The Scholarship of Public Diplomacy: Analysis of a Growing Field

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Public diplomacy is a fast-growing area of study with little agreement on its boundaries. In support of the subject's development as a field of academic inquiry, we present a content analysis of English-language peer-reviewed articles on public diplomacy since 1965 ($N =$ 2,124). We begin with analysis of bibliographic data to establish the field's institutional boundaries by highlighting trends in scholarship over time and identifying prominent disciplines and journals. We then sketch the field's conceptual boundaries by analyzing the concepts and topics that appear most in the literature. This process allows us to characterize decades of scholarship on public diplomacy and offer recommendations for future work.

Keywords: public diplomacy, soft power, meta-analysis, topic modeling, text mining

This study tackles the challenge of drawing institutional and conceptual boundaries for research on public diplomacy. This work aims to support the development of public diplomacy as a coherent field of academic inquiry. Since its early days, public diplomacy has attracted the attention of practitioners and scholars from a variety of backgrounds. As a result, the literature is quite varied in terms of both methods and focus. Indeed, one of the few points of consensus among public diplomacy scholars is that there is no agreement about the boundaries of the field (Gregory, 2008).

Diverse, interdisciplinary approaches to public diplomacy research are not an inherent problem. However, the breadth of what falls under the shifting rubric of public diplomacy suggests both a lack of definitional clarity and potential connections to other disciplinary programs that address similar concerns (political persuasion, international education, cultural policy, etc.). The public diplomacy research space is not quite an interdisciplinary program of study but rather a crossroads, with opportunities to examine international contexts of power, media, communication, and culture.

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A generic definition positions public diplomacy as the practices through which international actors—predominantly nation-states—engage in purposive communication with foreign publics to advance foreign policy objectives or otherwise cultivate conditions among foreign publics that support diplomatic relations. In practice, public diplomacy involves a range of activities, including educational and cultural exchange, broadcasting, information programs, and transparent strategic communication campaigns. Earlier studies have identified obstacles to setting clear parameters for the subject as a coherent field of study (Gilboa, 2008; Hayden, 2012), and scholars have employed various disciplinary approaches, including public relations (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2013; Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006), history (Cull, 2008a), security studies (van Ham, 2010), and mass communication (Golan, Yang, & Kinsey, 2015).

Growing interest in the study of public diplomacy is evident in the increase in academic professional organizations dedicating attention to the subject. The International Communication Association established the Public Diplomacy Interest Group in 2015. The International Studies Association (ISA) hosted a public diplomacy preconference in 2013, and papers sponsored by several ISA sections—including diplomatic studies; foreign policy analysis; international communication; and science, technology, and arts in international relations—often incorporate public diplomacy themes. And the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication increasingly hosts panels that address aspects of public diplomacy, with the association's international communication and public relations divisions the most frequent sponsors.

In the educational context, a handful of scholars and institutions have demonstrated a sustained commitment to nurturing the next generation of public diplomacy scholars. Over the last several years, for example, R. S. Zaharna of American University has organized "emerging scholars" panels at ISA's annual conference. The University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy trains and houses scholars and practitioners, sponsoring research and providing a variety of forums for distributing their work. In addition, at least three institutions offer graduate degrees in public diplomacy: the University of Southern California, Syracuse University, and Beijing Foreign Studies University. Others—including George Washington University, American University, and Kyoto University of Foreign Studies—offer concentrations on the topic.

A few journals specifically address public diplomacy, including *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy* and *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. The Palgrave Macmillan Global Public Diplomacy series offers a venue for publication of book-length work on the subject. Finally, several blogs and regular e-mail lists, including those produced by Bruce Gregory and the Public Diplomacy Council, endeavor to keep people informed about research with implications for public diplomacy research and practice.

Given this activity, we believe it is time to construct a map of the field using a variety of available metrics. Since public diplomacy is not discipline-specific, we settled on a meta-analysis of the peer-reviewed literature as the most straightforward means of constructing a big-picture view of the state of research. Although the interdisciplinary nature of the study and practice of public diplomacy means that no single theoretical perspective unites the work, there are nevertheless insights to be discerned in the methods used and in the themes that have emerged over time that define the field of public diplomacy studies. A meta-analysis of the literature offers a look at trends characterizing public diplomacy scholarship since 1965. Our results confirm some conventional wisdom about familiar topics and approaches but also offer some unexpected insights.

The Need for This Study

Encompassing a range of practices and tools for engagement, public diplomacy is suited to different types of inquiry from various disciplinary perspectives. In the realm of international relations, public diplomacy is often the subject of research into how states employ public-facing instruments for foreign policy leverage. But approaches typically associated with research in journalism and mass communication studies are also often applied to public diplomacy, including inquiry into more granular aspects of persuasion, cross-cultural communication, and cultivation of understanding through educational and media-based interventions. In other words, public diplomacy is a subject of interest to scholars exploring a range of research questions, theoretical perspectives, and analytical approaches beyond the expected attention from fields such as international relations and political science.

As a subject of academic inquiry, public diplomacy offers an international and often cross-cultural vantage point for examination of communicative, relational, and methodological questions. Definitions of public diplomacy are fluid and often driven by the disciplinary perspective of the person offering the definition rather than by the intent to establish uniform terminology (see, e.g., Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, 2005; Cull, 2008b; Tuch, 1990).

Public diplomacy is also the subject of policy practice. Practitioners are among those who conduct studies, and insights derived from the research can be translated into useful information for their work. That peer-reviewed journals publish work from researchers, practitioners, scholar-practitioners, and teams combining these perspectives adds a layer of complexity when evaluating the literature with respect to both its academic contributions and practical implications.

Given the diverse community of contributors, what defines the scope and content of public diplomacy studies? Are there emergent themes or objects of inquiry that reveal prevalent topics and areas of perceived significance for researchers? We draw on a sociology of knowledge perspective, which provides an important warrant for our work as it presumes that there are consequences to how knowledge repertoires are constructed (see Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Keller, 2005, 2012). We do not employ a strictly discourse analytical approach to the construction of knowledge about public diplomacy. Rather, we acknowledge that the production of knowledge claims about public diplomacy may impact future research agendas and interdisciplinary attention. These claims may reveal the influence of path-dependent terms, definitions, and practices as well as the outsized presence of certain political actors and regions on the boundaries of knowledge about public diplomacy.

