



Original Article

America's selfie – Three years later

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ABSTRACT Recent years have seen the emergence of relational approaches to public diplomacy and public relations. The adoption of approaches that emphasize the creation of relationships between organizations and stakeholders have also been advocated by nation branding scholars. Thus, relational approaches can serve as a link between all three fields. An additional link is lack of clarity when using the terms “dialogue” and “engagement”. This study attempted to further to investigate the association between nation branding, public diplomacy and public relations by evaluating the manner in which the US State Department branded America on its Facebook channel during January of 2016, and by conceptualizing and measuring the State Department's use of “dialogic engagement”. A comparison between America's 2016 Selfie, and that evaluated in 2013, demonstrates that the State Department is narrating a consistent and coherent national brand and is adept at integrating everyday events into that national brand. By so doing, the State Department maintains a consistent voice and matches words for deeds thus facilitating the creation of relationships with Facebook followers. However, results also suggest that the State Department fails to provide any opportunities for dialogic engagement. Thus, it is lack of dialogic engagement that links all three fields.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen the emergence of relational approaches to public diplomacy that place an emphasis on engagement between diplomatic institutions and their SNS (social networking sites) followers. Such approaches are similar to the concept of MBRs (mutually beneficial relationships) developed by public relations scholars. Nation branding scholars have advocated a

similar practical shift towards online engagement in order to successfully manage and promote a national image. Thus, relational approaches may serve as conceptual links between the fields of public diplomacy, nation branding and public relations. An additional link between all three fields is a lack of clarity when using the terms “engagement”, “dialogue” and

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“dialogic engagement”. This study aims to further investigate the conceptual and practical links between the three aforementioned fields. To this end, the study analyzed the national image of America, or Selfie, promoted on the US State Department’s Facebook profile in 2016 and compared it to the Selfie promoted by the State Department in 2013. In addition, the study conceptualized and measured the extent to which the State Department offers followers opportunities for “dialogic engagement”. Results suggest that the State Department portrays a consistent and coherent national image of America. Dialogic engagement analysis revealed that while SNS followers are eager to converse with the State Department online, it fails to provide any opportunity for two-way interactions. Thus, it is *lack* of dialogic engagement that links the fields of public diplomacy, nation branding and public relations.

Between public diplomacy and public relations

Traditionally, public diplomacy was conceptualized as influence over foreign public opinion that would impact the conduct of diplomacy (Pamment, 2012). During the twentieth century, influencing foreign populations was achieved through mass media channels such as the radio, television and newspapers (Roberts, 2007). Thus, twentieth century public diplomacy was characterized by a one-way flow of information entailing limited interaction between communicator and recipient (Pamment, 2012). Yet the 9/11 terror attacks, coupled with global proliferation of SNS, has led to a conceptual and practical shift in the practice of public diplomacy known as the ‘new public diplomacy’ (Melissen, 2005; Hayden, 2012).

According to Melissen (2005) and Gregory (2011) the ‘new public diplomacy’ focuses on engaging with increasingly ‘connected’ publics while transitioning from one-way flows of information towards dialogue, engagement and long-term relationship building. SNS may be the very tools for the practice of the ‘new public diplomacy’ as they enable organizations to

transition from “broadcast” to “communicative” paradigms that are centered on interaction with online followers (McNutt, 2014). SNS are particularly relevant to the ‘new public diplomacy’ as relationships are the foundation of such sites (Waters *et al*, 2009). Moreover, SNS provide ideal conditions for two-way engagement as organizations may communicate with individuals on topics of shared interests (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009).

In an attempt to practice the ‘new public diplomacy’ MFAs (ministries of foreign affairs) and diplomats have flocked to SNS in a practice commonly referred to as “digital diplomacy” (Manor, 2016; Hocking and Melissen, 2015). According to the Twiplomacy website (2016), there are now more than 400 foreign ministers, foreign ministries and heads of state on Twitter, in addition to a plethora of international organizations (e.g., UN, NATO). The advent of relational approaches to public diplomacy (Zaharna *et al*, 2013) is akin to relatively new approaches in public relations which place an emphasis on creating MBRs between organizations and their publics (Cutlip *et al*, 2006; Szondi, 2010). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) define relationships as a state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the action of either side impacts the economic, social, political and cultural wellbeing of all sides (*ibid*, p. 62).

The notion of MBR may be related to Grunig’s “Excellence Theory” which states that two-way symmetrical communication is especially ethical as it requires mutual understanding between organizations and publics thus allowing public attitude to influence the behaviour of organizations- and vice versa (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Kent and Taylor (1998) further developed the notion of dialogic public relations when exploring the internet’s ability to foster meaningful dialogue between organizations and online publics.

In recent years, numerous studies have evaluated the extent to which private organizations employ Kent and Taylor’s principles when interacting with SNS followers. The majority of these studies have concluded that organizations fail to realize the dialogic potential of SNS as they focus on one-way

asymmetrical communication (Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008; Bortree and Seltzer, 2009; Sommerfeldts *et al.*, 2012; Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014). Similar results were found in studies focusing on MFAs (Cha *et al.*, 2014; Kampf *et al.*, 2015).

Between public diplomacy and nation branding

Conceptually, one may draw linkages between nation branding and public diplomacy. Nation branding can be defined as “a process by which a nation’s image can be created, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to improve or enhance a country’s reputation amongst a target international audience” (Fan, 2010, p. 6). This definition suggests that, like public diplomacy, nation branding activities also target foreign populations. Moreover, both nation branding and public diplomacy aim to promote a nation’s financial interests (Van Ham, 2001, 2008; Papadopoulous and Heslop, 2002; Anholt and Hilderth, 2005; Rawson, 2007; Kaneva, 2011; Aronczyk, 2013). Positive national images are also the outcomes of both activities, as is the promotion of the national culture and values which are important facets of a nation’s brand and image (Szondi, 2008; Manor and Segev, 2015, p. 93). Lastly, Szondi has suggested that two-way communication and relationship building may serve as additional elements that link nation branding and public diplomacy (Szondi, 2008).

