

**Post-truth public diplomacy:
A detrimental trend of cross-national communication and how open societies address it**

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Abstract

This article divulges a new form of public diplomacy with post-truth content overseen by host countries to influence the cognitive and affective condition of publics in target countries. The goals of the practice are multifaceted and the negative impact on international communication and open societies is detrimental. All relevant concepts intertwined with the practice of post-truth public diplomacy (PTPD) that range from public diplomacy 2.0, post-truth content, international information flow, cyberspace issues, to unveiled PTPD cases are discussed in detail. Moreover, a four-fold typology of PTPD flow across national borders is illustrated for a better, comprehensive understanding of the PTPD terrain. Solution to address the alarming trend is proposed, which consists of five routes: detection and deterrence of PTPD sources, proactive monitoring and managing the communication space, increasing saturation of truthful information and antidotes of PTPD, media and information literacy education for target peoples, and maintenance of free cross-border communication for publics. The implications and ramifications of PTPD practice are also deliberated.

Keywords: public diplomacy, post-truth, international communication, disinformation, cyber space, media literacy

Hundreds of thousands of Americans during the 2016 and 2020 election seasons might have been exposed to misinformation about the presidential candidates, their families, or the voting system (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Grinberg et al., 2019). Some of the sources of the misleading content or falsehood had originated overseas. The goals of these deceitful messages not only eye on the critical election per se – which directly meet their national interests – but also aim to deepening division in society, impair trust in electoral system, and discourage democratic participation. Many scholars may simply call this type of information fake news or a smear campaign generated by foreign entities. However, this phenomenon in effect should be dissected more carefully and explicated in the right conceptual crux to illustrate its vital importance in international communication. The underlying international contest for yielding and harnessing supports among foreign publics via communication channels demands a new understanding, mindset, and action.

This essay introduces the concept of post-truth public diplomacy that has been practiced mostly in internet and mobile communication conduits to generate the aforementioned impact across national borders. Post-truth public diplomacy is a new form of public diplomacy that employs post-truth content generated through social networks and overseen by host countries to influence the cognitive and affective condition of publics in target countries. There are a host of subject areas that are inextricably intertwined with this concept and its mechanism of dissemination across national borders recently. In particular, public diplomacy, information flow, the cyber space, and convergently, post-truth public diplomacy via the internet and other communication vehicles has been implemented and should be examined more deeply to shed a new light on the worrying trend. What follows in this article illustrates 1) the emergent, post-

truth communication campaigns that transcend borders of nation states, 2) the conceptual background of the alarming practice that promotes post-truth and/or suppresses facts, 3) how this trend should be understood in the realms of international relations, foreign policy-making, and media regulation, and 4) what should the direct and collateral stakeholders of foreign affairs do about this detrimental trend that can induce wide impact.

Public Diplomacy 2.0

Traditional public diplomacy is an extension of formal diplomacy and aims to persuade foreign publics with receptive messages and positive experiences about host countries (Cull, 2019). The practice of public diplomacy is multifaceted, cross-departmental, and often embodied with programs such as cultural exchange, business promotion, relationship building, and mediated campaigns. The communication about and experience in the host country is supposed to win hearts and minds of foreign publics in target countries (Entman, 2008; Nye, 2004, 2022). The concept of public diplomacy tends to be more practice-centered and case-oriented; it seems less empirically verifiable though. Nevertheless, it has been embraced in international relations and foreign affairs and its implementation resonates agreeably with public relations and other communication-related fields (Wang, 2006). Public diplomacy is executed by not only governments but also NGOs and the private sector to inform and influence foreign publics to gain grounds or favorability for the sponsoring entity's values, perspectives, and interests (Manheim, 1994). Current trend unveils that deliberate communication programs that purport to influence publics across borders may effectively undermine competitors' edge in international arena – rather than simply bolster the host nation's standing (Vargo & Hopp, 2020). The new development of public diplomacy that emphasizes on horizontal rather than vertical flow of information (“public diplomacy 2.0” afterward) (Cull, 2013) deserves a rekindled attention to public diplomacy practices in the context of advanced communication technologies for several reasons.

