Issues of Public Diplomacy Effectiveness Measurement: Possible Help from Principles Used In Persuasion and Political Communication

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Christopher Paul (2011) argues that vague phrases like “winning the battle for hearts and minds” or “winning the long war” offer nothing useful for measuring the success of strategic communication. He also argues phrases like “making them like us” are useless for the serious pursuit of national persuasion.

We might argue alongside of Paul that other vague concepts like soft power may be lacking in sufficient clarity to allow any precise metrics that can be used for measuring the success of strategic communication or public diplomacy. As Paul (2011) notes, liking is not sufficient as a basis for political objectives despite the fact that being liked is better than being disliked.

Likability ratings or national image polling numbers are one small part of a set of metrics that can be used to measure USG public diplomacy (PD) effects. Still, we should be careful about the possibility that the United States is doing something right, gaining more favorability perception from some nations and simultaneously gaining negative ratings from adversarial populations.

Scholars and practitioners of public diplomacy have employed different definitions of public diplomacy that have proven problematic (Gilboa, 2008). We thus argue that definitions that don’t take account of changes in public diplomacy might negatively impact measuring success of strategic communication or public diplomacy.

An examination of major public diplomacy programs reveals that they are centered on immeasurable goals where they tend to consider outputs rather than outcomes and concentrate on the wrong indicators thus suffering from a lack of appropriate methods for conducting audience analysis (Pahlavi, 2007). For effective measurement of public diplomacy projects, a clear separation of outputs from outcomes based on public diplomacy goals is necessary.

Methods used for estimating the impact of public diplomacy in terms of audience and opinion have also proven problematic as they lead to production of evaluations that are mostly approximations and fragmented (Pahlavi, 2007). Realistic estimates of public diplomacy influence on public opinion ought to include new dimensions to raw audience figures.
Pahlavi (2007) argues that key concepts such as audience awareness, real audience reach, audience quality or audience trust and understanding should be factored. A shift from evaluation goal of calculating audience size to redefining evaluation to focus on a new framework grouped around 1) quality of target segments; 2) reputation (trust); and 3) understanding and message retention is necessary.

We argue that metrics should be refined to take account of how audiences process messages based on source reputation; taking note of cognitive processes and heuristic cues as suggested by elaboration likelihood model of persuasion.

Making Changes in SC and PD

In order to improve strategic communication (SC) and public diplomacy, it is necessary for numerous changes to be made in paradigm, objectives, strategies, and tactics. We recommend a paradigm shift from the information paradigm to the networking diplomacy paradigm.

In moving from an information paradigm to a networking paradigm, we argue for the following changes:

- Broadcasting and other one-way forms of communication diminish in focus while two-way forms of interaction such as educational exchanges, increase dramatically.
- United States policy study and formulation should involve political leaders, analysts, leaders of affected nations, and experts in public diplomacy.
- Bilateral and multilateral deliberations should be encouraged often and in ways where many stakeholders can participate in dialogue, debate, and policy suggestions.
- Share perspectives, interests, and motivation for partnerships should be sought.

We recommend that objectives include the following:

- Nation level coordinated objectives with sub-objectives for agencies and disciplines.
- More theory and implementation tied to network theory.

Strategy changes should include the following:

- Less reliance on broadcasting and other one-way forms of communication.
- More use of new media networking (NMN), social media, and emerging media.
- Greater stress on working with other nations to co-construct both policies and public diplomacy.

Figure One: A Multilevel Model of Public Diplomacy Actions and Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>EFFECTS</th>
<th>MEASURES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lessening what Paul (2011) calls “say-do gaps”</td>
<td>Increased credibility</td>
<td>Credibility measure for public and for leaders in other nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing diplomacy networking</td>
<td>Increased partnering</td>
<td>Numbers of partnership in policy, economic, and military activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies which aid the national interests of the U.S. and other nations also.</td>
<td>Increased legitimacy</td>
<td>Focus group measures of leaders of other nations, content analysis of other nation leading political media.</td>
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In both political communication and persuasion applications that are done with the guidance of theory and research, an iterative cycle of message design and message effects is employed. This looks something like Figure Two in practice.

Figure Two: The Iterative Cycle of Message Planning and Implementation

Political Communication

From the study of political communication, two areas of research can aid the development of public diplomacy metrics. One is framing theory and the other is political image analysis. Framing theory shows how condensations of symbolic representations can be used to portray events and political actors. If the media frames used by a government are consistent with the cognitive frames of audiences, or can change the latter frames, public diplomacy can be deemed as working. With images, national image is a type of political image. Political images are constellations of input from all sources of political information sources trusted by message receivers. They are essentially cognitive representations of a political subject.

Kinder and Sanders (1990) argue that media frames serves both as “devices embedded in political discourse,” and as internal structures of the mind,” (p. 74). Short-term, issue-related frames of reference can have significant impact on perception, organizing, and interpretation of incoming information (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Notably, Scheufele (2000) argued that effects of messages in the real world are likely an outcome of both content and framing. We argue that metrics of public diplomacy measurements should account for short-term issues that can affect public diplomacy messages.
Persuasion Theory

One persuasion theory that is consistent with political image analysis is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The theory shows that attitude change results from cognitive responses to persuasive messages. Public diplomacy messages generate internal responses that are positive, negative, or neutral. These can be tracked and measured with methods such as cognitive response listing, a procedure done either during or after message exposure.

The Need for a Process Model

As with political communication and persuasion, a process model is needed in order to develop better metrics. We might start out with something as simple as the model below.

Finally, we argue that Zaharna’s concepts of network diplomacy should be integrated with what is described above in the application of persuasion and political communication principles. Networking applications should also be linked to continuous feedback and quantitative tracking. Some of the main principles from Zaharna (2010) that can be measured are as follows:

1. Messages of public diplomacy should be interactive. Message interactivity can be measured with methods like discourse analysis.
2. All-channel networks should be encouraged above hub or star networks. Metrics from network theory can be applied to measure the network topology.
References

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