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Strategic management of public diplomacy digital communication: A literature review

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Abstract: *Public diplomacy has been gaining a more significant role in national diplomatic relations, which has been instigated with greater usage of new technologies and digital media and expansion of online communication of government institutions with international public. Within the contemporary environment, the character of public diplomacy has changed and the essence of public diplomacy has moved from one-way and state-centered communication perspective towards an interactive, relationship building and fostering perspective. In order to enable reaching of foreign policy goals, public diplomacy demands strategic approach to communication, especially when it comes to digital channels such as social media. Important topics related to public diplomacy should be referred to as strategic issues in digital communication, which could represent either problems or opportunities for diplomatic institutions and individuals, and, therefore, should be approached from the perspective of strategic issue management. The aim of this paper is to improve the understanding of the public diplomacy digital communication from the strategic issues management perspective by providing a*

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comprehensive literature review on this topic, and to provide basis for further empirical research.

Keywords: *public diplomacy, strategic management, strategic issues, digital communication, social media*

Strateški menadžment digitalne komunikacije u javnoj diplomatiji: Pregled literature

Apstrakt: *Javna diplomatija dobija sve značajniju ulogu u nacionalnim diplomatskim odnosima, što je podstaknuto većim korišćenjem novih tehnologija i digitalnih medija i širenjem onlajn komunikacije diplomatskih institucija sa međunarodnom javnošću. U savremenom okruženju, karakter javne diplomatije se promenio i suština javne diplomatije se transformisala iz jednosmerne i državno-centrične perspektive komunikacije u interaktivnu perspektivu izgradnje i negovanja odnosa sa javnošću. Da bi se omogućilo postizanje spoljnopolitičkih ciljeva, u javnoj diplomatiji se zahteva strateški pristup komunikaciji, posebno kada su u pitanju digitalni kanali kao što su društveni mediji. Važne teme vezane za javnu diplomatiju treba razmatrati kao strateška pitanja u digitalnoj komunikaciji, koja mogu predstavljati ili probleme ili prilike za diplomatske institucije i pojedince, te im stoga treba pristupiti iz perspektive upravljanja strateškim pitanjima. Cilj ovog rada je unapređenje razumevanja digitalne komunikacije javne diplomatije iz perspektive upravljanja strateškim pitanjima pružanjem sveobuhvatnog pregleda literature na ovu temu, kao i pružanje osnove za dalja empirijska istraživanja.*

Ključne reči: *javna diplomatija, strateški menadžment, strateška pitanja, digitalna komunikacija, društveni mediji.*

1. Introduction

Dynamic environment imposes the need to both private and public organizations, which operate in various fields, to change the ways of communication with various groups of public. In accordance with that, the nature and practice of public diplomacy has changed as well. The public diplomacy has been gaining a more significant role in national diplomatic relations, and this has been instigated with greater usage of new technologies and digital media and online communication. Within the context of evolving technological solutions and global communications, the character of public diplomacy has changed (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016). The necessity of using more efficient channels of communication at the global level, with diverse

foreign publics, and enabling effective communication and public engagement, thus has been obvious in the field of public diplomacy (Zaharna, 2018).

A complex environment, characterized by uncertainty, unclear impact of many internal and external factors which interact among each other, and the influence of multiple groups of public, imposes the necessity for organizations to take strategic orientation in an attempt to establish as much control as possible over these forces (Brønn & Brønn, 2002). So, strategic point of view has become obligatory in all business aspects, including public relations and communications. So as the case with other areas of strategic orientation, public diplomacy communication has also been gaining more strategic direction (Taylor, 2009). Since public diplomacy activities are conducted through different media and communication channels, both one-way and interactive, they may rise certain issues that gain wider public attention. Due to that, it is suggested in the literature, that the area of public diplomacy communication, and digital communication in particular, should be observed from a strategic point of view, especially from the point of view of strategic issue management. In accordance with that, the aim of this paper is to improve the understanding of the public diplomacy digital communication from the strategic issues management perspective by providing a comprehensive literature review on this topic, and to provide basis for further empirical research.

