

Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual and Practical Connections

Kathy Fitzpatrick, J.D., Jami Fullerton, Ph.D. and Alice Kendrick, Ph.D.

Conceptual and practical connections between public relations and public diplomacy, or the process by which governments communicate and build relationships with foreign publics in pursuit of political objectives, have been observed by scholars in both fields. Yet, there is little empirical evidence demonstrating similarities and/or differences in the two disciplines. This study helped to fill that gap through comparative analyses of the knowledge and skills considered important for success in each profession and in effective practices. Although some differences were revealed, the data provided evidence that perceived conceptual and practical links between public relations and public diplomacy are real. The research indicated significant potential for public relations concepts and practices to inform thinking and practices in public diplomacy, particularly in the area of research and evaluation. At the same time, insights gained by public diplomats working in international environments could be valuable to global public relations practitioners.

Introduction

“Public diplomacy is not public relations,” contended Matthew Armstrong (2009), in calling for a more robust U.S. public diplomacy on his blog MountainRunner.us. Armstrong (2009), who served briefly as executive director of the Congressionally-appointed U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, argued, “The power to engage global audiences is a national security imperative and must not be a mere tool of public relations,” which he referred to as “simply promoting ideas and values.”

This view of public relations as a promotional or publicity tool is not uncommon among public diplomacy practitioners, who have long attempted to distance themselves and their work from what many believe to be a business marketing function ill-suited to diplomatic endeavors (see, e.g., Floyd, 2007). As one former director of America’s public diplomacy agency observed, U.S. public diplomacy officials reject “the sometimes captivating but superficial notion that [the agency’s] goal should be to simply win friends and influence people. There is, we submit, a considerable difference between responsible and representative public diplomacy (which we advocate) and public relations (which we reject)” (quoted in Pederson, 1977, p. 20).

Those more familiar with public relations argue that such views are both uninformed and out of line with contemporary thinking and practices in the field. For example, in response to Armstrong’s post, one writer suggested that “PD practitioners don’t seem to understand PR, or are so eager not to be tarred with that brush that they cling to the conceit of distinction regardless of fact” (Armstrong, 2009). Another like-minded respondent pointed out that many of the areas Armstrong “referred to as public diplomacy are in fact a core

part of various PR strategies,” demonstrating that “PD sits comfortably as a specialization of PR” (Armstrong, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to identify conceptual and practical similarities and differences in public relations and public diplomacy. The study involved comparative analyses of the knowledge and skills considered important for success in each field and effective practices in each area. Although conceptual and practical connections – as well as some differences – have been observed by scholars in both fields, there is little empirical evidence supporting such observations. This study helps to fill that gap through a comparison of data from the *USIA Alumni Study*,¹ which identified professional credentials (knowledge and skills) and practices important to success in public diplomacy with contemporary thinking and practices in public relations. In examining the links between public relations and public diplomacy, the study responded to Stromback and Kiouisis’ (2011) call for integrative research that seeks to understand the processes through which an organization or actor, in political contexts or for political purposes, “seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (p. 8).

Literature Review

Much like public relations, public diplomacy lacks a clear and coherent and widely agreed upon definition. One popular definition is: “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies” (Tuch, 1990, p.3). Another is “the art of communicating with foreign publics to influence international perceptions, attitudes and policies” (Waller, p. 19). Yet another is “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented” (Sharp, 2005, p. 106).

Despite seemingly obvious parallels with public relations, few scholars had considered conceptual and practical connections between public relations and public diplomacy before September 11, 2001. Signitzer and Coombs observed in 1992 that although governments are recognized as actors in international relations, “the theoretical and practical public relations literature has been conspicuously silent about this issue” (p. 138). These scholars noted that “[p]ublic relations and public diplomacy people often pursue the same objective – to affect public opinion for the benefit of their client/organization” (p. 130). This “natural process of convergence,” they contended, “should be cultivated and not ignored,” particularly since neither field was fully equipped to handle the new demands created by new technology and the increasing influence of non-state actors in global affairs.

L’Etang (1996) similarly found “clear overlaps” in three shared functions in public relations and public diplomacy – “representational (rhetoric, oratory, advocacy), dialogic (negotiation, peacemaking) and advisory (counseling)” (p. 15). She cited the “boundary spanning role of both parties, which sees them crossing cultures (whether organizational

¹ The *USIA Alumni Study*, initially reported in 2010, surveyed members of the United States Information Agency Alumni Association, which included public diplomats who conducted public diplomacy throughout the world on behalf of the U.S. government for nearly half a century from 1953 to 1999 (see Fitzpatrick, 2010). The organization later changed its name to the Public Diplomacy Alumni Association.

or national) and bridging cultural gaps” (p. 16), as well as “interpretative and presentational roles” in which “both attempt to manage communication about issues” (p. 16). At the same time, L’Etang (2008) suggested that differences in the two disciplines also should be examined in efforts to identify ways in which the respective disciplines might inform and advance the other.

Following 9/11, an increasing number of scholars from several disciplines began to explore links between the two fields. For example, Kruckeberg and Vujnovic (2005) proposed that the United States reject “propaganda or market-oriented advocacy” and “practice true public diplomacy, which should rely not only on political theory and the theories of international relations, but also on theories and models of public relations that are based on two-way symmetrical communications and community-building” (p. 296). Dutta-Bergmann (2006) suggested that a public relations approach to public diplomacy based on dialogue and respect for mutual values and designed to promote understanding between cultures would be most effective for U.S. public diplomacy going forward. In contemplating a “new” (post-9/11) public diplomacy, Melissen (2005) observed that “the modus operandi of the new public diplomacy [in foreign ministries throughout the world] is not entirely different from the public relations approach” (p. 21). Signitzer and Wamser (2006) pointed out that public relations and public diplomacy are both “strategic communication functions of either organisations or nation-states, and typically deal with the reciprocal consequences a sponsor and its publics have upon each other” (p. 41).

