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Public Diplomacy in Post-Truth Era*

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Abstract

Advancements in technology and the pervasive influence of internet and social media on individuals have propelled societies into post-truth era. This epoch is characterized by distinct features that have brought about significant changes in both societal dynamics and communication methods. Notably, the emergence and proliferation of social media and internet have played a key role in shaping and exacerbating these changes. Given that information dissemination and communication via internet and social media platforms now constitute a substantial component of contemporary public diplomacy practices, the realms of public diplomacy and post-truth share commonalities in terms of platforms used, target audience, and content delivered to them. Consequently, alterations in these factors within the post-truth era have a discernible impact on the field of public diplomacy. This study aims to investigate and analyze this impact, using grounded theory method to propose a novel analytical model for assessing public diplomacy activities within the framework of post-truth era. An examination of how these factors are applied in the realm of public diplomacy reveals a notable shift in policies and practices, from traditional objective of cultivating a positive image, towards a more assertive approach. This study introduces this new approach as a theoretical framework, termed "Antagonistic Public Diplomacy".

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Disinformation, Fake News, Post-Truth, Public Diplomacy

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1. Introduction

When the Oxford Dictionary and other organizations selected the term 'Post-Truth' as their Word of the Year in 2016, it was an acknowledgment of an already established phenomenon, which has been spreading to shape a new era. The term 'post-truth' has, in fact, been around for a while; in 2004, Keyes defined it as the blurring of boundaries between lying and truth-telling and, likewise, fact and fiction (Keyes, 2004). The Post-Truth as an era, is defined by scholars from 2015 onward and is mainly associated with Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as US president, and is marked with a series of changes in people and societies. (Yerlikaya & Aslan, 2020; Waisbord, 2018; Saliu, 2023; Fischer, 2021; Hopf et al., 2019). The concept of post-truth encompasses a range of changes and advancements that have occurred across various levels, including technology, communication methods, political activities, and the actors and audiences within societies and throughout the world. These changes have had both direct and indirect impacts on these domains.

The widespread availability of the Internet, which has become a fundamental necessity for modern individuals, has provided virtually everyone with network access the ability to access news, data, and information at any given moment. While traditional and official media outlets typically apply various filters to examine content before publication, individuals on Web 2.0 platforms have been granted the freedom to publish their content on the Internet without the obligation to fact-check or without verify the information they share or distribute. Furthermore, the rise and ubiquity of social media and smartphones allow any user to easily share content in various formats on the web with just a few taps of their fingers. Regardless of the number of followers or readers they

have, social media users, bloggers, and vloggers are not required to fact-check their content before publication, and there is no standardized verification or assessment process to question the accuracy of their posts. This lack of verification has accelerated the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news throughout the web, which is exacerbated by other users who feel no responsibility to verify the content before resharing or promoting it.

In focusing on media and journalism, or technologies of communication in framing the problem of post-truth politics, Hannan (2018) locates the problem of post-truth politics in social media. He suggests that trolling has gone mainstream, shaping politics and even legislation. Referring to Britain's Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump, Cull (2016) argues that "new media have given global publics an unprecedented role in determining their own and one another's destiny;" and that this reality creates new responsibilities and priorities by which three lessons loom large for public diplomacy policies: "people matter; facts matter; and places matter".

Bjola and Pamment (2018) write about the 'dark side' of digital diplomacy, when speaking of "the use of digital technologies as disinformation and propaganda tools by governments and non-state actors in the pursuit of strategic interests, has expanded to the point that it has started to have serious implications for the global order. The ease of access to content creation and editing tools, coupled with the integration of AI technology into smartphones, has also paved the way for fraudulent activities, the creation of deep fake videos, and the dissemination of fake news, and more easily being published all over the social media. Unfortunately, this has led to a blurring of the line between subjective comments and verifiable

facts. Users often consider content with a significant number of likes or reshares on social media as factual, without verifying its accuracy. The AI, has given rise to bots that can masquerade as humans and artificially inflate the number of followers, likes, and reshares. Users are more likely to be drawn to topics that have garnered high engagement, considering them as valid and trustworthy, thus resharing them as factual information.

Personalized web experience that tailors content, advertisements and pages to users' previous online behavior, restrains users to an environment that matches their existing worldview and approach; effectively closing the door to different ideas or beliefs. Surrounded by homogeneous content, readers become entrenched in a bias that not only shields their beliefs from criticism or challenge, but also limits exposure to alternative perspectives. Hyman and Jalbert (2017) believe that "the worldview is the problem leading to misinformation acceptance. When reading the news and scanning social media, one will look for information that is consistent with one's activated worldview".

People in post-truth era are easily and extensively exposed to disinformation and fake news through various media channels, social media platforms, and the web. Consequently, there is a gradual erosion of truth and factual understanding, as individuals become immersed in a world shaped by the information they hear, read, or watch. One of the most significant works on post-truth so far, is the one by Lewandowsky et al. (2017, p. 353), who provide helpful examples of disinformation in various countries and introduce the destructive consequences of extensive use of disinformation in politics. The post-truth world emerged "as a result of societal mega-trends, such as a decline in social capital, growing economic inequality, increased polarization, declining

trust in science, and an increasingly fractionated media landscape”. They also provide a suggested model for coping with post-truth era. These changes have profound implications for the field of public diplomacy (PD), which aims to engage and communicate with the public. The traditional methods, objectives, and policies of public diplomacy may no longer be effective in this era, as the public itself has changed and people’s means of accessing information and communication with others have evolved. This study seeks to explore the impact of post-truth on public diplomacy and redefine the concept in light of these changes.