For one thing, public diplomacy 2.0 is no longer a mere supplement to conventional diplomacy that only involves national leaders, governmental agencies, and policy elites. This updated version of public diplomacy can induce large-scale, long-term influence – vis-à-vis hard or sharp power, including military force, business interests, and economic clout – on intended publics of other nations (Nye, 2022). It should be understood as a multifaceted, long-term, and synergistic operation (Manheim, 1994), beyond placing a single wave of splashy advertisements, hosting an Olympics game to appeal to foreign tourists, fostering student and scholar exchange programs, or maintaining international broadcasting, which are still embraced by global powers though. Now, internet-based technologies such as AI-backed coding and algorithms, crowd-based and program-backed content creation, and geosocial targeting can generate superbly tailored messaging for groups and individuals worldwide (Duncombe, 2017). Moreover, commercial and freelance services that assist at amplifying online presence, building trend, and fabricating impression are available and within reach (Alba & Satariano, 2019; Fisher, 2021).

Today, how well nations communicate with international publics hinges more on media-related technologies than in the 20th century when satellite dishes and broadcasting equipment were mentioned in New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Throughout modern history, keen observers can see profound yet distinct influence from different mediums during different points in time. Radio, for example, was strategically utilized during WWII by both Allies and Axis nations that transmitted their propagandist messages to the other camp. Currently, political leaders' frequent and wide-ranging use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, especially in the international context, has resulted in unfathomable impact on

cross-national relations and foreign policy-making. The tweet by Boris Johnson to directly address France on the Channel crisis in 2021 prior to his scheduled meeting with his French counterpart (Syal & Henley, 2021) is a case in point. The very tweet not only canceled the meeting but also stymied the bilateral solution to the refugee situation – which could be exactly what Johnson wanted. What’s more, this practice also has facilitated direct, unfiltered communication with tens of millions of global audiences instantaneously (Duncombe, 2017). The unparalleled, unprecedented practice of “social media diplomacy” and its impact on the public opinions of the world needs to be inspected. The community of international relations and world politics simply cannot afford to underestimate this new force of public diplomacy. More of the implication and ramification of social media-based public diplomacy will be discussed in the Cyberspace section.

Another media practice in the free markets warrants our attention. Traditionally, promotional information and images of individual nations have been clearly labeled as non-editorial content and/or placed in a distinct section of media output that denotes the underwriting nature of the content. However, the distinction between editorial and sponsored messages, due to business pressure and market force, has blurred. Audiences (even the most educated and experienced) nowadays are not capable of distinguishing editorial content from sponsored content, because advertisements can appear precisely like news, i.e., “native advertising” (Wojdyski, 2016). In effect, some sponsors would demand their promotional content to blend in seamlessly in the news to camouflage, and therefore, to elevate persuasion effect.

In addition to journalism practice that often caves to marketing pressure, other forms of media content also lay out red carpet to accommodate sponsors’ interests. The entertainment industry has been keen in embracing product placement in their content – Mac computers appearing in sitcoms are not accidental, for example. Imagine nations are products in entertainment content. Movies and games have used long-format or interactive ads to feature a place or a nation. Skepelos, Greece in *Mamma Mia!* (2008), Paris, France in Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris* (2011), and Dubrovnik, Croatia featured prominently in *Games of the Thrones* (2011-19) are vivid examples of national images embedded in plots and individual nations’ soft power being enhanced by location promotion. The intricate combination of public diplomacy and unscrupulous, profit-driven media practice undoubtedly influences how people’s opinions, sentiments, and evaluations of individual nations can be formed or altered in today’s media ecosystem.

With the potential impact of media content on country images and favorability in mind, every country is expected to produce or steer content – its own or its rivals’ – to its advantage, via means and resources at their disposal. While public diplomacy efforts to help create content appropriate for foreign nations are usually accepted, their interference with creative and journalistic works can be frowned upon and encroach on the freedom of expression, especially in the U.S. context. But that does not stop foreign nations from trying. Hollywood’s reliance in the gigantic Chinese market and finance, for example, has been reported to intervene in the production process, including rewriting scripts for movies or changing the villains’ nationality (Qin & Carlsen, 2018). Given this, one needs to examine not only text-based information, but also audios, images, visuals, and affective memes associated with individual nations from comprehensive sources, including entertainment and social media (Elasmar & Groshek, 2017). In other words, the communication repertoire of public diplomacy 2.0 is much broader, deeper, and more technological savvy than ever that we must reevaluate its impact on international communication and related arenas.

