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USING TWITTER AND CURATION ROTATION AS A BRANDING STRATEGY

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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RESEARCH APPROVAL

USING TWITTER AND CURATION ROTATION AS A BRANDING STRATEGY

By

Margaret Anne Moseley

Research Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Approved by:

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TITLE: USING TWITTER AND CURATION ROTATION AS A BRANDING STRATEGY

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As social media becomes deeply embedded in traditional marketing and branding campaigns, it has evolved from a supporting role to the main attraction in more innovative campaigns. One example is that Sweden's Tourism Department, Visit Sweden, is using Twitter to show transparency, democracy and ingenuity, to allow Swedish citizens be the twitter voice of the country for one week, until the next Curator of Sweden is passed the account. This study examines how a social media platform such as Twitter is used to excite new branding and marketing methods. It focuses on the method being "curation rotation" introduced by @Sweden.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0. has created an idyllic place for marketing and branding experts to explore new platforms and reexamine the marketing and branding rulebook. Changes propelled by social media include immediacy, interactivity and mobility. These characteristics require ingenuity on the part of marketers if they are to manipulate the platforms advantageously. For purposes of this research, Twitter will be the focus social media platform. This research will show uses, techniques, reasoning, benefits and consequences of undertaking such a platform for marketing and branding. Lastly, this research will present a new Twitter innovation called “curation rotation” and show how Sweden spearheaded a national branding campaign using this method and inspiring other bodies to follow.

Twitter fits under many classifications such as new media, social networking site (SNS), or social media. Twitter can most basically be defined as a microblog that is limited to 140 characters per post or “tweet.” These tweets are posted to a user's account sequentially. Profiles can be public or private, and users can gatekeep their profiles, if desired. In order to access the content on someone else's space, the user must “follow” other users to populate their news feed. Users can send direct messages, tweet their thoughts, share articles or photos, and “favorite” a tweet, which sends a message to the poster that their message was favorited. Users can also “re-tweet”, which posts another user's tweet to the re-tweeter's page and allows all of their followers to view the tweet as well. The general idea is that the more people a user follows, the more information they will have access to on their news feed, and the more people who

follow the user, the more people who will see their content. This creates a massive network of information sharing, much like a Facebook newsfeed. Perhaps the most immersive feature of Twitter is the utilization of the hashtag. The simple pound-sign takes new shape and meaning when it is used as a connecting thread to all like thoughts and ideas that share that title after the hashtag (Alfonzo, 2014). This connects faces to ideas and allows users to scroll through a hashtag for like-minded or topical content that connects them to other users. “By using hashtags on your information, you are able to search for that information across multiple public data streams and see what other people are talking about (Alfonzo, 2014).”

For celebrities like Katy Perry who in 2014 had over 57 million followers, followed by Justin Bieber with over 54 million and President Barack Obama with over 46 million (twitaholic.com), there are multiple different ways to flex influence and celebrity endorsement. With direct access to over 50 million people and indirect access through networks, harnessing the marketing potential in Twitter can be highly influential. There are many ways to network and reach the massive audience through hashtags, retweets and favorites. As of September 2014, Twitter had 230 million monthly active users (Alfonzo, 2014). These active users are have the ability to share twitter content through Instagram and Facebook through hashtags and link sharing, providing and even more extensive reach across demographics.

Titter is successful for many reasons. It is easy to use, the character limit makes it easy to read, and it can work with virtually any workflow i.e. it updates continuously and has a scrolling option that allows the user to see older content (O’Reilly & Milstein, 2009).

Contextually, the functions and uses of Twitter depend on the user. Some argue that

there are direct comparisons to microblogs and personal diaries made public (Humphries, Gill, Krishnamurthy & Newbury, 2013) Users may also use Twitter as a way to receive news content or stay informed with celebrities or topics of interest without posting their own content. Regardless of the users intended purpose, Twitter has underlined uses for marketing, advertising and public relations.

Social media marketing has been under construction for 20 years (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014). Social media has made evolutionary steps from a desktop platform to mobile devices, and different social media sites are constantly being introduced and indoctrinated into culture. This introduces new challenges and opportunities.