2. Public diplomacy in the contemporary context

Public diplomacy represents an area of political public relations which has been attracting increasing attention of scholars and researchers (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Both, political public relations and public diplomacy put an emphasis on conducting effective communication with public in order to establish and foster relationships for some political purposes. The focus of public diplomacy is on relations with foreign publics and it is practiced by national governments and organizations aiming to build relationships at the international level. There are three levels of relationship-building activities in public diplomacy. At the first level, there are cultural and educational programs. At the second level, there is a collaboration between public institutions and organizations from private sector. Building relationships between government institutions, nongovernmental organizations and other non-state actors aiming to achieve public policy objectives represents the third level. Countries need to engage on all three levels and none of the levels should be neglected (Zaharna, 2010).

As formulated by Sevin (2015), public diplomacy includes “communication-based activities of states and state-sanctioned actors aimed at non-state groups in other countries with the expectation of achieving foreign policy goals and objectives”. Public diplomacy represents an integration of diplomatic and

international communication activities targeting foreign publics, which seek to create a positive image and/or certain political influence, which in essence contribute to the achievement of foreign policy goals (Azpíroz Manero, 2015). It includes communication and persuasion instruments conducted with the goal to influence foreign public and achieve foreign policy objectives (Jia & Li, 2020). The public diplomacy has been observed from two aspects. One aspect observes public diplomacy as a communication conducted by governments with the goal to have an impact on international publics, whereas other aspect observes public diplomacy as “no longer a domain of governments alone, but also a function of intergovernmental organizations (e.g., the United Nations), corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and activist groups and their attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public” (Storie, 2017).

As Wei (2020) pointed out, in the theoretical sense, scholars have made a distinction between traditional and new public diplomacy, and consider that, since the beginning of the XXI century, public diplomacy has been transforming from the former to the latter form. In a traditional sense, diplomacy has been regarded as the integration of state interests with the broader concepts of economic and political power and public security (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016). Over time, the character of public diplomacy has changed, and with the changes in technologies and communication practices, an evolution of diplomacy in the digital age has also occurred. In a modern sense, public diplomacy reflects “the interaction of political leaders, journalists and the wider public in determining cultural relations and exchanges, international forms of broadcasting and nation branding” (Iosifidis & Wheeler, 2016). Today, public diplomacy involves multiple instruments of communication used by government institutions and diplomatic organizations, such as embassies, as well as public institutions and international organizations and associations and even individuals. Those instruments are used to communicate and establish relations with publics in countries where countries conduct bilateral and multilateral diplomatic activities, as well as with global public. It is important to notice that the activities conducted in the field of public diplomacy should be complementary to other activities carried out by traditional diplomacy, however, communication channels and instruments and target public might be different. As Melissen (2005) noted, “The basic distinction between traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy is clear: the former is about relationships between the representatives of states, or other international actors; whereas the latter targets the general public in foreign societies and more specific non-official groups, organizations and individuals”. It is often assumed that public diplomacy in the traditional sense does not treat public as valuable enough, whereas publics are central in public diplomacy and the emphasis is put on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. The importance of public has grown significantly as they are now observed more as partners

sharing communication power than passive recipients of political messages (Graham, 2014). Therefore, contemporary public diplomacy transfers the focus from a reactive to a proactive mode. It puts public as the most essential element claiming that established relationships with different groups of public may act as a preventive factor in case of future crises. Strategies and tactics of public diplomacy “are shifting from one-way informational diplomatic objectives to two-way interactive public exchanges; exchange and reciprocity are becoming trust-building measures and we are adding a personal and social dimension to other variables of influence and persuasion” (Snow, 2009). Contemporary public diplomacy is organized in a horizontal mode, which includes multiple actors which communicate and interact together, and it is often called Public diplomacy 2.0 in distinction with traditional version, which is organized in a hierarchical mode where dissemination of information is centralized by the government (Wei, 2020).