In addition, like public diplomacy, SNS may hold many benefits for nation branding activities. Manor and Segev (2015) assert that engagement with SNS followers may enable MFAs to overcome many of the limitations of traditional nation branding activities. By engaging in dialogue with followers, nations may alter their perceptions among foreign populations as personal experiences impact the manner in which people perceive other nations (Papadopolous and Heslop, 2002; Fan, 2010). Likewise, nations may use SNS to tailor content to the manner in which they are perceived by global audiences. For instance, nations commonly associated with armed conflict may highlight their rich cultural heritage and democratic tradition (Manor and Segev, 2015, p. 97).

While the use of mass media in nation branding campaigns has been thoroughly researched (Manheim, 1994; Gilboa, 1998; Wang, 2006) few studies have focused on how nations use SNS in nation branding activities. One such study, conducted by Manor and Segev, analyzed the manner in which the US State Department brands America on its SNS profiles. Given that nation branding is an attempt by a nation to draw its self-portrait, and given that in the age of SNS such portrayals are known as Selfies, the authors refer to the art of nation branding via SNS as “Selfie diplomacy” (2015).

Manor and Segev decided to focus on the US given the crisis in brand “America”. While the US once symbolized values such as democracy, human rights and freedom, the Bush Administration’s global War on Terror led foreign populations to view the US as a self-serving, greedy, anti-Muslim militaristic empire (Silver and Hill, 2002; Skuba, 2002; Anholt and Hildreth, 2005; Rawson, 2007; Quelch and Jocz, 2009). Manor and Segev therefore assumed that the US State Department would be engrossed in the task of altering America’s global image.

Using thematic analysis, Manor and Segev analyzed all content published by the State Department on Twitter and Facebook during December 2013. Their analysis revealed four themes that comprise America’s Selfie. The first focused on mending relations with the Arab and Muslim world. Content comprising this theme highlighted America’s efforts to negotiate a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine and its open criticism of Arab dictatorships.

The second theme dealt with America’s moral leadership and included tweets and posts in which the US called for democratic reforms and promoted human rights. The third theme dealt with America’s “military might”. Notably, Manor and Segev (2015) found an overall lack of reference to US military power.

The final theme was America’s economic leadership. Manor and Segev (2015) argued that State Department SNS content focused on US financial aid to developing countries, support of clean energy and a new trade agreement between the US and EU that would boost both economies.

Manor and Segev concluded that the State Department branded America as an economically responsible superpower, guided by moral values and committed to diplomacy and building meaningful relations with the Muslim world (Manor and Segev, 2015).

Among public diplomacy, public relations and nation branding

This study aims to elaborate on Manor and Segev's findings while also furthering the linkage between nation branding and public relations through the perspective of MBRs. Heath and Coombs (2005) argue that, from a public relations perspective, MBRs requires a strategic approach which consists of five factors: aligning with stakeholders by maintaining a consistent voice, making sure messages are true, providing two-way symmetrical communication as a means to engage stakeholders in dialogue, being proactive and meeting stakeholders' information needs and identifying opportunities by which an organization can serve the community (ibid; Szondi, 2010).

Two of the factors identified by Heath and Coombs are inherently relevant to nation branding. The first is maintaining a consistent voice. As Szondi argues, a consistent voice necessitates that a nation's statements be reinforced by its policies and actions (Szondi, 2008). Yet, just as important is a nation's ability to project a coherent national image. While events unfold daily, nations are required to find the means through which to incorporate such events into the national brand. The second factor that is relevant to nation branding is providing opportunities for two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue through which the national identity may be negotiated with online publics (Gregory, 2007).

Moreover, this study aims to further the linkage between public diplomacy, public relations and nation branding by clarifying the terminology of dialogue and engagement that is common place in all three fields. Like public relations scholarship, nation branding and public diplomacy studies often refer to the terms "engagement", "dialogue" and "dialogic engagement" without

adequately clarifying each term (Kampf *et al*, 2015; Manor and Segev, 2015). Indeed, as Taylor and Kent (2014) recently argued, the term engagement is regularly used by scholars without being defined. The global rise of SNS has only added to this lack of clarity.

When reviewing the employment of the term "engagement" by public relations scholars, Taylor and Kent (2014) found that most studies regard engagement as a one-way flow of information that fosters relationship building. Similarly, Manor recently found that the term "engagement" is used by diplomats and MFAs to signify a one-way flow of information that is aimed at influencing foreign populations (Manor, 2016).

In an attempt to clarify the term "engagement", Taylor and Kent (2014) refer to dialogue theory. Within dialogue theory, two components are viewed to be necessary for dialogue to take place. The first is dialogic procedures, which are procedures involved in creating an ethical communicative environment in which people are willing to share information. The second is engagement, which is a two-way flow of information. Once dialogic procedures and engagement have been enacted, dialogue may take place (Kent and Taylor, 2014, p. 388).