Smartphone and tablet minutes' usage increased by 445 percent from 2010 to 2013 (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014). As platforms shift, so must marketing efforts. Fulgoni and Lipsman's (2014) study shows a great dissidence in time spent on media platforms versus money spent by advertisers. Print media has the second most amount of advertising money. However, it has the least amount of time spent. Mobile devices have the lowest advertising budget but have a significant amount of time spent. This holds similarly true to desktop devices, but they have a higher advertising effort (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014). Advertisers and marketers must use social media advantageously to create and utilize networks if they are going to continue to appropriate money this way. Sweden began using Twitter in tourism, however in 2011, Sweden initiated a new campaign that would revolutionize the way they view social media and citizenship by using curation rotation. This paper will explain curation rotation in greater detail and examine its success as amplifying social media, specifically Twitter, as an interactive branding tool.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Twitter in Social Media Marketing

While Social Media Marketing has been “under construction” for 20 years (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014), the noticeable influences did not fully emerge until the introduction and popular adoption of Web 2.0. Some Argue that Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential election success can be attributed to social media marketing. “The campaign managed to mobilize people who might not have voted, giving the senator an edge that his principal opponent, Senator John McCain, did not consider (Yan, 2011).” Using social media also helped equalized the business field. When Web 2.0. emerged, many businesses had a web presence which may require paying for web space and a domain name. By utilizing social media, businesses with existing domain space could capitalize on their web investment through social media. It allowed businesses to self promote on multiple platforms to reach more people in different networks and demographics. Businesses that did not have a website could create a free page on Twitter or any other social media platforms. This allowed all businesses to have a simple, free web presence and have connectivity to a web-based audience. It also allowed customers to gather basic information from the social media page and perhaps see upcoming promotions through the Web or mobile devices. Social media accounts were becoming easily manageable by virtually anyone with a computer. No HTML required. This introduced mobility and interactivity, more easily linking the consumers to the companies. Consumers could post comments and experiences to the pages and share them on their social media platforms. This ability to be an interactive consumer

helped create an improved customer experience because companies could see what people were saying about them on the Web, be it good or bad. This information could also become viral through platforms such as Urban Spoon, Yelp, and FourSquare, who all have a rating system and a way for consumers to leave tips and comments about establishments for other future consumers to see.

Twitter and Branding

The importance of branding and imaging has always been important to a business's continuity and success, but with changing media platforms, it is increasingly more important to utilize social media in branding efforts. Once Web 2.0. was able to harness and capitalize on social media marketing, the next evolutionary step would be to allow social media to take center stage in campaigns and be used for brand development, creating an interactive platform and a more inclusive customer experience. The nine goals of social media marketing and branding, as stated by Yan (2011) are as follows:

“a) Build a sense of membership and citizenship in the organization, b) encourage the acceptance and communication of brand values, and (c) encourage the audience to engage in dialogue and promote the brand. Strategically, that dialogue can (d) help the organization find and maintain a competitive advantage; (e) inform the vision behind the brand and build differentiation for it; and (f) act as a check on whether the brand is being properly communicated and understood by the audiences. The consequences are to (g) build positive brand associations, (h) build the perceived quality of the brand, and (i) build greater awareness of the brand to audiences that it has not yet reached.” (Yan, 2011)

Social media sites, specifically Twitter, are used for many reasons such as marketing and advertising, but the purpose of this research is to emphasize the importance of social media in branding. Twitter, while simply a microblog, is an ideal platform to accommodate Yan's (2011) nine goals of social media marketing and branding. The

networks developed and maintained on Twitter create community, especially through interactive campaigns (McDonald's Monopoly instantly comes to mind). The interactivity of Twitter facilitates dialogue between the organization and fellow users, as in President Obama's campaign. Twitter can be used to communicate a transparent message, and user's comments and hashtags help maintain an accurate representation of the brand and the public perspective.

Social media, especially Twitter, shows an intimacy between the company and the user (Yan, 2011). Tweets provide the user short, immediate messages. It not only keeps the brand in the mind of the user, but the short, sometimes playful messages allow the company to give the brand a personality that is seemingly transparent and accessible. Consumers can feel comfortable trusting brands that have the appearance of transparency and can relate to brands that have an interesting message and communicative tone. "[C]ommunication scholars and practitioners are increasingly acknowledging the fundamental role of corporate brands in representing corporate values and shaping business relationships (Vernuccio, 2014)."