Zaharna and Huang (2022) and Zaharna (2022) noted that relations, connectivity, and interactivity are crucial in today’s public diplomacy and that there is a shift from actor-centered public diplomacy towards humanity-centered diplomacy which responds best to the needs of contemporary society. An important aspect of public diplomacy is relationship cultivation, which represents the “process of initiating, nurturing positive, and recovering from negative relationships between various public diplomacy actors” (Storie, 2017). There is a distinction between notions of relationship cultivation and relationship management. Whereas relationship management in public diplomacy refers mainly to the maintenance of good relationships, relationship cultivation is based on the premise that certain relationships, which could be damaged, had to be restored, in order to gain positive relational outcomes (Storie, 2017). Also, fields relevant to public relations such as crisis communication, public opinion and issues management are essential in the field of public diplomacy (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Certain public relations strategies can be applied in public diplomacy in order to “resolve misinterpretation, misunderstanding and miscommunication with international publics”, especially talking into consideration that countries and nations can be portrayed in a stereotypical manner in mass media (Kim, 2016).

Media are central in the public diplomacy since they serve as channels to disseminate information and as active creators of public opinion. Due to that, governments and governmental institutions have been strategically using mass media, traditional media and Internet for communication and engagement with national and foreign public for the purposes of building a country’s image and reputation and promotion of their political stance on certain issues (Albishri et al., 2019).

As regarding the components of public diplomacy, Cull (2008) listed: (a) listening, (b) advocacy, (c) cultural diplomacy, (d) international exchange and

(e) international broadcasting. Authors Cowan and Arsenault (2008) pointed out three layers of public diplomacy - monologues, dialogue, and collaboration. Sevin (2015) pointed out the following areas in public diplomacy: public opinion, relationship dynamics, and public debates which contain six pathways to connection, or ways to reach international audiences and achieve foreign policy goals. The first pathway, called "Attraction" by the author, relates to the making influence on mass public opinion. The second pathway, "Benefit of the doubt" considers the creation of the perception that included parties possess similar policy interests. These two pathways relate to the area of building of public opinion. The area of relationship dynamics includes two pathways – socialization and direct influence. "Socialization" relates to the creation of new relationships, while "Direct influence" relates to creating changes in attitudes of elites. The pathway of "Agenda-setting" refers to the introduction of "a given issue or increasing its salience in media or public agendas in target audiences" (Sevin, 2015). Digital media are especially observed to be effective at agenda-building and may be used solely or in combination with the mainstream media (Albishri et al., 2019). Finally, "Framing" relates to creating the changed coverage of a certain issue so more favorable aspects are highlighted. These two pathways fall into the area of public debates (Sevin, 2015).

3. Digital communication in public diplomacy

Since technological advancement and new communication means have affected relations in an international environment, public diplomacy has transformed into digital diplomacy. While in the traditional context of public diplomacy, communication primarily relied on mass media, today the Internet and social media represent crucial channels which offer governments and public opportunities to connect and develop two-way communication (Zhong & Lu, 2013; Storie, 2015; Albishri et al., 2019). Traditional diplomacy mainly included one-way communication and dissemination of information, with government-centric sources of information (Sevin, 2015; Jia & Li, 2020). By conducting such one-way communication and using traditional mass media to convey messages, "the goal of conventional public diplomacy was primarily to generate support and create a favorable understanding for state policies abroad" (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). However, the evolution of communication technologies and dissatisfaction of public with the role of solely passive message receipts has instigated the transformation of the traditional concept of public diplomacy (Zhong & Lu, 2013; Parmelee, 2014). So, actors in public diplomacy have realized that by maintaining traditional media communication and one-way information dissemination, they cannot expect to be considered relevant and have credibility in public (Zhong & Lu, 2013; Zaharna & Uysal,

2015). This has redirected the essence of public diplomacy from perspective which is one-way and state-centered towards an active, relational, public-centric, perspective (Zaharna & Uysal, 2015; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). This concept is often called public diplomacy 2.0 (Cull, 2013; Dodd & Collins, 2017). As noted by Cull (2013), public diplomacy 2.0 is characterized by the greater ability to develop relationships with public and online communities, dependency on the content generated by users and feedback, and development of networks of information exchange which are horizontally arranged.