The study of public diplomacy is inevitably shaped by how the term is defined by research that draws on previous studies, typologies, and organizational usage. *Public diplomacy*, as a term of practice, has its origins in the United States during the Cold War (Cull, 2008b). In addition, many accounts of historical public diplomacy reinforce how the term combines and relates practices to influence foreign publics *as* public diplomacy (see Cull, 2008a; Malone, 1988).

Yet public diplomacy scholars have noted the need to account for the term's parochial origins and how these origins have shaped subsequent scholarly understanding of the practices public diplomacy

represents as well as how the term figures into a larger range of state actions (Melissen, 2005b; Pamment, 2018). For countries other than the United States, the term *public diplomacy* may not necessarily conflate educational, cultural, and broadcasting modes of engagement with foreign publics. Put differently, what is studied as public diplomacy has—at least during the period of growth in public diplomacy studies after 2001—been strongly shaped by the U.S. experience and the categories used by U.S. institutions.

This is not to say that public diplomacy research is fixated on the United States and its strategic communication interests. As the evidence presented here suggests, regional and comparative approaches to public diplomacy are expanding. To understand how public diplomacy is framed in research questions and as an object of inquiry remains important to charting the limits of research where knowledge production about public diplomacy is most evident and in identifying opportunities for future interdisciplinary attention.

This study tracks the development of public diplomacy as the subject of academic inquiry from 1965 to the present through an examination of peer-reviewed work. We recognize that this approach neglects several venues where valuable work on public diplomacy appears, including government and think tank publications. But our work is concerned with the scope of peer-reviewed attention to this subject. A meta-analysis of this subset of work is appropriate for characterizing the body of literature as it has evolved over the decades. The resulting appraisal offers an opportunity to observe the contemporary landscape and highlight changing academic practices and areas of interest (Günther & Domahidi, 2017, p. 3053). We start with a sweeping research question:

RQ1:   What are the key trends in peer-reviewed public diplomacy scholarship?

Trends reflect theoretical and disciplinary approaches to the study of public diplomacy as well as topics and regions studied. To answer this first research question, we examine two relevant and interdependent aspects of the literature: the volume of work published (institutional boundaries) and the topics at the center of research (conceptual boundaries and relevant actors).

RQ2a: What is the volume of scholarly work produced?

We examine the metadata associated with each article to view the growth of public diplomacy as a field of academic inquiry. Using bibliographical data, we identify the number of peer-reviewed publications in which research on public diplomacy has appeared.

RQ2b: Which academic journals publish work on public diplomacy?

We then examine the journals that have published these articles. Inclusion of this variable illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of public diplomacy research. In most meta-analyses, researchers target the key journals in their field and then limit their work to studies appearing in those publications (cf. Günther & Domahidi, 2017; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). But in this case identification of key outlets is a research objective rather than a starting point. Apart from a handful of specialized publications on public diplomacy, the research spans a variety of journals. We seek to identify all journals that have published peer-reviewed work on the subject since 1965.

RQ3a: What topics are most common in public diplomacy research?

After considering the metadata, we turn to evaluation of article content. Public diplomacy is affiliated with many concepts, actors, and practices—including educational and cultural exchange, broadcasting, information programs, soft power, psychological warfare, strategic communication campaigns, and nation branding. We begin by identifying the topics that appear in the data set of peer-reviewed articles. Recognizing increased academic interest in public diplomacy over the period under consideration, we assess whether such interest has led to the development of identifiable topics of study, whether in terms of patterns in the countries or regions studied, disciplines incorporated, or activities undertaken.

RQ3b: What topics co-occur most often in public diplomacy research?

Early public diplomacy research was characterized by a focus on the United States (Snow, 2005), but scholars later called for studies that explored further afield (Gilboa, 2008; Gregory, 2008; Melissen, 2005a). We look for patterns in the co-occurrence of topics in the articles included in this study. This exploration includes, but is not limited to, identifying countries and regions that appear in the research.

RQ3c: How do topics vary across the countries and regions in the articles in the data set?

We look for correlations among the countries or regions that appear most in the literature as well as the topics and concepts considered therein. In addition to identifying the countries and regions as the focus of research, we seek to determine whether the way that scholars conceive of public diplomacy varies with that geographic focus. We identify the topics most likely to appear with each of the 10 most mentioned countries or regions.

Our method produces data that illustrate different aspects of collective knowledge production about public diplomacy, with particular attention to research forums and topics. The research is designed to map the field of public diplomacy in six steps. The first three steps use bibliographic data from the articles to draw the institutional boundaries of the field. The last three steps analyze the content of these articles to construct a conceptual map.

Method

Sampling

This study examines English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals since 1965. Although interesting and important work has appeared in other venues, we limited our analysis to peer-reviewed journals. While this approach necessarily excludes work appearing in other forums, it enables a systematic search for content. By employing various academic databases and using the same search criteria across them all, we imposed a degree of methodological rigor to the identification of content for inclusion in this analysis that would not otherwise have been possible. We chose the year 1965 as the starting point since it is widely accepted as the time when the term *public diplomacy* was first used by Edmund Gullion, then dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, 2008). Even

though references to public diplomacy appear before 1965 (Cull, 2006), they are too sporadic to warrant inclusion in the analysis presented here. We made a further decision to limit the analysis to peer-reviewed literature published in English. Here, too, we erred on the side of ensuring methodological rigor. Certainly, good research on public diplomacy and related concepts such as soft power is reported in other languages. However, because we strived for replicability, we limited our search for literature to the largest, most reliable, and most easily accessible academic databases. While the databases we used contain some non-English-language materials, there is no assurance of the comprehensiveness of their collections in any language beyond English.