Twitter and Social Currency Theory

In *Twitter: Digital Media and Society Series*, Murthy (2013) acknowledges that Twitter has the appearance of being a "lazy" activity. Scrolling through countless threads of metadata can unwittingly consume an alarming amount of one's time. As addictive as Twitter can be, there is theory that contradicts that Twitter is a mind-numbing platform. Twitter as a communication technology has a "summon to action," making it engaging to its users and encourages an "event society" (Murthy, 2013). Murthy (2013) introduces theory suggesting that new media is not a based on

“products” but, instead, a media “project.” By publishing tweets, retweeting or posting interesting content, and following and communicating with interesting people, Twitter users are actively participating in a fluid, interactive medium. The hashtag creates a participatory aspect that connects users to events, activities, trends or social movements. These connections create digital artifacts that can be revisited for sentiment, documentation, newsgathering or pure curiosity. These network connections can likewise create social or interpersonal connections between participants (Murthy, 2013). Artifacts and relationships are part of the reward for consistent use, or investment into the medium. The new buzzword among pop-culture is “FOMO,” or “fear of missing out.” This is directly tied to the idea of being detached from instant communication or not actively participating in an event that could benefit the user socially or otherwise, creates a fear or missing the moment.

The idea of social benefits is linked to social currency theory. Social capital is the power that is associated with networks and connections (Mandviwalla & Watson, 2014). “Social media can operate in two broad spaces, within and without the organization. The external space includes the public, customers and prospective customers, legislators and regulators, competitors, suppliers, distributors and the financial markets. Social media facilitate four types of “social flows” in these two spaces (Mandviwalla & Watson, 2014).” This can be extremely useful in marketing and branding. Mandviwalla and Watson (2014) explain the use of social capital in a macro sense, however social capital is also highly influential on a micro level. Social capital can help members solve problems, gain support, gather news, or express emotions and receive sympathy and empathy (Canhoto & Clark, 2013). This capital, while not

monetary, is enough to keep users engaged and active on social media, making the platform rich and lively and thus making it an ideal space for brand development and marketing campaigns.

Many scholars attribute the “Oprah Effect” to Twitter’s smooth adoption in the United States (Yan, 2011). This “Oprah Effect” refers to the celebrity talk show host, Oprah Winfrey’s uncanny ability to endorse an item and lead to the item, or ideas instant adoption into American popular culture. In essence, Oprah’s brand is so powerful, that it can greatly influence the success of any brand endorsed by her brand. This effect is paralleled to Oprah’s extensive network of followers through her multi-media platform empire that includes a magazine, a network show, and even a cable television station, along with her endorsed book club, cooking items, etc. By Oprah adopting Twitter, she introduced a new platform to network and expand her brand using electronic word of mouth. Electronic word of mouth is the term used to define the many networks interlocked through social media and viral social media messages (Jin & Phua, 2014). This electronic word of mouth linked with social capital theory suggests that by building a celebrity status for the brand, the campaign is virtually unstoppable.

For those who are less convinced that social capital is a motive for social media use or popularity, it can also be presented as a way of presenting the best aspect of one’s self. “The act of tweeting is born from individual contributions and is about self-production (Murthy, 2013).” Murthy explains that Twitter is appealing because it is a form of projecting one’s personality or person image. It focuses on the more internal, self-focused aspects of using social media, and less on the community affirmation of social currency. Self-production through social media platforms including Facebook,

Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, etc. are a way of making a digital presentation of one's image, interests, opinions and personal image. Not only can users project their image, they can edit it and project a desired image that might be more interesting or appealing than in face-to-face interactions. It can even be considered social currency to have a celebrity acknowledge a tweet.

