



Scope and status of public diplomacy research by public relations scholars, 1990–2014



Antoaneta M. Vanc^a, Kathy R. Fitzpatrick^{b,*}

^a Quinnipiac University, 275 Mount Carmel Ave., Hamden, CT 06518, United States

^b American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016-8017, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 July 2015

Accepted 15 July 2015

Available online 1 February 2016

Keywords:

Public diplomacy

International public relations

National image

Nation branding

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the scope and status of public diplomacy research by public relations scholars between 1990 and 2014. The work examined authorship, research topics, methodological approaches and contributions to theory building in public diplomacy. The research revealed tremendous potential for public relations researchers to contribute to the intellectual and practical development of public diplomacy. The investigation also identified a need for empirical studies that would deepen our understanding of how diplomatic actors build and sustain relationships with foreign publics and the potential role and value of public relations concepts and practices in such processes. Recommendations for future research are offered.

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Inc.

1. Introduction

Historically, public relations scholars have shown little interest in public diplomacy, or the process by which diplomatic actors communicate and build relationships with foreign publics. In 1992, for example, Signitzer and Coombs observed that although governments are recognized as actors in international public relations, “the theoretical and practical public relations literature has been conspicuously silent about this issue” (p. 138). These scholars found:

How nation-states, countries or societies manage their communicative relationships with their foreign publics remains largely the domain of political science and international relations. Public relations theory development covering this theme has yet to progress beyond the recognition that nations can engage in international public relations (p. 138).

This “intellectual divide” (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 189) began to close shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, which sparked broad global interest in public diplomacy’s expanded role and value in an increasingly interdependent and highly-connected global society. Since 9/11, dozens of books, articles, papers and reports have been written about public diplomacy by scholars and practitioners in a range of fields, including political science, international relations, diplomacy, journalism, marketing/branding, cultural studies, international communication—and public relations. The global conversations generated by this growing body of public diplomacy knowledge – combined with significant attention to public diplomacy in foreign ministries throughout the world – has created a new field of scholarship and practice (Gregory, 2008) to which public relations scholars and practitioners are uniquely qualified to contribute.

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 202 885 2017.

E-mail addresses: amvanc@quinnipiac.edu (A.M. Vanc), kfitzpat@american.edu (K.R. Fitzpatrick).

In examining the state of public diplomacy scholarship, Gilboa (2008) concluded that “despite the growing significance of public diplomacy in contemporary international relations, scholars have not yet pursued or even sufficiently promoted systematic theoretical research in this field” nor have they “proposed a comprehensive and integrated framework” (p. 73). With respect to public relations, he noted that practitioners in public diplomacy have neglected relevant knowledge in communication and public relations, while communication and public relations scholars have neglected relevant literature in international relations, diplomatic studies, and strategic studies. According to Gilboa (2008), “[a] new research agenda is clearly needed to close the wide gaps” (p. 73).

This study assessed the scope and status of public diplomacy research by public relations scholars from 1990 to 2014 and identified opportunities for future research. The study documented a significant increase during the time period of the study in the involvement of public relations scholars in scholarly research that enhances understanding of public diplomacy concepts and practices. The research also revealed ways in which public relations concepts can not only be transferred to public diplomacy scholarship, but applied, tested and recommended as workable theoretical frameworks in the academic and practical domains of public diplomacy.

The work first examines authorship, research topics and methodological approaches used by public relations scholars in studying public diplomacy. It next considers public relations scholars' contributions to theory building in public diplomacy. Finally, it proposes a future research agenda for public relations scholars interested in contributing to the intellectual and practical development of public diplomacy.

The specific research questions addressed were:

RQ1: How many works pertaining to public diplomacy were published by public relations scholars in the publications included in this study during 1990–2014?

RQ2: Who were the leading public relations authors in public diplomacy in the publications included in this study during 1990–2014?

RQ3: What research topics and methodological approaches appeared in public diplomacy research conducted by public relations scholars in the publications included in this study during 1990–2014?

RQ 4: To what extent have public relations scholars contributed to theory building in public diplomacy?

2. Method

The contributions of public relations scholars to the public diplomacy literature were determined by a comprehensive review of published works by public relations scholars from 1990 to 2014. We selected 1990 as the start date for the study because prior works revealed little scholarly activity in public diplomacy prior to that time period. The unit of analysis for this study was a published work, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, and monographs. Although a sizable number of unpublished works (e.g., conference papers, dissertations, theses) were identified, they were not included in the analysis. Also excluded from the analysis were book reviews, editorials, magazine articles, and online and blog publications.

The peer-reviewed works were retrieved via scholarly databases in the social sciences and targeted reviews of public relations and communications scholarly journals, including *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Journal*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of International Communication*, and *International Communication Gazette*. The sample included four additional journals widely viewed as publication outlets for public diplomacy research, including *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, and *International Journal of Communication*.

Criteria for inclusion in the study were that the author was a public relations scholar and the study pertained to public diplomacy. The key search terms for scholarly journals and books were “public diplomacy” and “national image” in quotation marks. Book chapters were retrieved through a review of public diplomacy and selected public relations books. Scholarly monographs were retrieved via a review of publications by the leading resource center in the field, the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California.

Content analysis was employed to examine the manifest content of public relations scholars' work in public diplomacy. Content analysis was used because it enabled the authors to examine a relatively large number of works in a straightforward systematic manner (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980). In this study the authors employed both emergent and a priori coding.

2.1. Coding categories

To understand the breadth and depth of public relations scholarship, all publications that fit the criteria were analyzed on the basis of categories adapted from Ye and Ki (2013), who explored the status of online public relations research, proposed four broad categories of analysis including general information about the article, content of the article, research tools, and suggestions for future research. In order to fit the purpose of this work, the coding sheet included the following five specific categories: (1) the name of the journal in which the article was published and publication year, and for books and book chapters, the title of the book and publication year; (2) authorship; (3) topics of interest; (4) research method; and (5) theory building.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/138246>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/138246>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)