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The Paradox of Public Diplomacy on the Web: An Empirical Analysis on Interactivity and Narratives of Nation-States' Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web Sites

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of Habermas' theory of communicative action, we empirically analyzed the level of interactivity and narratives offered in nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites. A multiple regression analysis was performed in an attempt to identify factors affecting the level of interactivity in such Web sites. Findings revealed that the level of economic development is the sole significant factor in regards to the level of interactivity. Further, self-interested, goal-directed, and strategic purposes behind the allegedly transparent, engaging, and interactive public diplomacy were evidenced through a critical analysis of the objectives, key issues, and target publics addressed and highlighted in the public diplomacy narratives on the Web. The results suggested a possible digital divide in the interactive adoption of Web public diplomacy as well as strategic motives and interests embedded in the public diplomacy communication on the Web. This study helps increase our understanding of the paradox of public diplomacy in the digital age.

Key words: *Public Diplomacy, World Wide Web, Strategic Communication, Interactivity, Digital Divide, Critical Analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As nation-states have strived to develop and maintain desirable global images and mutually beneficial international relations, public diplomacy has gained its theoretical and practical momentum over the past few decades [1]. Public diplomacy, as the term literally implies, is mainly founded on nation-states' direct, engaging, and two-way communication with foreign publics in an attempt to project, share, and negotiate their respective values and ideas within international/multicultural contexts [2]. In its most ideal manifestation, public diplomacy aims for establishing favorable public opinions abroad and, consequently, nurturing mutually beneficial relationships between nation-states and foreign publics by means of interactive communication and genuine dialogue [3], [4].

Not much criticism may be invited to argue that the advent of digital communication technologies, the Internet in particular, has spurred the increasing application of public diplomacy in recent years [5]. The Internet has fostered a global public sphere that serves as an intermediary system of communication and deliberation involving a wide spectrum of publics overseas [6]. It appears that public diplomacy has been greatly facilitated and fulfilled by and on the Web, since actors–both nation-states and foreign publics–concerning and engaging in public diplomacy and foreign policies, have begun much more easily addressing their own political viewpoints and directly communicating with each other without the intervention of traditional intermediaries, such as diplomats and the news media [2], [7]. Above all, the interactive nature of the Internet needs special attention, in that interactivity has allowed two-way communication and

deliberation between nation-states and foreign publics, which are essential for true public diplomacy [8]-[10].

However, whether such public diplomacy on the Web has been practiced in accordance with its theoretical ideal remains an open question. More often than not, public diplomacy practitioners fall into a dilemma when the fundamental doctrine of open communication and mutual understanding conflicts with the notion of international competition and maximization of national interests [5]. In other words, the democratic ideal of public diplomacy can be challenged and tarnished by the pursuit of economic interests in any diplomatic context. Such paradox with respect to *diplomatic* communication and action may have aggravated the everlasting skepticism toward public diplomacy. As seen in the case study of nation-states' symbolic communication efforts in relation to philanthropic aid for the Asian tsunami disaster [11], even some overt public diplomacy practices can be interpreted as highly strategic and meaning-laden *diplomatic* actions in support of power competition and capitalistic interests. After all, nation-states are considered, from the eyes of many beholders, to be the main agents attempting to secure and maximize their own capitalistic benefits through *diplomatic* initiatives and actions [12], [13].

Such criticism and skepticism toward public diplomacy warrant a more in-depth investigation on how nation-states actually communicate with foreign publics, while questioning their underlying and, occasionally manipulative, purposes and intentions. Specifically, nation-states' public diplomacy communication on the Web should be of particular interest, for the Internet has been regarded as one of the major, if not the only, media that helps facilitate the democratic ideal of public diplomacy with its ease of use as well as interactivity [14], [15]. Studies along this vein may help shed light on previously underexplored aspects of public diplomacy and, perhaps more importantly, put theoretical discussions on public diplomacy in a more balanced way, stepping aside from the somewhat utopian perspectives that currently prevail in the academic circle.

To this end, we conducted a series of empirical analyses. First, we content-analyzed nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites, based on our conceptualization and operationalization. Second, we attempted to statistically identify potential factors that influence the level of interactivity in such Web sites. Lastly, we critically analyzed the public diplomacy narratives conveyed through such Web sites.

