

Major assignment 2

Assessment 2: The National Characteristics of Australia

Group C

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Introduction

The recent bush fires in Victoria, Australia, grabbed the attention of the world. The unexpected tragedy left Australians evaluating the fragility of life and the importance of community. Self-identification with those who survived brought them together. The stories of mateship, with offers of help in their various forms; the knowledge of small towns of people who battle through adversity; the reality of the untamed bush; the survival of native animals burnt but still revered... these are the type of stories that make up the Australian history. Australians identify with these stories and they become part of the Australian psyche. This one event clarified Australian national characteristics across cultures, professions and individuals. It is an event that while cruel, is also binding.

As discussed by Keith Dinnie in *Nation Branding*, "National identity plays a key role in nation branding. An awareness and understanding of the core features of national identity is a prerequisite for developing nation-branding campaigns" (p. 111, 2008). National identity encompasses many things including history, culture, economy, landscape and people. There is a national and international viewpoint. The nation also needs to brand itself in relation to the rest of the world.

Designers, like many other disciplines, have a role to play in nation branding. A recognition of the audience; an understanding of the nation, including: symbols, traditions, colours; and a clear understanding of the issues; play a part in developing a nation brand.

Fundamental Features of the Australian National Identity

According to Dinnie, the fundamental features of national identity include: an historic territory, or homeland; common myths and historical memories; a common, mass public culture; common legal rights and duties for all members; and a common economy with territorial mobility for all members (p. 112, 2008).

Australia's homeland is an island continent. Indigenous Australians roamed here long before European settlement. Australia is now a multicultural society and the majority of the estimated 21.7 million Australians are descendants of colonial-era settlers and post-Federation immigrants from Europe. Over 8% of the current population is of Asian descent. People of mixed indigenous and indigenous Australian descent make up only about 2.5% of the total population (Wikipedia, 2009).



Nevertheless, the indigenous people have a unique style of art, ceremony traditions, Dreamtime stories, Aboriginal music, and dance that greatly influence contemporary Australia. Their sacred Uluru and the red desert are uniquely identified with Australia, along with the Great Barrier Reef, sandy beaches, blue seas and open landscapes.

The national flag is a visual expression of Australia's identity. Its conception and life is an historical memory. Other visual manifestations of Australia's multiethnic development include today's art, architecture, cinema, music, fashion, television and media, cuisine, and sport.

"Australians are known to be friendly and easygoing... tolerant and willing to compromise... quiet achievers... without pomp or fuss. After two hundred years Australia is well established. People have learned to govern themselves sensibly and justly. They have slowly gained not only economic independence from the mother country, but also a psychological and social one" (Carroll, 1992). We have political and economic policies directly influenced by fundamental features of Australia.

The Nation as an Imagined Community

Australia has undergone many changes, with the dilution of various cultures into the nation. Within the community there are different groups, yet the Australian people imagine the community as one, with common myths and memories. They combine allegiance to the one flag, sing the Australian national anthem, and recognise common national characteristics, for example, displayed by Australians in the recent bushfires. The imagined community may not be 'actual' in all places at all times but it is a general belief held by Australians.

Some influences of the imagined community include the ancient indigenous past, and the relatively new culture after the European influx including the convict era, the 'Gold Rush', Eureka Stockade, Ned Kelly and many more.

Invented Tradition

Traditions are attained, developed, and evolved into unique forms over time. Some of these are 'invented' traditions. They have reference to historical events but have been embellished and repeated to achieve goals like social cohesion and establishing collective identities.

'Over time, there have been various incarnations and reincarnations of the bush pioneering spirit and larrikin stereotype. The archetypal larrikins, 'The Sentimental Bloke' and Ginger Mick created by C.J. Dennis during World War I, the ANZAC legend of the 'digger' most recently epitomised by Mel Gibson in Gallipoli, our sporting heroes, the bronzed Aussie Bondi volunteer lifesaver of the 1950s, the Aussie Battler as portrayed in the 1997 film *The Castle*, and even the heroic portrayal of our local volunteer fire fighters today can be seen as forming a continuum of national myth-making.' (Cousins, 2005)

There is a role for invented tradition in nation branding. An important consideration is to have an inclusive approach rather than a 'fabricated narrative handed down from on high' (Dinnie, 2008). People will reject deception. It needs to come from a 'real' place and aim to achieve a moral and ethical outcome.