In noting that public diplomacy’s “roots are in the persuasion industries of PR, marketing, and advertising,” Snow (2009) argued that “there is a need to examine public diplomacy and public relations in a comparative context of what we are doing” since “public diplomacy includes intercultural communication theory and practice as well as public relations best practices” (p. 10). Snow pointed specifically to the relational focus of contemporary public relations practices, as reflected in the excellence theory of public relations (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006), as a possible future foundation for public diplomacy.

In considering public relations’ potential contribution to contemporary thinking and practices in public diplomacy, Fitzpatrick (2007) proposed that relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003) could provide a sound conceptual foundation for ethically and effectively achieving a nation’s foreign affairs objectives. A relational paradigm, she suggested, would provide both a defining worldview characterized by symmetry and mutuality and a unifying, holistic framework to support the strategic dimensions of public diplomacy. Pigman and Deos (2008) similarly argued that governments could benefit from both the methods and techniques of public relations and also from working directly with external public relations and political communications professionals. “As the global media environment becomes more competitive and global publics gain greater access to streams of information,” they contended, “it is becoming progressively more difficult to undertake public diplomacy successfully on their own” (p. 87).

In one of few empirical studies examining connections between public relations and public diplomacy, Yun (2006) tested the excellence theory through a survey of foreign public diplomats based in Washington, DC, on matters related to public diplomacy management and behaviors. The results indicated potential for public relations theories to contribute to

the advancement of public diplomacy theory, as well as to deepen understanding of “how and why nations practice and manage public diplomacy as they do” (p. 308).

Expressing a more cautionary note about a possible merger of public relations and public diplomacy, Van Dyke and Vercic (2009) observed that the post-9/11 integration of public relations and public diplomacy in strategic communication efforts “suggest[s] a practical convergence that is moving beyond a theoretical explanation” (p. 822). Such movement, they argued, “could erode and threaten the integrity of public relations and public diplomacy” (p. 822). In particular, they said, the involvement of these functions in psychological and military information operations could threaten the credibility and efficacy of both fields.

In an effort to assess the status and scope of public diplomacy research by public relations scholars, including the extent to which public relations scholars have contributed to theory building in public diplomacy, Vanc and Fitzpatrick (2012) conducted a review of published works on public diplomacy topics by public relations scholars from 1990-2010. The results revealed ways in which “public relations concepts can be not only transferred to public diplomacy scholarship, but applied, tested and recommended as workable theoretical frameworks in the academic and practical domains of public diplomacy.” At the same time, these researchers found neither a discernible “public diplomacy worldview” nor “a coherent and integrated research agenda that would help to build knowledge of how and why public diplomacy works the way it works – and how it might be improved.”

Scholars in political public relations also have cited the need for research that would recognize public relations role in international political endeavors and bridge the gap between public relations and public diplomacy. For example, Stromback and Kiousis (2011) observed that “[p]ublic diplomacy efforts are recognized as a major part of successful international relations among nations and political public relations activities are a key component of these activities” (p. 322). Molleda (2011) extended this thinking to include transnational corporations that operate within complex political environments that require them to attend to the expectations and legislation of multiple governments (p. 288). In such an environment, he said, “[p]ublic relations theories and teachings are easy to extrapolate” (p. 290).

Macnamara (2012), on the other hand, suggested that public relations may have more to learn from public diplomacy. He pointed out that while the “fields of international relations and political science are primarily dismissive of any comparison and any theoretical or practical overlap between the fields,” public relations scholars have focused mostly on how public relations concepts and principles could be applied in public diplomacy contexts (p. 312). Macnamara compared key concepts from the “new” diplomacy (Riordan, 2003) to public relations as defined in excellence theory (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2006), finding “strong parallels and common ground” between the two fields, as well as “significant differences” (p. 321). According to Macnamara (2012), unique aspects of public diplomacy include the use of interpersonal communication, techniques for addressing relational power imbalances, formal protocols for resolving conflicts, negotiation skills, recognition and acceptance and plurality in interests and views, and a long-term focus. As a result, he said, “PR should embrace public diplomacy concepts and principles to develop new ways

of thinking and new practices that are “more effective, more societally-oriented, more ethical, and ultimately more publicly-accepted” (p. 322).

Research exploring “mediated public diplomacy” (Entman, 2008) – or organized attempts by a government to influence the framing of that government’s policy in foreign media– revealed additional insights into the possible cross-fertilization of public relations and public diplomacy. In applying a domestic media framing model to international communication, Entman (2008) suggested that public diplomacy processes might be improved by “active engagement and empathy with audiences, rather than simply making pronouncements to them” (p. 100). Recognizing that modern public relations theory assumes that organizational goals are best accomplished through symmetric rather than asymmetrical communication, he said, “the goals of mediated public diplomacy might be better conceived not as promoting unconditional support of [a nation] but rather *mutual understanding*” [*emphasis in original*] (p. 100).