2. CALLING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY INTO QUESTION: COMMUNICATION OR STRATEGY?

The Internet has offered seemingly more democratic communication channels, where governments and foreign publics engage in presumably open, interactive, and two-way communication regarding international affairs, regardless of their physical, political, and cultural distance [9]. However, whether governments and those who are in power truly take into consideration foreign publics' voices and interests in their public diplomacy communication and practice is rather

an open question. Also, which publics are addressed or excluded in such communication processes remain underexplored.

For skeptics, many governments' obtrusive propagandistic communication in the past invites questions toward the authenticity of public diplomacy philosophies and practices [16]. Beneath the claims for transparency, interactive dialogue, and mutual understanding that public diplomacy theoretically exteriorizes, governments' bottom line is still to secure and perpetuate their specific political and economic interests. As reference [2] argued, "Governments see the global state as an opportunity to maximize their own interests, rather than a new context in which political institutions have to govern together" (pp. 88-89). From this perspective, public diplomacy may simply serve as governments' subtle strategies to reinforce the status quo as well as to sustain the hegemony in international affairs [17].

Reference [5] seems to be among a few scholars who have inquired into public diplomacy through critical lenses. They pointed out that the theoretical and practical adoption of public diplomacy has been largely based on public relations and marketing ideas, which are supposed to attract and persuade targeted publics. They further insisted that many approaches of public diplomacy have exploited strategic, calculated, and sometimes deceptive communication, and the extant power asymmetries between governments and foreign publics have hampered the theoretically ideal actualization of public diplomacy.

Particularly taking the Obama administration as an example, reference [5] made a sharp remark upon the use of the Internet and the way-too-utopian assumption of the US public diplomacy efforts focusing on *engagement*. One of the keynotes that the Obama administration has stressed with regard to foreign affairs policies is listening to and connecting with foreign publics, and thereby building long-term and mutually beneficial relationships based on *engagement*. In other words, the Obama administration has been attempting to engage foreign publics into interactive relationships, with the Internet as the main communication channel for the most part, and to attract, persuade, and convince them by mutual understanding and respect as a result of *engagement*. However, perhaps the most disturbing part in this process for many critics is whether such an *engagement* approach actually promotes as well as ensures genuine communication and authentic dialogue.

> The promise that an engagement centered-PD (public diplomacy) will yield mutually beneficial outcomes is disingenuous. Engagement therefore is perhaps better understood as a relatively participatory persuasion: a form of persuasion crafted to generate some amount of tolerance for otherwise entrenched US policies [5, p. 209].

As mentioned earlier, public diplomacy has garnered increasing attention as a more democratic, and thus, more legitimate way of governing international affairs. Since interactive relationships are at the core of democracy, advocates of public diplomacy have highlighted two-way communication, dialogic relationship building, and mutual

understanding. They have also cherished the Internet as a leveled playing field in order to cultivate peaceful and rational government-foreign public relationships [3], [18], [19]. On the one hand, it is hard to disregard the Internet's role in transforming the ways in which governments and foreign publics share information and deliberate international affairs. On the other hand, however, the democratic nature of the Internet may not necessarily guarantee the utopian attainment of transparent, engaging, and interactive dialogues between governments and foreign publics. After all, 'what is communicated to whom' in such public diplomacy communication is as equally important as 'how it is communicated through what channel.' It is the main reason why we analytically focused on the level of interactivity offered in nation-states' public diplomacy Web sites as the unit of observation.

3. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WEB INTERACTIVITY

Interactivity has been conceptualized in a number of different ways [20]-[22]. Across such diverse conceptualizations of interactivity, however, three attributes have consistently stood out in understanding and characterizing interactivity: control, synchronicity, and two-way communication [23]. In other words, the level of interactivity can be determined by the degree to which users are allowed to control the interaction conditions and processes (control), by the degree to which the communication between users and providers is simultaneous (synchronicity), and by the degree to which the communication between users and providers is mutual and reciprocal (two-way communication).

In an attempt to measure the level of interactivity of nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites, we conceptualized and operationalized Web interactivity, focusing on Web sites' actual capabilities. In evaluating interactivity capabilities, we took into consideration different levels of interactivity across Web items, classifying them into user-content interaction items, user-interface interaction items, and user-user interaction items. That is, according to the extent to which Web items help facilitate interactive communication between users-providers and users-users, we assigned different weights to Web items to reflect different qualities of interactivity, ranging from low (user-content) to medium (user-interface) to high (user-user) conversational capabilities.

