

# Mediated Public Diplomacy Redefined: Foreign Stakeholder Engagement via Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned Media

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## Abstract

Mediated public diplomacy literature examines the engagement of foreign audiences by governments via mediated channels. To date, scholars have examined the competitive contest between global rivals in promoting and contesting one another's frames as reflected in global news media coverage. Recognizing the meaningful impact of social media platforms, along with the global rise of government-sponsored media organizations, the current study builds on previous mediated public diplomacy scholarship by expanding the scope of the literature beyond the earned media perspective to also include paid, shared, and owned media. The article presents a revised definition of the term *mediated public diplomacy* along with a case study of government to foreign stakeholder engagement via the social media platform, Twitter.

## Keywords

public diplomacy, framing, social media, international relations, mediated public diplomacy

## Introduction

As an emergent multidisciplinary area of scholarship, public diplomacy draws from disciplines such as international relations, mass communication, political science, peace studies, and law (Gilboa, 2016). The term was originally coined in 1965 by

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former U.S. ambassador Edmund Gullion as an alternative term to Soviet propaganda that was widely used during the Cold War (Cull, 2010). In essence, public diplomacy refers to “the process by which international actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics” (Cull, 2008, p. 31). Or as Manheim (1994) explains, public diplomacy consists of “efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage” (p. 4).

Over subsequent decades, public diplomacy has been continuously redefined by scholars collectively attempting to establish a new academic field, ever adjusting to shifting political, social, and technological changes such as the end of the Cold War, the rise of globalization, the diffusion of the Internet along with social media, and the emergence of nongovernmental organizations as global players; the very definition of public diplomacy is continuously challenged. For some scholars, public diplomacy is focused on government engagement of foreign publics for the purpose of foreign policy support (Golan, 2015). Other scholars view public diplomacy in a wider perspective arguing that *new public diplomacy* also includes nonstate actors such as corporations, nongovernmental organizations, international governmental organizations, and even individuals (Melissen, 2005; Seib, 2009; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992).

The key challenge in defining public diplomacy is well articulated by Gregory (2016):

A stunning variety of definitions frame public diplomacy at different levels of abstraction. If the level of abstraction is too high, definitions lack relevance and the variables needed for successful research and practice. Definitions such as “winning hearts and minds” or “a government’s engagement with people” are problematic for these reasons. Alternatively, low levels of abstraction can oversimplify. (p. 7)

The lack of consensus regarding public diplomacy’s basic definition continues to undermine its development as an academic discipline. As argued by Gilboa (2008), scholars in public diplomacy ought to provide a more robust theoretical foundation to the field in order to clear the confusion and push the field forward. Over the past two decades, several public diplomacy taxonomies, models, and theoretical perspectives have been introduced by scholars (Cull, 2008; Entman, 2008; Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017; Gilboa, 2008; Golan, 2015), while others drew on public relations and mass communication theories to predict and explain some of the key relationship and reputation management functions of public diplomacy (Grunig, 1993; Tam & Kim, 2019; Yun, 2006) or its public opinion outcomes (Nisbet, Nisbet, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2004; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009; Stoycheff & Nisbet, 2016). While both approaches provide important contributions to the field’s continued development, public diplomacy is fundamentally undermined by the continuous lack of a clear organizing theoretical foundation that can guide its scholarship forward. There is, however, one concept and along with it an assumption that is ubiquitous in public diplomacy research: soft power.

## *Soft Power*

As originally conceived by Gullion, the practice of public diplomacy is focused on the cultivation of positive public opinion in foreign nations. Recognizing that publics, and within these elites, can at times influence their government's foreign policies (Gilboa, 2016), nations aspire to positively interact with the citizens of foreign nations. This central assumption serves as the bedrock of public diplomacy research and practice and is best represented by Joseph Nye's (2004) soft power concept. Soft power helps achieve desired outcomes in world politics through mutual agreement and cooperation (Nye, 1990). Understanding that both sticks and carrots are tactics of inducement, a nation's soft power draws rather on the attractiveness of that nation's culture, values, and foreign policies (Nye, 2008). To reach the desired foreign policy outcomes, nations can no longer rely on coercion alone and must turn to global cooperation. Central to global cooperation is a nation's legitimacy; Nye (2004) argues, "When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (p. 256).