Dialogic engagement can, thus, be understood as a two-way relational process between organizations and publics that aims to improve understanding between participants, make decisions that benefit both organizations and their publics and create a fully functioning society (Taylor and Kent, 2014, p. 391). Dialogic engagement includes the following five components: previous research to identify issues, key publics and cultural variables; positive regard for publics' input, experiences and needs; interaction with the aim of relationship building rather than problem solving; seeking council with publics on issues of shared concern and a recognition by organizations and publics of their interdependence and collaborative action for the good of the community and society. In summary, dialogic engagement is an ongoing process that might result in dialogue (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

While MFAs have mostly neglected to adopt relational approaches to public diplomacy

(Comor and Bean, 2012; Metzgar, 2012; Ociepa, 2012), some have employed SNS in a manner that is consistent with the components of dialogic engagement. The British FCO, for instance, operates a Twitter channel (@UKA-againstDaesh) used to counter the narratives spread online by Daesh (a.k.a ISIS, ISIL). The FCO uses Twitter survey questions in order to research the interest of its followers and publish content that addresses followers' concerns. Moreover, the FCO's social media advocacy campaign to end sexual violence in conflict was promoted in collaboration with numerous NGOs and civil society organizations thus offering relationship building opportunities and seeking council of publics on issues of shared concern (Pamment, 2015). Similarly, the US embassy in Korea has used SNS to create trans-national networks of influence that can co-create advocacy campaigns thus addressing issues of shared concern (Seo, 2013).

This study returned to the State Department's Facebook account three years after Manor and Segev's study in order to re-examine America's online Selfie. Specifically, the study evaluated the themes that comprise America's current Selfie in order to ascertain the extent to which the State Department portrays a consistent national Selfie of America thus meeting components of Heath and Coombs' (2005) MBRs. Moreover, the study evaluated the extent to which the US State Department practices dialogic engagement as defined by Taylor and Kent (2014) thus meeting additional elements of MBRs (Heath and Coombs, 2005) and negotiating the meaning of brand America with online followers (Gregory, 2007).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

RQ1 To what extent does the US State Department portray a consistent and coherent Selfie of America?

H1 State Department Facebook content published in 2016 will differ substantially from that published in 2013.

It was assumed that the issues addressed by the State Department in 2016 will be substantially different from those addressed in 2013. During December of 2013, the US was engulfed in two major negotiations: seeking a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and resolving the conflict surrounding Iran's nuclear ambitions. In 2016, the US found itself engulfed in two different global conflicts- the Syrian Civil War and the efforts to degrade and destroy Daesh. Thus, it was hypothesized that State Department Facebook posts would illustrate a different American Selfie than the one promoted in 2013.

H2 Everyday events will be incorporated into the national Selfie.

Given the need to narrate a coherent national image, it was hypothesized that the State Department would integrate everyday events (e.g., terror attacks, responses to natural disasters) into the national Selfie. For instance, in 2015 the State Department portrayed American financial aid to Vietnam as part of a global effort to address the effects of climate change, thus portraying the US as a conscientious economic superpower.

RQ2 To what extent does the State Department create the conditions necessary for online dialogue with Facebook followers?

H3 The State Department will refrain from offering opportunities for dialogic engagement.

Taylor and Kent (2014) identify five components of dialogic engagement that, if met, may result in dialogue between organizations and publics. The first of these, using research to identify publics and issues of concern, was not evaluated in this study as it focused on online interaction between the State Department and its followers rather than the Department's working procedures. It was hypothesized that the State Department would fail to meet the additional four components of dialogic engagement. This stems from the fact that MFAs are change-resistant organizations that are risk averse and fear the possible loss of control over the message that may

arise from two-way information exchange (Copeland, 2013; Manor, 2016).

H4 When dialogic engagement is practiced it is in the form of quarantined Q&A sessions.

It was hypothesized that if the State Department offers opportunities for dialogic engagement, it will be in the form of SNS Q&A sessions that are limited to a specific issue and time. This hypothesis stems from recent studies that have found that MFAs, including the State Department, quarantine dialogic engagement by offering followers the opportunity to ask questions relating to one issue only in a pre-defined time span (Kampf, Manor and Segev, 2015; Manor, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The research corpus includes 146 Facebook posts published by the State Department during the month of January 2016. As opposed to Manor and Segev's (2015) analysis, this study did not include tweets published by the State Department given the finding that more than 80 per cent of the content shared by MFAs on Facebook is also shared on Twitter (Kampf *et al*, 2015). Thus it was assumed that the majority of Tweets would be identical to the posts published by the State Department. Moreover, the decision to focus on Facebook rather than Twitter stemmed from differences between both sites. While Twitter is a medium for information sharing, Facebook is a medium for social interaction (Kwak *et al*, 2010; Hughes *et al*, 2012). The month of January was selected as it included Facebook posts summarizing the State Department's activity during 2015 and President Obama's final State of the Union Address in which he reflected on America's role in the world during his time in office.

Procedure

Throughout the month of January, the researcher visited the State Department's Facebook page on a daily basis. In each visit, the URLs of all posts published during the previous 24 h were stored

electronically so that they can be accessed at a later time. In addition, each post was recorded in the form of "print screen" image so as to ensure the post could be analyzed even if it were deleted by the State Department.

In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2, all State Department posts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This methodology was employed given a desire to compare between this study's Selfie analysis and that conducted by Manor and Segev in 2015. The analysis followed the roadmap offered by Braun and Clarke (2006) who define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting on patterns, or themes, within a given data corpus (*ibid*).

During the first phase of the analysis, half of all the posts published by the State Department were reviewed. Once this had been completed, initial categories into which the entire research corpus would be categorized were created. For example, a large number of posts dealt with US condemnation of terror attacks in foreign countries. Thus, a category named "terror condemnation" was created. Likewise, posts calling for democratic reforms were categorized under "democracy". Next, one third of all posts were reviewed yet again in order to ensure the relevance of the identified categories. This led to the formation of several sub categories. For instance, posts dealing with calls to free opposition leaders were categorized as "promotion of democracy", while posts dealing with US aid to fledgling democracies were categorized as "facilitation of democracy".