Attitudes and National Stereotypes

The primary basis of Australian culture is largely Anglo-Celtic, although distinctive Australian features have developed from the country's natural environment and indigenous cultures. Since the middle of the 20th century, Australia's culture has been heavily influenced by American pop-culture, and by large-scale immigration from non-English speaking countries such as China, Italy, Germany, Greece and India. As such, a large proportion of the Australian population still connect their own sense identity with the cultures and traditions of other nations. Australia is therefore referred to as multi-cultural society.



Globally, the Australian community is largely rd by stereotypes sourced through media and advertising. The projected identity is sometimes not the reality. Recently, Australia has sought to update its international identity through popular culture, such as music, design, artists and other talent, while politicians and business represent Australia the political and economic front. Steve Irwin represented a stereotypical Australian. He was brave, easy going, adventurous, family oriented, loved nature, enjoyed a laugh, and was proud of his country. Recently, the movie 'Australia' was touted overseas with mixed reviews while Prime Minister Kevin Rudd appears popular overseas amongst other politicians.

Cultural Elements of the Australian National Identity

As described by Ian McAllister, national identity is “the feeling of being associated with a national group, defined by a common heritage which may be based on attributes such as race, history, territory, language and culture” (p.5, 1997).

Culture plays an critical role in the process of enriching a country’s national identity, and in driving public perceptions towards a fuller and more durable understanding of the country and its values. As discussed by Simon Anholt in *Competitive Identity*, “The cultural aspect of a national image is irreplaceable and cannot be copied because it is uniquely linked to the country itself. It is reassuring because it deals with non-commercial activities, and it is dignifying because it shows the spiritual and intellectual qualities of the country’s people and institutions” (Anholt, p.99, 2008).

In the mind of the consumer, culture also works as a metaphor for a nation’s personality. People deduce a great deal about the inner qualities of a nation through its cultural enterprises. Success in sport, for example, communicates a nations’ strength, courage, physical prowess, agility, determination, honour, and team spirit.

According to Australia.com, “Australian culture is founded on the stories of battlers, bushrangers and brave soldiers. Of sporting heroes, working heroes and plucky migrants. It’s all about a fair go, the great outdoors, and a healthy helping of irony. Today Australia also defines itself by its Aboriginal heritage, vibrant mix of cultures, innovative ideas and a thriving arts scene” (Australia.com, 2009).

The Australian government (2009) states that Australia’s national values include:

- Respect: for the freedom and dignity of the individual.
- Equality: of men and women.
- Freedom: of religion.
- Commitment: to the rule of law.
- Support: for parliamentary democracy.
- Egalitarianism: mutual respect, tolerance, fair play, compassion, mateship.
- Equal Opportunity: for individuals, regardless of their race or religion.

With its historical roots in Judaeo-Christianity, Australia is a fairly individualist society. In a 2004 study, West and Murphy found that individualism was the strongest value-orientation in Australia, with a score of 90 out of 100, compared to the world average of 43 (p.50, 2004). From an early age, Australian children learn the value of independent thought and argument. Samovar and Porter describe Australia as a low-context culture, because the population is less homogeneous and more diversified. The dominant communication style of Australians is very open, and the majority of messages are verbal as opposed to non-verbal (p.81, 2003).

The following outlines some key examples of cultural elements that comprise the Australian National Identity.



Language

Australians have a unique colloquial language, and an accent referred to as 'strine' by renowned linguist Alistair Morrison (1965). Australian English combines many long-lost cockney rhymes and Irish sayings of the early convict days with words from Aboriginal Languages (Australia.com, 2009).