As noted by Liaw et al. (2020), "development in technology has transformed diplomatic engagement, which is now no longer limited through bilateral talks and discussions but also encompassing social media platforms for negotiation or other endeavours". In accordance with the shift in practice, an online communication and, especially, social media communication in public diplomacy has been gaining greater research interest (e.g. Hayden, Waisanen, & Osipova, 2013; Dodd & Collins, 2017, Sevin & Ingenhoff, 2018; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019; Liaw et al., 2020). The popularization of social media as communication channels in public diplomacy is related to the potential to stimulate engagement and interconnection and interaction with foreign publics (Zaharna et al., 2014). The essence of social media lies in their ability to overcome special and time boundaries and to allow members of the public to interact with political subjects directly (Parmelee, 2014). Using the social media as tools for political discourse have significantly influenced the practice of the public diplomacy (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). Communication via social media enables value co-creation through establishing dialogue, stimulating engagement, social presence and conversation (Ravazzani & Hazée, 2022). In accordance with that, as experience-sharing and relationship-building based on the common values and interests related to the international public is in the focus of today's public diplomacy (Zhong & Lu, 2013). As noted by Ingenhoff, Calamai and Sevin (2022), "Introducing user-generated content into diplomatic activities has challenged the exclusive positions of diplomatic corps and institutions as producers and gatekeepers of diplomatic messages. The increased use of web 2.0 - and later, of social media - has made it simultaneously easier and more complex for governments and other official bodies to communicate with foreign publics".

Twitter is used most intensely for the purpose of public diplomacy. By using their Twitter accounts, governments, governmental institutions and embassies communicate with wider public (Waters, & Williams, 2011; Yepsen, 2012; Uysal, Schroeder, & Taylor, 2012; Parmelee, 2014; Dodd & Collins, 2017). There is even a term "Twiplomacy" constructed to explain using of this social media by state leaders and diplomats. Besides Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are also used for the purpose of public diplomacy. Countries have different levels of utilization of social media. There are some which fully utilized

this channel of communication as a main for conveying information to the international public (Liaw et al., 2020).

There are several advantages of using the social media in public diplomacy. Communication via social media is seen as a “gateway to positive perception of state” and as a tool for strengthening the international relations. It also creates a sense of transparency, which is important in a today’s world where people tend to share content from daily lives online, which, in turn, demands same level of openness and transparency from governments and sharing of their activities (Liaw et al., 2020). It also provides a platform for dialogue since members of the public are no longer passive targets, but have the ability to express their opinion and share their thoughts on various. Social media “empowers publics to engage in a public debate battle to increase the salience of a given issue, or to shape frames that reach the target audiences and achieve their foreign policy goals” (Jia & Li, 2020). It is said that social media platforms have brought about the true revolution in public diplomacy by enabling state governments to interactively communicate with international publics beyond physical boundaries (Jia & Li, 2020).

On the other hand, there are certain disadvantages of using the social media in public diplomacy. As noted by Storie (2017), social media in public diplomacy can be sometimes observed as an image-making tool, used solely for the purposes of creating perception of being modern and to attract the attention of the younger generations who are bound to digital technologies. Also, communication via social media requests fast responses and efficient exchange of information, therefore, it is considered to be time-consuming and demands, usually, a team of people to work on it without time boundaries. The second disadvantage is a cyber-threat, especially of hacking of social media accounts, which could create a crisis situation. There is also a risk of misinterpretation and judgement, which may arise as a consequence of linguistic and cultural barriers between diplomatic actor and members of a certain public. So, there might be different perceptions of the same posts depending on a cultural background of public members (Liaw et al., 2020). Therefore, public diplomacy requires a careful use of social media in order to cultivate trust, and taking into account that every mediated communication has certain limitations (Storie, 2017).