This digital presentation of the mundane such as Instagramming food and tweeting the commonplace is something that might seem unexciting, but social currency and self-presentation do not necessarily have to be a motivator, but rather a byproduct of doing what people have been doing for centuries, and this is keeping a log, or diary of their lives. Humphries, Gill, Krishnamurthy and Newbury (2013) cited "systematic analyses of small everyday writings can reveal large insights into the larger cultural milieu (Miller, 1998)." Diary-like interpretations of the commonplace can serve as a digital documentation on social media sites like twitter and unlike diaries, they are immediately published to the masses for all to interpret. "Reading the banal historically can give it new meaning (Murthy, 2013)." However, in this context, historically is much more short sighted. In the quick-paced digital arena, it can give a living, active, interactive record of one's experiences and create interest and intrigue, for example when a user is live tweeting a sporting event or even overhearing a tragic breakup. This can also be strikingly useful in citizen journalism. The purpose of this literary review, however, is to interpret the uses and functions of social media, particularly twitter, in branding.

Branding with social media can be unpredictable because interactivity and the ability for anyone to post or connect threads of data take control away from the

company. When a hashtag has negative messages about the brand, it is necessary for the company to contain those messages while remaining transparent and accessible. With Twitter, Yelp and other social media platforms that use location technology, the brand must be completely transparent, and meanwhile vigilant of what messages are being released by the public. If done properly, the brand can successfully relish in the fruits of hard social media labor by being an active, trendy brand. This interactivity can also be used to the advantage of the brand by collaborating with the public in new strategies, company decisions and marketing campaigns. The interactivity portion of social media branding allows the user to feel connected to the brand, building loyalty and helping the brand evolve with the public (Yan, 2011).

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The @Sweden Project

Rebranding a company is a huge undertaking, but rebranding a nation is complex because the ultimate goal is to change the external and internal markets' perception of an entire culture. It begins with an internal cultural change that accepts and exudes the brand (Varga, 2013). It is almost like rewriting an atlas or an encyclopedia. Margaret Thatcher is quoted saying "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul (Varga, 2013)."

After undergoing a great theoretical analysis of social media marketing and branding, there is little debate over the assertion that Twitter is a media staple in western society and in strategic social media campaigns. It is one of the most popular microblogs on the Internet and connects the users to timely, worldly information (Larson & Moe, 2012). This makes Twitter an ideal platform for disseminating and receiving global news, entertainment, communication, advertising, etc. It provides users with the ability to directly connect with people across the world from various different backgrounds and celebrity and allows people to create dialogue or send fleeting thoughts in 140 characters. It provides the extensive network for electronic word of mouth on the global scale. Selecting Twitter as the main social media platform for Visit Sweden's campaign shows that the branding message, while forming locally, was expected to reach a global audience. It is only natural that these attributes make

curation rotation seem less like a trendy project and more likely to completely revamp a nation's image through the people who live it daily.

In 2011, Visit Sweden, the Swedish tourism department, decided that they were going to brand their nation through Twitter by utilizing a revolutionary marketing technique called curation rotation.

“The @Sweden project (known as Curators of Sweden), established in 2011 as a government-financed nation-branding exercise to increase Swedish exposure on Twitter, was the brainchild of the Volontaire advertising agency (which also works for corporations such as Nestlé and SonyEricsson), at the behest of the Swedish Institute (a state organization involved in public diplomacy) and Visit Sweden (the Swedish national tourism agency).” (Christensen, 2013)

The concept of curation rotation is simple. It simply creates a master user account, in this case “@Sweden,” and rotates the “curator” or main user of the account weekly (Christensen, 2013). The curators are Swedish citizens who are meant to show what life is like as a Swede. They are selected by Visit Sweden, gain access to the account for one week and are meant to use the account as they would their personal account. The only difference is that for one week, an otherwise ordinary Swedish citizen, is the voice and face of the country for the entire world to see and with whom the world could potentially interact.

In order for Sweden to approve of such a unique tourism or branding strategy, they would need to ensure the proper infrastructure is in place to ensure to reach their intended audience. They would also need to ensure that they are using an effective media outlet to maximize visibility and participation. Sweden was the first country to have a national majority of the population online. Sweden is ranked as the sixth most competitive telecommunications network of the 148 nations considered (Sweden Country Profile, 2013). In 2012, Sweden's mobile phone usage was 100 percent

saturated and nearly 94 percent of the country had high speed Internet. Sweden is also highly competitive in technological development creating a “global scientific landscape” (Sweden Country Profile, 2013). As of 2013, the Office of National Statistics showed that Sweden had 54 percent of the population active on social networks, being among the highest in Europe, and showed that Sweden had the highest daily use of social media, 79 percent, among 16 to 24 year olds (Woollaston, 2013).