With the conceptualization of interactivity and the analytic approach, we attempted to address the following question by assessing nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites:

> RQ1: To what extent do nation-states adopt and employ interactive strategies in their ministry of foreign affairs Web sites?

4. DETERMINANTS OF INTERACTIVITY IN WEB PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

It has been well known that web interactivity is influenced and determined by a variety of factors [24]-[26]. Specifically, we focused on three nation-level factors, through a review of literature, as potential determinants of interactive public diplomacy on the Web: political system, economic development, and social freedom.

Reference [27] insisted, "The processes of politics–how domestic and foreign policies are made and how well they serve or respond to national interests or objectives–are influenced or constrained by both cultural and structural aspects of a given political system" (p. 89). More precisely, a democratic nation-state is more likely to adopt and develop more advanced and sophisticated Web sites, as it is more transparent in government-citizens interactions and is more responsive to public opinions and discourses, compared to non-democratic nation-states [24]. Taking into account such tendencies, a democratic nation-state is likely to employ more interactive strategies in its public diplomacy Web site than is a non-democratic nation-state. Hence, the following hypothesis was drawn:

> H1: Democratic nation-states would adopt more interactive strategies in their public diplomacy Web sites than do non-democratic nation-states.

The level of economic development, on the other hand, is another significant factor that might affect nation-states' interactive strategies for Web public diplomacy. A stable and open economy is one of the prerequisites for the E-Government readiness and development [24], [26]. A nation-state with a more affluent economy is more likely to establish and maintain a more developed ICTs infrastructure and, hence, is more likely to take advantage of such a system in its governance [24]. From a public diplomacy perspective, in addition, an economically developed nation-state may be more interested in and likely to be more active in international trade and investment that might lead to more interactive communication in Web public diplomacy. In this light, the following hypothesis was suggested:

> H2: Economically more developed nation-states would adopt more interactive strategies in their public diplomacy Web sites than do economically less developed nation-states.

Meanwhile, the level of social freedom appears to be conducive to the development of interactive Web public diplomacy as well. Free and open public communication on the Internet has often been regarded as a great challenge to the sovereignty and authority of nation-states [28]. As a consequence, a number of nation-states have banned the public use of the Internet [28]. In contrast, citizens with more social freedom are allowed to voice their opinions and to participate in the political processes, being able to capitalize greater access to government information as well as decision making processes via such communication platforms [24], [29]. A nation-state tolerating social freedom, therefore, is

likely to adopt more interactive strategies in its public diplomacy Web site than its counterpart. A hypothesis was formulated as follows to demonstrate such a supposition:

H3: Nation-states tolerating social freedom would adopt more interactive strategies in their public diplomacy Web sites than do nation-states controlling social freedom.

5. THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION: RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

The criticism against public diplomacy centers upon the strategic nature of diplomatic communication under the disguise of interactivity and engagement. Two-way communication and mutual dialogue advocated by the public diplomacy principles and facilitated by the Internet are the focus of censure, while being questioned about its authenticity and efficacy. With public diplomacy as a more democratic way of international affairs on one side and public diplomacy as another tactfully persuasive apparatus of nation-states on the other, it is important to theorize why such competing debates have been generated around public diplomacy and to reconceptualize public diplomacy in such a theoretical light. In that sense, the theory of communicative action, postulated by [30], [31], appears to offer an insightful theoretical framework to understand why public diplomacy has failed to reach its ideal and why much criticism has been charged at its practical application.

Under the overarching thesis of how people resolve social conflicts and proceed to attaining mutual agreements, Habermas stressed the importance of rational discourse among people. Such rational discourse, of course, is subject to free and autonomous communication among social constituencies based on universal communication ethics and democratic communication procedures. Rational discourse among people, in turn, is likely to bring forth mutual understanding and peaceful consensus in society.

In reality, however, mutual agreements through rational discourse among people are not easy to accomplish as it theoretically seems, because human beings keep calculating the outcomes as a result of social interactions and vying for maximizing their own interests over the others. Oftentimes, people opt for proper actions in social relations in consideration for the situation they are in and the outcome they will obtain. Reference [30] sorted such actions into three different types: instrumental, strategic, and communicative action. Both instrumental and strategic actions are egocentric and success-oriented human behaviors in social relations, whereas communicative action aims for mutual understanding and consensus based on rational discourse.