Post-Truth Flow

International news, as a distinct news category, has been pivotal to understanding of the world. For many who do not have the means to travel, it is the only window to learn about foreign countries. The volume, valence, velocity, and direction of news flows from one country to another (or from one part of the world to the rest) and the constituted components of news present a critical issue for understanding of the world (Stevenson & Shaw, 1984). The long-term concern about the imbalance of information flow between the North and the South sparked debates about the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s-80s. The ensuing endeavors of counterflow and horizontal flow of news across blocs have been facing setbacks – even in 21st century (Thussu, 2007). A sizeable body of empirical works has been devoted to investigating the pattern and characteristics of international news coverage (Hester, 1973; Wu, 1998; Wu, 2019) and many editorial and contextual determinants of the coverage have been identified and studied by scholars (Segev, 2016). These underlying forces inevitably hinder average people from staying in-the-know about and keeping abreast of other countries. However, news is merely one category of content that flows across national borders (Thussu 2007). So do many other categories of content, including infotainment (Walter et al., 2016), films (Fu & Sim, 2010), television shows (Straubhaar, 2021), social media posts (Wu, 2020; Wu et al., 2016), and above all, post-truth content. This is the type of content this article aims to emphasize and alert the public diplomacy community.

Post-truth, according to Oxford University Dictionaries (Languages, 2016), is “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” It is conceptually broad to include many commonly referred terms in the media, including misinformation, disinformation, junk news, fake news, alternative facts, falsehood, and affect-based expressions in mass as well as social media (Beckett 2017; Howard 2020; McIntyre 2018). Many of the above terms may overlap somewhat, but one key element, intention, may distinguish them. Misinformation, for example, may not necessarily include the intention to mislead audiences, unlike disinformation that does (LibertiesEU, 2021). Yet, when any of the above content is repurposed, distributed, and amplified, then its original purpose does not matter anymore. Under the encompassing post-truth umbrella, one can see an assortment of content that is fully fabricated, partially fact-based, or deliberately and ingeniously created, to launch and advance a unique perspective and sway others’ opinion or sentiment regarding an issue, culture, or country.

As the above definition indicates, post truth tends to be loaded with emotion and personal judgment that resonates remarkably well and galvanizes targeted audiences – under the particular circumstance, the publics of other countries. Such content – due to its controversial qualities, attention-grabbing attributes, and AI-backed distribution and amplification – can swiftly spread across national borders and do real damages in open societies where censorship and control of information are scarce and personal liberty is embraced. Russia’s strategic maneuver of social media in an effort to sway U.S. voters’ perceptions on the candidates and the electoral system and possibly voting outcomes during the 2016 presidential election provides a vivid example (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Grinberg et al., 2019). Recently, other nations, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, are reported (Stubbs, 2019) to also resort to social media to troll and fabricate tactically tailored content to generate sociopolitical impact in various other nations. Donald Trump has been known for making and spreading false information on social media; his assertion and association of some pandemics (such as Ebola and Covid-19) with specific foreign

nations via Twitter while being in the White House (Rogers et al., 2021; Salek & Cole, 2019) can serve as yet another example of post-truth flow.

Beyond information or imagery about individual countries, the author argues that the concerning post-truth umbrella should also cover personal expression, sentiment, opinion, and evaluation pertaining to countries that may not necessarily deviate from the usual orbit but could collectively and cumulatively mislead people on the receiving end. This type of message about countries is not necessarily based on objective, verifiable truth because of its highly personal and subjective nature but it is nonetheless an important and popular aspect of social media-generated content that a significant number of the world's people access and rely on (even more so than the mainstream media) (Pew Research Center, 2021). This type of content about any country, in a great variety of forms – albeit not necessarily truth per se – can be pointed, widespread, or amplified, and thus cannot be ignored by international affairs practitioners.

The distribution of post-truth, especially in the cyber world, has been an enormous challenge for all who deal with information – governments, social media platforms, communication professionals, and citizens alike (Mitchell et al., 2019). The task of fact-checking content on myriads of media platforms is critical to normally exercise democracy and safeguard the public's well-being, but average users often do not have the required expertise or knowledge to navigate this quagmire. Therefore, media and information literacy training for average users would not suffice. Alternatively, new laws and regulations regarding media operation – particularly its algorithms and privacy protection – should be made to deter negative impact yielded by post-truth that circulates profusely on media. However, social media platforms where most post-truth originate and disseminate have faced incoherent and evolving societal demands vis-à-vis their profit-driven business models; they also have taken inconsistent stances when it comes to flagging false and illicit content posted on their platforms. A case in point: Facebook and Twitter took opposite actions when facing Donald Trump's social media posts in 2020 (Isaac & Kang, 2020).