Knowledge and Skills

In both public relations and public diplomacy, the diverse backgrounds of successful professionals, combined with the broad scope of responsibilities in each field, make it difficult to define precisely the capabilities *required* for success in these disciplines. Although public diplomacy lags behind public relations in constructing a profile of the successful professional (Fitzpatrick, 2010), some progress has been made in both camps to identify the knowledge and skills important to professional success.

In public relations, the national Commission on Public Relations Education – representing leading educators and practitioners – has played a leadership role in offering research-based recommendations for education and training in public relations. The Commission’s (2006) recommendations on the capabilities important to professional success are presented as “objectives for excellence as identified by a cadre of distinguished professionals and educators” in the public relations field (p. 5). The Commission (2006) report on undergraduate education identified the knowledge and skills that should be taught in the undergraduate curriculum and supplemented with practical experience in the field. In 2012, the Commission released a similar report focused on graduate education.

Combined, the undergraduate and graduate curricula emphasize four broad categories of knowledge and skills deemed important:

- 1) Communication / Relationship-building
- 2) Management
- 3) Multicultural / Global, and
- 4) Research / History.

For a complete list, see Table 1.

Table1. Knowledge and Skills Important to Professional Success in Public Relations

<p>Category 1: Communication/Relationship-building Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies Communication and public relations theories Relationships and relationship-building Persuasive communication Mastery of language in written and oral communication Problem-solving and negotiation Informative and persuasive writing Community, consumer and employee relations and other practice areas Technological and visual literacy Sensitive interpersonal communication Critical listening skills Fluency in a foreign language Message production Public speaking and presentation Critical thinking Creative, innovate problem-solving</p> <p>Category 2: Management Management concepts and theories Information management Organization management</p>
<p>Relationship management Communication management Crisis management Issues management Risk management People, programs and resource management Ethical decision-making Legal requirements and issues Marketing and finance Organizational change and development Strategic planning Audience segmentation Best practices in a digital environment Leadership and entrepreneurship Business principles and processes</p> <p>Category 3: Multicultural/Global Societal trends Multicultural and global issues Diversity issues World social, political, economic and historical frameworks Cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity</p> <p>Category 4: Research/Historical Public relations history Research methods and analysis Uses of research and forecasting Current issues Environment monitoring</p>

Practical Perspectives

The dominant paradigm in public relations is based on relational concepts grounded in two-way symmetrical practices. Both excellence theory (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995) and relationship management theory (Ledingham, 2003) adopt a co-creational approach in which publics are viewed as participants (as opposed to audiences) in organization-public relationships and communication is viewed as a tool for building relationships (rather than an end in itself). As described by Botan and Taylor (2004), “The co-creational perspective sees publics as co-creators of meaning and communication as what makes it possible to agree to shared meanings, interpretations and goals. This perspective is long-term in its orientation and focuses on relationships among publics and organizations” (p. 652).

This contemporary view of public relations as a collaborative enterprise is reflected in widely-accepted practice models, which reflect the evolution of thinking and practices in the field (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The four models – all of which are still in use today – range from one-way promotional and informational approaches to dialogic two-way approaches that engage publics as participants in organizational decision making. The models, as identified by Grunig and Hunt (1984), are:

- 1) Press agency/publicity – one-way promotional efforts that seek primarily through mass media channels to maximize public exposure;
- 2) Public information – one-way distribution of information;
- 3) Two-way asymmetrical – two-way “scientific persuasion” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p. 22) designed to gain the support of publics for the self-interest of the persuader; and
- 4) Two-way symmetrical– two-way dialogue and engagement that seeks to achieve mutual understanding and benefits for both organizations and publics.

The two-way symmetrical model is widely considered “the best in the practice of public relations” (Parkinson & Ekachai, 2006 , p. 210), as well as the most ethical (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). In addressing the role of public relations in international affairs, Grunig (1993) said, “Symmetrical public relations would eliminate most ethical problems of international public relations. More importantly, it would make public relations more effective in producing international understanding and collaboration” (p. 162). On the other end of the spectrum, the press agency model, in which truth often is not a concern, has been equated with propaganda (e.g., Stromback & Kioussis, 2011; Parkinson & Ekachai, 2006)

In public diplomacy, a review (Fitzpatrick, 2010) of more than 150 definitional statements in the scholarly and professional literature revealed six functional perspectives whose primary purposes were described as follows:

- 1) Advocacy / Influence – to influence the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of foreign publics;
- 2) Communication / Informational – to communicate with citizens of other nations to inform and educate them about a nation and its policies;
- 3) Relational – to establish and sustain beneficial relationships with people in other countries;
- 4) Promotional – to promote or “sell” particular aspects of a nation to foreign publics;

- 5) Political – to engage in international politics; and
- 6) Warfare / Propaganda – to support and/or complement military efforts.

Although there is little empirical evidence showing which perspectives dominate public diplomacy thinking and practices, historical efforts generally have been described as primarily “informational” (e.g., Tuch, 1990). In the post-9/11 environment, however, there has been considerable movement toward the adoption of more relational approaches perceived to be more effective in a global environment in which non-state actors have gained increased power and influence (Melissen, 2005). Characteristics of the “new” public diplomacy, which is widely viewed as the most promising way forward for public diplomacy, sound strikingly similar to the defining characteristics of relational models in public relations (Melissen, 2005). As described by Fitzpatrick (2011), the “new” public diplomacy:

- anticipates a more collaborative approach to international relations
- contributes to mutual understanding among nations/international actors and foreign publics
- helps to build and sustain relationships between nations/international actors and foreign publics
- facilitates networks of relationships between organizations and people in both the public and private sectors
- involves both foreign and domestic publics.
- includes foreign publics in policy processes
- is based on principles of dialogue and mutuality
- emphasizes two-way communication and interactions
- favors people-to-people interactions over mass messaging techniques
- has a primarily proactive, long-term focus on relationship-building.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess empirically conceptual and practical connections between public relations and public diplomacy in two areas: 1) knowledge and skills considered important to professional success and 2) public diplomacy practices considered most effective.