Once all posts were categorized, they were gathered into meta-categories, or themes, so as to identify the overall characteristics of America's Selfie. For instance, the categories "promotion of democracy" and "promotion of religious tolerance" were gathered into the "Moral Leadership" theme as both dealt with the values America promotes around the world (for a list of sub-categories, categories and themes see [Appendix](#)).

Measures

In order to test H3 and H4, this study examines the US State Department's compliance with four components of dialogic engagement identified by Taylor and Kent (2014). To this end, the number

Table 1: State Department practice of dialogic engagement

<i>Kent and Taylor (2014) Component</i>	<i>Conceptualization</i>	<i>Measurement</i>
Engagement requires demonstration of positive regard for stakeholders/publics input, experience and needs	The State Department will meet the needs of online followers by answering questions and supplying requested information. The State Department will positively regard follower input by responding to follower comments	Recording all instances in which the State Department responded to followers' queries, supplied information on demand, published user-generated content or responded in any other way to followers' comments on posts
Engagement requires interaction with stakeholders/publics for relational purposes outside of an immediate problem/issue	The State Department will invite followers to converse with it on issues of shared concern. Moreover, the State Department will hold continuous conversations with its online followers by addressing issues or concerns raised by Facebook followers	Recording all instances in which the State Department invited followers to converse with it as well as all instances in which the State Department responded to concerns raised by Facebook followers
Engagement requires interaction with stakeholders/publics for their advice and council on issues of organizational/public/community concern	The State Department will query followers by posting questions relating to its activities. The State Department will also query followers by posting questions relating to their informational needs or services they require. Finally, the State Department will query followers on how they perceive the role of the US in the world, their countries' relations with the US and US actions in the global arena	Recording all instances in which the State Department queried its social media followers be it in an individual Facebook post or in response to a comment posted by followers
Engagement requires interaction that contributes to a fully functioning society, whereby organizations and publics recognize their interdependence and act together for the good of the community	The State Department will offer collaborative opportunities for the formation of online networks of influence, advocacy groups and advocacy campaigns aimed at raising awareness to issues of mutual concern to its followers	Recording all instances in which the State Department offered opportunities for collaborative action be it in forming networks of influence with Facebook followers, conducting shared online advocacy campaigns or co-creating content to raise awareness to issues of shared concern

of comments posted by Facebook followers in response to each State Department post was measured and recorded. In addition, the extent to which the State Department offered opportunities for dialogic engagement was also measured. The table below demonstrates how each of Kent and Taylor's (2014) components was conceptualized and measured in this study (Table 1).

RESULTS

Selfie analysis

Theme number one: America's moral leadership – Leading by example

The first theme identified in the Selfie analysis was that of America's moral leadership. Facebook posts comprising this theme accounted for 30 per

cent of all posts published by the State Department during January 2016.

Throughout the month of January, the State Department demonstrated the manner in which America's national narrative serves as an example for the rest of the world. Thus, the State Department branded America as the world's moral compass which leads by example. This was most evident in a State Department blog post from January 2nd which stated that "*Part of the mission of the U.S. Department of State is to share America's story. One of the most noteworthy elements of this story is the importance the United States places on diversity and religious pluralism*". The post further asserted that America's story is that of diverse groups, religions, cultures and identities coming together to have "*honest, respectful, dialogues*".

The aforementioned post elucidates the values that America holds dear to heart- religious

tolerance, multi-culturalism and open dialogue which is the basis of democracy. Each of these three values was manifest in State Department Facebook content.

The global promotion of democracy was evident in a series of posts depicting American support for emerging democracies. Such posts dealt with American aid to Haiti ahead of national elections, official visits to Burma following national elections, criticism of the Rwandan president's decision to seek another term in office and American condemnation of the arrest of opposition leaders in Turkey and Ethiopia.

America's support of religious tolerance was evident in a statement by Secretary Kerry according to which "fighting for religious tolerance will define the twenty-first century". In the same post Kerry spoke of the need to act as a "community of values" which would promote religious tolerance through collaborations between the government, civil society and faith communities. The collaborative approach to religious tolerance, emphasized by Kerry, would prove to be a recurring feature of America's Selfie throughout the month of January.

Finally, multi-culturalism was manifest in America's support, and acceptance, of refugees from Syria. Interestingly, here again America's moral leadership was tied to its national narrative. As Secretary Kerry stated: "We dare not turn our back on refugees, accepting them is what made us who we are... Refugees have added an immeasurable amount to the richness of American culture, contributed to our economic strength and honored our core values as a nation, engraved in our Statue of Liberty".

The aforementioned statements by Kerry demonstrate how daily events, and political crises, may be incorporated into the national Selfie. The acceptance of Syrian refugees was depicted by Kerry not as a humanitarian act but as a moral imperative that holds true with America's core values that are forever enshrined in its national symbol.

As was the case with the promotion of religious tolerance, American efforts to aid refugees focused on collaborations with additional partners. To this end, the State Department

announced plans to hold multi-lateral summits which would boost humanitarian aid to refugees.

The most visible component of the morality theme was the issue of modern slavery as January was designated by President Obama as *Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month*. Posts relating to this issue stated that the prevention of trafficking would include partnerships with "the private sector, advocates, survivors, communities of faith, civil society" demonstrating yet again America's collaborative approach to meeting global challenges. Notably, America's referencing of human trafficking as modern day slavery demonstrates again how America leads by moral example, being a nation that fought a civil war to abolish slavery.

The final element of this theme included posts in which the State Department condemned human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, Syria, North Korea, China and Burundi. It is the global spread of such comments that portrays America as a global power.