While post-truth concept has garnered considerable attention from researchers in recent years, there has been limited exploration of its implications for public diplomacy. Most studies that touch on both post-truth and public diplomacy focus on how the Western world has been affected, particularly in relation to events like the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential elections. This study aims to go beyond these specific cases and delve into the broader changes brought about by post-truth age in the field of public diplomacy. It seeks to reframe the notion of public diplomacy in a world where technology dominates and people’s behavior and attitudes have been shaped by communication technologies.

2. Literature Review

2. 1. Literature on Post-Truth

A noteworthy work, closely related to post-truth discussions, is the book of Surowiec and Manor (2021), which reflects on public diplomacy in age of uncertainty, which may be interpreted as

another term for post-truth era. Their work is a collection of a wide range of research and will be further discussed later in the current research. Eric Cheyfitz reviews the pervasive influence of disinformation and misinformation in contemporary society. The book investigates how disinformation shapes public discourse, political narratives, and social interactions. Cheyfitz (2017) argues that the spread of disinformation poses significant threats to democracy, truth, and ethical communication.

Woolley and Howard (2019) focus on the role of social media and digital world in the spread of fake news and disinformation, and the shaping of post-truth world. They consider the exploitation of digital technology for propaganda campaigns as computational propaganda, and talk about issues such as bots and algorithms in this area. Technological developments have led to an evolution which, according to Maddalena and Gili (2020, p. 4), “is closely connected to globalization and digital revolution because these intertwined processes have strengthened lying and manipulating in three main directions: a more extensive spreading of lies and more people being deceived, a deeper penetration into public opinion thanks to social media, and a greater speed with which fake news can circulate within the system of communication”.

Wharton (2017, p. 8) argues that there are dangers in accepting a post-truth paradigm. “Communicators, experts, and officials may feel overwhelmed and succumb to inaction or, worse, be seduced into adopting ‘post-truth techniques’ that appeal only to emotion and sideline facts or challenging audiences’ beliefs”.

There are also a small number of works that have paid significant attention to the relationship between public diplomacy and post-truth. Saliu (2021) has studied the narratives of public diplomacy in the post-truth era and explains the way in which

narratives can serve policies of states and the way in which citizens and non-state actors can play a role in favor of their country's foreign policy. He also discusses the way in which states can use public diplomacy technics in post-truth era to influence foreign governments by influencing their citizens.

Another work, which is the closest to the topic of the current study, is the article written by Wu (2023), who discusses post-truth public diplomacy and attempts to find out how trends of public diplomacy have changed in this era, shaping a new form of public diplomacy, which employs “post-truth content generated through social networks and overseen by host countries to influence the cognitive and affective condition of publics in target countries” (Wu, 2023, p. 1). The most important consequence of post-truth, is that explained by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell: “intentional and coordinated disinformation campaigns should be treated as a hybrid threat to European and global security” (Borrell, 2020). Similarly, Swedish state describes disinformation as a problem, as it “undermines trust in the state” and “when directed at Sweden, could harm the image of our country” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021).

In the RAND study of truth decay, authors summarize the consequences of this era in four aspects; (1) The erosion of civil discourse; (2) Political paralysis; (3) Alienation and disengagement of individuals from political and civic institutions; and (4) Policy uncertainty at the national level (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018). As depicted by Lewandowsky et al. (2017), a functioning democracy relies on a well-informed public, therefore, “if people are pervasively misinformed, chances are that societal decisions will be suboptimal”.

Behaviors of people in post-truth era and the way they deal with information or media contents are marked with cognitive bias, motivated reasoning and reliance on echo chambers, which leads to polarization in the society, as people adhere to their own sources and closed circles of social connections and resist anything from outside those boundaries. Polarization and lack of communication among different groups of people will reduce civil discourse (Surowiec & Manor, 2021; Kavanagh & Rich, 2018; Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Breakdowns within the society will remove civil discourse and cohesion in a nation, and disagreements and conflicts endure over various subjects. It is needless to say that a divided nation is more likely to face challenges and less likely to overcome obstacles. Aside from social and political issues, this crack in society can impose heavy economic burdens on a country and its people.

All of these malfunctions bring about political stalemate or paralysis; a government which is not supported by its nation, cannot make decisions, or does not have fact-based reasoning behind its decision-making procedures; moreover, a state that is trapped in bureaucratic hinderances loses its authority and power and becomes an inefficient government. At international level, this might affect foreign relations, as allies cannot trust the government and adversaries would try to exploit such weaknesses (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018; Rui, 2002; Lewandowsky et al., 2017).