Foreign production and push mechanism of post-truth content present a different type of issue, which has seldom been mitigated effectively and thus is particularly alarming. For example, according to Cook (2019), the Chinese maneuver of the Internet and disseminating self-benefiting messages in other countries is notable. Another report indicates China's increasing communication presence and campaign activities to promote its national image in Latin America (Micolta, 2020) and South-East Asia ("Chinese propagandists court South-East Asia's Chinese diaspora," 2021). Its well-orchestrated cyber programs have utilized various methods to monitor, censor, and actively shape foreign publics' perception of China, and above all, to steer opinions of key publics in other countries to its advantage (King et al., 2017; Mokry, 2017). In the U.S. context, China-backed efforts reached out to soybean farmers in the Midwest (who supposedly lose in the trade war) via mainstream media to influence the 2018 midterm election (Cook, 2019). Another cross-border endeavor of China to influence election result was found in Taiwan's presidential election (Chung-shan et al., 2019). These anecdotes indicate that sophisticated communication apparatus has been implemented by nation states or their proxies to affect socio-political outcomes in foreign nations and to harness various benefits that may ensue.

Social media-based maneuvering through the uses of algorithms, artificial intelligence, and bots can have a marked impact on the sentiments of the publics in other countries. The Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA), according to the Mueller Report, published in 2019, strategically intervened U.S. electoral process through social media:

The IRA conducted social media operations targeted at large U.S. audiences with the goal of sowing discord in the U.S. political system. These operations constituted "active measures," a term that typically refers to operations conducted by Russian security services aimed at influencing the course of international affairs. (Mueller, 2019, p.14)

According to the report, by the end of 2016, the IRA had produced 80,000 Facebook posts and reached 126 million people. Twitter reported 3,814 accounts were controlled by the IRA and 1.4 million may have been in contact with an IRA-controlled account. This trend of reaching out to foreign nationals with disinformation is likely to worsen over time (Davis & Mazzetti, 2019). In 2020, Twitter took down 23,750 accounts linked to China that tweeted 348,608 times, 1,152 Russian accounts that tweeted 3,434,792 times, and 7,340 Turkish accounts that tweeted 36,948,524 times (Observatory, 2020), which most likely indicates only the tip of the iceberg.

These facts should shed light on what lies ahead. The era of post-truth (Mcintyre, 2018) has facilitated the practice of spreading emotion-stimulated disinformation and complete falsehood to advance sponsoring nations' interests and to wreck long-term havoc on the affected societies. Capitalizing on openness of cyberspace and unfettered connections on social media, countries, their agents, and proxies can and have bypassed traditional news gatekeepers and communicated directly with foreign publics and stakeholders around the world. Moreover, the transmitted content can be meticulously – and automatically – tailored to achieve individual targeting, creating the intended effects the sponsor envisions. News reported that Russian's online operation unit based in St. Petersburg (MacFarquhar, 2018) served exactly this purpose. The old-fashioned culture events held during peace times or blatant propaganda operations during war times have been transformed into a far more high-tech, large-scale, and covert manipulation in cyberspace.

Cyberspace

Although the majority of public diplomacy and international communication scholarship focuses on traditional mass media, a significant volume of global communication takes place in cyberspace nowadays. This artificial space arguably has exerted greater influence than other types of media in the 21st century – it enables multitude of communication activities and transforms how people access, process, and act on messages originating from other countries. It is notable that under certain circumstances the cyber version of the world can overwhelm and overpower the counterparts delivered by mass media (Rainie & Wellman, 2014; Turkle, 2011). The combined impact of platform functionality, content creation and sharing, and widespread participation in cyberspace can cut through the aforementioned topics and has resulted in welcoming as well as challenging changes. It is therefore little surprise to find that countries have resorted to cyberspace to orchestrate, compete with one another, and skew reality outside their borders (Alba & Satariano, 2019; Fournoy & Sulmeyer, 2018). As Choucri and Clark (2018) indicated, the ease of access to online information has been a great equalizer, enabling weaker actors to influence or even threaten stronger actors on the world stage. Cyberspace also provides a level playing field for all levels of participants – not only nation states and large corporations, but also high-power individuals, private sectors, and other issue communities – to voice, collaborate, network, and advocate for their interests, representation, and possible actions. Despite these positive indications, cyberspace does offer wide-ranging avenues for spreading post-truth content that knows no borders.