Theme number two: Engagement with the world

In their 2013 analysis of America's Selfie, Manor and Segev (2015) found that the State Department portrayed America as committed to mending relations with the Muslim world through engagement. The second theme identified in the 2016 analysis dealt with America's commitment to engaging with the world at large. Facebook posts comprising this theme account for 44 per cent of all content published by the State Department during January 2016.

Most representative of this theme was a video excerpt from President Obama's State of the Union Address delivered on January 13th. In this video, Obama pondered how America can remain safe and strong without isolating itself from the rest of the world or embarking on "nation-building exercises" around the globe. The answer is a patient foreign policy strategy in which America mobilizes other nations to jointly confront global challenges. The President then exhibited such mobilization by describing the coalition of nations that negotiated a settlement to the Iranian nuclear crisis, the coalition of nations

combating Daesh and multi-lateral efforts to stop the spread of Ebola in West Africa.

Obama's comments contribute to the portrayal of America as a nation that has abandoned uni-lateral actions and is attempting to engage with other nations on a range of global issues. The examples given by Obama (i.e., Ebola, Iran) also demonstrate how current events are incorporated into the national Selfie, in this case America's new collaborative approach to international affairs.

The portrayal of America as committed to global engagement was also evident by the frequent use of the term "engagement" by US officials. When commenting on rising tensions in the Middle East, US State Department Spokesperson, John Kirby, stated that direct "diplomatic engagement and direct conversations" between countries and leaders in the region are the best way to ease tensions. In another post, Kirby stated that Secretary Kerry spoke to regional leaders and stressed the need for "direct engagement and conversations" between responsible leaders. Finally, in a post published on January 7, Secretary Kerry stated that "The United States is today, more deeply engaged in more parts of the world, on more consequential issues, than ever before in history".

The aforementioned comments also demonstrate America's collaborative approach to diplomacy as it relies on responsible leaders to engage directly with one another rather than having the US impose policies on other nations.

An important component of this theme included Facebook posts dealing with the implementation of the Iranian nuclear agreement and the re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Cuba. Indeed, it is these two events that validate America's engagement policy. Posts dealing with the Iranian agreement included statements by US officials attesting to the fact that Iran met all the obligations it undertook during the nuclear negotiations. This positive portrayal of Iran may have been part of an attempt to demonstrate America's newfound ability to engage with Muslim countries.

While both Iran and Cuba were dominant in US State Department posts during January, the most frequently mentioned world region was Asia-Pacific. Posts dealing with Asia-Pacific can be separated into two categories. The first dealt

with America's need to coordinate its response to a North Korean nuclear test with regional allies. To this end, US officials visited South Korea, Japan and China. The North Korean nuclear test exemplifies once more how daily events are used to emulate components of America's Selfie, in this case its collaborative diplomatic approach.

Secondly, Asia-Pacific posts were used to highlight the impact of America's policy of engagement. According to Secretary Kerry, American engagement led to both the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) trade agreement signed between America and 11 countries in the region and prompted China to sign the Paris climate accord following US-China dialogue.

Theme number three: A common war on terror

The third theme identified in this study dealt with the War on Terror and extremism. Posts comprising this theme accounted for 20 per cent of all content published by the State Department during the month of January.

The vast majority of posts dealing with terror focused on the war on Daesh. Notably, all posts mentioning Daesh also mentioned the global coalition of countries combating the organization in Iraq and Syria. For instance, on January 5th the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL updated journalists on recent events in the region. The envoy focused on Secretary Kerry's deliberation with coalition leaders to supply Syrians with humanitarian aid as well as ongoing negotiations with Turkey and Kurdish leaders in Iraq.

During January there was no mention of US military attacks on Daesh or images of American soldiers taking part in air strikes in Syria or Iraq. The only picture of a coalition soldier to be posted online was that of a Jordanian soldier trained by American forces. However, this soldier was shown against the backdrop of refugees rather than in military action. Shot against a clear blue sky, the smiling Jordanian soldier has no weapons, but only compassion for the refugees behind him.

Throughout January the State Department portrayed the War on Terror as diplomacy-driven and collaborative in nature as was evident in a

post from January 29th announcing that Secretary Kerry would travel to London and Rome to meet with ministers from coalition nations and further discuss how to defeat Daesh and deliver humanitarian aid to Syria. Another post included a video in which Kerry stated that progress on global issues, such as terror, was not the result of the actions of one country but of governments, faith-based organizations, NGOs and civil society working together to achieve joint goals.

It may be argued that this new depiction of the War on Terror is in direct contrast to the Bush years that saw numerous unilateral actions and a division of the world into those who stand with America and those who stand with terrorists.

The diplomatic aspect of the War on Terror was also evident in a post from January 5th detailing American activities in the UN Security Council. This included a meeting between the Security Council and US officials on the coalition efforts against Daesh and meetings with world leaders meant to disrupt the Daesh's funding.

While commenting on the global coalition against Daesh at the World Economic Forum, Secretary Kerry insisted on using the term Daesh rather than ISIL as it is not a state nor is it Muslim. A similar sentiment was echoed in President Obama's State of the Union Address as he stated that Daesh was not representative of Islam. Both Kerry and Obama's statements suggest that 15 years after the 9/11 attacks, mending relations with the Muslim and Arab world remains an important American foreign policy goal.

Theme number four: A climate-oriented economy

The final theme identified in America's Selfie was that of America's commitment to promoting a climate-oriented economy. Only 6.4 per cent of all State Department posts dealt with economic

issues, a surprising finding given that "America's business is business".

Posts comprising this theme dealt with the manner in which the US-led global economy is climate conscious. For instance, in a blog post summarizing the State Department's main achievements in 2015, Secretary Kerry noted two economic accomplishments- the TPP agreement that "protects workers and the environment" and China's willingness to sign the Paris climate accord following intense American negotiations.