One considerable effect of post-truth is the way in which it can destabilize a country from inside; mediatization of politics in post-truth era has negative impact on the authority of states, as power is not merely at the hands of government, and nonstate actors, such as the media have a foot on the ground; this is when a state may even need mass media to reach out to people or consider media and its

coverage when making policies or decision. “The state has lost its former primary role because it has moved from Gutenberg (top-down flow information) to Zuckerberg (horizontal and non-monopolistic flow of information)” (Saliu, 2023).

As stated by Hjarvard (2013, p. 3), media “have become key structural elements and enablers of social and cultural practices”, and with hierarchical structures overturned, groups can use non-hierarchical environment of social media to organize themselves and thrust into political environment. Post-truth can create an ‘anti-establishment mob mentality’ (Giusti & Piras, 2021) in such groups, whereas the horizontal nature of these movements makes them very difficult to break. Their diversity and flexibility give them an organic strength (Seib, 2012), which means that headless movements can easily be formed in societies and organize themselves through social media and potentially take action to pursue any causes around which they might have formed on social media, under the influence of disinformation and fake news or biased information transmitted to them (Kalpokas, 2019).

As illustrated in the above-mentioned studies, nations are vulnerable in this era and are stripped of means of good governance and appropriate collective actions. Post-truth era is a ‘unique’ opportunity, enabling states to “shape foreign publics’ reality” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 139) making the situation fertile for foreign intervention to force a country toward miscalculations or even instability through intervention. Foreign actors can play a role, “blurring the line between opinion and fact and increasing the relative volume, and resulting influence, of opinion and personal experience over fact through the dissemination of false information”, and threaten national security of states as “volume, diversity of sources, speed, and repetition are some of the

characteristics that make disinformation successful as a tool or weapon” (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018, p. 125).

States are using digital platforms and social media to target foreign citizens by fracturing, contesting and assaulting reality, creating feelings of uncertainty and fueling tensions within society (Surowiec & Manor, 2021), as some call it a war tactic “to hack an enemy’s society” (McKew, 2017; Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 175). As indicated in research, disinformation and negative news receive more coverage than normal in international reports (Surowiec & Manor, 2021) and with the help of algorithms of social media and bots, can massively reach foreign audiences (Woolley & Howard, 2019), and exploit echo chambers to supply personalized contents for online microtargeting (Landon-Murray et al., 2019).

Despite being within the domain of soft power, “some militaries and intelligence agencies are making use of social media as conduits to undermine democratic processes and bring down democratic institutions altogether” (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017). However, as revealed in a 2015 study, when US policymakers expect a democracy to decline or decay, covert interventions become more likely (Landon-Murray et al., 2019), and it seems arguable that the US might also use such social media conduits to weaken a target nation and use PD as “tools through which the US sought to exercise international hegemony” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 8).

2. 2. Literature on Public Diplomacy

Bruce Gregory, Director of the Public Diplomacy Institute at George Washington University, believes that, states use public

diplomacy “to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance interests and values” (Gregory, 2008). There is no doubt that Joseph Nye is a noteworthy name in research on public diplomacy, as his theory of Soft Power and Smart Power has long been used or discussed by scholars. In his recent studies, he has paid special attention to the idea of Sharp Power, as he admits that soft power is rarely sufficient by itself and needs to be completed by other areas (Nye, 2020).

Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2012) are among researchers who have used theory of soft power, but they also believe that soft power theory lacks the specificity needed for falsifiable testing public opinion. This is not the only critical view of Nye’s theory. In recent years and with developments in global community and technology, more studies are dedicated to analyzing the evolution or weaknesses of soft power. Laura Roselle et al. (2014) believe that strategic narrative is needed in soft power, as the idea of soft power and its elements are not persuasive enough by themselves; they believe that at times, coercion or at least a persuasive narrative of a coercive force is also needed to persuade target audience to follow a soft power campaign.

Roselle has also worked on strategic narrative and the way in which it can be used in foreign policy and strategic alliance of countries by addressing both public opinion and states. The research discusses the way in which strategic narrative can impact members within an alliance or the way in which actors out of an alliance can use narratives to divide between members of an alliance. This can be done in all three levels of strategic narrative in international system narratives, identity narratives and issue narratives (Roselle, 2017). Prior to her study, others have also

discussed the Narrative Turn in international relations and IR studies, such as Geoffrey Roberts (2006, p. 704), who argues that storytelling and narrative is “the central defining practice of history as a discipline” and narrative is dominant mode among diplomatic historians; he believes that narratives of the past events can affect policies and actions of present in international relations of countries.

Mattern (2005, p. 583) discusses the way in which representational force can complement soft power; she comments, “soft power should not be understood in juxtaposition to hard power, but as a continuation of it by different means”. Moreover, Winkler (2019) argues that the success of soft power is actually based on narrative rather than reification of values. She has dedicated her research to the application of soft power in Japan’s relationship with the United States, where it is shown that nurturing the narrative of soft power aids the theory to be applied into measures and policies of Japan.