We call an action oriented to success instrumental when we consider it under the aspect of following technical rules of action and assess the efficiency of an intervention into a complex of circumstances and events. We call an action oriented to success strategic when we consider it under the aspect of following rules of rational choice and assess the efficacy of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent. Instrumental actions can be

connected with and subordinated to social interactions of a different type—for example, as the "task elements" of social roles; strategic actions are social actions by themselves. By contrast, I shall speak of communicative action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action, participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions [30, pp. 285-286].

While the public diplomacy principles theoretically espouse two-way communication, interactive relationship building, and mutual understanding between nation-states and foreign publics, its practical application is under constant criticism and skepticism with the suspicion of hidden-agendas and propagandistic manipulation. That is, public diplomacy can be deemed as another governmental instrument that consists of instrumental or strategic actions in order to make foreign publics believe they are engaging in interactive, symmetric, and genuine discourse with nation-states. As a result, much of criticism and skepticism is targeted to such ostensibly communicative actions of governments.

In situations of concealed strategic action, at least one of the parties behaves with an orientation to success, but leaves others to believe that all the presuppositions of communicative action are satisfied. This is the case of manipulation [30, p. 332]

With little doubt, the foremost doctrine of nation-states' diplomacy is to safeguard the national interests. More precisely, many nation-states' diplomatic actions are directed toward maximizing economic interests in line with the globalization of capitalism. As reference [32] asserted, "the nation-state today works as the main agent of international capital, keeping social costs low, keeping social conflict in check, enforcing austerity on ordinary people, and keeping labor immobilized while capital moves freely across national boundaries" (p. 242). Reference [31] also pointed to the power of capital in international relations by stating, "Indeed, economic nationalism is likely to be a significant influence in international relations as long as the state system exists" (p. 34). He further insisted that "trade and economic intercourse are a source of peaceful relations among nations because the mutual benefits of trade and expanding interdependence among national economies will tend to foster cooperative relations" [31, p. 31].

Based on the *soft power* philosophy and theoretically advocating mutual understanding through interactive communication, public diplomacy may be merely strategic actions by nation-states that are ultimately destined to benefit their own economic interests. It appears that nation-states' aspiration toward maximizing economic gains must drive public diplomacy, while keeping international relations peaceful and cooperative.

Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic

influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but replace it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favor of media steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer for the coordination of action [31, p. 183]

With such a question in mind, we aimed to address the following research question:

RQ2: What is communicated and who is addressed in narratives offered in nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites?

6. RESEARCH METHODS

We empirically as well as critically analyzed 50 randomly selected nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites (see Table 1). The reason why ministry of foreign affairs Web sites were chosen as the units of analysis was that such an organization is generally recognized and widely accepted as the most central and prominent governmental agency regarding public diplomacy. The 50 Web sites were content-analyzed in order to measure the level of interactivity. Also, the narratives described in the Web sites were analyzed with a method of inductive qualitative content analysis, while coding and categorizing recurrent themes and keywords without any predetermined taxonomies [33], [34].

Besides, the secondary data were gathered through several statistics. The governments' political systems were classified into four sub-categories in accordance with the democracy index reported by Economist Intelligence Unit: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes [35]. The level of economic development was operationalized as GDP, for GDP is one of the most frequently used measures that helps gauge a nation's level of economic development [24], [26]. The 2015 Gross Domestic Product statistics of World Bank was used for the GDP data collection [36]. In terms of social freedom, the Freedom in the World 2014 index of Freedom House was cited [37].

Table 1. Analyzed nation-states (in alphabetic order)

Nation-states
Afghanistan, Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Georgia, Germany, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The U.K., The U.S., Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan

6. 1 Coding instrument and inter-coder reliability check

Referring to reference [38] suggestions of Web items that help promote interactivity, a code book and a coding instrument were developed. The coding instrument consisted of 30 Web items, which are conducive to ease of interface, usefulness of information, conservation of visitors, return visits, dialogic loop, and interactive communication [38]. Whether or not such Web items were available in each analyzed public diplomacy Web site was checked on a presence/absence basis.

A pretest for the content-analysis was administered in order to test inter-coder reliability of the coding instrument. Three independent coders participated in the pretest, and they analyzed 10 randomly selected public diplomacy Web sites with the coding instrument. Inter-coder reliability tests revealed acceptable results with Holsti's coefficient of .948 and Scott's pi coefficient of .853.