4. Strategic management in public diplomacy

Strategic management represents an approach that was initially associated with private sector, but today is also successfully applied by public institutions and organizations which use it to reach their goals. Strategic planning has a

rising prominence in the public sector, and the public sector is more prone to adoption of the concepts of strategic planning and management for the purpose of the formulation of more effective forms of acting (Joyce, 2015). Strategic management contains several phases, from strategic planning, formulation of strategies and defining ways of strategy implementation, and continuous with strategic learning (Bryson & George, 2020). It includes different approaches, among which is the strategic issues management approach (Bryson & George, 2020). This approach bases on the premise that, in the environment, there are underlying systemic potential issues in all business sectors, therefore, “an effective preventive process fundamentally requires capacity to scan the environment, gather information, assess and evaluate that information and turn it into action” (Jaques, 2010). With the increasing level of environmental turbulence, strategic issues appear more frequently and impose challenges to regular ways of conducting business activities. The type of response of an organization would depend on the level of turbulence. So, when turbulence is on the relatively low level, the response of an organization might be restrained solely to making certain operational changes. On the other hand, under the conditions of high turbulence, when emerging strategic issues may have a serious impact on the organization’s ability to fulfil its objectives, the periodic planning has to be replaced with a strategic issue management, which is dynamic and real-time system of strategic planning (Perrott, 2011).

Public institutions and government organizations, as well as activist organizations, have had an important role in shaping public relations theory and practice, among which also an issues management (Woods, 2022). The strategic issue management (SIM) approach, which responds to signals in “real time”, was proposed by Ansoff (1980). It has become a widely accepted theoretical and practical approach to strategic management. This approach includes processes which reflect strategic thinking, that represents an integration of creative and analytical abilities which result in superior strategic planning, and it provides a solid basis for conducting environmental monitoring (Brønn & Brønn, 2002). Research findings have showed that proper adoption of issues management activities by organizations improve their business performances (Heugens, 2002). This concept is primarily based on the identification of risks and opportunity before organization’s key audiences could and development of capacity to act in a rapid and efficient manner, in order to seize opportunity or minimize risk before it evolves into crisis and make serious implications on business operations and reputation in public (Palese & Crane, 2002). It is generally perceived as an early warning or pre-crisis mechanism which is closely coordinated with strategic planning (Jaques, 2010). Heath (2006) has defined strategic issues management as organized action towards timely identification of emerging trends and issues which possess the probability to influence an organization during following years and development of a range of proper organizational responses to those issues. As defined by

Heath and Palenchar (2009), broadly defined, strategic issue management represents the combination of specific functions and responsive culture which includes strategic planning, issue monitoring, and strategic communication necessary to foster supportive relationships between organizations and the environment.

In the context of public relations and strategic communication, Coombs and Holladay (2018) noted that “issues management has become a more broadly focused proactive strategic communication function that helps management achieve larger organizational goals”. Issues management is a multidisciplinary discipline, and it includes public affairs, communications, community and stakeholder relations in combination with strategic planning. In essence, issue management is a discipline and process which “systematically identifies, analyses and tests corporate strategy in the context of changing expectations and changing circumstances”. It can help shaping expectations and relationships with public and managing and improving reputation with key public groups (Palese & Crane, 2002).

By conducting the issue management, organizations should prevent certain issue from becoming an actual problem. It contains various tools and techniques which could be used independently or in a synergy to face an issue and develop a proper response (Palese & Crane, 2002; Oliver & Donnelly, 2007). Strategic issue management systems, with their component tools, can be used effectively to provide a more objective understanding of the issue and to shape a more effective strategic objective and tactical plan” (Oliver & Donnelly, 2007).

Perrott (2011) defined following stages in this process of strategic issue management: capturing issues, reviewing implications and sorting and coding of issues, assessing importance and ranking issues, setting priorities, planning actions, monitoring progress and continuing issue capture. As defined by Heath and Palenchar (2009), there are following functions of strategic issue management: monitoring and gathering information, information analyzing and issue classification, sorting and prioritization of issues, and development of an action plan. The first and crucial step in the process is the identification, capturing and prioritizing of strategic issues. By regularly scanning the environment, issues could be identified and recorded. Afterwards, they need to be sorted by relevance and priority. This step is especially important for decision-makers in order to place focus on strategic issues that are prioritized, so they could mobilize adequate resources to address critical issues. Valuable tool with this regard is the Strategic Issue Priority Matrix (SIPM) which enables sorting of strategic issues in terms of perceived level of urgency and potential impact. After being placed in the matrix, issues can then be observed in terms of their relative importance and necessary speed of reaction (Perrott, 2011). From the strategic point of view, determination of the importance of issues can