In their comprehensive book, *International Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Communication and Engagement*, Golan et al. (2015) have dedicated a lion’s share of the content to introducing the model of “Integrated Public Diplomacy;” the concept defines three dimensions for public diplomacy: relational public diplomacy, mediated public diplomacy and nation branding or country reputation. A similar definition is what Nye quotes from Mark Leonard, enumerating three dimensions for public diplomacy, which are daily communication, strategic communication and lasting relationship (Nye, 2004).

The book *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy* by Ilan Manor (2019) explores the impact of digitalization on the institutions, practitioners, and audiences of diplomacy. It delves into the way in

which digital technologies have influenced the norms, values, and strategies of public diplomacy. Throughout the book, Manor argues that the emergence of digital communication and social media has significantly transformed the landscape of public diplomacy. The book provides insights into the conceptualization, practices, and challenges of digitalization in the field of public diplomacy (Manor, 2019).

A common approach in studying public diplomacy is related to media and its role in public diplomacy. Robert Entman has theorized Mediated Public Diplomacy in his works in which drawing on interdisciplinary research, he focusses on role of media in public diplomacy and management of media to serve foreign policy (Entman, 2008). Zhang et al. (2017) use the notion of mediated public diplomacy through an analysis of agenda-setting in state-owned media and the way in which states attempt to frame media and influence their people. They conceptualize state media as information subsidies of governments for agenda building.

Sheafer and Shenhav (2009) consider mediated public diplomacy in new warfare, whereas due to the development of communication technology, war has become more visible and because of that, public diplomacy has become the main part of diplomacy of states and media plays key role. Thus, states try to exert as much control as possible on media and frame their stories (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). Similarly, Sheets et al. (2015) have also reviewed the role of media in public diplomacy in case of war or conflicts and the way in which rival states use mediated through public diplomacy to promote their own narratives and policies (Sheets et al., 2015).

With technological developments, media can be used remotely

at a low cost and presented to audiences of millions or even billions”, and it dominantly dictates what to think, how to think about it, how to make associations between issues and attributes, and how people think about other states and nations. Therefore, a tailored “proactive public diplomacy” is needed as “target public should define the platform on which diplomats are active” (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009, p. 273; Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 137).

Zaharna (2010, p. 4) recognizes a transition from Information Age to Global Communication Era, which requires a change in the concept of engagement in PD as well. Accordingly, “whereas information production and dissemination once were critical to gaining the communication advantage, today those who master a network and relational approach will command communication power”. However, Zaharna’s idea seems incomplete, as others argue that in this era, “public diplomacy no longer simply means communicating with foreign populations and creating relationships” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 115).

3. Methodology

Considering the intention of this study to redefine public diplomacy, a new definition of this notion needs to be developed, based on categorization of data on current theories and practices of public diplomacy and reviewing them within the post-truth domain. To this end, Grounded Theory is applied as the research method, since “grounded theory studies are especially helpful when current theories about a phenomenon are either inadequate or nonexistent... and the major purpose of a grounded theory approach is to begin with the data and use them to develop a theory” (Leedy & Omrod, 2015, p. 274). The study delves into

current studies on post-truth areas as well as public diplomacy studies, and tries to discover the way in which they are related to one another. Data collection in a grounded theory study is field-based, flexible, and likely to change over the course of the investigation.

Data analysis in a grounded theory study begins almost immediately, at which point the researcher develops categories to classify the data. Subsequent data collection is aimed at saturating the categories—in essence, learning as much about them as possible—and at finding any disconfirming evidence that point to possible revisions in the categories identified or in interrelationships among them. The theory that ultimately evolves is one that includes numerous concepts and interrelationships among those concepts; in other words, it has conceptual density (Leedy & Omrod, 2015, p. 274).

In order to answer the research question and redefine public diplomacy, the study initially offers a set of codes to scrutinize practices of public diplomacy and further cleaves post-truth era into a set of subdomains to recognize its dynamics and procedures. In the following step, the two sets are compared to find out parities and disparities and discover the way in which the former is affected by the latter. The study reviews how this combination of post-truth and public diplomacy have set the ground for the formation of a new type of public diplomacy, or a new approach in public diplomacy, which will be introduced further within the study. A summary of the codes is demonstrated as follows:

- 1- Elements of post-truth
 - a. Platform
 - b. Audience
 - c. Content

- 2- Elements of public diplomacy
 - a. Platform
 - b. Audience
 - c. Content
 - d. Topic
- 3- Consequences of post-truth
 - a. Erosion of civil discourse
 - b. Political paralysis
 - c. Alienation
 - d. Uncertainty
- 4- Domain of consequences of post-truth
 - a. Within society (domestic)
 - b. On society (domestic)
 - c. Implosion (domestic)
 - d. Foreign intervention (international)
- 5- Impacts of post-truth on public diplomacy
 - a. Vulnerability of people
 - b. Shift from convincing and positive image to manipulation and coercion
 - c. Negative tactics against target community or third party
 - d. Changes in platforms and means
 - e. Uncertainty as both obstacle and objective of public diplomacy

4. Findings on Post-Truth and Public Diplomacy

PD scholars see the rise of disinformation as one of the year's most important implications for the field (Cull, 2016) because of the inevitability of countering disinformation and fake news, which is described as the "public diplomacy problem of our time" (Pamment, 2018). The spread of disinformation in the post-truth era has resulted in the growth of uncertainty, which is now

considered not only a calamity of the time or even for PD, but also a new trend and objective for it.