The data set, collected through mid-2017, comprises peer-reviewed articles with the term *public diplomacy* in their titles or abstracts. For initial data gathering, we used EBSCO Host, Web of Science, and ProQuest Central. This approach yielded 1,964 articles from EBSCO Host, 1,422 articles from Web of Science, and 378 articles from ProQuest Central. We scraped the bibliographic data associated with these results, including abstracts and keywords where applicable, and then merged all this information into one data set. After removing duplicates, the data set contained 2,124 total articles. Fifty-two of these articles did not have abstracts; therefore, the abstract-based calculations presented below reflect information derived from analysis of the remaining 2,072 articles, while the metadata- and title-based calculations presented reflect results generated through consideration of all 2,124 articles.

Analysis

Our effort to draw disciplinary borders for the study of public diplomacy relies on descriptive statistics, many of them coming from the metadata attached to the articles collected as outlined above. We used bibliographic data to assess the number of articles and journals in the field. Through additional research, we also incorporated descriptive information about the disciplinary homes of the journals. We relied on descriptive statistics to assess the field and report the findings in terms of frequencies.

Drawing a conceptual map for the literature posed another challenge. To account for the scope and breadth of scholarship, we chose to focus on topics. We deliberately use this more inclusive term to describe the main emphasis of the articles analyzed. Topics are a unit of analysis derived from the topic modeling method used, and they may contain abstract concepts as well as specific terms or contexts (Günther & Domahidi, 2017, p. 3056). We reserve the process of concept formation for a future study (see Sartori, 1970).

Given the size of the data set, we employed computer-assisted textual analysis. For concepts associated with public diplomacy, we used MAXQDA, a text analysis software, as well as a text-mining package called *tm* in R (Feinerer, Hornik, & Meyer, 2008) to generate frequency listings. Using MAXQDA to conduct an analysis of word frequency using the software's installed dictionary to remove the most common English words, we identified the 100 most used words in the title data set. We also identified the 12 countries or regions that appeared most in the titles. We further used MAXQDA to identify which terms co-occurred the most in studies that mentioned each of the 12 countries or regions. Finally, we examined the co-occurrence of each of those 12 places with others among the group, identifying dyads and examining the appearances of these dyads over time.

Following common practice in meta-analyses of bodies of literature (Charles-Smith et al., 2015; Günther & Domahidi, 2017; Kane, Rogé, & Snapp, 2016), we relied on topic modeling to identify topics and subjects. Topic modeling enables unsupervised classification of texts (Silge & Robinson, 2017). Put differently, it allows for automated placement of texts into categories based on the frequency of words or phrases. Latent Dirichlet allocation, the specific topic modeling algorithm we used, presents each article in the data set as having a mixture of topics, and each topic as a mixture of words (Silge & Robinson, 2017). Latent Dirichlet allocation facilitates the identification of words that come together to constitute a topic, and it allows us to identify the mix of topics that appeared in each article (Silge & Robinson, 2017). We then used the *topicmodels* package in R for our calculations (Grün & Hornik, 2011).

Findings

Institutional Boundaries

We began by looking at the volume of scholarly work produced each year (RQ2a). Before 2001, annual overall output was in the single digits and accounted for less than 4% (75 articles) of the entire data set. The number of articles published each year after 2001 is shown in Figure 1. Since 2008, more than 100 articles have appeared annually, resulting in more than 25-fold growth between 2001 and 2017.
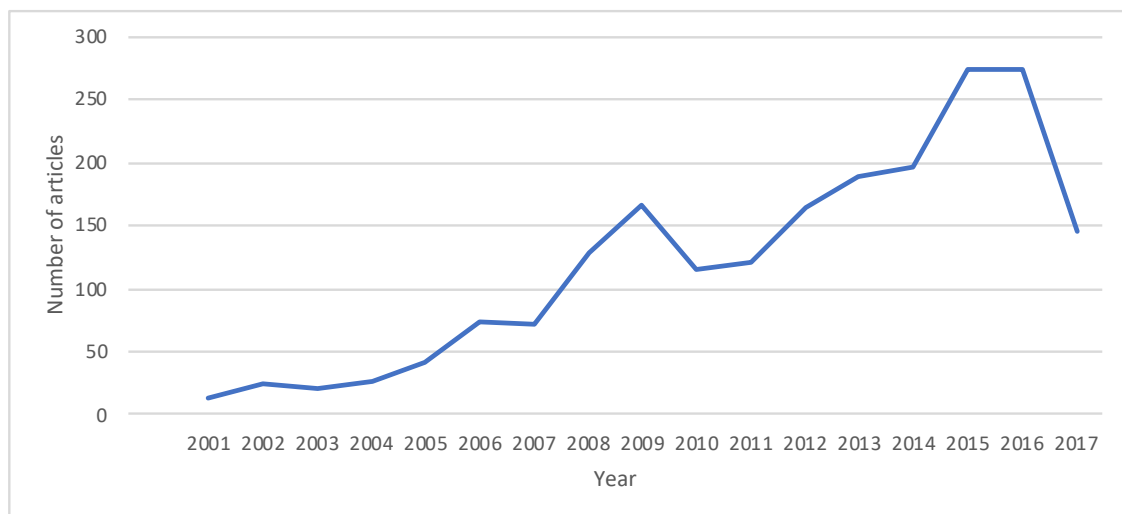
Figure 1. Number of articles on public diplomacy published per year from January 2000 to August 2017.