be regarded as one of the most critical activities of the strategic issues management. Even though all issues which are regarded as strategic could be given high priority, there is a still even a slight difference between issues so some might demand more urgent action and higher resources while some could be handled more routinely (Lawal, Elizabeth & Oludayo, 2012). So, it is crucial to consider that the lack of preparation for the proper response to an issue and failure to provide proper resources and to have established procedures for effectively addressing the issue represents a threat to organization's activities (Barnhill, 2013).

Sommerfeldt and Yang (2017) noted that issues evolve from their potential stage to the resolution. An issue is in the potential stage when a certain person or group expresses interest in the issue and points the need for facing the issue. When passes to the imminent stage, an issue becomes accepted as legitimate by a wider public and public groups begin to see certain connection with an issue and others who express interest in the issue. When an issue further passes to the current stage, there is a wide dissemination of information about an issue through various channels such as mass media, which makes an issue broadly recognized in the public. Furthermore, an issue has reached the critical stage in case when it is being discussed in public as something that government institutions and other authorities possess the power to "resolve". Finally, an issue can be resolved when certain policy decisions on an issue have been made. Despite resolving, some issues can later resurface and can restart the life cycle again, together with new issues which emerge.

5. Strategic approach to digital communication in public diplomacy

Since organizations of all sizes and in all sectors have become digital, and tend to invest in information technology and enhancing of their online presence, a strategic perspective with this regard has become an imperative in contemporary turbulent environment (Phillips & Moutinho, 2018). Nowadays, almost every country uses social media for interactions with the public in the virtual surroundings, so, social media have become the main platform where public diplomacy communication takes place and, therefore, possess the strategic value in a today's environment (Jia & Li, 2020). In contemporary digital media environment, strategic communication is needed for the purpose of resolving problems and misconceptions with different groups of public (Kim, 2016). In the context of public diplomacy, social media, as a contemporary way of communication, should be observed as issues, which could represent opportunities, as well as problems. Since public diplomacy demands strategic

communication, the use of social media in public diplomacy should shift from solely tactical tools into strategic tools of communication and relationship development (Zhang, 2013).

Strategic issues management is recognized in international public relations. This proactive strategic management approach is ideal for addressing public concerns in turbulent environments (de Brooks & Waymer, 2009). Adopting issues management is important for organizations in addressing issues of their concern (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017), including issues which appear in digital environment. Social media have become a valuable tool for dissemination of information regarding various issues to public in the earliest stages of their development, and for prevention of their further escalation (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).

Zhang (2013) proposed that the use of social media as communication channels in the context of public diplomacy should be observed from a perspective of strategic issue management. In his research, author identified the following four phases of this process in public diplomacy: (1) the issue fermenting and going viral phase, (2) the proactive phase, (3) the reactive phase, and (4) the issue receding and new issue emerging phase. While social media represent mainly tactical tools in the first and the last phase of strategic issue management, they gain strategic importance in the proactive and reactive phases. In the first phase, which is called the issue fermenting and going viral phase, first signs of a certain issue appear on social media. This issue might be triggered by a certain event or might emerge spontaneously or purposely (Zhang, 2013). In this phase, it is advisable to sort issues regarding their potential impact and urgency and prioritize them as they emerge, in order to address critical issues in a proper way (Perrott, 2011).

In the second, the proactive phase, diplomatic institutions conduct research and collect information on the issue, and start actions on social media to strengthen the favorable trends, position the agenda and influence the public opinion. In the reactive phase, actions previously taken by the diplomatic institutions or individuals may cause adverse reactions, so even certain conflicts on social media may emerge. These conflicts might demand different communication strategies and negotiation approaches. In the final phase, current issue gradually loses intensity but it is advisable that diplomatic institutions continue to communicate with key publics and to maintain built relationships. Simultaneously, new issues may appear on social media and the new cycle starts (Zhang, 2013).