As indicated in the review of literature on post-truth studies, the phenomenon is mainly about people and how their reception and expectations of the world outside has changed. Going through discussions and works by scholars, their arguments can be categorized into three main categories: audience, content and platform. People, either as individuals or collectively as society, are impacted by drivers of this age; messages and contents that are being posed at them or received by them have also undergone changes. Moreover, the medium of delivering the message to the audience is also discussed, which is mainly considered to be media including traditional mass media and new media and social media.

On the other hand, through scrutiny over the studies on public diplomacy and practices of public diplomacy, this research suggests that elements of public diplomacy activities and measures can be categorized into four vital elements, which seem to be necessary for any practices: Platform, Audience, Content and Topic. Platform refers to the format of the activity, which can be a media content, an educational course, a competition or any other formats used by practitioners. Audience is the target community of practice, which is supposed to be influenced by public diplomacy measures; this can be as small as an individual, like in scholarships, or as vast as an entire nation, like the target audience of mass media. Content includes the message that is considered to be delivered to the audience, and topic is the general idea of the message and the larger scale of public diplomacy activities, which means which area of activity or subcategories of public diplomacy are considered to be taken into account, e.g., art diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, etc.

As seen above, post-truth and public diplomacy have three elements in common. Thus, as the three elements are affected and changed in post-truth era, it means that elements of public diplomacy have also changed and these developments must be taken into consideration. In the symbiosis of public diplomacy and post-truth and the competition between the actors – mostly official, state actors – some impacts can be considered for public diplomacy policies and practices, which shall be addressed in the current study.

Drivers of post-truth era and their consequences have changed the people around the world and they can easily be exposed to manipulative contents. Being caught in echo chambers, affected by cognitive bias and addicted to motivated reasoning, human beings are defenselessly vulnerable before such factors. The audience in post-truth era has become vulnerable and defenseless, which means that the audience of PD has changed and practitioners have to consider these changes in their activities.

It is notable to mention that public diplomacy in a post-truth rhetorical landscape can be entirely divorced from any reality, any real sense of the probable, other than the strategic reality of audience effects. PD becomes a performance of rhetorical style, designed to construct spectacular simulacra, which manipulate uncertainty despite having no anchor in reality (Surowiec & Manor, 2021; Young, 2018). It reiterates that a rhetorical approach in PD can prove fruitful in distracting a target community and planting uncertainty among them needless of any real grounds.

As discussed before, in today's world, the means of communication have changed and tech devices are omnipresent in our lives, connecting people to the Internet and social media. Users are constantly shelled by information, and have shifted from TV

and radio to websites and social media to read news and communicate. Therefore, in an era that “the news media can be strategically used in order to take advantage of, or increase, uncertainty in target publics and it is important to recognize that PD efforts might not always depend upon constructing stable, positive images of a state or its ambitions” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 158) it can be witnessed that the toolbox of PD practitioners has completely changed and diversified compared to a few decades ago. Meanwhile, artificial intelligence is also changing the means of communication and information technology. Not all people use the same platforms and practitioners and designers of PD need to find different platforms to reach out to the public, while considering, at the same time, challenges and threats of each platform.

In spite of all efforts, the future of this battleground seems even more threatening, as technological developments and the emergence of AI have opened the way for deep fake: states or even nonstate actors, even individuals, can use generative artificial intelligence to create entirely fake ‘footages’ of political leaders and broadcast them in order to potentially cause major geopolitical and diplomatic implications. According to Warzel (2018), “these tools can be used to stoke tensions and animosity between and within states and feed false narratives about the past, simulate citizen input, creating false impressions of constituency preferences when key decisions are made”. It can be imagined how reactions of citizens to a rumor can be faked with footages of protests or riots, etc. and then broadcast to trigger such reactions among the citizens after the rumor is diffused among them (Landon-Murray et al., 2019).

Public diplomacy begins with provision and projection of a positive image in the world. As such, if this image is not supported

within the country, its validity could easily be challenged by anyone across the world. A successful public diplomacy campaign needs a supportive backbone in its own nation to be a representative of that nation. Post-truth is challenging this aspect in different ways; first, drivers and consequences of post-truth have changed people all around the world by downgrading truth and facts, increasing polarization and shaping distrust in governments, and any country whose experts want to launch PD efforts, might be facing a domestic society that does not support its foreign policy or PD attempts, and even opposes basic values of their country.

The negative side of uncertainty in PD, is the domestic side of it, where the public understanding of measures taken, thus their support for them falls, and they turn against them. For instance, in the United States, the American public increasingly sees engagement in the world as neither needed nor beneficial, and has severe concerns about its costs and burdens. Therefore, while the US has retained “ample capability to act on the global stage, the American public increasingly doubted the value of doing so” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p 12.).