The importance of the soft power approach to government engagement of foreign audiences is rooted in its stakeholder mapping. While traditional diplomacy is focused on foreign diplomats, public diplomacy aims to influence foreign governments through influencing both ordinary citizens along with foreign elites. This shift toward foreign stakeholder engagement has led many public diplomacy scholars to adapt the relationship-focused public relations literature to the study of soft power promotion (Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Yun, 2006; Zaharna, 2007).

As noted by Gilboa (2008), soft power is so central as a public diplomacy concept that the two are sometimes used interchangeably. A great part of public diplomacy scholarship has focused on such so-called soft power programs as educational and cultural exchanges, language education programs, art, sports, and even food diplomacy (Golan, 2015). Yet other important aspects of soft power such as its scope and potential outcomes are widely ignored by scholars (Hayden, 2012a).

The focus on interpersonal soft power tools, mechanisms, and programs has been identified by scholars, including Nye (2013) himself, as a key limitation of soft power scholarship. While soft power may at times help explain the potential of nations to influence foreign governments, it fails to provide the emergent area of public diplomacy scholarship with a robust theoretical underpinning (Entman, 2008; Gilboa, 2008). Scholars interested in mediated engagement of foreign publics by governments often turn to agenda setting and framing literature to provide a more robust theoretical perspective (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009).

## *Mediated Public Diplomacy*

As noted by Golan (2015), people-to-people programs such as educational and cultural exchanges, along with language programs, are viewed by many public diplomacy practitioners as leading ways to promote soft power among foreign publics. However, the vast majority of foreign citizens learn about foreign affairs from news media rather than from soft power programs. Thus, governments require alternative means to reach

significantly larger portions of foreign populations, and so enters international broadcasting to the field of public diplomacy. Where telecommunication platforms traditionally include television and radio broadcasters, the modern telecommunication landscape also includes digital platforms, such as websites, blogs, and social networking platforms, that equally mediate the public diplomacy communication process between governments and foreign audiences.

Nye (2008) points to both the potential and the danger involved in the promotion of soft power via mediated channels such as government-sponsored broadcasting and entertainment media. While the governments of Great Britain, the United States, Russia, Germany, and France have used government-sponsored media platforms for decades as platforms to promote their soft power and frames abroad, the global diffusion of satellite broadcasting technology opened the door for many new actors such as Qatar (Al Jazeera), Saudi Arabia (Al Arabiya), Iran (Press TV), and China (CGTN) to compete in this new media ecology where governments not only promote their own agendas but also often compete against their international rivals via both satellite television news and social media platforms. This new reality, where media play a key role in international relations, opens a new door to a wide array of scholarship that is focused on mediated public diplomacy.

As originally conceptualized by Entman (2008), mediated public diplomacy is “the organized attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of U.S. policy in foreign media” (p. 89). As put by Entman (1993),

To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52).

While framing literature tends to analyze the existence of frames in the media, little framing research has looked at the sources and reasons behind the creation and dissemination of such frames (Borah, 2011; Carragee & Roefs, 2004).

Thus, to research public diplomacy via framing is to approach the framework with more theoretical rigor. This is achieved by incorporating the anarchic power dynamics of the international system into determining not only *if* frames are selected and salient but also *by whom* the frames are constructed, *for what purpose* they are constructed, and *what effect* they have on foreign audiences (Miskimmon & O’Laughlin, 2017). While the literature has tended to research framing in static conditions—that is, one frame disseminated to a population—Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that to understand political communication it is necessary to investigate frame competition (Borah, 2011) or the extent to which two or more frames compete simultaneously for predominant acceptance in a population. Approaching the study of public diplomacy through framing is not only to optimize public diplomacy scholarship itself but also to contribute to the broader theoretical context of framing in political communication. As foreign citizens are exposed to news media coverage, they are offered “common

sense” interpretations of foreign affairs (Entman, 2003). Recognizing the meaningful agenda-setting potential of foreign news media coverage (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004), global framing competition has become a key component of international relations.

As governments attempt to shape and influence media coverage of foreign affairs, they often engage in strategic news management that aims to not only set the media agenda but also engage in frame building and promotion (Sheafer, Shenhav, Takens, & van Atteveldt, 2014). The rich body of literature on framing and frame promotion (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) is particularly salient to the study of international relations and public diplomacy, where governments actively promote and contest frames promoted by their global rivals as related to the newsworthiness and value salience of their foreign policies in the eyes of foreign stakeholders (Sheafer, Shenhav, & Amsalem, 2018).