Turning to the journals in which public diplomacy research has been published (RQ2b), articles appeared in 843 different journals, 514 of which contributed just one article each to the data set. At the other end of the spectrum, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* supplied 5.84% (124) of all articles. Figure 2 identifies the 30 journals that published the most articles on public diplomacy, with the size of individual boxes corresponding to the number of articles published. These 30 journals together contributed 29.57% of all peer-reviewed work included in this study.
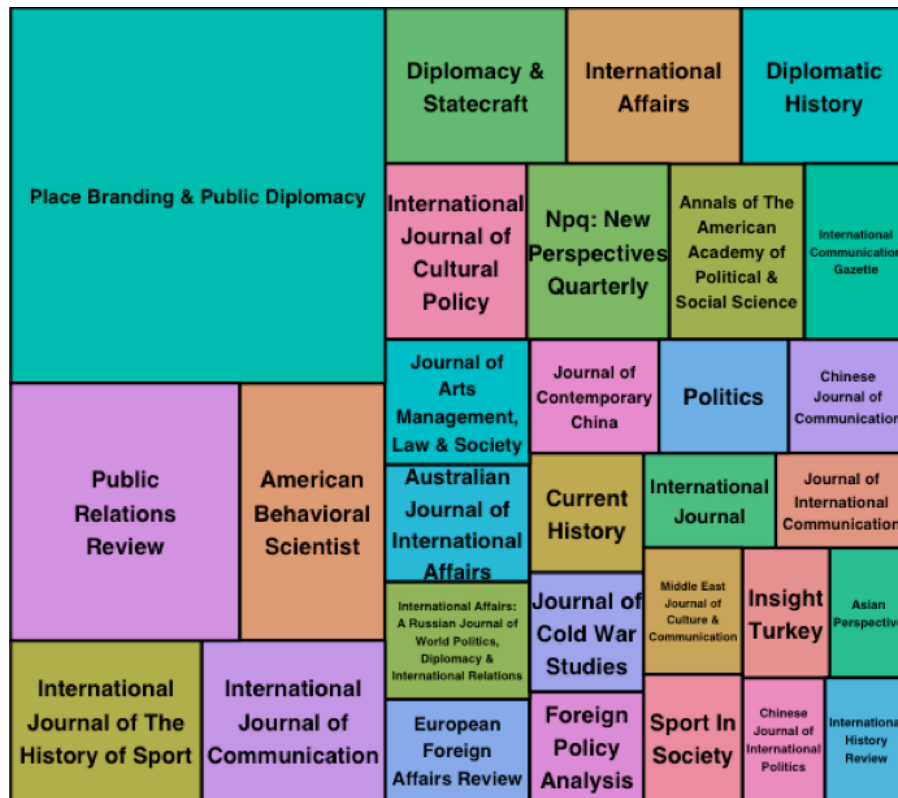
Figure 2. The top 30 publishers of articles on public diplomacy, 1965–2017.

We then grouped the journals according to discipline based on each publication's description of scope on its website. Fifteen of the 30 journals that published the most work about public diplomacy hail from international relations, with 11% of the scholarship considered here appearing in one of these journals. The fields of communication and cultural studies rank second and third, respectively, as disciplines whose journals also contributed large numbers to this data set. See Table 1 for a breakdown of these results.

Table 1. Disciplinary Breakdown of Top 30 Publishers of Public Diplomacy Articles.

Discipline	No. journals	No. articles	Percentage (%)
Communication	5	116	5.46
Cultural studies	3	50	2.35
History	3	33	1.55
Interdisciplinary	1	33	1.55
International relations	15	234	11.02
Public diplomacy	1	124	5.84
Sports	2	38	1.79

With the exception of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, the journals' output varies over time. Since 2007, the other top 29 journals published at least one public diplomacy article each year, averaging 1.46 such articles annually. This is in contrast to the annual average of 11.6 public diplomacy articles per year in *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.

While Figure 2 presents the 30 journals that published most of the scholarship on public diplomacy, and Table 1 documents the disciplines with which those journals are associated, a natural question emerges concerning the influence of these journals. Again limiting our discussion to the 30 journals that published the most public diplomacy research, we find that 11 of the 30 journals identified here do not appear in InCites Journal Citation Reports, a proprietary database owned by Clarivate Analytics. InCites tracks approximately 3,000 journals in 50 disciplines and calculates a journal impact factor for every journal that appears in the database. The Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) is widely considered a marker of influence for academic journals in the social sciences.

The journal that accounts for the largest percentage of published scholarship (124 articles, or 5.84% of the total), *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, is not indexed and does not have an impact factor. Of the 30 journals shown in Figure 2, the publication with the highest overall impact factor is *International Affairs*. It has an impact factor of 2.92 and appears in the International Affairs SSCI. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* is the next highest ranked journal, with an impact factor of 2.401 and a place in the top quartile for both Political Science and Social Science Interdisciplinary SSCIs. *Chinese Journal of International Politics* boasts the third highest impact factor at 1.813 and ranks in the second highest quartile of the International Relations SSCI. This is followed by *American Behavioral Scientist*, with an impact factor of 1.749. The journal appears in both the Psychology and Social Science Interdisciplinary SSCIs.

Among the 30 journals that have published the most public diplomacy scholarship, three of the 10 highest ranked journals focus on China. *Chinese Journal of International Politics* ranks third, *Journal of Contemporary China* ranks fifth, and *Chinese Journal of Communication* ranks seventh. Although this may seem surprising at first, it echoes the strong orientation toward China reflected in our analysis of the topics that appear most in the scholarship.

The 10 highest ranked journals in which public diplomacy scholarship appeared between 1965 and mid-2017 are highlighted in Table 2. These 10 journals published 9.7% of the public diplomacy scholarship considered in this meta-analysis (206 of the 2,124 total articles). What is most evident is the lack of public diplomacy studies in top-tier publications, regardless of discipline.

Table 2. Ten Highest Ranked Journals Publishing Public Diplomacy Scholarship (Ranked by Impact Factor).

Journal	SSCI Index	Impact factor	Quartile	No. articles	Percent of total (%)	Country of publication
International Affairs	International Relations	2.952	Fourth	24	1.1	England
Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science	Political Science, Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary	2.401	Fourth; fourth	21	0.99	United States
Chinese Journal of International Politics	International Relations	1.813	Fourth	9	0.42	England and China
American Behavioral Scientist	Psychology; Social Sciences, Interdisciplinary	1.749	Second; third	33	0.16	United States
Journal of Contemporary China	Area Studies	1.575	Fourth	13	0.61	England
Foreign Policy Analysis	International Relations	1.386	Third	11	0.52	England
Public Relations Review	Business; Communication	1.378	Second; third	52	2.4	United States
Chinese Journal of Communication	Communication	1.188	Second	12	0.56	England
International Journal of Cultural Policy	Cultural Studies	1.15	Fourth	5	0.24	England
International Journal of Communication	Communication	1.128	Second	26	1.2	United States

Topic Map

To find the most common topics in public diplomacy research (RQ3a), we ran two keyword frequency analyses, one for the titles and one for the abstracts. Table 3 shows the top 10 terms that appear in the titles and abstracts. *Power*, *soft*, *cultural*, *policy*, *international, world* and *media* appear in both lists. Only one country—China – appears in both. The next geographic reference, Africa, comes lower in the list followed by Russia, Europe, Japan, and Turkey. Africa is number 55. Russia is 129, Europe 196, Japan 142, Turkey 219.