Another aspect of uncertainty is the vulnerability of the nationals of a country itself. With uncertainty being an objective in PD, reasonably, other countries can also have the same objective toward citizens in any country. Therefore, PD experts and practitioners have a domestic front to fight as well to protect their nation from such affects. In contemplations on digital diplomacy, scholars such as Manor, Bjola and others argue that digitalization of diplomacy has added a ‘national citizenry’ to diplomats, as they have turned to social media and report their activities to their own citizens back home as well, and by doing so, seek their support for foreign policy activities, and inform them of international events as

well. According to them, “Proactive public diplomacy must also take place at the national level as domestic publics are exposed to foreign states’ false claims. Embassies should thus target foreign populations, while MFAs seek to engage with local ones” (Bjola & Manor, 2021 in Surowiec & Manor, 2021).

However, looking from the perspective of PD practitioners and regarding foreign citizens, uncertainty is considered a blessing and an objective. Uncertainty is “productive, as it yields particular effects—it shapes identities, knowledges and ‘truths’ about the world — and is also operationalized as a means of governing, all of which enact a particular global politics” (Surowiec & Manor, 2021, p. 278). Diplomatic communication seeks to decrease certainty in foreign publics and confuse and destabilize populations or manipulate perceptions about the actions or intentions of a state (Surowiec & Manor, 2021; Landon-Murray et al., 2019). That is how Beck’s (1996; 2002) conception of ‘world risk society’ has to say in theorizing the increasing turn of PD towards the amplification of uncertainty rather than its reduction (Surowiec & Manor, 2021).

Another aspect of aggressive form of PD in post-truth era can be toward a third-party country. As post-truth conditions have opened the route to people’s minds, the practice can consider ruining the image of a third-party country in the target country as well. Such negative campaigns can damage alliances of the target country with other nations to favor the practicing country’s foreign policy objectives. This means that PD experts and practitioners need to deal with such negative campaigns as well. They are not working in isolation for intact minds; sometimes they might need to erase the negative image created by rivals in the target nation or might want to launch a negative campaign against a third country.

Negative PD campaigns of other countries against a PD practicing country can also exacerbate this and increase uncertainty in the society. A country who wants to launch a PD attempt might itself fall victim to negative tactics of PD of another country and lose grounds of national confidence in its foreign policy and PD operation. Rivals and adversaries can target a nation and turn them against their own government and destroy the supportive backbone of PD in that country. A country engulfed in protests and unrest, can by no means, introduce itself as a democratic or peaceful country.

5. Conclusion

In order to fulfill the objective of the current study and address the aforementioned research questions, the work has induced a series of codes from the literature of the topic, as well as the practices of public diplomacy.

If people are not welcoming facts and data like before, or their trust in official sources of content have evaporated, they would not easily believe public diplomacy contents provided by official resources and data and figures would not work for them. The biased mind of communities or individuals informs practitioners that this bias would stand against new images that they are hopeful to implant in those minds. A common citizen who is trapped in echo chambers is consuming resources that fit his/her own beliefs or presumptions and there is a good chance that he/she would stand against any content that would challenge his/her previous beliefs about a country for instance. As a result, addressing the audience and public opinion in another country can be used for not only making a change in their mindset about the operating country, but

also making a change in their behavior inside and vis-à-vis their own country and towards their own government by sending messages that due to post-truth era vulnerability of the audience can simply turn into beliefs of people. With that, public diplomacy can pursue the foreign policy of operating country beyond soft power and act coercively and aggressively.

Inducing from all the topics and discussions above, this study believes that a comprehensive understanding of public diplomacy policies, strategies and practices – which has inevitably changed – in the post-truth era needs a new theoretical framework to explain its mechanism and dynamics. This study suggests that this can be achieved through *Antagonistic Public Diplomacy* theoretical framework. While many parts and elements of *Antagonistic Public Diplomacy*, like using lies for political objectives, exploiting public diplomacy to pursue foreign policy, using propaganda, etc. might have been available and used in the past, yet the combination of all these elements at the same time in the post-truth era and, more importantly, the changes in the way of thinking, consuming and interacting in societies are both new phenomena, which is unprecedented in history. The main difference is that people are now more open and even welcoming toward lies, and prefer emotions to facts and logics, sometimes being happy to be deceived and misled. This fertile ground for other negative aspects might cultivate a hostile and aggressive objective for public diplomacy policy makers and practitioners compared to the past.

In *Antagonistic Public Diplomacy*, exploiting features of post-truth era, realities and truth are neither important, nor effective in storytelling, and a story can be composed of nowhere, and based on that narrative, an image of a potential reality is drawn up and this image and all stories built upon them move the situation, by

affecting the people, towards shaping of the reality in real world. That assumed, the objective of public diplomacy is not only displaying a positive image of a country or promoting soft power factors among a target nation. Its objective is to *forge reality* by exploiting public opinion in a target country to make changes in the foreign and domestic policies of that country. This is pursued through storytelling to the public based on characteristics of post-truth society and contents that are designed in a way that would touch those characteristics of people, such as emotion, paralyzing logical and rational behaviors as enumerated above.

In short, in post-truth era public diplomacy tends to be *Antagonistic* by being an aggressive and hostile approach that pursues destructive objectives against its target community, irrespective of one's self-image.