In addition to Australian English, there are said to be greater than 200 dialects spoken by indigenous Australians.



Art & Literature

Art and literature are important because they add colour, detail and richness to people's perception of a country, and help them to get to know the place as well as if they'd been there (Anholt, p.100, 2008).

Poetry and ballads have played an important role in the foundation of Australian literature. Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson are primary examples. Patterson was responsible for the famous Australian verses *Waltzing Matilda* and *The Man From Snowy River* (Wikipedia, 2009). A complicated, multi-faceted relationship to Australia is displayed in much Australian writing, often through writing about the nation's unique landscape, history, and what it means to be an Australian. The Art of Australia includes Australian Aboriginal art, plus colonial, landscape, modern, and contemporary art. The importance and sacredness of the land is a unifying theme.

[Insert photographic examples here: Photo of Banjo Patterson & Henry Lawson, Aboriginal art, colonial art, landscape art].



Music & Sound

The music of Australia ranges across a broad spectrum of styles and genres. Whilst most modern trends in Australian music are based on similar trends from the United States and Europe (Wikipedia, 2009), traditional indigenous music dates back more than 60,000 years.

[Insert photographic examples here: Didgeridoo, AC/DC, Kylie Minogue]



Food & Drink

Before the British settlement of 1788, Aboriginal people survived off the native plants and animals of the Australian environment. Native animals such as kangaroo and emu were regularly hunted and killed for food. Other foods that seem less palatable to modern urban Australians—but nevertheless feature as key symbols of Australia’s culinary identity—include: Witchetty grubs, lizards and snakes.

Since then, Australian food traditions have been heavily influenced by those that have settled in the country. Throughout the early period of modern Australia, Australian cuisine was based on traditional British food, brought to the country by the first modern settlers. Australian food has also been influenced by a hybrid of Mediterranean and Asian foods, introduced by immigrants that arrived during the 19th and 20th centuries (Wikipedia, 2009).

Australia’s wide variety of seafood is also popular and barbeques are common at weekend family gatherings. Beer and wine are the national beverages of choice. Iconic Australian foods and beverages include damper, Vegemite, Milo, the Chiko Roll, Violet Crumble, Tim-Tams, Lamingtons, Weet-bix, Penfolds Wine and Fosters Beer.



Sport

Sport in Australia is popular and wide spread. It plays a significant role in the country’s national identity. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, levels of participation and watching are much higher than in many other countries (abs.gov.au, 2006).

[Insert photographic examples here: AFL, Cricket, Rugby, Surfing]



Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians are distinguished as either Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders, Indigenous culture is perhaps the most unique and interesting component of the Australian national identity.



Architecture



Famous Australians

[Insert photographic examples here: Dame Edna Everidge, Kylie Minogue, Hugh Jackman, Nicole Kidman, Ernie Dingo]



Flora & Fauna



Conclusion

“Contrary to commonly held assumptions, the concept of national identity based on widely agreed associations about the nation may never exist – this is because the nation is not a unitary entity in which all members think, feel, and act in the same way. Instead, each individual engages in many different ways in making sense of the nation and national identities” (Thompson 2001, cited Fan 2008)

There are fundamental features of the Australian national identity, such as, the relatively large and beautiful country, the multicultural, tolerant and easy-going nature of the community, plus democratic and ‘level playing-field’ economic policies.

Australians have an imagined community where, as Australians, they unite. There are traditions, some of which are invented traditions. A culture has developed over time made up of language, art and literature, music and sound, food and drink, sport, indigenous Australians, architecture, famous Australians, flora and fauna and the like. Stereotypes of Australians have evolved from these sources. This is the face of Australia.

Nation branding looks at these areas to find the essence of a nation and make improvements. brand channel.com believes ...‘that brands truly have the power to change the world, they have the power to change the way we view the world and how we choose to see one country in contrast to another.’ Designers can use their skills to help a nation build a brand by understanding what makes up a nation’s identity when acting to create a nation brand.

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