INTRODUCTION

The Role of Networks in Public Diplomacy

Contemporary public diplomacy scholarship and rhetoric have increasingly included reference to multilateral initiatives, working in partnership, and collaborative or cooperative approaches. However, those prepared to work in genuine partnership or collaboration are almost as rare as the scholarship that identifies methodologies or means through which collaborative forms of Public diplomacy could function. *Battles to Bridges* by R. S. Zaharna provides a breakthrough in this area, and expands significantly the literature on the role of relationships within Public diplomacy. This expands the work of Brian Hocking, Amelia Arsenault, and Geoffrey Cowan, from the conceptualization of collaboration to that of practical application and policy analysis. Increasingly public diplomacy focuses on partnership and collaboration. In doing so scholars recognize the role of relationships and the larger network structures these relationships create. These developments in public diplomacy can be enhanced through the research into the influence of networks on human behavior.

The study of networks has a long and distinguished history. Recently the increase in computing power has significantly expanded the potential to investigate ever-larger networks. The analysis of public diplomacy by Brian Hocking and R. S. Zaharna draw influence from the concepts of “boundary spanners” and “network weavers” developed by network analysts including Valdis Krebs, Everett Rogers, and Thomas Valente. Key within these concepts is the in meaning of the term “periphery.” Contrary to colloquial use, when applied to a network infers the potential of great influence and importance. Thomas Valente has emphasized “the importance of marginals who act as bridges in diffusion.” Across these bridges new ideas, perspectives, and information can flow into a network. In public diplomacy, the factors that influence these individuals will be of growing importance as the emphasis on collaborative working and evaluating impact increases in scholarship and practice.
This work is supported by the role of weak ties within a network. In the article “Strength of Weak Ties,” Mark Granovetter demonstrated the importance of those more distant members of a network in providing new information from diverse sources.\(^5\) Strong ties, those through which an actor is in closest contact, have a role in sustaining the core activities of a network. Weak ties link to the periphery of an actor’s network; in doing so weak ties have the potential to increase the size and diversity of an actor’s information horizon. If identified, these weak ties have the potential to increase the impact of public diplomacy practice and, for scholars, these weak ties provide the means to understand the influence of individuals able to bridge between one network and the next.

Public diplomacy is always conducted through the interaction of individuals in a network and the interaction between networks. Success in public diplomacy is inextricably linked to the way individuals collaborate through relationships. This is the result from the way humans huddle in networks. The relationships between these huddles, or clusters, are negotiated through the connections that link the different hub points. A network might be a family, community, corporation, charity, or a network facilitated by social media. They are all networks, containing “small worlds” and “spheres of influence.”\(^6\)

As Mark Gerzon put it:

> We are all profoundly affected by the decisions and actions of people whose faces we may never see, whose language we may not speak, and whose names we would not recognize—and they, too, are affected by us.\(^7\)

This emphasizes the potential of interpreting public diplomacy as a practice operating within a series of interconnected networks. The structure of a series of relationships can be thought of as a network if there are two or more connections between three or more points. These connections provide contacts and relationships through which influence can flow. That flow of influence has the potential to be multidirectional, as it could move in either direction down any of the connections.

The multi-hub and multidirectional nature of the networks of influence emphasize the need to look beyond a broadcast-inspired model of “many-to-many” evolving from “one-to-many.” The complex connections through which public diplomacy takes place are better understood as numerous few-to-few interactions. These few-to-few interactions cluster around numerous hubs and coordination points that create complex networks linking governments, substate, and nongovernmental groups to each other and to communities in countries around the world. It is within this context that collaborative public diplomacy takes place.

Strategies for public diplomacy cannot be based around a concept of many-to-many, where it is thought everyone is in communication with everyone else. These “all-channel” networks absorb a huge amount of time due to