Considering all the discussions on characteristics of post-truth era and the way in which public diplomacy has changed in the current era, the coded model offered earlier seems to provide a model for analysis and recognition of antagonistic public diplomacy efforts. The PACT model is the first step to set out a review to understand if the practice is using a platform like mass media or social media, which address the public audience, and further find out which cohorts of people are being targeted by the public diplomacy action under review. Furthermore, the most important part is the content of the action and the message that is being delivered to the audience. Antagonistic public diplomacy contents are more inclined toward post-truth characteristics such as adhering to emotions and being less consistent with facts; they try to intrigue people's feelings, rather than providing them with objective contents. It is needless to say that this model needs further discussions and reviews by other scholars and researchers.

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Appendix

The following is application of PACT model to practices of public diplomacy of the United States which are all taken from the latest report of ACPD in 2022 reflecting activities and programs carried out under the fiscal year of 2021. (ACPD, 2022) For the sake of authenticity, descriptions for each project have been acquired from original sources and directly quoted here to avoid any misinterpretations and to give the opportunity to elaborate dimensions based on the original texts. Parts of the descriptions which demonstrate details of that program based on dimensions are underlined to clarify basis of categorizations.

1. YSEALI Regional Workshop on Diversity, Inclusion, and Youth Sponsored by PAS Kuala Lumpur

Description: The proposed workshop will focus on building local capacity within ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste to help participants advocate for and foster the implementation of organizational practices related to diversity and inclusion (D&I). Workshop sessions should be designed to introduce and operationalize best practices in this space that emphasize the power of D&I practices to instill greater acceptance and tolerance among communities, mitigate unconscious bias, stigma and discrimination in order to eventually stimulate steady growth, increase participation and productivity, and develop robust leadership and economic opportunities for all. The program will complement good governance initiatives and programs that emphasize respect for individual rights already underway within the Indo-Pacific region. Achieving community acceptance and tolerance for differences in gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, age, origin, and appearance remains a challenge in the ASEAN region. The value of diversity is often overlooked, and discrimination can occur in hiring and other selection processes. Despite the formulation of D&I frameworks within certain corporations, the actual implementation has yet to work its way through the

organizational layers and down to the functional level. This workshop will bring together practitioners from all levels of society and administration including NGOs, civil society, governments and experts to discuss challenges, develop action plans, and leverage opportunities for regional collaborations to foster the implementation of D&I practices. The workshop will be held in Malaysia, which is home to diverse cultures and international industries, including American businesses. (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=333644>)

Platform: Workshop

Audience: The youth in ASEAN nations and Timor-Leste, generally Indo-Pacific region

Category: Cultural diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy

Topic: Diversity and inclusion, good governance, individual rights, minorities (gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, age, origin, and appearance.)

2. 2021 Spring TechGirls International Summer Exchange

Description: TechGirls is a U.S.-based summer exchange program designed to empower and support young women (ages 15-17) from the United States and select countries around the world to pursue higher education and careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields through hands-on skills development training with American technologists. The centerpiece of the program is an approximately ten-day technology camp, hosted on a U.S. university campus, that provides participants with an in-depth examination of cutting-edge technologies and various educational and professional paths in STEM fields. The camp is complemented by additional activities such as site visits to technology companies, leadership workshops, job shadow experiences, community service opportunities, cultural/recreational events, and homestays with American families. As part of program follow-on, the TechGirls implement at least one peer training program or service project within their schools and/or communities. (<https://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/techgirls>)

Platform: Exchange program, workshop, exploration

Audience: Young women from US and select countries, participants' schools or communities' members (indirectly)

Category: Tech diplomacy, science diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, citizen diplomacy

Topic: Diversity and inclusion, good governance, individual rights, minorities (gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities, age, origin, and appearance.)

3. Community College Initiative Program

Description: The Community College Initiative Program (CCI) provides scholarships to spend up to one academic year at a United States community college. Participants build technical skills and may earn certificates in their fields of study. Through professional internships, service learning, and community engagement activities, participants strengthen English language proficiency and immerse themselves in the culture and day-to-day life in the United States. Participants study in one of the following eligible fields: agriculture, applied engineering, business management and administration, early childhood education, information technology, media, public safety, and tourism and hospitality management. CCI Program participants are recruited from historically underrepresented and underserved communities. After completing the program, participants return home with new skills and expertise to help them contribute to the economic growth and development of their country. The recruitment and nomination of candidates in the eligible countries is administered by the Fulbright Commission or the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy. CCI awards are not Fulbright awards. (<https://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/community-college-initiative-program>)

Platform: Exchange program, workshop, training, education, exploration

Audience: The youth at age 18 from select countries

Category: Science diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, citizen diplomacy

Topic: Various academic fields, development and growth, humanitarian support, language and culture

4. Women's History Month Celebrations Hosted by PAS Vientiane

Description: PAS Vientiane and USAID organized a panel discussion for Women's History Month in which four women leading local NGOs and significant development projects spoke frankly about the issues facing women in Laos. Their organizations work to promote human rights. in various fields, including strengthening disability rights, combating human trafficking, and facilitating girls' education. The leader highlighted women's self-esteem, patience, and leadership skills as keys to success in advocating for gender inclusivity. (ACPD, 2022)