Specific research questions were:

RQ1. What knowledge and skills are considered most important to the success of a public diplomacy professional, according to U.S. public diplomats?

RQ2. How similar are knowledge and skills considered important by U.S. public diplomats to knowledge and skills considered important to the success of a public relations professional, according to the recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education?

RQ3. What public diplomacy practices are considered most effective, according to U.S. public diplomats?

RQ4. How similar are practices considered most effective by public diplomats to practices considered most effective in public relations?

Method

This research analyzed existing data from the *USIA Alumni Study*, which documented the views of high-ranking veterans of U.S. public diplomacy on a range of matters related to public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2010). The study population consisted of former officers in the United States Information Agency (USIA), which for nearly half a century (1953-1999) was one of the largest and most sophisticated public diplomacy agencies in the world.

Respondent Profile

In an effort to achieve a census, a 15-page questionnaire was mailed to all 441 members of the USIA Alumni Association. Nearly half (48 percent or 213) of the members of the USIA Alumni Association participated in the study. Of those responding, a total of 169 (79 percent) were male, 43 (20 percent) were female, with one not responding. The survey participants worked in U.S. public diplomacy an average of 25 years from 1953 to 2007, with a range of less than one year to 66 years. The average age was 73. The majority (73 percent) of the USIA alumni came from the top three ranks of the U.S. Foreign Service. The public diplomats reported service in multiple areas of the world including Europe (53 percent), the Western Hemisphere (38 percent), East Asia (34 percent) and Africa (33 percent). Fewer reported service in South Asia (25 percent) and the Near East (17 percent). A sizable majority (76 percent) also reported service in Washington, D.C. The majority of participants left government service after the end of the Cold War and prior to the dissolution of the USIA in 1999.

Instrument

The analysis herein focused on the findings of the *USIA Alumni Study* regarding professional knowledge and skills and effective practices. In the section dealing with knowledge and skills, participants were presented 15 credentials and asked to rate, on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important), the importance of each to the success of a public diplomacy professional. In the section of the survey dealing with effective practices, participants were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of 23 activities on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not Effective) to 5 (Very Effective).

Data Analysis

Factor analyses were conducted to reduce the data into fewer variables and discern the underlying dimensions reflected in public diplomacy knowledge and skills and in effective practices. Findings from the factor analyses were then compared to the recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education for undergraduate and graduate education and to classic public relations practice models to uncover similarities and differences between the two professions.

Results

Factor Analysis

Cronbach's reliability analysis indicated that both the credentials ($\alpha = .70$) and the effective practices ($\alpha = .80$) scales showed adequate internal consistency. To gain better understanding of the underlying dimensions of the constructs, both were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation. An orthogonal rotation was chosen because the goal of the analysis was to obtain unique underlying dimensions that were believed to be relatively unrelated. Factor analysis was deemed appropriate because the respondent ($n=212$) to item ratio approached 10:1 (Stacks, 2002). Four criteria for factor extraction were followed: (a) three or more questionnaire items must load on a factor; (b) items have loadings of at least .60 on a factor, but not loadings greater than .40 on any other factor; (c) factors have eigenvalues of greater than 1.00; and (d) on the scree plot, factors must fall to the left of the point where eigenvalues appear to level off (Cattell, 1966).

Knowledge and Skills

RQ1. What knowledge and skills are considered most important to the success of a public diplomacy professional, according to U.S. public diplomats?

Table 2 illustrates the knowledge and skills deemed most important to the success of a public diplomacy professional. Mean scores revealed an emphasis on cross-cultural understanding, foreign language skills and communication skills, followed by practical and problem-solving skills, management skills and knowledge of U.S. history. Research skills were considered less important, as were training/experience in journalism, public relations and advertising and travel or study abroad. See Table 2 for individual item mean scores.

An initial factor analysis of the 15 knowledge and skills items revealed five factors; however, one item, "Foreign Language Skills" cross-loaded on two factors and two items – "Cross Cultural Understanding" and "Managerial Skills" – had weak loadings on all factors. Therefore the three items were removed and a second factor analysis was conducted with the remaining 12 items. In the resulting analysis four factors were extracted in five iterations and labeled – *Communication/Critical Skills*, *Research/Analysis Skills*, *Communication Training* and *Public Diplomacy Training*. Together they explained 57.86% of the variance.

Factor One, *Communications/Critical Skills*, captured the value of communication and critical thinking skills to the practice of public diplomacy. Items such as "writing skills" and "problem solving skills" loaded on this factor. Factor One explained 23.59% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 2.830. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .66, which indicated good internal consistency for the *Communications/Critical Skills* factor. Items measuring communications and critical skills subsequently were collapsed into a single variable ($M=4.72$), which indicated a high level of importance for communications and

critical thinking to the successful practice of public diplomacy, according to the public diplomats.