To this extent, the current study draws on Entman’s (2004) operational definition of what constitutes a frame, including problem definition, attribution of responsibility, moral judgment, and recommended solution. These frame elements are particularly salient to media coverage of international affairs where audiences with high need for orientation depend on the news media to provide simple explanations for complex global issues. This is particularly true in times of international conflict when global actors attempt not only to justify their own policies but also to discredit the position of their international rivals (Ayalon, Papavoich, & Yarchi, 2014; Cheng, Golan, & Kioussis, 2015; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009), suggesting that frame building and promotion are as integral to the practice of mediated public diplomacy as is frame competition (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009).

The examination of frame competition is of particular salience to the modern international relations ecology where governments actively attempt to shape global public opinion via mediated channels. A wide body of scholarship has examined media frame building competition in the context of international conflicts or tensions between nations (Arif, Golan, & Mortiz, 2014; Sheafer et al., 2018; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). As explained by Sheafer and Gabay (2009), Entman’s (2008) understanding of framing as applied to international conflict allows audiences to identify what the global problem is, identify who is responsible for the problem, offer a moral evaluation of the global actors, and offer a solution. So, for example, while the United States defines its War on Terror in Iraq and Afghanistan as an attempt to bring freedom and democracy to the region, the opposing side frames U.S. involvement as an act of aggression and imperialism perpetrated by the United States, which aims to force its political and cultural values on foreign nations.

A review of the growing literature on mediated public diplomacy indicates that scholars mostly focus on governmental news management as expressed by the ability of governments to affect media framing of foreign affairs (Arif et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2015; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). The research highlights the importance of cultural and political congruence between involved actors in government and media, suggesting that frame building lends particular advantage to international *partners* rather than *rivals* (Sheafer et al., 2018; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). While governments often use a variety of information subsidies to try and promote their foreign policy frames in foreign media, mediated public diplomacy efforts expand beyond this.

At the time it was published, Entman's (2008) definition seemed all encompassing. However, the diffusion of social media platforms along with the prevalence of government-sponsored news media platforms, such as Russia's RT, China's CGTN, and Qatar's Al Jazeera, have changed the assumptions related to governmental attempts to shape and influence coverage of foreign policies in foreign media. No longer focused exclusively on *earned media* strategies, governments include *paid advertising* (Fullerton, Kendrick, & Kerr, 2009; Golan & Viatchaninova, 2014; Zaharna, 2010), *owned media* such as government-sponsored media in most nonfree states (Chang & Lin, 2014; Fahmy, Wanta, & Nisbet, 2012; Rawnsley, 2015; Samuel-Azran & Pecht, 2014), and *shared media* via social media channels (Golan & Himelboim, 2016; Kampf, Manor, & Segev, 2015; Seib, 2012) in their media mix.

Realizing that Entman's original conceptualization fails to capture the centrality of social media and broadcasting channels as platforms for frame promotion and distribution, we offer this revised definition of mediated public diplomacy that builds on Entman's (2008) original conception while updating it to reflect the modern global media landscape:

Mediated public diplomacy refers to the organized attempts by governments to influence foreign public opinion via mediated channels including paid, earned, owned and shared media for the purpose of gaining support for its foreign policy objectives.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

A review of scholarship on mediated public diplomacy indicates that its main focus is on governmental attempts at news management of the framing of its foreign policy by elite newspapers and television. However, the diffusion of social media platforms allows governments to partially bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly engage foreign publics via platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The proliferation of government-sponsored social media tactics has facilitated the emergence of scholarship known as digital diplomacy.

According to Cassidy and Manor (2016), digital diplomacy relates to diplomats' use of a plethora of information and communication technologies ranging from e-mails to smartphone applications, messaging applications, and social media sites. The migration of governments to social media were intrinsically linked to diplomats' need to frame events, actors, and issues in a new global media ecology brought about by social media platforms (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). Conceptually, digital diplomacy falls under the umbrella of mediated public diplomacy as it deals with owned and shared media platforms and content, complimenting government use of earned and paid media strategies.