Several issues arise. First, due to the level of diversity of participants (content providers, commenters, influencers, bots, and so forth), the degree of complexity increases exponentially (Veale & Cook, 2018). The term “lateral pressure” was coined to explain cyber entities’ behavior and influence beyond established boundaries (Choucri & Clark, 2018). For example, the #MeToo movement that started in the U.S. spread to many other countries and exerted cross-national influence in various domains. Alt-right and extremist messages, quietly existing in some corners of cyberspace intended for limited, cliquish members, have been blamed to wreak havoc on traditional democracies (Benkler et al., 2018). The main point here is that nation states are no longer suitable units of analysis when it comes to cyberspace content and that the Internet has significantly empowered all participants, regardless of their intention, articulation, skill, or real-world nationality. Foreign affairs professionals ought to heed to not only authoring nation states and their proxies, but also ideas, issues, images, and agendas that may pertain, in one way or another, to their countries.

Zeroing in on cyber “participants” further, one can anticipate that some with superior technological know-how and better networks can exert a much greater influence than others. As pointed out earlier, the operational definition of participant on the Internet should be extremely inclusive to defy the odds of missing the major players. For example, WikiLeaks enjoys unparalleled access to critical information on key leaders and global security; its operation – completely circumventing mainstream media’s mechanism – has been able to create political bombshells worldwide (Cook, 2019; Xiao, 2020). Tencent’s WeChat messaging service that reaches an estimated 100 to 200 million users outside China offers a large, multifunctional platform that is closely monitored and censored (Cook, 2019; Xiao, 2020). The cyberspace ecosystem (shown in the shade area in Figure 1), along with other related issues such as sovereignty, security, and censorship, affects cross-national communication immensely. Due to the complexity, wide swath, and technical nature of cyberspace issues, there is a need of designating an impartial tech-savvy entity to constantly monitor and inform concerned authorities and enterprises for large-scale post-truth activities.

Practice of post-truth public diplomacy (PTPD)

Even though cyberspace can be an enabler and equalizer for the entire world’s communication participants and enhance the efficiency and magnitude of global communication, many thorny issues warrant immediate attention and action. It has become the primary venue where the nexus of two critical topics – post-truth and public diplomacy – takes place. As explained above, the ascendance and wide spread of post-truth in the communication conduit (usually via cyberspace) unveils alarming trends, which have been reported in both domestic and international settings. Public diplomacy 2.0 (Cull, 2013) aims at communicating directly with foreign publics via networks in hope of benefitting sponsoring agents as well as yielding impact on target countries. Yet, the primary conduit is where participants can not only contribute to post-truth content – either because of their own personal interests and perspectives or on behalf of other sponsor agents – but also serve as willing and effective amplification partners to directly generate impact on publics of certain locales or within particular networks. This is a unique aspect of public diplomacy where the *public* are efficiently engaged, albeit in the dissemination process of post-truth. This process is similar to the “citizen marketer approach” in political action (Penney, 2017).

With post-truth and public diplomacy merged together, we can envision a new practice that strategically disseminates fabricated or non-fact-based content across national borders to sway and shift public opinion of target publics, bolster sponsors’ interests, and fulfill their

multifaceted goals. Post-truth public diplomacy (PTPD) is much more than a version of propaganda apparatus witnessed during the World Wars or the Cold War. It is much more sophisticated, technically advanced, and extremely challenging to be detected, defended from, and resisted by target participants in the cyberspace and other mediums. It has been embraced and implemented by various nations across political blocs for quite some time (Alba, 2021; Fisher, 2021) and can engender a gargantuan impact on how different parts of the world are communicated, understood, and perceived. Even though more empirical evidence is needed, the potentially devastating impact of PTPD on the psyche and cognition in target countries and subsequent policy-making consequences can be profound (as warned in the Mueller Report).