Research/Analysis Skills (Factor Two) had an eigenvalue of 1.661 and explained 13.84% of the variance. Items such as “Research Skills” and “Knowledge of U.S. History” loaded on this factor. A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .50 indicated sufficient internal consistency. Items measuring these skills subsequently were collapsed into a single variable (M=3.75), which indicated moderate importance of research and analysis skills to the success of the public diplomacy professional.

Factor Three was labeled *Communications Training* and represented training in the fields of advertising, public relations and journalism. This factor had an eigenvalue of 1.274 and contained 10.62% of the total variance. Cronbach’s alpha was sufficient at .55. The factor had a total mean score of 2.77, indicating lower perceived value of advertising, public relations and journalism training to public diplomacy practitioners.

Factor Four, *Public Diplomacy Training*, represented experience related directly to the practice of public diplomacy. Only two items loaded on this factor – “U.S. foreign service experience” and “field experience and training in public diplomacy,” but the factor was retained because of the strong loadings and conceptual fit with the overall analysis. Factor Four explained 9.81% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.178. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .51. The items subsequently were collapsed into a single variable (M=4.54), which indicated a high level of importance of experience and training in public diplomacy to the success of the public diplomacy professional.

The four factors were relatively unrelated and high in discriminant validity. A test of correlation showed that for all of the significant bivariate correlations, Pearson’s r ranged from .17 to .32, which is considered a negligible to moderately weak correlation (Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2002). See Table 2 for factor loadings, eigenvalues, variance explained and mean scores.

Table 2. Knowledge and Skills Important to Professional Success in Public Diplomacy

Retained Factors and Items	1	2	3	4	Mean	Eigen-Value	Total Variance
Factor 1: Communication Skills					4.72	2.830	23.59%
Writing skills	.587	.277	-.082	.355	4.65		
Oral communication skills	.792	1.07	.037	.245	4.84		
Interpersonal skills	.812	-.180	.127	-.067	4.86		
Problem solving skills	.632	.336	-.065	-.073	4.54		
Factor 2: Research Skills					3.75	1.661	13.84%
Research skills	.179	.734	.171	-.214	3.54		
Knowledge of U.S. history	.176	.622	-.016	.251	4.31		
Personal travel or study abroad	-.054	.656	.128	.180	3.40		
Factor 3: Communications Training					2.77	1.274	10.62%
Training in public relations	-.037	.135	.744	.099	3.04		
Training in advertising	.019	.011	.828	-.141	1.78		
Training in journalism	.077	.097	.539	.318	3.49		
Factor 4: Public Diplomacy Training					4.54	1.178	9.81%
US Foreign Service experience	.033	-.021	.133	.753	4.61		
Field experience and training in PD	.123	.181	.007	.718	4.47		
Items Not Retained							
Foreign language skills					4.70		
Cross cultural understanding					4.90		
Managerial skills					4.35		

Note: Results from Varimax Rotation in five iterations

RQ2. How similar are knowledge and skills considered important by U.S. public diplomats to knowledge and skills considered important to the success of a public relations professional, according to the recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education?

While a direct comparison between the knowledge and skills necessary for the successful practice of public diplomacy and public relations, respectively, cannot be made given the nature of this study, the findings of the *USIA Alumni Survey* and recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education reveal substantial similarities and some differences. The most apparent similarity is *Communication Skills*. Both the responses from USIA alumni and the recommendations of the Commission on Public Relations Education reveal a strong communication component as integral to practice. Management skills, which were stressed in the report of the Commission on Public Relations Education, ranked relatively high among USIA respondents, although clearly secondary to communication knowledge and skills. The emphasis on multicultural/global knowledge and skills in the Commission’s report is mirrored in the high mean ratings that public diplomacy professionals placed on “Cross Cultural Understanding” and “Foreign Language Skills.” *Research* capabilities, which were stressed in the Commission’s recommendations, were viewed by the public diplomats as less important than both communication knowledge and skills and practical experience in public diplomacy, suggesting less emphasis placed on research and evaluation in public diplomacy than in public relations. Notably, practical experience in the respective fields was cited by both the Commission and the USIA alumni

as important to professional success. At the same time, training in other communication industry disciplines was not considered important by the public diplomacy practitioners, reflecting a relative lack of regard for training in public relations, journalism and advertising.

Effective Practices

RQ3. What public diplomacy practices are considered most effective, according to U.S. public diplomats?

Table 3 illustrates the public diplomacy practices deemed most effective by U.S. public diplomats. The mean scores indicate an emphasis on relational practices involving interpersonal interactions, followed by media and informational programs. Activities involving paid advertisements, disinformation and psychological warfare were considered least effective.

A factor analysis of the 23 public diplomacy practice items was conducted and seven factors were extracted. Upon close examination, the seventh factor only contained two items, which were conceptually unrelated; therefore those two items were dropped and a second factor analysis was conducted with the remaining 21 items. The second factor analysis resulted in six factors in 12 iterations, which cumulatively explained 57.38% of the total variance. The six factors were named *Cultural*, *Relational*, *Informational*, *Influential*, *Propaganda* and *Political*.

Factor One, *Cultural*, had an eigenvalue of 4.149 and contributed 19.76% of the total variance. Activities such as “performing arts” and “cultural exhibits” loaded on this factor. When the items were collapsed into a single variable, the mean score was 3.92. Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha=.73$) revealed strong internal consistency.