As explained by Zhang (2013), social media should be used as strategic tools in the proactive and reactive phases of issue development, as “they are used to drive the viral trends, to communicate staged events and actions, to stress the key values, and to resolve conflicts, all of which are essential in achieving

long-term policy goals and organizational missions". On the other hand, they should be purely tactical tools in the phases of issue fermenting and issue receding as they are mostly used for daily, routine communication and actions.

The premise of the issue catalyst model of issue management lies "on the idea that for an organization to pursue its goals, an organization must create opportunities by influencing the environment in which it operates" (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). This model bases on development and implementation of various communication strategies which could be used in an attempts to influence public in public policy decisions. Therefore, the emphasis in the catalytic model is put on the creation of an issue. This model can be successfully transferred to virtual environment and used for the purpose of digital communication.

An issue begins with the potential stage which occurs when actors (an organization, a group, a government official) recognizes certain situation as a problem, and, therefore, creates an issue which has to be resolved. The focus of communication in this potential stage is on defining an issue. The imminent stage emerges when the number of actors (groups of public) interested in the issue expands. The focus of communication activities is on achieving legitimacy of an issue which means the acceptance of the issue as worthy and gaining greater public attention. Transition from imminent to current stage requires attracting media coverage of an issue and further expansion of the number of parties involved with the issue. As noted by these authors, "policy issues typically emerge slowly but can burst into the public discussion through immediate traditional media interest in the issue - an issue suddenly might move to the current status" (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Two major communication interventions in the current stage of issue evolvment are attracting media attention and polarization. In contemporary digital environment, online channels and, especially social media, can be used as most efficient media to rise global awareness of the issue. Polarization is based on the forcing of public to choose a certain option of the resolution of an issue which would consider proper. During polarization, organizations put efforts into promoting the legitimacy of their preferred course of action. An issue will go unnoticed or taken as not particularly relevant if organizations do not succeed in creating awareness of an issue within a broader public. During these initial stages, the usage of social media should be strategic.

The next stage in issue catalyst model is entitled critical stage, and it is characterized by further public examination of the issue and creating a pressure on organizations to act. Therefore, diplomacy actors have to decide whether they will take an action and how they plan to resolve the issue. It is necessary to make an attempt to persuade public to accept the preferred course of action as a form of agenda building and setting. However, the situation is that different actors and public groups advocate for different solutions or even no action to

be taken at all. As regards that, current and critical stages require certain adaptation in communication in order to maintain relationships with public (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Social media should be used strategically during this process in order to create awareness of an issue, create the legitimacy of the issue as well as of the diplomatic institution, establish two-way communication with the goal to attract positive media attention and achieve strategic goals.

6. Conclusion

Public diplomacy represents important discipline and practice of political public relations that enables diplomatic actors to build and maintain relationships with public in an international context. As well as other areas, public diplomacy is also exposed to the impact of various internal and external factors which create strategic issues that may affect a possibility to achieve foreign diplomacy goals. Therefore, as pointed in the literature, those strategic issues need to be first identified and prioritized and then confronted with proper resolutions. While the concept and practice of issues management was initially developed for the purpose of strategic communication in corporate sector, today it is efficiently implemented by governmental organizations as well. Strategic issues management in public diplomacy can be, in a broad sense, defined as a strategic management approach which entails organizational activities of monitoring the environment, analyzing potential threats and opportunities, and communication with target publics regarding certain matters of diplomatic concern. This approach can be successfully used in digital communication in the field of public diplomacy. Based on the literature review, it is shown that social media in communication could be used strategically for networking, collaborating, and connecting with public, rather than merely treating them as purely tactic tools. Theoretical findings of this paper provide a solid foundation for conducting further research, especially empirical type of research, which could be useful for help government organizations and diplomats to better identify, face and resolve issues in digital communication with different groups of public.

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