@Sweden published its first tweet as a curating nation account on December 10, 2011 (Christensen, 2013). This sparked the official transition that changed the voice of Sweden from the tourism department to the Swede, creating the image of transparency and a sense of democracy with the brand and the nation of Sweden. As of April 2014, @Sweden has 68,600 followers and over 82,000 tweets.

Internal Rebranding

Sweden has displayed very nuanced messages in their campaigns that have been entirely fostered by the citizens themselves. According to curatorsofsweden.com, the reason Twitter was an obvious choice for this campaign was because the brief, 140 character messages, but more importantly, the ability to initiate dialogue. That is exactly what Swedes do when they account is in their control. The weekly curator of Sweden uses the account as a personal account, making it authentically Swedish. Some curators of Sweden like to initiate dialogue about culture, some promote local establishments or causes, but most Swedes just like to use that account as an insight into the life of a Swede with the eyes of the world following. For @Sweden citizens can nominate someone who fits the criteria of being active on Twitter and can explain why

they would be interesting to someone outside of Sweden (curatorsofsweden.com, 2014).

Using citizen produced media to build solidarity and pride is not a new concept. Rodriguez (2011) writes about indigenous media in Columbia as a mirror into ones community. Being able to produce media not only builds community through the output, but there is a collectivity in the process of producing media. Social media, while it does not require the same production efforts described in rural Columbia as described by Rodriguez (2011), it does however support that communities take pride in community produced media. Curation rotation through Twitter, I argue, is a web-based example of community-produced media.

The majority of content published on Sweden's account focuses on everyday life (Sweden.se). These themes directly align with Rodriguez's (2011) observations of indigenous media, even in a nations as politically upset as Columbia. People want to capture their traditions and cultural nuances that make their country special. Rodriguez (2011) describes Columbians in very violent towns creating radio broadcasts about cooking traditional dishes, explaining traditions or mundane tasks that are unique to their culture. While the platform could have easily been a used to orchestrate demonstrations or speak against human rights violations, the people found peace in preserving their traditions and way of life (Rodriguez, 2011). Preserving and sharing culture is instinctive and relating to one another creates solidarity, and through solidarity, nationalism can flourish.

External Rebranding

Part of what makes curation rotation so successful in rebranding outside of the nation is that it creates a celebrity-like status for the country. It gives an actual name and face to the country that is consistently changing so it makes it hard for users to get bored or to dislike the personality of the country, it has a different personality every week, hidden under the guise of a national account. What could be more compelling than a celebrity tweeting about a brand? Conceptualize that the @Sweden curator is a celebrity. This is not an unreasonable request based on the close to 70,000 followers. Now add to the idea that Sweden is a brand. Sweden, in fact, is a brand for purposes of tourism. By framing the Curator of Sweden as a celebrity, that creates an extensive ability to influence others through electronic work of mouth. Because @Sweden uses a fabricated celebrity, it adds credibility, accessibility, and the ability to control the message and influence power in suggesting the brand. In this case, the brand is Sweden.

Risks of Curation Rotation

Curation rotation and peering into individual's lives has risks. Those responsible for the media must decide what is more valuable, free speech or an image that matches the intended branding message. @Sweden gives guilty satisfaction in a similar way to celebrities gaining publicity through Twitter battles and giving out social capital. @Sweden received minimal flack for the unruly curator and brought additional attention to the account through media coverage. As previously mentioned, part of the appeal of curation rotation is the perception of transparency, celebrity and democracy. It would be virtual impossible to maintain a "citizen's media" without eventually having a curator

with radical ideas that risk damaging the brand or requiring censorship. In June 2012, a Sonja Abrahamsson took control of the account and reminded Visit Sweden of these risks. The 27-year-old woman used her curation time as an opportunity to ask controversial questions about “why people hate ‘Jews’ so much (Ani, 2012).” She justified her actions by claiming that she wanted to ask a large bank of well-educated people. Her explanation did not deliver any sympathy from @Sweden followers or the media because previous to her arguably anti-Semitic remarks, she was documented making inappropriate jokes about homosexuals and starving children in Africa (Ani, 2012).