Relational items loading on Factor Two included “educational exchanges” and “visitor programs.” The eigenvalue for Factor Two was 2.541 and it represented 12.10% of the total variance. Factor Two had the strongest internal reliability at .74. When the *Relational* items were combined into a single variable, the resulting mean was also the highest at 4.85, indicating that diplomats considered relational exchanges among the most effective practices in public diplomacy.

Factor Three, *Informational*, contained practices such as “media relations” and “speaker programs.” One item, “interviews with U.S. officials by the foreign media,” cross-loaded on Factors Three and Four. However, the item was retained on Factor Three because of its strong conceptual link to the *Informational* dimension and because retaining it contributed to the overall strength of the analysis. The eigenvalue for Factor Three was 1.756 and it explained 8.36% of the total variance. Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha=.65$) revealed good internal consistency. Factor Three items were collapsed into one variable, which resulted in a mean score of 4.49 on a 5-point scale, indicating perceived high effectiveness for successful public diplomacy.

The fourth factor, *Influential*, contained activities used to advocate U.S. policies, values and ideals, such as “editorials” and “international broadcasting.” *Influential* practices were considered relatively effective, as indicated by a combined mean score of 4.04. The

eigenvalue for Factor Four was 1.435 and it represented 6.83% of the total variance. Factor Four had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .63$).

Factor Five was labeled *Propaganda* and included activities such as “psychological warfare” and “disinformation campaigns.” These items, when collapsed into a single variable, had the lowest mean score at 2.09, illustrating the perceived ineffectiveness of the use of wartime propaganda in modern public diplomacy. The eigenvalue for *Propaganda* was 1.118 and it represented 5.32% of the total variance. It contained adequate internal reliability ($\alpha = .56$).

Political was the sixth and final factor. Only two items loaded on *Political* -- “democracy initiatives” and “development assistance” -- but the factor was retained because they were conceptually related and contributed to the overall analysis. The combined mean score for *Political* was 3.57. It had an eigenvalue of 1.052 and explained 5.00% of the total variance. Cronbach’s alpha revealed adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .50$).

Tests of correlation found the six factors to be relatively unrelated and therefore high in discriminant validity. For all of the significant bivariate correlations, Pearson’s r was .40 or below, which is considered a moderately weak correlation (Frankfort-Nachmias & Leon-Guerrero, 2002). See Table 3 for factor loadings, eigenvalues, total variance explained and mean scores.

Table 3. Most Effective Public Diplomacy Practices

Retained Factors and Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	Eigen - value	Total Variance Exp.
Factor 1: Cultural							3.92	4.14	19.76%
Performing arts	.788	.117	.033	.020	.037	-.016	4.18		
Documentaries and films	.724	-.082	.182	.206	.056	.162	3.64		
Cultural exhibits	.784	.051	.073	.082	.022	.169	3.95		
Factor 2: Relational							4.85	2.541	12.10%
Exchange programs	-.041	.777	.020	.179	-.155	-.102	4.85		
International visitors program	.041	.831	.179	.087	-.036	.087	4.81		
Educational exchanges, e.g., Fulbright, American Studies	.125	.760	.088	-.162	.004	.089	4.85		
Factor 3: Informational							4.49	1.756	8.36%
Face-to-face interactions with local publics	.215	.325	.429	.044	.014	-.387	4.84		
Interviews with U.S. officials by the foreign media	-.034	.000	.487	.415	-.219	-.089	4.11		
Speaker programs	.136	.088	.606	.251	.094	-.041	4.35		
Dialogue with political elites and other opinion leaders	.081	.310	.712	.057	.073	-.037	4.67		
Media relations	.063	-.018	.711	.027	-.081	.265	4.46		
Factor 4: Influential							4.04	1.435	6.83%
International broadcasting (i.e., Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty)	.296	-.013	-.003	.474	.051	.296	4.22		
Editorials, op-eds in local media	-.006	-.120	.353	.516	.044	-.036	3.78		
US government libraries	.413	.259	-.031	.510	-.070	.053	4.54		
US government publications, i.e., magazines, brochures, etc.	.274	.070	.090	.661	.274	.068	3.88		
Wireless file	-.066	.092	.354	.560	.019	.186	3.81		
Factor 5: Propaganda							2.09	1.118	5.32%
Paid advertisements in national/local media	.190	-.195	-.008	-.124	.604	.287	1.91		
Disinformation campaigns	-.039	.011	-.051	.339	.747	-.158	2.15		
Psychological warfare	-.018	-.049	.104	.008	.709	.267	2.26		
Factor 6: Political							3.57	1.052	5.00%
Democracy initiatives	.145	.109	-.007	.100	.089	.770	3.36		
Technical and development assistance	.188	.004	.124	.144	.257	.631	3.80		
Items not retained									
Internet sites							3.56		
American Corners							3.48		

Note: Results from Varimax Rotation in 12 iterations

RQ4. How similar are the practices considered most effective by public diplomats to practices considered most effective in public relations?

Relational concepts that are reflected in the two-way symmetrical model of public relations align directly with Factor 2, *Relational*, from the survey of USIA alumni. It is, in fact, *Relational* activities such as educational exchanges and visitor programs that received the highest rating by public diplomats. This overlap of relational components indicates that relational approaches are perceived to be of the highest value in both fields. Notably, practitioners in both public diplomacy and public relations view propaganda/press agency activities as least effective.