***Table 3. The 10 Most Common Terms in Titles and Abstracts of Articles
on Public Diplomacy, 1965–2017.***

Titles	Abstracts
Power	power
Soft	soft
China	China
Cultural	international
International	cultural
Policy	policy
Relations	foreign
World	states
American	world
Media	media

Our topic modeling work consisted of two analyses. We first looked at which words come together to create a topic. This process required setting the number of topics to be determined beforehand. To find the most appropriate number of topics, we experimented with all values between two and 30. Since topic modeling also assigns percentage values to define the mixture of topics in each article, we ran all iterations with two to 30 topics, resulting in instances where articles did not have a single topic that outweighed all others in the mixture. We therefore complemented our topic modeling with inductive coding. For each iteration, we assessed whether the keywords presented a coherent topic while keeping the number of different topics as high as possible. Setting the parameter to 10 topics presented a good balance between presenting coherent yet diverse topics.

In the end, we identified nine topics under three headings: region, function, and discipline. Under region, we identified articles discussing public diplomacy practices in Asia (mainly Russia, Turkey, Korea, and Japan), in Europe (mainly Germany and the United Kingdom), and in China, which is presented here as a topic unto itself. In terms of function, the analysis led to connections between public diplomacy and conflict resolution, international development, and reputation management. The final topic group included works on the United States, including comparative, functional, and disciplinary studies, in the process overlapping with keywords associated with other topics. Table 4 presents these results.

Table 4. Topics Identified in Public Diplomacy Scholarship, 1965–2017.

Topic	No. articles
Region	
China	318
Europe	189
Asia	209
Function	
International development	184
Conflict resolution	129
Reputation management	124
Discipline	
Historical studies	223
Communication studies	271
Marketing studies	170
U.S. studies	148

The topic modeling process generated results for all articles with abstracts ($n = 2,072$). Of these articles, 95% ($n = 1,965$) were assigned one topic. The remaining 5% ($n = 107$) were not included in Table 4 because 13 articles were classified as having three topics and 94 were classified as having two. The most common topic for the remaining articles was public diplomacy in China, with 318 articles, and the least common topic was public diplomacy as reputation management, with 124 articles.

The final component of the analysis considered differences in topics across all the articles in the data set. RQ3c asks how different topics are addressed in studies of different countries and regions. Because not every article in the data set includes an abstract, the analysis here is based only the titles. The 12 countries or regions appearing most in the titles of the 2,124 articles are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Most Frequently Mentioned Countries and Regions in Public Diplomacy Articles.

Country or region	No. occurrences in article titles
China	279
Africa	97
Europe	82
Russia	80
Japan	66
United States	56
Korea	49
India	41
Australia	40
Turkey	33
Germany	13
Britain	9

Having thus identified researchers' geographic priorities, we then sought the keywords and topics typically associated with each (see Table 6).

Table 6. Top 10 Key Words That Appear in Article Titles by Country or Region in Public Diplomacy Scholarship, 1965–2017.

Africa	Australia	Britain	China	Europe	Germany	India	Japan	Korea	Russia	Turkey	United States
South	Diplomacy	Antarctic	Relations	Union	American	Power	Power	South	Power	Power	Diplomacy
Sub-Saharan	Public	Diplomacy	EU	Public	Attitudes	Soft	Cultural	Power	Soft	Soft	Public
Relationships	Case	*	Rising	Diplomacy	Cases	China	Soft	Soft	Diplomacy	Arab	Asia
West	Colombo	*	US	Power	Hohenzollern	American	Diplomacy	Diplomacy	Public	Balkans	Power
China	Cultural	*	Africa	Soft	Legitimacy	Diplomacy	Asia	Public	Ukraine	East	War
Contemporary	International	*	Brand	Policy	Nation	Public	Brand	East	Policy	EU	Soft
Francophone	Relation	*	Building	Security	Peace	Modi	China	China	China	European	China
Illustration	Student	*	Emerging	Cultural	Political	New	East	Cultural	Asia	Foreign	Culture
Issues	Advertise	*	Medium	East	Abroad	Strategy	Cool	North	Central	Global	East
Medium	Context	*	Power	Foreign	Afghanistan	War	Policy	Relations	Discourse	Middle	Empire

Note. These words exclude country or region names and variations thereof. All words listed here appear at least twice in the articles that include the country or region in the title. Only nine articles contain *Britain* in the title. In these articles, *Antarctic* and *diplomacy* are the only two keywords that are used more than once. The other 70 words that appeared in titles about Britain appeared just once and in no meaningful order for presentation here; they are marked with an asterisk.

We also identified the co-occurrence of those countries and regions with one another (see Table 6). China and Africa and China and India were the two most common pairs, at 10 co-mentions each. China and Japan was the next most common pairing, appearing seven times. The following pairings each had four co-mentions: China and Australia, China and Korea, China and Russia, China and the United States, Japan and Korea, and Korea and Russia.

Table 6 shows the 10 words that appear most in the article titles for each of the countries and regions identified above. Trends related to China are worth noting. First, *US*, *EU*, and *Africa* are among the top 10 terms associated with China. Since China is engaging in aggressive development projects in Africa, it is not surprising to see that continent on the list. Also of interest on the China list are the verbs *rising*, *building*, and *emerging*.

Table 7. Intersections Among Identified Countries or Regions
in Public Diplomacy Scholarship, 1965–2017.