The multitude of platforms through which governments can engage foreign publics has opened the door to new actors and, to an extent, has diminished the influence of traditional gatekeepers resulting in more competitive frame competition between international actors. Indeed, since the mass political adoption of owned and social content platforms, governments soon realized that social media sites constituted an

intensified competitive framing arena in which the frames of one actor could immediately be negated by those of another (Hayden, 2012b). This led to the adoption of new practices such as framing events as they unfold in near-real time, thereby competing with the frames disseminated by media institutions, citizen journalists, and other diplomatic actors (Cassidy & Manor, 2016).

Yet governments also employ social media to shape how journalists view the world and report on it. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) dedicates substantial digital resources to reshaping the media's depiction of Poland's role in Nazi atrocities during World War II. The MFA and Polish embassies around the world monitor global publications and demand they label concentration camps as *Nazi camps on occupied Polish territory* as opposed to *Polish concentration camps*. In so doing, the Polish MFA hopes to distance Poland from Nazi crimes and associate Poland with positive values such as multiculturalism and tolerance. Similarly, the Russian embassy in London routinely tags British publications in its tweets hoping that these will take note of Russian statements and adopt Russia's framing of events and issues (Cassidy & Manor, 2016). These activities suggest that diplomats still aim to interact with journalists and shape journalists' reporting. As such, Entman's (2004) cascading activation model has only been partially disrupted by digital technologies (Manor & Crilley, 2018).

The competitive nature of social media framing is best manifest during times of conflict and crises. This is because crises see a credible threat to the national interest of a country. By turning to social media, and framing events and actors, governments can try to influence how domestic and foreign populations make sense of a crisis that comprises rapidly changing circumstances and high levels of uncertainty. Moreover, governments can use social media to frame and market their desired resolution to a crisis among social media users, citizen journalists, and global media institutions. Importantly, social media framing may be most potent during times of crises as publics scramble to make sense of events, while journalists are likely to "rally around the flag" and adopt the government's framing of events (Auerbach & Bloch-Elkon, 2005; Bloch-Elkon, 2007). Yet a government's framing is confounded by the fact that other actors involved in the crisis will offer their own narration of events leading to a frame competition.

To date, few studies have investigated governmental use of social media for real-time framing during times of crises. One notable example is Manor and Crilley's (2018) analysis of the Israeli MFA's framing of the 2014 Gaza War. Their study found that the MFA used social media to frame Hamas as an extension of Daesh—thus, morally delegitimizing Hamas. Moreover, the MFA created a clear moral dichotomy between Hamas, who uses citizens as human shields, and Israel, which shields its citizens. The centrality of morality in the MFA's framing stems from the fact that morality breeds legitimacy on the international stage. Countries that are seen as promoting positive values such as democracy and human rights are less likely to encounter resistance to their foreign policies, even if these include the use of hard power (Natarajan, 2014; Quelch & Jocz, 2009). Last, Manor and Crilley (2018) found that the Israeli MFA marketed the military invasion of Gaza as the only possible response to the threat

of Hamas rockets targeting Israeli cities. Thus, Israel used social media framing to constrain the actions of Hamas while increasing its own latitude.

While Manor and Crilley's (2018) analysis offers insight into governmental framing during crises, it does not investigate the competitive nature of social media framing. Moreover, their analysis fails to elucidate if, and how, one actor responds to the framing of another. Last, Manor and Crilley did not demonstrate how government frames integrate rapidly changing circumstances into their framing of events. This study aims to address these substantial gaps by analyzing Twitter framing competitions between the U.S. and the Russian governments during the 2014 Crimean crisis. The crisis was deemed a relevant case study as it saw a direct confrontation between the national interests of the United States and Russia. From Russia's perspective, the fall of the Yanukovich government limited Russia's ability to manage its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. From America's perspective, Russia's stealth invasion of Crimea could not go unanswered as that would only lead to further territorial incursions in Europe. Moreover, the Crimean crisis was selected as it saw an online confrontation between the United States and Russia, which are among the most active and followed foreign ministries on Twitter (Kampf et al., 2015; Manor & Pamment, in press). In addition to attracting other diplomatic institutions, both the Russian and the U.S. government attract a global audience to their profiles, including media institutions, citizen journalists, and social media users looking to make sense of the world around them.

