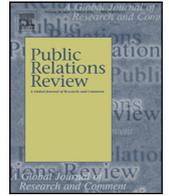


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Public Relations Review



Public relations and public diplomacy in cultural and educational exchange programs: A coorientational approach to the Humphrey Program



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1. Introduction

According to a series of surveys of “The Global Attitude Project,” ([Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2002, 2005](#)), the U.S. national image has continuously eroded across the globe, from Western allies to Muslim countries. Anti-Americanism is not a recent issue; it has been one of the main concerns of international relations scholars and diplomats for nearly three decades ([Wang, 2006a](#)). After the Cold War, waning U.S. budgets for public diplomacy, dropping by one-third from 1993 to 2000, indicated a loss of interest ([de Lima, 2007](#)). However, since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the U.S. government appears to be revisiting public diplomacy. For example, funding for the Fulbright Program, a major U.S. public diplomacy institution, increased from \$215 million in 2001 to \$386 million in 2010 ([William Fulbright Scholarship Board, 2001, 2010](#)).

The U.S. government made efforts to engage the minds of Arab people and to shape a positive U.S. image. The advertising campaign “Shared Values Initiative” was run in the Middle East and Asia between October 2002 and January 2003, spending \$15 million ([Kendrick & Fullerton, 2004](#)), and Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra were launched in 2002 at an expense of \$35 million and \$62 million, respectively, in 2004. The results of these attempts were deemed skeptical, even worsening the attitudes toward the United States, as the Arab public recognized the implicit intention of the U.S. government ([el-Nawaway,](#)

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2006; Plaisance, 2005). As is often the case, communication does not necessarily lead to mutual understanding or intended outcomes, and thus, must be strategically planned and managed until its goal is attained.

Strategic communication, defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007), has the potential to help solve such problems, because strategically designed communication with foreign publics could help remove unnecessary misunderstanding, while fostering mutual understanding. A growing number of public relations scholars have attended to public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2007), arguing for the need for long-term relationship-building with foreign citizens built upon the understanding of other cultural values (Kruckeberg, 1996; Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005) and communicating with them on the individual level (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). However, there exists a lack of empirical research on this need; most studies have theoretically compared and contrasted two areas. At the same time, public diplomacy has been criticized for its lack of theoretical frameworks, perceived as relying on techniques to achieve its goals, rather than relying on academic research-based approaches.

One way of looking at the public diplomacy is through the examination of cultural and educational exchange programs. Ingrid Eide called the international student a “culture carrier,” and such face-to-face interaction between cultures through cultural and educational exchange programs has been found to be effective in reducing biases and stereotypes (de Lima, 2007, p. 239; el-Nawawy, 2006). The U.S. State Department makes an effort to interact with foreign publics at the interpersonal level, through such diverse programs as the Fulbright Exchange Program or the International Visitors Program. However, it is unclear whether such programs successfully achieve their goals, especially when various individuals from different countries interact within such programs. Equally important as the development of such programs for public diplomacy are the ongoing tasks of evaluating and managing their functions to maximize their effectiveness, which are critical to the achievement of the intended goals of the programs. In particular, depending on positions (e.g., staff, participants), individuals’ perceptions may vary. A better understanding of the perceptual differences and possible consequent miscommunication is expected to increase communication effectiveness. For example, reduced conflict at the workplace can enhance the productivity of a company, and removing miscommunication between two countries can prevent wars. With the assumption that strategic communications with foreign publics can help achieve U.S. public diplomacy goals, the current study examines a cultural and educational exchange program. Specifically, this study examines the Humphrey Fellowship Program using the coorientation model – a useful framework to observe gaps between two groups – with focus on the perceptual differences between staff members and Fellows.

The main purposes of the study are threefold. First, the study aims to contribute to the body of public relations literature by testing the applicability of public relations theories to the public diplomacy area. Second, it attempts to provide theoretical frameworks for public diplomacy researchers within which strategic communication plans can be developed. Last, this study aims to provide practical implications for public diplomacy practitioners.

2. Literature review

2.1. Public diplomacy and public relations

Traditionally, diplomacy is defined as “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations” (Diplomacy, n.d.). Unlike such government-to-government- or diplomat-to-diplomat-based diplomacy, public diplomacy extends its realm to non-governmental individuals and institutions. According to the definition of the University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy, “public diplomacy focuses on the ways in which governments (or multilateral organizations such as the United Nations) acting deliberately, through both official and private individuals and institutions, communicate with citizens in other societies. Public diplomacy as traditionally defined includes the government-sponsored cultural, educational and informational programs, citizen exchanges and broadcasts used to promote the national interest of a country through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences” (Defining PD, n.d.). The concept of public diplomacy is evolving and its boundary has been blurred. Especially, Nye (2004) emphasized the growing importance of “soft power.” In contrast to hard power, which attempts to influence citizens in other countries through coercive means such as military or economic power, soft power tries to attract foreign publics through a variety of cultural or ideological interactions, such as, popular culture, fashion, sports, news, or the Internet (Defining PD, n.d.). Whereas the former attempts to influence the public immediately through “fast media such as radio, television, or newspapers, and news magazines,” the latter aims to foster “mutual understanding through slow media such as academic and artistic exchanges, films, exhibition, and language instruction” (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 438).

Public diplomacy has received considerable attention from various fields such as media studies or international relations. Public relations scholars, particularly, approached public diplomacy as a case where organizational public relations functions are transferred to governmental activities at an international level. They looked into the similarities between public relations and public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006) and suggested public diplomacy employ public relations disciplines, such as relationship management (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Smith, 2001), two-way asymmetrical/symmetrical communication, (Grunig, 1993; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005; Wang, 2006b, 2007), environmental scanning roles (L’Etang, 1996, 2006), or community-building (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005). Yun (2006) also applied the Excellence Study (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) to public diplomacy by surveying foreign embassies and concluded that “public relations frameworks are transferable to conceptualizing and measuring public diplomacy behavior and excellence in public diplomacy” (p. 307). These scholars have argued that public relations strategies can be extended to the realm of public diplomacy “not only to

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