	Africa	Australia	Britain	China	Europe	Germany	India	Japan	Korea	Russia	Turkey	United States
Africa	97	0	0	10	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	1
Australia	0	40	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Britain	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	10	4	0	279	3	0	10	7	4	4	0	4
Europe	0	0	0	3	82	1	0	0	2	2	3	2
Germany	0	0	0	0	1	13	0	0	0	0	0	1
India	1	1	0	10	0	0	41	1	0	0	0	1
Japan	0	0	0	7	0	0	1	66	4	0	0	2
Korea	2	0	0	4	2	0	0	4	49	0	0	1
Russia	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	4	80	0	0
Turkey	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	33	0
United States	1	2	0	4	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	56

Note. Highlighted number is the total number of articles with that country or region identified in the title. For example, a total of 279 articles mention China in the title. Ten of those article titles also mention Africa. As another example, a total of 49 articles mention Korea in the title. Four of those article titles also mention Russia.

India and the United States are the only two countries or regions whose top 10 words include *war* (see Table 6). India's ongoing standoff with Pakistan is one possible explanation for the former, while multiple studies examining U.S. Cold War public diplomacy and the more recent global war on terror may offer reasonable explanations for the United States. Also related to the United States, the only countries or regional references appearing in its top 10 are related to Asia: *China*, *Asia*, and *East*.

With the appearance of *student* on its list, Australia is the only country whose keywords include specific reference to education. *Colombo* also appears on this list, a clear nod to Australia's long-standing Asia-focused international educational exchange effort, the Colombo Plan (see, e.g., Byrne, 2016). Russia's list includes both *Ukraine* and *China* as well as *Central* and *Asia*. Russia's conflict with Ukraine in 2014 and the fallout from that conflict explains that country's appearance in Russia's list, while Russia's complicated relationship with China, especially as they both eye Central Asia in what some have termed a New Great Game, offers a reasonable explanation for these terms' frequent appearance in the data (see, e.g., Ferdinand, 2016).

Not surprisingly, *cool* appears on Japan's list, a clear reference to the cool Japan phenomena, which many scholars of nation branding often mention (see, e.g., Valaskivi, 2013). *China* is also on Japan's list, another unsurprising appearance given geographic proximity, historical animosity, and Japan's recognition of the need to play well with China to ensure its own security. The list for Turkey is instructive. Words found there, including *Arab*, *East*, *EU*, and *Balkans*, belie that country's literal role as middle ground between Europe and Asia. Also of note here is the word *middle*, likely a reference to scholarly discussion about

Turkey's geopolitical rank as a middle power and the ways it can exert influence in this context (see, e.g., Seib & Cevik, 2015; Sevin, 2017).

Table 7 shows the most frequent pairings of the 12 countries and regions appearing most often in the literature we examined. The scope of academic interest in China's public diplomacy is illustrated more dramatically here than in any other visual in this study. The intersection of China's public diplomacy with other countries and regions far exceeds interest in other countries or regions. Indeed, its implementation in places around the world is of greater interest than the efforts of any other country, including the United States. Africa appears in the next largest number of dyads, followed by Europe, Russia and Japan. Britain appears least frequently in the dyads captured in this table.

Finally, analysis of keywords and topics over time yields the data presented in Table 8. This table shows trends in public diplomacy scholarship since 1965. The evolution of interest in countries and regions beyond the United States over this period is clear, as is the move toward interest in public diplomacy's role as a tool for conflict resolution, reputation management, and international development.

Table 8. Trends in Public Diplomacy Scholarship, 1965–2017.

Years	PD and China	PD and Europe	PD and Asia	PD as international development	PD as conflict resolution	PD as reputation management	Historical studies	Communication studies	Marketing studies	US studies
1967-1999	5	3	4	5	3	3	18	6	1	5
2000-2003	7	5	10	3	3	3	12	5	4	4
2004-2005	6	4	7	2	3	3	13	12	5	5
2006	10	6	2	6	8	5	2	14	5	4
2007	8	4	5	5	6	9	9	8	8	7
2008	18	13	11	10	10	7	13	13	18	10
2009	22	16	15	6	10	13	10	28	11	27
2010	19	13	13	9	9	4	9	13	10	6
2011	19	18	11	16	6	6	7	18	5	6
2012	27	19	17	19	6	15	13	25	9	8
2013	26	16	18	16	8	18	12	30	18	16
2014	31	16	16	25	12	10	27	15	20	8
2015	47	20	27	24	22	8	37	34	23	14
2016	51	24	36	23	18	12	24	31	22	20
2017	22	12	17	15	5	8	17	19	11	8

Note. PD = public diplomacy.

Figure 3 represents data from 2001 to 2017 graphically. Here the most obvious trend is the spike in interest in China. Less dramatic but still worth noting is the cyclical pattern of interest in studies focused on historical aspects of public diplomacy or studies grounded in communications.
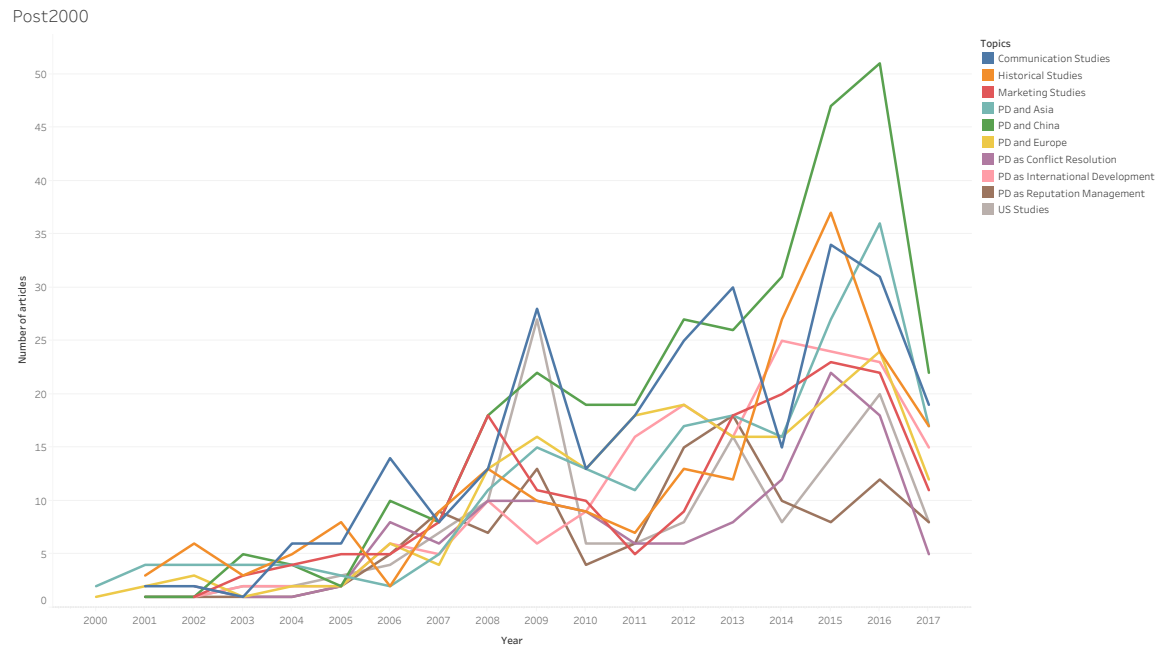
Figure 3. Trends in Public Diplomacy Research, 2001–2017.