## **Methodology**

While the majority of previous studies on mediated public diplomacy focus on frame building in traditional news, which constitutes earned media, the current study examines government frame building on the Twitter platform that represents a form of owned and shared media. The current study uses an inductive framing analysis (Manor & Crilley, 2018) to examine the competitive nature of frame building competition between two international superpowers during an instance of international conflict. The study analyzed all Crimea-related tweets published by the U.S. State Department and the Russian MFA between December 4, 2013, and March 30, 2014. This time frame was elected as it saw the onset and escalation stages of the Crimean crisis beginning with the fall of the pro-Russian government and ending with the annexation of Crimea to the Russian federation. The analysis of the Crimean crisis included 510 tweets published by the Russian MFA and 260 tweets published by the U.S. State Department resulting in a sample of 761 tweets. Tweets published during December 2013 were gathered by one of the authors who visited both governmental Twitter profiles on a daily basis. During each visit, all tweet published over a 24-hour period were stored by capturing screen images of governmental Twitter feed. All tweets published between January and March 2014 were scraped using the TwimeMachine application, which enables users to access the 3,200 most recent tweets published by any public Twitter account.



## *Operationalizing and Identifying Government Frames*

Following Manor and Crilley's (2018) example, all Russian and U.S. tweets were segmented into weekly clusters given the assumption that both governments would continuously create and disseminate new frames given the need to comment on rapidly changing circumstances. Identifying the frames disseminated by both governments was achieved using an inductive approach to framing analysis in which frames arise from the research corpus itself (De Vresse, 2005). Notably, frames were defined as consisting of the four elements identified by Entman (1993): a problem definition, a moral evaluation, a causal attribution, and a suggested remedy.

In the first stage of analysis, all tweets published during a given week were analyzed so as to detect tweets that identified the problem at the root of the Crimean crisis. Next, all remaining tweets were categorized based on the problems they addressed. This was necessary given that during some weeks both governments identified more than one problem driving events in Ukraine. Once all tweets were categorized based on the problems they addressed, they were classified into tweets that offer a moral evaluation, a causal attribution, and a suggested remedy. In this way, the frames articulated by each government were identified. Table 1 demonstrates how tweets published during the second week of the crisis created a frame.

## **Results**





### *Week 1: December 4 to 12, 2013*

December 2013 saw great civil unrest in Ukraine as pro-European Union (EU) protesters demanded that the Yanukovich-led government sign a trade agreement with the EU. That week saw a rapid escalation in tensions between protestors and the government as some 300,000 protestors gathered in Kiev's Independence Square, while activists seized the City Hall building.

According to the Russian MFA, the tense stalemate in Kiev was an internal issue that should be resolved by Ukrainian leaders and in accordance with the Ukrainian constitution. The problem leading to the stalemate was violent altercations between the opposition and the security forces; the cause was the "aggressive" actions taken by the pro-EU opposition. The labeling of the opposition as aggressive in nature offered a moral evaluation as activists were depicted as preventing a peaceful resolution to the stalemate. The solution proposed by the Russian MFA was twofold: first, both sides were urged to begin settlement talks and seek a constitutional resolution to the stalemate, and second, outside parties such as the EU were urged not to interfere in the Ukrainian internal affairs.

According to the U.S. State Department, the problem at the core of the stalemate was the government's violent response to pro-EU protests, while the cause of the stalemate was the government's decision to break into opposition offices and intimidate activists. The moral evaluation stated that such behaviors do not befit a democracy.

**Table 1.** Example of the Four Dimensions of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Frame.

Frame Dimension	Example
<p><b>Problem Definition</b></p>	
<p><b>Causal Attribution</b></p>	
<p><b>Moral Evaluation</b></p>	
<p><b>Suggested Remedy</b></p>	

Last, the U.S. State Department argued that the solution was for the government to listen to the people of Ukraine and enter into dialogue with the opposition.

The analysis of the first week of the Crimean crisis demonstrates that the Russian and the U.S. governments offered two very different accounts of events unfolding in Kiev. The two governments offered different problem definitions, causal attributions, and moral evaluations. In fact, both offered competing frames, with the United States

laying the blame for the violence on the government and Russia laying the blame on the opposition. However, both governments agreed that the best way forward was direct talks between both parties.