Understandably, the detail of any PTPD operation is extremely covert and, hence, difficult to uncover. In addition to the anecdotal cases delineated earlier, a number of news stories unveiled potential PTPD operations in 2022. For example, BBC news reported that Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO) discovered fake accounts – with the U.S. and the U.K. as "presumptive countries of origin" – were created to influence Middle East social media networks (BBC, 2022). Yang (2022) showed that the widespread rumor on Twitter in 2022 that China had a coup right after President Xi's visit to Central Asia in September was originated and amplified in India. China also launched post-truth campaigns targeting Taiwanese voters during Taiwan's presidential election in 2020 (Chung-shan et al., 2019); the social media-generated post-truth content was documented and its traffic tracked by Yu et al. (2022). These PTPD examples probably unveil only a fraction of the operation in today's world.

To illustrate the potential impact of PTPD further, I selected five disinformation items that were fact-checked by either FactCheck.org or the Poynter Institute and sought to gauge their disbursement in Twitter around the world with the help of Brandwatch, a commercial service of data analytics. After the raw data were extracted with pertinent keywords in English language and under the condition that tweets must occur after the first appearance of the disinformation, each of the tweet's embedded geo-data were converted to specific countries with Google map, which allows for analysis of geographic distribution of a given disinformation. The five selected disinformation items under examination were centered on a nation or a national leader and can result in opinion change of their audiences. They are 1) China attacked Taiwan's armory after Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan; 2) Volodymyr Zelensky makes \$11 million per month; 3) Sean Penn's visit to Ukraine shows the war is staged; 4) In Israel, students carry weapons to class; and 5) Trudeau declares Emergencies Act amounting to near martial law in Canada. Table 1 shows their respective wide reach as well as primary countries of influence, which was made possible by post-truth content creation, distribution mechanism, and general Twitter participants.

[Table 1 here]

Of the five disinformation items, the most significant one is about Zelensky's staggering income and saving. This item generated 12,609 tweets or retweets from 139 countries. The number of people worldwide that were reached – and potentially influenced – by these tweets could be huge, which could result in opinion shift toward the war, Ukraine, and Zelensky himself. It is important to note that the presented evidence should be only the tip of the iceberg of the reach because the search terms were quite stringent that may not scrape the entire corpus of relevant tweets. These post-truths should have been circulated on other platforms as well – not just Twitter. Moreover, these are only five of the many reported cases in these two credible fact-check organizations that are likely to focus exclusively on North America and content in English language. Furthermore, not all post-truths have (or can) been identified and verified by researchers. Social media platforms based in the U.S. have their screening mechanisms in place

(Hern, 2022) that could have automatically deleted post-truths before researchers can access them. In other words, the PTPD operation and its potential impact around the world can be far greater than estimated.

While the U.S. tends to be the target nation of known PTPD campaigns, one of the enduring themes in the existing literature – ironically – has been the American influence – in language, pop culture, and media ownership (Stevenson, 1992). The U.S. dominance in the new media domain remains notable, for current technology juggernauts such as smartphones, internet search engines, content streaming services, and social networking sites are all based in the U.S. The question is whether these media conglomerates should and can be held accountable for identified PTPD that goes through and gets amplified by their services (whether they acquiesce or intentionally promote due to their interests is another matter) (Tang, 2021). Even with the volume and scope of PTPD unveiled so far and the perceivable, potential damage, these pro-profit firms may lack sufficient incentives, still would not proactively initiate sweeping corporate policy or self-regulation, or voluntarily put effective mechanisms in place to filter and curb PTPD from spreading. However, their acts against PTPD, if executed in a socially and politically responsible manner, would undoubtedly elevate their corporate image and meet individual and collective interests of their worldwide customers.

Proposed Solutions

The underlying issues for a few media conglomerates that control key technologies are multifaceted, complex, and definitely deserve more scrutiny. For one thing, the amplification of PTPD via various platforms is one urgent issue as companies wrestle to find solutions on how to handle highly deceitful content such as deep fake within civil, open societies (Dowdeswell & Goltz, 2020). Systematic, constant fact-checking and detection of PTPD by independently run, not-for-profit, non-partisan entities should be a necessity in order to protect the general public from being misled or deceived en masse. Literacy training that sharpens and sensitizes social media participants would also make sense. Making sound, effective laws and policies regarding various issues of incentivizing PTPD production and amplification should be another feasible pathway. Lastly, the identified trend here provides implications and ramifications for journalism practice. News professionals working everywhere need to refrain from relaying content expediently gathered via the Internet, social networking sites, or even incentivized sources without double-checking (Lambert & Wu, 2018). In light of the PTPD trend, journalists, especially whose beats are foreign locales, should not be co-conspirators in aiding PTPD's influence. Likewise, for average social media participants, it is a bad idea to engage in and share PTPD within their circles, which should be an essential part of media literacy training.