6.2 Measurement scheme

We quantitatively measured interactivity of the nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites. In order to reflect actual interactivity, different interactive qualities across Web items were taken into consideration. Thus, we used the following formula to measure the level of interactivity of Web sites:

$$Y(\text{Interactivity}) = X_1 (\text{User-Content}) + 5X_2 (\text{User-Interface}) + 10X_3 (\text{User-User})$$

We categorized the Web items into three groups representing low interactivity (user-content), moderate interactivity (user-interface), and high interactivity (user-user), taking into account the attributes of each Web item. Then, as shown in the formula, we assigned different weights to each group to reflect different interactive qualities that facilitate conversational capabilities. In other words, the frequency of user-content items was counted as-is, whereas the frequency of user-interface items was multiplied by five and that of user-user items was multiplied by ten. The level of interactivity of each Web site was measured by summing up the differently weighted frequencies.

7. RESULTS

7.1 Descriptive analysis

Among the 50 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Web sites, the mean score of interactivity was 76.19 (SD = 20.84). According to the formula, the total score possible for conversational capabilities was 173: 8 user-content items + 5(11 user-interface items) + 10(11 user-user items). The mean score of 76.19 out of the total score 173 pointed to the analyzed Web sites' interactivity capabilities limited at only a rudimentary level. In other words, the user-interface and user-user Web items that presumably more facilitate interactive exchanges between nation-states and users as well as between users and users were somewhat less employed in the analyzed Web sites. The public diplomacy Web site of the

United States scored 125, while that of Namibia scored only 20 for conversational capabilities.

7.2 Hypotheses test

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to statistically test the hypotheses. A correlation test revealed that there were statistically significant relationships between the level of interactivity in the analyzed Web sites and the independent variables. That is, Web interactivity was all significantly correlated with political system ($r = .378$, $p < .05$), economic development ($r = .361$, $p < .05$), and social freedom ($r = .436$, $p < .05$).

The regression model was statistically appropriate and significant ($F(3, 46) = 9.656$, $p < .05$). The independent variables collectively accounted for approximately 27 percent of the variance in Web interactivity ($R = .518$, $R^2 = .268$). As Table 2 describes, however, the regression coefficients indicated that among the independent variables, only economic development was statistically significant at $p < .05$ level in accounting for the variance in Web interactivity. Therefore, only hypothesis 2 was statistically supported. In other words, nation-states with more developed economies employed more interactive strategies in their ministry of foreign affairs Web sites than nation-states with less developed economies.

Table 2. Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	70.785	5.167		13.698	.000
Political system	6.502	8.442	.118	.770	.443
Economic development	.005	.002	.280	2.833	.006
Social freedom	3.468	1.917	.281	1.809	.074

(a) Dependent Variable: Web interactivity

7.3 Critical analysis

7.3.1 Economy-oriented objectives

All the analyzed Web sites frankly as well as clearly expressed the objectives of public diplomacy in line with securing their national interests, especially economic interests. This was not a surprising finding and was, in fact, in parallel with the hypothesized influence of capitalism that primarily motivates and drives governments' public diplomacy policies. More specifically, many public diplomacy narratives placed emphasis on attracting foreign investment and enhancing economic competitiveness. It was one of the common themes identified in the analyzed narratives irrespective of a nation-state's economic infrastructure and level of development. Such narratives, as evidenced by the quotations below, help illustrate the strategic and goal-oriented aspect of public diplomacy, instead of the communicative and consensus-oriented principles of public diplomacy.

> (Our ongoing priority is to achieve) greater economic competitiveness for Canada through enhanced commercial engagement, secure market access and targeted support for Canadian business (Department of Foreign Affairs of Canada, n.d.).

> Economic development has played a dominant role in shaping Kenya's foreign policy. The need to pursue an open economic policy and the demand for foreign capital and investment flows…has influenced Kenya's approach to foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya, n.d.).

> (The objective is) to pursue foreign investment in Namibia, trade opportunities, grants, soft and interest-free loans, and joint

ventures on behalf of the Namibian private and public sectors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Namibia, n.d.).

Safeguarding national/regional security and maintaining mutually beneficial international relations were also frequently advocated in the public diplomacy narratives. In such narratives, a nation-state's interests were prioritized as words such as 'development,' 'strengthen,' and 'successful' were often alluded. For example:

> (Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) safeguards the interests and rights of the country   and ensures that they are respected by foreign states, that the interests and rights of Ethiopian nationals abroad are protected, and that good neighborly relations with neighboring countries are strengthened (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, n.d.).