Although the effectiveness of activities that would fall under the public information and two-way asymmetrical models in public relations has not been rated in similar fashion as the activities rated by the public diplomats in the USIA survey, there are clear connections in the types of activities frequently employed in both fields. For example, *Informational* activities align closely with public information activities in public relations, such as interviews, speeches and media relations. Similarly, *Influential* activities in public diplomacy resemble two-way asymmetrical efforts (e.g., editorials, publications) used in public relations to influence public opinion and public debates. At the same time, activities included in the *Cultural* (e.g., performing arts, cultural exhibits) and *Political* (e.g., democracy initiatives, development assistance) categories of the USIA survey seemingly are unique to public diplomacy – at least as they relate to the efforts of a nation to advance global understanding of its ideals, policies and values.

Discussion and Implications

When analyzed in the context of public relations, results of the USIA alumni survey indicate substantial similarities in both knowledge and skills considered important in public diplomacy and public relations and practices deemed most effective. Although some differences were noted, the findings provide considerable evidence that the conceptual and practical links observed by many scholars and practitioners are real.

The study also provides empirical support for the idea that public diplomacy – like public relations – is a multidimensional enterprise (Fitzpatrick, 2010). In addition to confirming the existence of multiple approaches or practice models in public diplomacy, the research provides important insights into which of these are perceived to be most effective, as well as how they compare to public relations. While one-way and two-way practices are prevalent in both public diplomacy and public relations, this study indicates that practitioners in both fields share the view that interactive approaches involving engagement with publics are most effective.

Additionally, the rejection of propagandistic approaches by both public diplomats and public relations professionals indicates that concerns regarding the integrity of the fields (Van Dyke & Vercic, 2009) may not be warranted. In the USIA study, practices based on psychological warfare and/or disinformation were judged as ineffective.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings suggest that, given the relative youth of public diplomacy as an academic discipline (Gregory, 2008) and a profession (Fitzpatrick 2010), public relations concepts could contribute to the development of a coherent and integrated framework for public diplomacy research and practice (Gilboa, 2008). As Botan and Taylor (2004) observed, public relations “has the potential to unify a variety of applied communication areas” (p. 659).

From a practical perspective, the research illustrates the importance of public relations concepts and practices in international political contexts. As Stromback and Kiouisis (2011) contended, to the extent that organizations – including governments – have political agendas and try to influence political opinion formation or policy-making processes, “they are involved in political public relations activities” (p. 10). This study shows that public diplomats routinely engage in political public relations activities.

As a result, the study supports calls for the integration of public relations perspectives in public diplomacy planning and practices (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2007), as well as the hiring of “information officers with knowledge in the field of communications” (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006, p. 211). In mediated public diplomacy, for example, there is a clear need for skilled practitioners who understand global media. As Sheafer and Gabay (2009) observed, “In their competition for foreign media, actors (including national actors) are required to demonstrate skills, performance and talent that are pertinent to these media values, such as initiating major political events that will be considered ‘good stories’ by foreign media” (p. 449).

Another area in which public relations might contribute to the growth and development of public diplomacy is in research and evaluation. The study shows limited appreciation for this function, which is considered critical to public relations success. An increased focus on research could help to advance strategic planning in public diplomacy, which has been cited as a weakness (GAO, 2006).

At the same time, the study also indicates potential for public diplomacy concepts and practices to inform public relations. Although this research did not reveal the degree of differences cited by Macnamara (2012), the findings suggest that public diplomats’ long-term experience in international environments – which led them to rate cross-cultural understanding as the most important capability for public diplomats – could be valuable to public relations practitioners working in the global arena. As Sriramesh and Vercic (2009) observed, a robust body of international public relations knowledge that can help “to predict the best way to practice public relations in a particular country or region” does not exist (p. 3).

Finally, it should be noted that the public diplomats’ view that training in public relations is not very important is incongruent with their responses regarding knowledge and skills that are considered important to professional success. Although both the age of the diplomats, as well as the relative maturity of these disciplines, could have influenced their responses, the results suggest a lack of understanding of public relations on the part of public diplomats. This finding, combined with the historic lack of interest and involvement on the part of public relations scholars and practitioners in public diplomacy (Signitzer & Coombs,

1992), indicate a need for increased understanding of the respective disciplines among scholars and practitioners in both fields.

Limitations and Future Research

Data from both the undergraduate Commission on Public Relations Education Report (2006) and the *USIA Alumni Study* (2010) reflect perspectives formed prior to the introduction of communication channels that are prevalent in public relations and public diplomacy practice today. Notably, the majority of participants in the *USIA Alumni Study* left government service prior to the advent of social media. Thus, the use and perceived effectiveness of new technologies should be explored in future studies. Additionally, demographic and geographic variables that were beyond the scope of this study but might influence the theoretical and practical perspectives of practitioners should be examined in future research.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the interplay of public relations and public diplomacy as political functions deserves further scrutiny. As Kioussis and Stromback (2011) observed, political public relations extends beyond political campaigns to include a host of organizations that influence political issues, processes or public opinion related to political matters. Public diplomacy, which illustrates the breadth of political public relations in government, provides a deep and rich well for further exploration.