Given the concept and widespread practice of PTPD delineated above, there is an urgent need to demonstrate possible scenarios for international relations practitioners to entertain prospective actions in a holistic fashion. Presented here is a four-fold typology of PTPD flows that can help people visualize and execute a comprehensive blueprint to harness effective, synergistic result of preventing and alleviating PTPD's influence. With the U.S. as an example of target country, these are: 1) foreign-originated content for U.S. publics, 2) foreign-originated content for other foreign publics, 3) U.S.-originated content for foreign publics, 4) U.S.-originated content for domestic publics. The first two categories refer to foreign sources that distribute PTPD intended to influence publics in either U.S. or other countries to form impressions on the U.S. The latter two categories include U.S. sources that distribute either advantageous public diplomacy content or PTPD antidotes that are related to the U.S. for either domestic or foreign publics.

The aforementioned typology can serve as a working structure to combat PTPD. A great deal of detail would be needed regarding various types of work each of the individual categories may entail, which may differ somewhat across various contexts and countries. The primary goal here is to lay out a grand blueprint and to call for immediate action in open societies to curb and prevent the detrimental PTPD trend that has been empirically reported. It is imperative for every country to monitor, analyze, and respond to potential PTPD campaigns via all mediums; furthermore, foreign affairs-concerned entities – particularly governmental ministry – should regularly have its executive programs reviewed and ensure an effective coordination with every concerned agency to prevent and mitigate negative impact of PTPD. As reported in Stanzel and Voelsen (2022), many countries have already launched AI-backed programs that can automatically sift and identify disinformation or misinformation on the Internet, which appears to be on the right track. Nevertheless, more needs to be implemented to prevent PTPD from materializing and generating havoc in open societies. Moreover, the know-how and technique of such operations should be shared with other countries that have not done so or lack the needed resources.

Figure 1 about here.

While PTPD is highly related to public diplomacy 2.0, it is important to distinguish them. Public diplomacy 2.0 is a diplomatic practice that uses Internet-based technologies to facilitate relationship building with foreign publics in online environment, emphasizes horizontal exchange of information, and relies more on user-generated content than the advocacy model (Cull, 2013). PTPD, on the other hand, is a dark, malicious version that weaponizes post-truth to generate extremely negative impact on the receiving ends as delineated above. As such it should be avoided by host countries and impeded by target countries as much as possible. There are at least several areas target countries can develop to be preemptive against the detriment of PTPD (see the five red arrows illustrated in Figure 1). First, the affected government should communicate clearly with the host government about the ill-intended practice. There should be means or measures that can be implemented to effectively thwart against such practice, which leads to the second remedy: to reduce or even intervene in the flow of PTPD into the target publics. This resembles the practice of radio frequency interference (RFI); but there should be actionable methods for other mediums, particularly the Internet. Artificial intelligence is an effective means to process large volumes of data existing in the Internet related to a given country (Bjola, 2019). Once PTPD-related data is detected, preventing it from generating real damage is feasible. This approach will need supports from both legality grounds that permit filtering and industrial cooperation and collaboration (Arsenault, 2013). More technical detail on the criteria of PTPD, filtering level, and responsibility of the execution will be needed. Third, target nations would need to find effective preventive means within their communication systems that foster or even facilitate the ominous PTPD operation. Possible pathways to solution could be made via new executive policy, regulation, or even referendum resolution. The fourth solution is an educational, preemptive, and long-term method and can incorporate 1) media and information literacy training for children as well as adult citizens, 2) counter the PTPD with more and accurate information, and 3) strengthening fact-check resource and streamlining services for both media and average citizens, some of which may fall into the domain of not-for-profit organizations. And the last route is to continue allowing the general public of target countries to freely participate in the communication space and interact with the publics in locales where PTPD campaigns originate. The communication among publics (in light of the concept of *public*

diplomacy) can be quite effective in curbing PTPD and also informative for the sending publics that can be under exceedingly controlled environment.

