news stories and press releases emphasized the "Darwin Now" conference's provision of a space for debate. This, however, was not one of the main issues addressed by attendees in their feedback about the conference.

**Table 5. One-Way Analysis of Variance of Space for Debate by Medium.**

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between groups	2	18.69	9.35.81	40.81	.000
Within groups	159	36.42	.23		
Total	161	55.11			

Note.  $n = 162$

In-depth interview informants noted that space for debate was a key element in the branding of "Darwin Now" in Egypt. To create opportunities and a safe space for debating evolutionary theory, the British Council organized a faith and evolution debate for Muslim clerics as well as representatives from the different churches in Egypt. In addition, two BBC debates were held during the "Darwin Now" conference at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, one in English and another in Arabic. The panel of the Arabic debate consisted of Arabic scholars who spoke during the conference as well as Islamic scholar Zaghoul El-Naggar.

## **Discussion**

A wide body of literature already exists that demonstrates how perceptions of a parent brand influence the perceptions of a cobrand, and how cobranding enables positive associations to transfer between brands (Besharat, 2010). In terms of the moderating effect of prior attitudes and brand fit on attitudes about "Darwin Now," this study shows that such moderators positively influenced the media

participants' evaluations of "Darwin Now." This finding therefore supports the cobranding literature in terms of the link between parent brand and cobrand perceptions. This, however, does not apply to members of the general public who were interviewed, as they did not participate in any of the "Darwin Now" activities in Egypt. The general public had positive attitudes about both partner brands and perceived a compatibility between them.

The findings of the study indicate that the lack of negative spillover effects was mainly because of cobranding "Darwin Now" together with a reputable national partner. The positive brand equity of the British Council was also a contributor to this lack. This is consistent with previous research that shows that strong brands are more resistant to spillover effects than are weaker brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Even though Simonin and Ruth (1998) indicate that partner brands with high familiarity are equally affected by spillover effects, findings of this study do not fully support this thesis. Informants from the British Council as well as members of the media had all indicated that had there been any negative spillover effects, the British Council would be the one affected. They explained that the public would have been skeptical had the British Council introduced "Darwin Now" on its own and would have perceived it as cultural imperialism. Also, the only "Darwin Now" news story that was not positive was skeptical of the British Council rather than of both brands. It implied that the British Council was attempting to promote secular values. Overall, this suggests that the British Council is more susceptible to negative spillover effects than the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. These findings support the culture attack theory, which posits that Muslims have a strong fear of Western cultural imperialism, as it could erode Islamic values (Binder, 1988; Haddad, 1999; Shavit, 2014).

Overall, however, the British Council was perceived by the media and the general public in Egypt as trustworthy because of its apolitical nature and its cultural activity. Participants did not mention that the British Council receives funding from the UK government, nor that it works closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In fact, the media pointed out that they trusted it and did not trust American organizations such as the U.S. embassy or the USAID in Egypt, suspecting them of a political agenda. These results show that being apolitical is one of the main sources of brand equity of the British Council in Egypt. This is consistent with previous research, which indicates that the public perceives the British Council as being trustworthy because of its independence from the government and its cultural activity (Leonard et al., 2005). This also suggests that a cultural relations approach enabled the British Council to gain the trust of the public in Egypt.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

One of the limitations of this study is related to participants. Media informants were selected based on their involvement in "Darwin Now." Some of them generated media coverage, while others attended the international conference or the wraparound activities. As many were science journalists, they were familiar with Darwin's evolution and did not find it controversial. All the media in this study mentioned that they were happy to have participated. They believed it was positive that the project exposed the public and especially students in Egypt to controversial ideas and got them to think about evolution from a scientific point of view. They were not skeptical of the British Council, as all of them have engaged with it for some time and have had a positive experience. They represent the elite of media contacts, as they are highly educated, and some of them specialize in science, a specialization that is rare in Egypt. The opinions of other types of journalists who

potentially oppose Darwin's evolution, or who are possibly Islamists, were not represented in this study. An attempt was made to identify and contact more journalists, but this was not possible, as data was collected six years after the initiative took place. In addition, members of the general public included in this study are users of British Council services. Although their views may be more positive than nonusers, it was essential to include this group in particular, as they would be able to evaluate the fit between both partner organizations because of their familiarity with the types of products and services each of them offers.

Another limitation is the participants' feedback surveys included in this study. Those provided by the British Council were collected during the conference at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Several wraparound activities took place before the conference, such as the faith and evolution debate and media training workshops. It is possible that the surveys provided by the British Council were more positive than others because the conference took place at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. As the project took place six years before this study, other feedback surveys were not available.

This study extends the cobranding theoretical framework to the field of public diplomacy. To reach analytic generalization, two or more case studies are needed to replicate the results of this single-case study. Future research should aim to investigate other high-risk initiatives such as "Darwin Now" from a cobranding perspective. One of the unanticipated findings of this study was that being apolitical is one of the main sources of brand equity of the British Council in Egypt. Future research should further investigate this concept and establish whether it holds true in other countries within the Arab East.

Conducting the 2009 "Darwin Now" initiative in Egypt posed a substantial risk to the British Council's reputation due to controversies around evolutionary theory in the Muslim world. A primary implication of this study is that cobranding such initiatives together with a reputable national partner would mitigate any possible negative spillover effects. In addition, creating a safe space for debate for important groups through activities such as scientific conferences and interfaith debates would provide an opportunity for Muslim and non-Muslim voices, whether for or against, to be equally heard. Finally, I recommended that the place where such initiatives are held should be carefully evaluated. Both the city of Alexandria, historically a place where different cultures have coexisted, as well as the Bibliotheca Alexandrina have great historical significance. This makes them suitable settings for debating the controversial topics that typically create tension between the Muslim world and the West.

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