Both these achievements portray America as leading the global economy while also exhibiting its commitment to protecting the environment. Similarly, while delivering remarks in the Philippines, Secretary Kerry stated that the collaboration on sustainable development and the passing of the Paris climate accord was a testament to the close relationship between America and the Philippines.

The only economic post not related to the environment dealt with America's intention to connect 1.5 billion people around the world to the Internet. This long-term project was to be achieved with the aid of 30 countries that would join an American-led coalition.

In summary, this study finds that the State Department portrays the US as a diplomatic superpower that is guided by values and dedicated to tackling global challenges, such as climate change, through dialogue and engagement. This portrayal is quite similar to the Selfie identified by Manor and Segev in 2015 which portrayed the US as a climate-oriented superpower guided by values and committed to diplomacy and building relations with the Muslim world.

The table below compares the themes identified in 2013 and 2016. As can be seen, in both time periods the State Department depicted the US as a moral compass. Moreover, in both 2013

Table 2: Comparison between themes identified in 2013 and 2016 Selfie analysis

<i>2013 American Selfie</i>	<i>2016 American Selfie</i>
America's moral leadership	America's moral leadership—leading by example
Mending relations with the Arab and Muslim worlds	Engagement with the world
America's military might	A common War on Terror
America's economic leadership	Climate-oriented economy

Table 3: Comments by Facebook followers in response to State Department posts

<i>Average Number of Comments</i>	<i>Median Number of Comments</i>	<i>Minimum Number of Comments</i>	<i>Maximum Number of comments</i>
65.12	51	10	500

and 2016, America's Selfie was that of a super-power that is committed to responsible economic growth that prevents environmental degradation. While the 2016 Selfie focused on the War on Terror, it was similar to the 2013 Selfie as in both cases there was no depiction of US military might. Rather, in both time periods America was portrayed as the leader of global coalitions. The main difference between both Selfies lies in the State Department's current portrayal of the US as a nation committed to dialogue with the entire world rather than just the Muslim world (Table 2).

Given the similarity between the 2013 and 2016 Selfies, **H1 was rejected**. Following the integration of everyday events into the national Selfie, **H2 was validated**.

Analysis of dialogic engagement between the State Department and social media followers

Facebook followers' dialogic engagement with the State Department

The table below summarizes findings relating to SNS followers' dialogic engagement with the State Department. As can be seen, all State Department posts received comments from Facebook users. The average number of comments was 65.12 and the median was 51. This suggests that Facebook users routinely comment on State Department content. While the minimum number of comments on a post was ten, the maximum was 500. Interestingly, of the ten posts to receive the highest number of comments, seven dealt with terrorist attacks, terrorist threats or the War on Terror and three focused on Iranian implementation of the nuclear accord. Conversely, the ten Facebook posts to receive the smallest amount of comments dealt with upcoming state visits, a summary of 2015's

diplomatic achievements and details on a phone conversation between Secretary Kerry and the Russian foreign minister (Table 3).

State Department dialogic engagement with Facebook followers

Table 4 includes results obtained from the measurement of State Department dialogic engagement with its Facebook followers. The table includes both the conceptualization of Taylor and Kent's (2014) components of dialogic engagement and the measurement of such components. As can be seen, throughout the month of January 2016, the State Department did not offer any opportunities for dialogic engagement with its Facebook followers be it in the form of responding to follower comments, concerns and queries or creating opportunities for collaborative action (e.g., networks of influence, advocacy campaigns). Likewise, the Department refrained from querying its followers. The only component to be employed by the State Department was an invitation to a Twitter Q&A session dedicated to US foreign policy following President Obama's State of the Union address. Such an invitation represents a quarantined form of engagement (Kampf *et al*, 2015) as the conversation is limited in subject matter and duration. Given these results **H3 and H4 were validated**.

DISCUSSION

Recent years have seen the emergence of a relational approach to public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005; Cull, 2008) which is akin to relatively new approaches to public relations, namely MBRs. Such approaches place greater emphasis on establishing and maintaining relationships between organizations and a wide range of stakeholders (Cutlip *et al*, 2006; Szondi, 2010). One manner of fostering and maintaining

Table 4: Opportunities for dialogic engagement between State Department and Facebook followers

Conceptualization of Taylor and Kent's Components of Dialog Engagement	Number of responses to follower queries	Instances of supplying requested information	Number of publications of user generated content	Number of overall responses to followers' comments	Number of invitations to engage in conversations	Responses to followers' concerns	Instances of querying Facebook followers	Number of collaborative opportunities for creation of shared value
Measurement of Dialogic Engagement	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

such relationships is through dialogic engagement (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

More recently, scholars have advocated for the adoption of relational approaches to nation branding activities (Szondi, 2010). Similarly to Heath and Coombs' (2005) principles of MBRs, nation branding activities should align with stakeholders by maintaining a consistent voice, taking actions that hold true to that voice, engaging stakeholders in dialogue, anticipating issues of concern to stakeholders and creating opportunities in which the organization can serve the community (Heath and Coombs, 2005; Szondi, 2010).

Relational approaches can therefore be seen as one link between the fields of nation branding, public diplomacy and public relations. An additional link is the growing emphasis on SNS in all three fields as these are seen as enabling the formation of relationships (Szondi, 2010; Taylor and Kent, 2014; Manor and Segev, 2015). The final link between all three fields is lack of clarity when using the terms "dialogue", "engagement" and "dialogic engagement" (Taylor and Kent, 2014).