References

- Armstrong, Matthew (2009). *www.MountainRunner.us*. Retrieved from http://mountainrunner.us/2009/01/public_diplomacy_is_not_public_relations
- Botan, C. & Taylor, M. (2004). Public relations state of the field. *Journal of Communication*, 54, 645-661.
- Commission on Public Relations Education (2006). *The professional bond: Public relations education for the 21st century*. Retrieved from <http://www.commpred.org/uploads/report2-full.pdf>.
- Commission on Public Relations Education (2012). Educating for complexity: Standards for a master's degree in public relations. Retrieved from <http://www.commpred.org/uploads/report5-full.pdf>
- Dozier, D.M., Grunig, L.A. & Grunig, J.E. (1995). *The manager's guide to public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dutta-Bergman, M. J. (2006). U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East: A critical cultural approach. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30(2), 102-124.
- Entman, R.M. (2008). Theorizing mediated public diplomacy: The U.S. case. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13, 87-102.
- Fitzpatrick, K. (2007). Advancing the new public diplomacy: A public relations perspective. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2(3), 187-211.
- Fitzpatrick, K.R. (2010). *The Future of U.S. public diplomacy: An uncertain fate*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff/Brill.
- Fitzpatrick, K. (2011). *U.S. public diplomacy in a post-9/11 world: From messaging to mutuality*. CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy. Los Angeles, CA: Figueroa Press.
- Floyd, P. (2007). Try policy instead of PR. *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 2007, A21.
- Frankfort-Nachmias, C. & Leon-Guerrero, A. (2002). *Social Statistics for a Diverse Society*, 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, p. 253.
- Fullerton, J.A. & Kendrick, A.G. (2006). *Advertising's war on terrorism: The story of the U.S. State Department's Shared Values Initiative*. Spokane, WA: Marquette Books.
- Government Accountability Office. (2006). *U.S. public diplomacy: State Department efforts to engage Muslim audiences lack certain communication elements and face significant challenges*, GAO-06-535 (Washington, DC), 22.

- Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 55-77.
- Gregory, B. (2008). Public diplomacy: Sunrise of an academic field. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, 274-290.
- Grunig, J. (1993). "Public relations and international affairs: Effects, ethics and responsibility." *Journal of International Affairs*, 47, 137-162.
- Grunig, J. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Grunig, J. Grunig, L, & Dozier, D. (2006). "The excellence theory," in C. Botan, V. Hazelton (Eds.), *Public Relations Theory II* (pp. 21-62). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- James E. Grunig, Larissa A. Grunig, Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Yi-Hui Huang, and Anastasia Lyra, "Models of public relations in an international setting," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 7 (1995): 163-86
- Kruckeberg, D., & Vujnovic, M. (2005). Public relations, not propaganda, for U.S. public diplomacy in a post-9/11 world: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Communication Management*, 9(4), 296-304.
- Ledingham, J. (2003). "Explicating relationship management as a general theory of public relations," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 15(2), pp. 181-198.
- L'Etang, J. (1996). Public relations as public diplomacy. In J.L'Etang & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in public relations* (pp. 14-34), London, UK: International Thomson Business Press.
- L'Etang, J. (2008). *Public relations concepts, practice and critique*, London: Sage.
- Macnamara, J. (2012). Corporate and organizational diplomacy: an alternative paradigm to PR. *Journal of Communication Management*, 16(3), 312-325.
- Melissen, J. (2005) *The new public diplomacy: Soft power in international relations*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff/Brill.
- Molleda, J-C. (2011). Global political public relations, public diplomacy, and corporate foreign policy. In J. Stromback, J. and S. Kioussis, (Eds.), *Political public relations: principles and applications* (pp. 274-292). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Parkinson, M. & Ekachai, D. (2006). *International and intercultural public relations: A campaign case approach*. Boston: Pearson.
- Pederson, W. (1977). PR's global reach," *Public Relations Quarterly*, 22(1), 17-20.

- Pigman, G. A. & Deos, A. (2007). Consuls for hire: Private actors, public diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(1), 85-96.
- Sharp, P. (2005). Revolutionary states, outlaw regimes and the techniques of public diplomacy. In J. Melissen (Ed.). *The new public diplomacy: Soft power in international relations* (106-123). Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff/Brill.
- Sheafer, T. & Gabay, I. (2009). Mediated public diplomacy: A strategic contest over international agenda building and frame building, *Political Communication*, 26, 447-467.
- Signitzer, B. H. & Coombs, T. (1992). Public relations and public diplomacy: Conceptual convergences. *Public Relations Review*, 18(2), 137-147.
- Signitzer, B. & Wamser, C. (2006). Public diplomacy: A specific governmental public relations function. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton (Eds.), *Public Relations Theory II* (pp. 435-464). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Snow, N. (2009). "Rethinking public diplomacy." In N. Snow & P. Taylor (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.) (2009). *The global public relations handbook theory, research, and practice* (pp. 822-842). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stromback, J. & Kioussis, S. (2011). Political public relations: Defining and mapping an emergent field. In J. Stromback, J. and S. Kioussis, (Eds.), *Political public relations: principles and applications* (pp. 1-32). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tuch, H. (1990). *Communicating with the world: U.S. public diplomacy overseas*. New York, NY: St Martin's Press.
- Vanc, A. & Fitzpatrick, K. (2012). *Public relations and public diplomacy: A divided past, a shared future*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, Chicago, IL.
- Van Dyke, M. A. & Verčič, D. (2009). Public relations, public diplomacy, and strategic communication: An international model of conceptual convergence. In K Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.). *The global public relations handbook theory, research, and practice* (pp. 822-842). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Waller, J. M. (Ed.). (2007). *The public diplomacy reader*. Washington, DC: The Institute for World Politics Press.
- Yun, S.-H. (2006). Toward public relations theory-based study of public diplomacy: Testing the applicability of the Excellence study. *Journal of Public Relations*