Platform: Panel discussion

Audience: Women from Laos

Category: Cultural diplomacy

Topic: Women empowerment, girls education, human rights, gender equality, NGOs

5. Free to Run 10K

Description: The U.S. Consulate in Erbil organized a 10K race for women and girls from Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to mark the conclusion of a year-long Free to Run program, in coordination with Spirit of America. The program advanced Mission goals in support of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the promotion of peaceful coexistence. Working with women and girls from different ethnic and religious groups, many of whom reside in Internally Displaced Persons camps, Free to Run turned sport into a tool for female empowerment. (ACPD, 2022)

Platform: Sports event

Audience: Women and girls, refugees

Category: Sports diplomacy, cultural diplomacy

Topic: Women empowerment, human rights, gender equality, refugees

6. AWE and #StartAD Participants in Abu Dhabi

Description: The U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi implemented several programs to enable women to improve their opportunities as entrepreneurs. With #StartAD, an Abu Dhabi-based global accelerator powered by Tamkeen and anchored in NYU Abu Dhabi, the Embassy organized UAE editions of ECA's Academy for Women Entrepreneurs program in FY2020 and FY2021. The six-month programs provided forty-four women entrepreneurs with skills, resources, and networks needed to start and scale a successful business. As a result of the program, their businesses demonstrated growth, secured commercial agreements with UAE-based corporations, and expanded into Saudi Arabian and Qatari markets. (ACPD, 2022)

Platform: Education and Training

Audience: Women and girls, entrepreneurs in UAE

Category: Economic diplomacy, Tech diplomacy, science diplomacy

Topic: Women empowerment, entrepreneurship, business and startups

7. Psychosocial training in Jordan

Description: The U.S. Embassy in Amman collaborated on a grant with Mateen Rehabilitation and the Amman Comedy Club to deliver training to an inclusive group of 126 Jordanian and refugee youth on sketch comedy, impromptu and public speaking. The diverse slate of participants featured Jordanians and Syrian refugees, including men and women, from a variety of regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. This program provided young people with non-traditional means of psychosocial support, helping them to communicate challenging social issues (e.g., child marriage, child labor, generational conflict) in a way that promotes inclusion. (ACPD, 2022)

Platform: Education and Training

Audience: The Youth, refugees, Jordanians and Syrians

Category: Cultural diplomacy, media diplomacy

Topic: Social inclusion, psychosocial support, youth empowerment

8. “Profiles in Power” social media campaign

Description: To showcase and build support for the EB’s gender-focused programs worldwide, EB/EPPD launched “Profiles in Power,” a social media campaign that highlighted the impact of the bureau’s flagship initiative: Providing Opportunities for Women’s Economic Rise (POWER). EB/EPPD’s widely shared social media campaign illustrated the program’s success in training and mentoring female entrepreneurs in the Marshall Islands, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Indonesia, Jamaica, Montenegro, Ecuador, Papua New Guinea, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt. EB/EPPD also worked with the Bureau of Global Public Affairs to host a virtual panel discussion on how the Department of State and EB in particular partners with the private sector to implement the National Strategy on Gender and Equality. (ACPD, 2022)

Platform: Social media campaign, panel discussion

Audience: Women and girls, entrepreneurs, private sector

Category: Digital diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy

Topic: Women empowerment, gender equality, private sector and business

9. Rohingya Teachers in VOA Learning English Training Program at Refugee Camp in Bangladesh

Description: For many years, Voice of America has broadcast news programming in English and more than 40 local and regional languages. Additionally, VOA also broadcasts news content originally known as “Special English,” but now known as “Learning English.” These are news broadcasts in English with a limited vocabulary and read at a slower speed designed to inform listeners of world events while also improving their English-language skills. Such broadcasts continue but have recently been complemented by English language lessons at a variety of levels. To further foster English-language instruction, VOA has begun building custom curricula for a variety of partners and holding on-the-ground trainings. As

migration issues have become a leading news story, we realized that camp-based refugees could benefit from our content. We went to Bangladesh to begin an original curriculum for Rohingya refugees. (<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/good-practices/voa-learning-english-training-rohingya-refugee-teachers>)

Platform: Education, training of trainers

Audience: Refugees, teachers, other students and teachers (indirectly)

Category: Media diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy

Topic: Language, culture, refugees

10. Conservation of the 17th-Century Church in Moldova

Description: Chargé d’Affaires Laura Hruby together with the Minister of Culture Sergiu Prodan announced on September 27th the last phase of our joint effort to restore the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Church in Causeni. The Embassy provided an additional \$290,000 through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, bringing total U.S. support since 2016 to more than \$1 million. The project, a partnership between the U.S. and Moldovan governments, will preserve the unique church frescoes for future generations. The Archaeological Research Centre of the Republic of Moldova is in charge of the restoration. (<https://md.usembassy.gov/a-new-grant-to-restore-the-assumption-of-the-virgin-mary-church-in-causeni/>)

Platform: Operation project

Audience: Moldova nation

Category: Cultural diplomacy, religion diplomacy

Topic: Cultural heritage, religion