> As a part of its economic development strategy, the Croatian government plans to increase the export of Croatian products and attract foreign investments, whereby special attention will be given to stimulating Croatian emigrants to invest in the development of new industries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, n.d.).

7.3.2 Strategic issues

Key issues regarding public diplomacy seemed to vary in accordance with each nation-state's political, economic, social, cultural, and geographic conditions. Nevertheless, most frequently highlighted issues could be identified as economic development and growth through international cooperation. Such issues appear to be directly linked to nation-states' role as the main agent of global capital. One of the notable points was that many nation-states' public diplomacy Web sites specifically highlighted their economic

development within the contexts of international trade treaties, such as North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA), and supranational organizations, such as United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU).

> Within the European Union, Austria is committed to strengthening the EU's role as a successful international player and therefore supports all steps directed at deepening the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), promoting external relations and developing the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) (Austrian Foreign Ministry, n.d.).

> Norway's development cooperation efforts are based on the UN Millennium Development Goals, and Norway is contributing to development in poor countries in many areas and through many different channels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, n.d.).

> (The foreign policy of Fiji) includes responsibility for its international trade policy and the promotion and servicing of relationships with the various bilateral and multilateral arrangements to which the country is party to under various treaties, conventions, and memberships of international and regional organizations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Fiji, n.d.).

7.3.3 Target publics

Tourists, investors, immigrants, journalists, and students were the most addressed target foreign publics throughout the Web sites. Those targeted publics are directly connected with nation-states' economic gains and benefits. Most of the narratives tailored to such publics, indeed, appeared to be strategic messages with promotional goals to enhance national images and to attract visitors or investors.

> Potentially, Belarus is an attractive country for investors. A stable economic and social institution, promising projects in manufacturing and production, wise privatization policy carried out under the patronage of the state, highly qualified workers, advantageous geographic location, low corruption—all this, together with many other things, attracts the attention of the world business elite to Belarus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, n.d.).

> Bosnia and Herzegovina is exceptionally beautiful country where visitor encounters various fascinating sites, cultures, and traditions. It is a place where the east and west civilization meet with its respective peculiarities that have become a part of Bosnian opulent and versatile mosaic. This makes Bosnia and Herzegovina an ideal destination for your business trip, organization of your conference or participation in one of our numerous fairs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d.).

8. DISCUSSION

Public diplomacy has been lauded as a new means of foreign governance that highlights direct, open, and two-way communication between nation-states and foreign publics and, thereby, enhances mutual understanding and respect in the international arena. Advocates of public diplomacy have pointed out that such principles of public diplomacy would help accomplish democratic deliberations and rational

decision-making in government-foreign public relationships. In addition, the advent of digital communication technologies, the Internet in particular, has been believed to provide a leveled communication forum where interactive dialogues and democratic debates can take place in favor of the public diplomacy principles.

According to our results, however, such an assertion may be a myth. Specifically, nation-states with more developed economies were more leaning toward interactive communication and relationship building with foreign publics on the Web than nation-states with less developed economies. Although the Internet has been considered a leveled playground, our findings shed light on a certain gap among nation-states in the interactive adoption of such a technology for public diplomacy purposes. That is, it appears that a digital divide in Web public diplomacy might be taking place as a result of nation-states' economic capacity and orientation. More importantly, such a divide may lead to perpetuating the international hegemonies as well as aggravating the existing status quos in this global competition among nation-states. The significant disparities among nation-states in the interactive adoption of Web public diplomacy call for more scholarly attention as to what other factors contribute to such tendencies and how such tendencies can be remedied.

A critical look at nation-states' ministry of foreign affairs Web sites, in addition, has led us to raise a doubtful view against the Web public diplomacy at work. Most of the narratives appearing in such Web sites were considered egocentric and economy-oriented, as economic interests and benefits of each nation-state and its nationals were prioritized and emphasized. Such narratives were evidence of the strategic, not communicative, characteristic of nation-states' public diplomacy, which is far from its theoretical ideal.