### *Week 2: December 12 to 19, 2013*

During the second week, a tense standoff emerged in Kiev. In its wake, the Russian MFA disseminated a new frame stating that the problem driving events in Ukraine was the EU's meddling in internal Ukrainian affairs. Thus, the MFA shifted the blame from the pro-EU opposition to the EU itself. The cause of the upheaval was the EU's attempt to force Ukraine to choose whether to associate itself with the EU or with Russia. A moral evaluation stated that the logic of peace should govern the actions of states rather than "outdated methods" of geopolitical struggles. The MFA thus depicted Russia's foreign policy as resting on the principles of cooperation and the EU's policy as resting on the use of force. The MFA stated that the only solution to the upheaval was to respect the sovereignty of Ukraine. The United States did not publish any tweets dealing with events in Ukraine during the second week. It was thus assumed that the U.S. State Department still laid the blame for the violence on the government. As such, both MFAs offered competing frames with one depicting events as a gross violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and the other focusing on the nondemocratic methods of the Ukrainian government.

### *Week 3: January 14 to February 1, 2014*

The third week saw the Ukrainian parliament pass and repeal a controversial antiprotest bill. While the original bill sought to outlaw antigovernment protests, it was soon replaced with new legislation offering amnesty to all protestors should they abandon the seized government buildings. This week also saw increased tensions in Kiev as three protesters were killed by security forces leading to widespread clashes throughout the city. During this week, both governments continued to employ frames that were previously introduced with Russia focusing on the EU and the United States on the Ukrainian government. However, this week was the first in which the frames of both governments differed in all four dimensions with each offering a different problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and suggested remedy. This could suggest that the framing competition between both governments was escalating as events in Kiev were rapidly unfolding and would soon threaten the interest of both the United States and Russia.

### *Week 4: February 1 to 6, 2014*

The first week of February saw continued clashes in Kiev. While violence spread out across the city, the Russian MFA argued that such clashes could not be resolved so long as the EU attempted to coerce the Ukraine into signing a trade agreement. The MFA stated that such coercion demonstrated the West's lack of respect for Ukrainian

sovereignty and its right to determine its own path. This was also a moral evaluation that depicted the West as failing to respect basic principles of statehood. The solution was constructive dialogue between Russia and Ukraine and respecting Ukraine's right to determine its future.

The U.S. State Department did not publish any Crimea-related tweets during this week. It was thus assumed that the United States still viewed the clashes in Kiev as stemming from the Yanukovich government's undemocratic legislation. Notably, during this week, Russia expanded its critique of the EU to the "West" overall. This terminology may have been introduced to help social media followers make sense of the crisis by analyzing it through a familiar historical template—that of West versus East.

### ***Week 5: February 12 to 19, 2014***

The fifth week of the crisis saw a rapid succession of events in Ukraine as violent clashes left 18 protestors dead. These clashes erupted given parliament's inability to pass constitutional reforms and limit presidential powers prompting activists to seize more government buildings. The rapid succession of events were soon manifest on the Russian MFA's Twitter profile as it employed two frames. During the first part of the week, the MFA continued to argue that EU meddling was the problem aggravating tensions in Kiev in a process that defied the logic of peace. During the second part of the week, the MFA introduced a new frame according to which the problem driving events in Ukraine was that street violence had replaced democratic deliberations. The cause of the violence was the opposition that was branded by the MFA as "ultranationalist"—thus constituting a moral evaluation. The solution was to support the legitimate government of Ukraine and not the nationalist opposition. By the end of the week, the Russian MFA alleged that the neo-Nazi opposition was actually attempting to stage a coup d'état in Kiev.

During this week, the United States did not publish Crimea-related tweets. As opposed to the United States, the Russian MFA not only framed the crisis but also continuously adapted its frames to unfolding events thus practicing a form of real-time framing. By narrating rapidly evolving events, the Russian MFA may have been more influential as opposed to the U.S. State Department, which failed to serve as an important information source for its followers. Notably, by labeling the opposition as "neo-Nazis," the Russian MFA created an association with Russian historical frames given that opposition to the Nazi regime is an integral part of Russian collective memory. Here again, the MFA used historical templates to make sense of events in Ukraine.