In conclusion, the detrimental PTPD trend that has swept across the world in the past few years can do real damage on individual nations and bring tenacious toxicity into internal conflicts as well as international communication that results in conflicts and confrontations. The stake is extremely high for all countries, but particularly so for open societies, where freedom of speech and expression is embraced dearly and censorship more restricted. Even more critical is when countries are at war when truthful information can be the first casualty – such as the case of Russian invasion in Ukraine (Doroshenko & Lukito, 2021). There are a number of remedies that can be implemented to prevent harmful miscommunication between countries from materializing as well as effectively mitigate PTPD's negative impact. This article provides four-fold typology to demonstrate PTPD flows and five proposed routes to counter PTPD campaigns: to nip the PTPD sources in the bud by communicating directly with sponsoring governments and by regulating media platforms, to inoculate citizens from being infected with PTPD “viruses,” and finally to ensure publics to be able to communicate freely to facilitate truthful public diplomacy across national borders. These endeavors should be coordinated well with all concerned civil groups, international entities, and governmental agencies so that the negative consequences can be abated or prevented. The time to ponder and act on PTPD-prevention missions is now.

Table 1

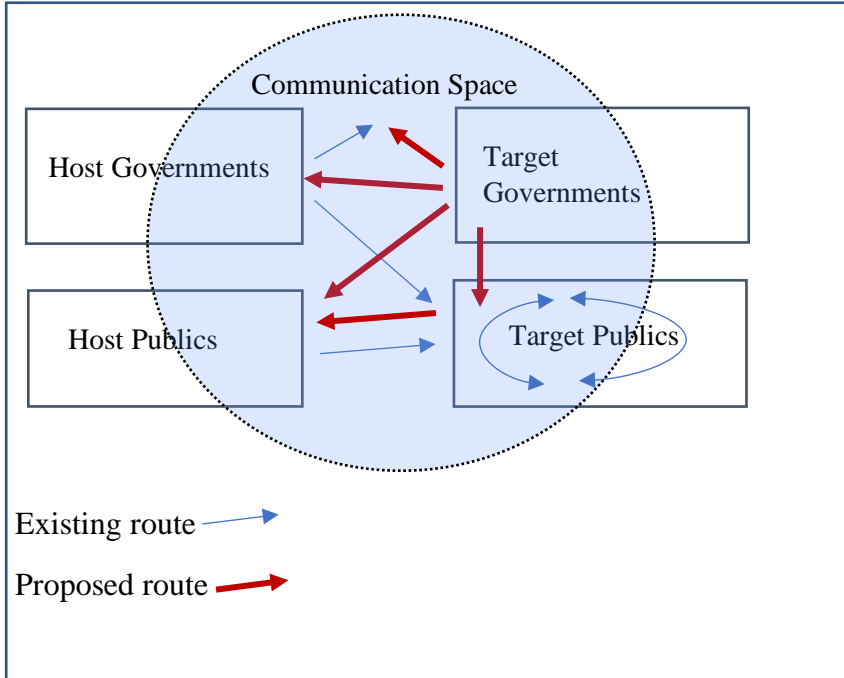
Illustration of 5 examples of PTPD via Twitter in 2022

Post-Truth item	Verification agency	Reach	Top 5 countries where tweets were authored	Estimated number of related tweets worldwide (As of October 5, 2022)
“China attacked Taiwan’s armory”	FactCheck.org	65 countries	US (754) India (51) UK (38) Australia (27) Canada (24)	1,075
“Zelensky makes \$11 million monthly and has \$1.4 billion saving”	FactCheck.org	139 countries	US (6,858) UK (1,739) Canada (622) Australia (386) Ireland (200)	12,609
“Sean Penn posted for showing fake Ukrainian war”	PolitiFact The Poynter Institute	19 countries	US (170) Indonesia (30) Canada (18) UK (12) Ukraine (3)	250
“Israeli students bring guns to schools”	FactCheck.org	29 countries	US (373) Canada (10) UK (9) South Africa (5) Australia (4)	433
“Trudeau declares Emergencies Act amounting to near martial law in Canada”	PolitiFact The Poynter Institute	86 countries	Canada (4406) US (886) UK (238) India (69) Australia (65)	6,140

Figure 1

A proposed solution for open societies to address PTPD

A proposed solution for open societies to address PTPD



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