Many public diplomacy objectives and key issues were narrated in line with safeguarding economic welfare and development. The most frequently addressed foreign publics in the analyzed Web sites appeared to be strategically targeted in accordance with economic gains, while striving to attract foreign tourists, investors, and students. More often than not, it seemed nation-states were taking advantage of their Web sites as promotional brochures filled with one-way propaganda, specifically speaking to and accommodating economically beneficial foreign publics. Beneath the theoretical surface of open, mutual, and genuine dialogues based on the advanced communication technology on the Web, the propagandistic tradition of conventional diplomacy still remains in the public diplomacy narratives, serving for self-interested and goal-directed purposes. To make matters worse, such propagandistic public diplomacy narratives seemed to be largely targeted and catered to economically beneficial segments of foreign publics, while marginalizing others from information seeking and mutual understanding.

Both philosophically and technologically, public diplomacy through the Internet should have helped facilitate open and symmetric communication exchanges and democratic deliberations between governments and foreign publics. Rather, our critical analysis revealed the distorted reality of public diplomacy at work on the virtual public sphere as a result of the discord between communicative

democracy and strategic capitalism. As reference [30] saw, democracy and capitalism compete for primacy in modern societies, and an inevitable tension is always in existence between them. Same as any social actions, engineering government-foreign public relationships is a social domain where democracy and capitalism compete for the driver's seat. Although public diplomacy pursues democratic ideals over capitalistic consideration in principle, the ghost of conventional diplomacy being planned and operated by ego-centric and self-serving purposes still takes over nation-states' diplomatic practices. Even with the most democratic medium, the Internet, the ideal practice of public diplomacy appears to be remote.

According to reference [30], all political systems attempt to create and reinforce mass loyalty in order for effective governance. In such processes, nation-states selectively produce mass loyalty "through a sociocultural filtering of access to the political public sphere, through a bureaucratic deformation of the structures of public communication, or through manipulative control of the flow of communication" [30, p.346]. Thanks to the advent of the Internet, many pundits have expected that restricting public access to the political information and deliberation has become more difficult than ever, and, therefore, nation-states' selective and egoistic production of mass loyalty may not be easy as it was in the past. However, our analysis helped uncover that nation-states' public diplomacy communication on the Web is still designed to create mass loyalty in favor of their interests by selectively and manipulatively controlling the flow of communication. Also, nation-states' public diplomacy Web sites, such as ministry of foreign affairs Web sites, can be deemed as an attempt to bureaucratically and strategically deform the structures of public communication in the first place.

As reference [30] put, "Insofar as mass media one-sidedly channel communication flows in a centralized network–from the center to periphery or from above to below–they considerably strengthen the efficacy of social controls" (p. 390). Contrary to the theoretical principles of public diplomacy and what many advocates have projected, nation-states have taken advantage of the new form of mass media, the Internet, in order to one-sidedly megaphone their capitalistic ideologies, to maintain dominant controls over foreign publics, and to maximize their own interests out of government-foreign public relationships. Our empirical analyses helped glimpse another bleak view of public communication where nation-states strategically and manipulatively communicate with the public to secure their hegemonies. In the meantime, it is always possible that the public can be deceived by the seemingly more open and symmetric communication structures based on the Internet and can be convinced that nation-states are taking communicative actions, not strategic actions, in such virtual communication forums.

9. CONCLUSION

For years, since the Internet has been introduced and woven into ordinary citizens' daily lives, many scholars and practitioners have believed and hoped that leveled information and communication forums can be constructed in virtual public spheres, and such democratic information and communication flows would empower citizens and eradicate the tyranny of nation-states. However, the advent of the Internet itself may not guarantee emancipatory citizenry as well as political transparency. In fact, it is closer to the truth that technology is often appropriated in favor of the people with power and authority. Theoretically pitching public diplomacy for mutual understanding and technologically using the Internet for interactive engagement, nation-states may be operating a new version of propaganda against foreign publics.

This new version of propaganda is particularly malevolent in that it helps disguise the strategic and, even manipulative, purposes behind seemingly open and symmetric communication exchanges between nation-states and foreign publics through the Internet. The Internet interfaces and technological apparatuses that theoretically help enhance participatory and two-way communicative actions may hoax foreign publics into an illusion that they are engaging in interactive dialogues and mutual exchanges, while being exposed to propagandistic information as well as being persuaded with strategic communication. It is still the old wine in new bottles.

Unfortunately, power asymmetries between nation-states and foreign publics do not fade away even with the most democratic communication channel, the Internet. Capitalistic and strategic interests that many nation-states are still pursuing in their diplomacy have shattered the ideal attainment of interactive and engagement-centered public diplomacy on the Web. After all, public diplomacy on the Web is paradoxical due to the dissonance between communicative democracy and strategic capitalism.

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