This study attempted to further investigate the association between public relations, public diplomacy and nation branding. By re-evaluating the nation branding activities of the State Department, and comparing them to those identified by Manor and Segev in 2015, the study analyzed the State Department's ability to maintain a consistent voice, promote a coherent national image and match actions to words. By conceptualizing and measuring the State Department's dialogic engagement with its followers, it adopted Taylor and Kent's (2014) assertion that scholars need to better define the term "engagement". Thus, this study regarded dialogic engagement as an array of opportunities, or procedures, which can facilitate two-way interactions between MFAs and stakeholders on Facebook.

The analysis of State Department posts published during January 2016 revealed four main themes that comprise America's Selfie. The first theme dealt with America's moral leadership which stems from three core values- religious



tolerance, multi-culturalism and dialogue. The emphasis the State Department placed on illustrating America's core values may validate the argument that values are important facets of a nation's brand and image (Szondi, 2008).

The second theme dealt with America's commitment to tackling global issues through collaborative diplomacy and engagement, rather than force. The third theme dealt with the War on Terror which was depicted as one that rests on collaborative diplomatic efforts, rather than the unilateral military invasions of the Bush years. The fourth and final theme included posts that emphasized America's commitment to leading a climate-oriented global economy. In summary, this study finds that America brands itself as a diplomatic superpower that is guided by values and committed to addressing global challenges, such as climate change and terror, through engagement and collaborations with other nations. As such, America no longer portrays itself as the world's policeman but rather as its chief negotiator.

While the issues addressed in State Department posts in 2016 differed substantially from those addressed in 2013, the overall American Selfie has remained remarkably consistent. In both time periods the US focused on its moral character, its desire to engage with foreign nations, its attempts to tackle climate change and its commitment to diplomacy, rather than military force.

The aforementioned results suggest that the State Department is narrating a consistent national brand. These findings led to the rejection of this study's first research hypothesis.

As was expected, the State Department attempted to integrate everyday events into the national Selfie, thus narrating a coherent national image and maintaining brand consistency. Markedly, by incorporating everyday events into the national Selfie, the State Department was able to demonstrate that US policies match its statements. These results validated this study's second research hypothesis.

The similarity between the 2013 and 2016 American Selfies, and the integration of everyday events into the national Selfie, suggests that the State Department employs two factors that

contribute to the formation of MBRs: maintaining a consistent voice and matching words with deeds (Heath and Coombs, 2005; Szondi, 2010).

The analysis of online interactions between the State Department and its Facebook followers suggest that followers are eager to converse with the State Department online. However, such conversations did not take place during the sampling period. In fact, the State Department did not offer any opportunities for dialogic engagement—be it in answering queries, responding to comments, supplying requested information, offering opportunities for collaborative action or querying its followers to understand their needs and to serve the community. The State Department did offer followers the opportunity to converse in the form of a quarantined Q&A session dedicated solely to one issue. These results validated this study's third and fourth research hypotheses and suggest that the State Department failed to implement three factors necessary for the formation of MBRs – open two-way communication, addressing followers' concerns and creating opportunities to serve the community (Heath and Coombs, 2005).

The results obtained from the dialogic engagement analysis are similar to those found in public relations studies, focusing on NGOs, and public diplomacy studies (Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008; Bortree and Seltzer, 2009; Sommerfeldts *et al*, 2012; Uzunoğlu and Kip, 2014). Findings also echo those found in recent digital diplomacy studies (Cha *et al*, 2014; Kampf *et al*, 2015; Manor, 2016). Like its peers around the world, the State Department has yet to transition from “broadcast” to “communicative” paradigms (McNutt, 2014).

Notably, this study identified a substantial gap between the actual practice of US public diplomacy and the online promotion of this work. Throughout the month of January 2016, American diplomats engaged with their counterparts, and non-state actors, in order to achieve diplomatic goals. Such was the case when Secretary Kerry announced a series of collaborations with civil society organizations and faith groups to advance religious tolerance, US

collaborations with communities to prevent human trafficking and US engagement with Iran and Cuba. However, when promoting American diplomatic activities on Facebook, US diplomats employed one-way communication models.

The question that follows is should scholars draw a distinction between the practice of public diplomacy, which calls for dialogic engagement between diplomats and stakeholders (e.g., state actors, non-state actors, foreign populations), and the promotion of public diplomacy activities online which may rely on one-way flows of information? While such a distinction can account for the lack of dialogic engagement identified in numerous studies, it is accompanied by two shortcomings. First, it reduces SNS activities to the marketing of offline diplomatic achievements. Second, it prevents scholars and practitioners of diplomacy from realizing the potential of incorporating SNS into diplomatic activities.

A more useful explanation for the gap between the State Department's offline and online activities may focus on the reasons for the observed lack of dialogic engagement. Scholars have argued that MFAs limit two-way interactions online given a risk averse institutional culture that fears a loss of control over the communication process (Copeland, 2013; Zaharna and Rugh, 2012). Additionally, diplomats tend to view online publics as unpredictable and volatile, at best (Haynal, 2011), and as potential trolls, at worst (Manor, 2016). Diplomats may also be reluctant to share information online given the belief that information is power and that sharing information reduces diplomatic leverage.

More recently, James Pamment has argued that diplomats' strategic objectives determine the communication models they adopt (Pamment, 2016). As Zaharna *et al* (2013) state, the emergence of mass media communication mediums throughout the twentieth century, such as the radio, led to a deep rooted organizational culture in which MFAs focus on one-way communication models with the goal of influencing foreign publics. In his analysis of the digital diplomacy activities of four MFAs, Manor (2016) too found that MFAs still favor influence

over relationship building and that the digital activities of MFAs often focus on message dissemination among elite audiences (e.g., journalists, policy makers, diplomats) rather than online publics.

It is therefore possible that the strategic goal of influencing elites has remained the objective of public diplomacy activities in the digital age, and that this objective determines the online communication models adopted by MFAs, including the State Department. This argument may also explain the apparent lack of dialogic engagement found in the online activities of non-state actors and private organizations.