### ***Week 6: February 20 to 27, 2014***

The sixth week was one of the bloodiest in Kiev's history as 88 protestors were killed and many more wounded in clashes with security forces. On February 20, Yanukovich fled Kiev for Russia. The following day, the opposition leader was released from jail, while on February 23, the Ukrainian parliament assigned temporary presidential power to the parliament's chairman, and a date was set for presidential elections. On February

25, a pro-Russian activist was appointed leader of the Sevastopol region. As pro-Russian rallies took place throughout Crimea, clashes erupted between pro-Russian and Pro-EU protesters.

During the first part of this week, the Russian MFA continued to employ the two frames introduced earlier. But during the second part of the week, the MFA altered its neo-Nazi coup frame and offered a new solution—that the opposition should honor an agreement it signed with the government on February 21, which called for democratic reforms and new presidential elections. By the end of the week, the Russian MFA disseminated another frame according to which the problem driving events in Ukraine was the government's infringement on the rights of Russian minorities in Eastern Ukraine. The cause was "Russophobic" behavior that included the desecration of monuments to Russia's victory in World War II and a ban prohibiting Russian TV stations from broadcasting in Ukraine. The moral evaluation stated that the human rights of Russian minorities were being violated, while the solution was to avoid religion-based conflict in Ukraine.

By contrast, the U.S. State Department disseminated a new frame at the beginning of the week suggesting that the cause of the upheaval in Kiev was that street democracy had replaced deliberations in democratic institutions. The moral evaluation stated that the rights of people to protest must be respected, while the solution was direct talks between conflicted parties. Following the fleeing of President Yanukovich, the U.S. State Department introduced the "Restoring Democracy" frame. The problem identified was that violence had replaced national dialogue; the cause was a reliance on violence by both the opposition and the security forces, while the moral evaluation suggested that the new government should adopt the logic of dialogue. The solution included holding new elections.

The analysis of Week 6 demonstrates the speed with which both governments updated and altered their frames in response to unfolding events. At times, new frames were created within hours of events taking place. Moreover, throughout this week, the frames of both governments were radically different as their competition grew fiercer with each side positively or negatively depicting events in Ukraine. According to the U.S. State Department, Ukraine was about to enter a new and more democratic era. According to the Russian MFA, Ukraine was the sight of egregious human rights violations.

### *Week 7: February 27 to March 4, 2014*

The seventh week of the crisis saw the initial disintegration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Armed pro-Kremlin activists seized government buildings and airfields in Crimea, the Russian parliament approved the use of military force in Crimea, and Vladimir Putin expressed the right to safeguard the lives of Russian minorities in Eastern Ukraine. This rapid succession of events led the Russian MFA to disseminate five different frames. Four of these had been introduced earlier and argued that Russia should protect the lives of ethnic minorities. Yet the MFA also added a new frame in which events in Ukraine posed a threat to Russian interests. The problem

was the disintegration of Ukrainian institutions and the breakdown of civil order. The lawlessness enabled by the new extremist government threatened Russian personnel and military installation in Eastern Ukraine. The moral evaluation urged actors to disassociate themselves from the opposition, as Russia had done, while the solution was direct talks between the Russian and the Ukrainian governments.

Similarly, the U.S. State Department employed several frames; at first, the U.S. State Department continued to employ "Restoring Democracy," introduced earlier. During the second part of the week, and following Russia's actions in Crimea, the U.S. State Department introduced a new frame calling on Russia to "Respect for Ukraine's Territorial Integrity." According to this frame, the problem at the root of the crisis was now Russian incursions into Eastern Ukraine. The cause was Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, while the moral evaluation stated that Russia's military actions risked further aggravating the crisis. The response was twofold: first, Russia needed to de-escalate tensions and withdraw all troops from Eastern Ukraine; second, the United States warned that there would be costs to Russia's incursion into Crimea. By the end of the week, the United States introduced another frame according to which Russia had violated international law by invading and occupying Eastern Ukraine. Thus, the U.S. State Department then depicted Russia's actions as a full-scale occupation rather than a mere military incursion. The solution was the international isolation of Russia should it refuse to withdraw from Ukraine. This isolation was manifested at the end of the week when the G8 group of nations became the G7 following Russia's expulsion.

## **Discussion**

The current study aims to build and advance scholarship on mediated public diplomacy in several ways. It offers a new definition of mediated public diplomacy that incorporates not only the news management function identified by Entman (2008) but also modern media engagement tactics including paid, earned, owned, and shared content. The study also bridges the scholarship on digital diplomacy, arguing that this new area deals with a subset of mediated public diplomacy, as defined by the current study. To create this conceptual bridge, the study provides a case study of elite frame competition between U.S. and Russian Twitter accounts regarding the Crimean conflict.