Discussion

We conducted this research to identify key trends in public diplomacy research (RQ1) through delineation of its institutional (RQ2a and RQ2b) and topical (RQ3a, RQ3b, and RQ3c) boundaries. RQ2a marks the start of the analytical process as we considered publication volume. The field of public diplomacy has expanded significantly over the last decade. Conventional wisdom suggests that 9/11 marked a turning point in public diplomacy practice and studies, leading to a wave of interest in the subject (Djerejian, 2003; Melissen, 2005a, 2005b; Zaharna, 2010). Our analysis supports this assumption, showing a significant increase in scholarly attention to the subject since 2003.[1] This attention has been sustained, continuing to result in the publication of about 300 public diplomacy–focused articles each year. To understand what a dramatic increase this represents, consider that the average annual publication rate over the last six decades was just 41 articles per year.

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[1] The two-year lag is given with consideration to the time required to complete and publish an academic article.

RQ2b considers the journals that publish work on public diplomacy. Consistent with the interdisciplinary nature of the field, the journals are associated with a variety of disciplines, including international relations, communications, and history. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* published the most articles making explicit reference to public diplomacy. Other publications demonstrated varying levels of interest in the subject. A few journals—including *Public Relations Review*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *Diplomacy and Statecraft*—have consistently published public diplomacy articles over the years. Other journals have included such work under the aegis of special issues. A 2008 edition of *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* with guest editors Geoffrey Cowan and Nicholas J. Cull is one such example. *American Behavioral Scientist* has produced two special issues focused on aspects of public diplomacy, the first in 2009 edited by Gregory Payne and the second in 2013 edited by Guy Golan. In terms of journals' disciplinary associations, those devoted to international relations have published the most articles, but journals associated with journalism and mass communication (including public relations) have also provided a stable outlet for publication of this work, welcoming studies in their regular issues as opposed to limiting them to special editions. A number of regionally focused journals regularly publish work on public diplomacy. These include *Insights Turkey*, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, and *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. Interest in public diplomacy spans disciplinary and geographic boundaries.

RQ3a asks about the topics that appear in the peer-reviewed research on public diplomacy. Soft power was the most common concept-based topic, confirming its status as a predominant framework for the field (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Meanwhile, the combination of media, international relations, culture, and foreign policy, followed by references to the United States and China points to the interdisciplinarity and regional focus of public diplomacy research.

Perhaps unsurprisingly since they were the search terms used to identify articles for inclusion in this study, *public*, *diplomacy*, *soft*, and *power* are among the most common terms in the 2,124 titles, as shown in Figure 4. Meanwhile, China is the country that appears most often, demonstrating that researchers have taken to heart earlier pleas for studies looking beyond the United States. The dominance of China in this data set is also evidence of that country's growing global dominance on multiple fronts.

The terms *cultural*, *policy*, *foreign*, and *international* also loom large in the word cloud in Figure 4, pointing to topics that dominate the research. Public diplomacy efforts are directed at audiences abroad, and that international orientation is reflected here. That public diplomacy is increasingly referred to specifically as a foreign policy tool is also evident in this analysis, as is the view of public diplomacy as a means of communicating across cultural boundaries.

***Figure 4. Word cloud of the 100 most common words in titles of articles on public diplomacy,
1965–2017.***

Topic modeling carried out to answer RQ3b demonstrates that most articles contain a mix of topics, and this fact constitutes both a finding and a limitation of the study. The figures associated with the topics should be seen as approximate values since the study relied on automated categorization. The prominence of China and the United States in the country and region category points to the volume of research focused on these two nations. In terms of public diplomacy functions, international development, reputation management, and conflict resolution are the unsurprising leading targets of research considered here. But this finding is also remarkable for what it does not include. The use of public diplomacy to shape media framing (see, e.g., Frensley & Michaud, 2006) and as a means of promoting foreign policy (see, e.g., Sun, 2008) appear understudied in comparison.

Overall, the topic modeling process yields two important findings. First, studies covering the U.S. practice of public diplomacy are prominent in the literature. The significance of the U.S. experience is not based solely on the number of articles published. Rather, we observe that scholars have studied U.S. public diplomacy through different disciplinary lenses and conceptualized it to have multiple functions. Second, despite the dominance of international relations journals as publishers of peer-reviewed research on public diplomacy, the field of international relations does not emerge as one of the three key fields identified through the topic modeling. While there is clear interest in public diplomacy demonstrated by journals focused on international relations, that interest manifests as a concept invoked in regional development and conflict resolution studies rather than as studies of public diplomacy per se. Public diplomacy is not readily framed, classified, or otherwise well articulated within international relations research.