Who Else is Using Curation Rotation

The United States might not be the best country to adopt a *national* branding campaign because of its expansive landmass and regionally diverse culture. The prospect of having a rotating Twitter account in the United States seems so enlivening, but it might not be plausible. Sweden is much smaller than the United States, and ideally regarded as having a centralized government hold on media infrastructure. The United States is not foreign to the use of Twitter by government agencies. A study conducted in 2014 compared Twitter use of government agencies in Korea and the United States (Khan, 2014). The results showed that United States agencies were more “individualistic” and disseminated messages that were specific to their goals and agendas, while Korean agencies took a holistic approach and were very connected to other agencies or ministries (Khan, 2014). This individualistic attitude is a robust attribute in an American’s persona. Not only are people very individualistic, the sheer land mass of the country creates cultural pockets and communities that develop their

own identity that is completely unique to anywhere else in the country. That is what comprises American culture, being different and creating a culture of their own. This however does not limit other countries or smaller entities from undertaking the technique for their branding needs.

Countries including Ireland, Vietnam, as well as American cities have attempted curation rotation. These campaigns all have similar goals as @Sweden. Vermont's department of tourism undertook the branding campaign idea. In 2012, Vermont's tourism department designated @thisisvt account tag as the rotating account (Hill, 2012). Vermont took action to mitigate inappropriate messages while still encouraging free speech. The Vermont Tourism spokesperson said, "Please don't Tweet something that you wouldn't feel comfortable telling your neighbor's twelve year old child or your Great-Grandma. The rest is up to you (Hill, 2012)." New Orleans created @BeingNOLA in June 2013 (Fensterstock, 2013), showing that curation rotation is gaining momentum in the United States.

Why Curation Rotation is Different

Curation rotation is an innovative branding technique because it uses basic human principles to keep attention and build brand momentum. It is supported by self-production and social currency and it engages the curator, the nation and the global audience through interactivity with not just a faceless brand or nation, but a living person. Curation rotation personifies a country or a governing body and allows it to interact with others, giving the account more than a brand message, but a personality, a face and a name that can never get boring because it is always changing. It ignites curiosity through spontaneity and unpredictability. It gives a country raw feeling,

thoughts and insights that are relatable and empathetic. This is what makes curation rotation a step above a typical social media branding campaign.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Social Media and Twitter have undoubtedly revolutionized social media marketing and branding. Through social currency, self-presentation, electronic word-of-mouth, and celebrity intrigue and networks, marketers are continuously exploring new ways to harness the power of Twitter and social media. Curation rotation has been successfully used by Visit Sweden since 2011, and so far there has been an increase of interest and participation by both tourism organizations and the general public. Though I do not have a measure of success for curation rotation, the increased study of the topic and constantly growing list of rotating curation accounts shows that this technique will have longevity as long as microblogging remains a fixture in social media platforms. In my opinion, these campaigns' unsolicited cultural effects outweigh any figures of growth because they solidify cultural bonds and document them on the Internet for everyone to see.

As previously mentioned, Twitter is a micro-blog, and the rich history of these cultures is captured and documented by the people who live it. I think, along with Rodriguez (2011), that people want to participate in culture. Rodriguez (2011) said that citizen media is like a mirror. We can see things in ourselves and in our culture that we would not have noticed without intervention, thus subtly changing the community. Visit Sweden understood this when they introduced this campaign, because Sweden generally takes pride in their account. It connects people abroad to their heritage. So often, tweets will get replies from people in other countries who are homesick for Sweden or the home of the rotating account. It is appropriate that this medium is called

a micro blog, not just for the limited character count, but because it acts as a tiny looking glass into the most micro level of culture, the individual person. This method of branding will continue to be considered successful as long as Sweden continues to market itself as a brand and as long as the holder of the account for the week will be seen as a celebrity. Through heritage, nostalgia, celebrity and electronic word of mouth, curation rotation will do its part by both solidifying a brand and microblogging the growth and changes of a nation.

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