The results of an inductive framing analysis point to several key findings. First, while both governments disseminated distinct frames, they did not attempt to discredit those frames promoted by their rivals. This is inconsistent with previous mediated public diplomacy studies examining frame competition during times of crisis (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). A potential explanation for the lack of interaction between frames may be that responding to an adversary's frames would partially legitimize such claims and increase their reach online. Had the U.S. State Department created a frame that glorified the Ukrainian opposition and argued that they were not neo-Nazis, it would have engaged in direct competition with the Russian MFA and exposed more users to Russia's core arguments.

A second key finding points to the reactive nature of frame promotion via social media platforms. Namely, the data showed that both the United States and the Russian

governments often changed frame schemes multiple times within the span of one week. This illustrates the fluid nature of a 24-hour audience-driven medium where governments compete with rivals and with elite media to promote foreign policy frames. Our findings suggest the need for governments to proactively engage in social listening and environmental scanning to stay abreast of issue evolution and respond as such issues change in real time. The importance of social media analytics in a competitive mediated public diplomacy environment highlights the need for a revisited definition of the concept itself from Entman's (2008) original conceptualization to the one offered by the current article.

Additionally, morality and moral evaluations played a key role in the crafting of dominant frames. Namely, both the U.S. and the Russian frames portrayed themselves as defending humanitarian interests and respecting state sovereignty. This aligns with soft power literature suggesting that the goal of mediated public diplomacy is to make a state desirable and influential by making itself look increasingly legitimate in the eyes of global public opinion: "When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (Nye, 2004, p. 256).

Recognizing the power of traditional and social media in modern foreign affairs, scholars argue that mediated public diplomacy research can be best contextualized through such mass communication theories as agenda setting and framing (Golan, 2015; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). Where international relations scholars recognize the value and importance of governmental agenda and frame building, they conceive of such behavior through a different lens. Namely, the related concept of *strategic narrative* (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017; Miskimmon, O'Laughlin, & Roselle, 2013) is becoming prevalent in international relations. Strategic narrative details the storytelling frameworks countries use in their communication strategies. Such narratives rely heavily on a country's social identity, as a product of its historical past, to create an interpretation of events that fits, and ideally benefits, the country's perceptions of its own actions abroad. U.S. and Russian frames were found in this study to correspond with each country's strategic narratives. Russia depicted its fight in Ukraine as part of its historic opposition to fascism, while the U.S. State Department argued that the United States was aiding a fledgling democracy. This shows that governments use historical templates to make sense of the present, which in turn can increase the potency of the frames.

Based largely in an international media ecology that is overly saturated with narratives of current and historical events, from governments, to international organizations, to the news media, to private corporations, to individual elites, and to mass public opinion, countries must successfully navigate elite competitive environments (Chong & Druckman, 2007) filled with frame competition (Borah, 2011) for their strategic narratives to influence opinion formation (Chong & Druckman, 2007) and ultimately modify the public expectations of a given country (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Though public diplomacy consists of the way in which a state communicates its narratives of itself to foreign audiences, the subfield of mediated public diplomacy is the manner in which this narrative-based function is carried out through mediated broadcast platforms. And although public diplomacy is not synonymous with strategic

narratives, both articulate reciprocal pieces of one communication process wherein state actors seek to engage mass foreign audiences.

## Conclusion

In a digital information environment that is increasingly saturated with a host of stakeholders due to the rising prominence of owned and shared media content, the role of mediated public diplomacy has never been more important. Engaging both domestic and foreign publics, mediated public diplomacy allows governments to bypass traditional gatekeepers and promote their foreign policy frames in an attempt to influence public opinion both domestically and abroad (Stoycheff & Nisbet, 2016). The results of the current study suggest not only that the conceptual perspective of mediated public diplomacy (Entman, 2008) needs to be revitalized for an era of statecraft in socially networked cyberspace but also that such study is simultaneously taking place in the fields of political mass communication and international relations. Therefore, moving forward, both the mass communication and the political science academies must be willing to engage more deeply in interdisciplinary research to optimally study and understand how state actors of the 21st century are using social media platforms to engage foreign populations in competitive agenda and frame building.

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