However, failure to practice dialogic engagement precludes MFAs from realizing the potential of SNS. Within the realm of public diplomacy, lack of dialogic engagement prevents MFAs from creating and leveraging online relationships with foreign publics as such relationships require a mutual co-dependence between organizations and their stakeholders (Taylor and Kent, 2014). Lack of dialogic engagement also prevents MFAs from conversing with SNS followers on issues of shared concern (Bortree and Seltzer, 2009) and demonstrating positive regard for followers' needs, concerns and input (Taylor and Kent, 2014). Within the realm of nation branding, lack of dialogic engagement prevents MFAs from managing national images as it is personal experience, such as online conversations, that are likely to change people's perception of a country (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002; Fan, 2010; Manor and Segev, 2015). Monologic communication also precludes MFAs from better understanding how their country and its policies are viewed abroad and tailoring online messaging to alter such views (Manor and Segev, 2015). Lastly, nation branding requires online dialogue through which the national identity may be negotiated with online publics (Gregory, 2007; Szondi, 2010). Yet even more fundamentally, by failing to provide opportunities for dialogic engagement, MFAs do not meet the expectations of online publics causing such publics to abandon MFA SNS profiles without bothering to return (Kampf *et al*, 2015).

In summary, this study attempted to explore linkage between the fields of public diplomacy, nation branding and public relations. Results demonstrate that in all three fields relational approaches do not inform online communication strategies and SNS are still used for one-way dissemination of information as opposed to relationship building. As such, it is the failure to develop MBRs that links all three fields.

This study offers several contributions to the field of nation branding. First, by evaluating whether MFAs follow the principles of MBRs, it furthers the study of relational approaches to nation branding. Second, the current study illustrates that longitudinal analysis of SNS content may enable one to analyze the extent to which MFAs are able to portray a coherent and consistent national brand. This study also offers a contribution to the fields of public relations and public diplomacy through its conceptualization and measurement of the term “dialogic engagement”. Likewise, this study demonstrates the potential applicability of MBR principles to digital diplomacy activities.

Finally, it is important to note two limitations of the present study. First, the sampling period of the study was limited to one month. This limited duration may have influenced the Selfie analysis as the prominence of events and countries on the State Department's Facebook profile may vary greatly from one time period to the next. Second, this study's analysis of Facebook followers' comments was limited to the number of comments made in response to each post and did not evaluate the type of comments posted by followers (i.e., statements of opinion, questions, verbal attacks). Such an evaluation is of great importance as it may help MFAs and scholars understand the needs of digital diplomacy followers and their willingness to engage in dialogue with MFAs.

The results of this study suggest that under the Obama administration the State Department crafted a coherent and consistent Selfie of America. It is unclear whether the attributes of this Selfie will remain consistent under the Trump administration which may set new foreign policy goals. Indeed there currently seems to be a dissonance between

Trump's rhetoric of “America First” and Obama's rhetoric of engagement identified in this study. As such, future studies should examine whether changes in governments lead to changes in national Selfies and whether such changes limit an MFA's ability to manage the national image. Future studies regarding Selfie diplomacy should also entail longer sampling periods. Moreover, it is necessary to better understand the needs of MFAs' Facebook followers. This could be achieved through analyzing the content of comments posted online using discourse analysis and evaluating the interaction between various followers who often comment on one another's remarks. Lastly, it may prove beneficial to interview social media managers at both diplomatic and private organizations to better understand the apparent lack of dialogic engagement.

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APPENDIX

Categories, sub-categories and themes identified in thematic analysis

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-category</i>
America's moral leadership—leading by example	Prevention of human slavery and modern day slavery	Anti-slavery task force meetings Anti-slavery coalition (civil society, governments, private sector survivors) Comments by national leaders on Anti-Slavery and slavery prevention
	The American Story and American values	The American Story—promotion of religious tolerance The American Story—promotion of multi-culturalism The American Story—US values strengthen US diplomacy The American Story—US has always been a safe haven for refugees like Syrian refugees The American Story- US to seek further aid from other countries to help Syrian refugees
	Democracy	US facilitation of democratic processes US condemnation of arrest of opposition leaders, journalists US promotes journalist safety around the world, US aid developing free media around the world
	Human rights	Human Rights—OS condemns violations around the world Human Rights—US collaborative efforts with UN to safeguard human rights
Engagement with the world	Diplomatic engagement	Diplomatic Engagement—comments by State Department officials using the term Engagement Diplomatic engagement—US facilitates direct engagement between nations, leaders Diplomatic engagement—success stories (Iran, Cuba, Russia) Diplomatic Engagement—coordinating response to regional issues (North Korea nuclear testing) Diplomatic Engagement- US officials meet counterparts around the world
	American leadership in the twenty-first century	American Leadership—rallying nations behind causes that are good American Leadership—creating coalitions to tackle global challenges
	Adversaries turned Allies—coordination with Iran on tackling Daesh, coordination with Russia on Syrian civil war and Ukraine	
	Environmentally conscious economic expansion	Trade agreements that promote clean economic growth (TTP, US- Philippines)
A climate oriented economy	Coalitions to address climate change US aid- infrastructure, Internet connections	
A common War on terror	Addressing terror attacks	Addressing terror attacks—condemnation of terror Addressing terror attacks—strengthening allies
	Global coalition against Daesh	Press briefings Building capacity of allies (Jordan) Progress reports (Iraq)
	Diplomatic efforts	Work at multi-lateral organizations (UN) Meetings of coalition leaders Referencing specific coalition members (Arab states)
	Additional coalitions	Preventing Daesh funding, Syria donor group Partnerships with civil society, private sector (extremism)