The insights derived from analysis of the words that appear most often with countries and regions offer further perspective on the findings presented elsewhere in this study (RQ3c). Research on China in the

public diplomacy context, for instance, is concerned with that country's growing influence. Moreover, while the word *power* does appear in China's top 10, *soft* does not. This may suggest a recognition that China's growing strength is not necessarily accompanied by similar increases in soft power influence. Looking at the concepts relevant to the United States, we surmise the presence of the words *China*, *East*, and *Asia* in that list is due at least in part to the most recent U.S. administration's emphasis on a foreign policy pivot toward Asia. This finding is also surely related, as is much else here, to China's rise. With respect to Japan, the appearance of the word *brand* on its list makes sense in this context, as does *cultural* since it is cultural capital that has been at the core of the cool Japan trend.

An unexpected finding is that international exchanges do not appear more often, especially considering how central exchange programs are to the practice of public diplomacy (Bettie, 2015; Metzgar, 2017; Scott-Smith, 2008). The dearth of references to international broadcasting is also noteworthy, although the word *medium* does appear in the lists of Africa and China. This might stem from China's aggressive efforts to disseminate news in sub-Saharan Africa via CGTN Africa (formerly CCTV Africa; see, e.g., Gagliardone & Pál, 2017).

Despite the lengthy publication process that typically accompanies peer-reviewed work, public diplomacy researchers nevertheless address timely topics that track with other geopolitical or policy-related developments. This finding points to the extent to which researchers conduct their work with an eye toward policy applications. "Peer-reviewed research with real-world implications" is how we would summarize the body of literature we have begun to examine here.

Conclusion

Given its relatively short history as a focus of academic study, its frequently atheoretical bent, and its sensitivity to changing geopolitical landscapes, public diplomacy research presents a unique opportunity for a meta-analysis. The benefits derived from this exercise have the potential to extend well beyond the halls of academe. Insights generated from this study could aid public diplomacy policy makers and practitioners by shedding light on areas where some dynamics are better understood than others, where certain practices are deemed more salient than others, where some actors are more—or differently— engaged than others, and where some thorny questions simply remain unanswered. It is our hope that this study will contribute to thinking about public diplomacy among all audiences with interest in the subject, both academic and applied.

The systematic approach we have employed for review of public diplomacy scholarship yields several insights. First, it highlights the influence of discipline-specific attention and the effect that such focus can have in narrowing the scope of questions being asked about public diplomacy. Political scientists embed their research about public diplomacy in the literature of international relations, while communication scholars frame their work in the context of public relations, media effects, and persuasive communication. When these two approaches do not intersect, there is the potential for loss of explanatory power. That same dynamic plays out on a larger scale when political science and communication researchers are not looking further afield for synergies with scholars working in other disciplines who may be examining many of the same dynamics. We suggest that if the study of public diplomacy is to deserve the description of *cross-*

disciplinary, then researchers might work more consciously toward incorporation of literatures and insights outside their own. Public diplomacy affords the possibility of recontextualizing concepts and theories by presenting cases that show where disciplinary concepts converge (e.g., media effects theories and treatments of power in international relations). But few examples illustrate where public diplomacy converges with more established studies of diplomacy (see Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, & Sharp, 2012).

Our work nevertheless demonstrates the breadth of public diplomacy research as well as how multidisciplinary the study of the subject has become. The keywords and topics addressed span regions and practices. Some journals have earned a reputation for being especially welcoming of public diplomacy research, and there is evidence of interest in public diplomacy across journals in the social sciences and the humanities. Yet this research is often most visible in more specialized journals rather than in flagship outlets.

Data about where public diplomacy research appears may suggest lingering concerns about the term and its embrace by various disciplines. Public diplomacy was derived as a term of bureaucratic convenience. The consequence of its lack of definitional precision is that it elides what it contains, such as cultural exchange, international broadcasting, and activities that might otherwise be more starkly apparent. Substantive questions in public diplomacy research concerning issues of strategic influence, persuasion, cultural relations, and media effects are relevant to research agendas in more established fields and disciplines. The term is not yet an invitation to traditional academic disciplines to view public diplomacy questions as their own. That public diplomacy research has not consistently broken into higher-tier journals across disciplines suggests both a lack of visibility and perceived absence of potential for future studies.

Third, although the lack of a unifying theory for the study of public diplomacy has long been lamented, having conducted this study, we are tempted to conclude that this characteristic is a strength rather than a shortcoming (Entman, 2008; Melissen, 2005a). While we endorse the incorporation of appropriate theory to guide research questions and ensure coherence in analysis of results, we are agnostic about which theories are most useful for the study of public diplomacy. Indeed, having evaluated the peer-reviewed literature as a whole, we propose that such ecumenicalism with respect to theory may be the field's greatest strength. However, future meta-analyses should map how public diplomacy reflects theoretical frameworks and, in the process, reflects persistent questions and prescriptions that have defined the field thus far.

While this meta-analysis examines data related to more than 2,000 studies on public diplomacy and makes a significant contribution, we acknowledge the work has some limitations. Key among them is the consideration of only peer-reviewed research. The methodological rationale for taking this approach is sound and has allowed us to speak authoritatively about the findings. However, rich insights about public diplomacy both in theory and practice are to be found in books across a variety of disciplines as well as in policy-focused studies produced by government institutions, think tanks, and others, including the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy, which has been central to the promotion of public diplomacy as a subject worthy of both academic inquiry and policy consideration.

Additionally, given the size of the data set compiled for this study, we analyzed only the titles and abstracts of the identified articles. While even limited analysis is better than none at all, a more in-depth

review of the content of the 2,124 articles we collected will offer more nuanced results, including consideration of theory, methodological approach, and any programmatic evaluations contained therein. In other words, how public diplomacy is rendered visible as an object of inquiry will be an important next step in mapping the boundaries of the field through the kinds of questions and methods used to make claims about public diplomacy.

We argue that the meta-analysis presented here can serve as a solid foundation for developing a better understanding about the evolution of public diplomacy research over the last several decades. Indeed, we hope our work will prompt further reflection about the state of public diplomacy research and be an indicator of the areas that would benefit from additional, sustained attention from various disciplines. In addition, we hope that such reflection and any potential redirection of scholarly attention that result will ultimately lead to the translation of public diplomacy research into actionable insights for practitioners, policy makers, and others concerned with the engagement of foreign publics in pursuit of foreign policy goals.

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