Ukrainian Public Diplomacy During the Russian Full-Scale Invasion (February 2022 – June 2023)

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Abstract: Since 2014, Ukraine has started its public diplomacy (PD) activities to counter Russian aggression, intensifying these efforts in 2022 following the full-scale invasion. Despite this, much of Ukraine's PD remains understudied, with existing research either outdated or primarily focused on specific aspects. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Ukrainian public diplomacy is developed and implemented within a war-related context by comparing official PD strategy documents with the practices of state PD actors, particularly those targeting Germany. Using a case study method, this research incorporates document analysis and interviews with Ukrainian diplomats and PD practitioners. The findings illustrate how the key actors of Ukrainian public diplomacy operate, highlighting their goals, target audiences, narratives, and the challenges they face. The study reveals the contextual nuances of public diplomacy efforts in Germany. While core PD goals remain unchanged, practitioners have shifted focus, adapting narratives and refining their target audiences to address war-related issues. In line with increased international attention on Ukraine, communication efforts have been intensified to bridge gaps in global understanding of the war and to combat foreign public attention fatigue.

Keywords: Public diplomacy, Ukrainian public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, case study method, nation branding, soft power, digital public diplomacy, war-time public diplomacy

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Introduction

Ukraine began its public diplomacy (PD) work mostly in 2014 after the Russian occupation of Crimea and the initiation of the war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. Yet Ukrainian PD efforts were rarely analyzed and only received some attention after the Russian full-scale invasion of the country in 2022. The latter became a watershed moment for Ukraine and prompted unprecedented global interest in the country. To leverage this public attention, Ukrainian PD actors intensified their work to gain international support. This war and Ukrainian PD activities also stimulated scholars to study Ukrainian public diplomacy. However, most research has focused primarily on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, while other Ukrainian PD actors and their activities have not been examined in the same level of detail. To fill in these gaps, the research will analyze how the Ukrainian government and related organizations have been shaping and implementing PD activities and how the Russian-Ukrainian war influenced these practices.

Due to the broadness of the topic, it was decided to narrow down the scope of this analysis to the time from the onset of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 until June 2023 and to focus on Ukrainian PD activities aimed at Germany due to its influential role in the EU and NATO. This study aims to answer the following research questions: *What are the strategies of Ukrainian public diplomacy during the Russian full-scale invasion? And has Ukraine changed its public diplomacy since the Russian full-scale invasion?*

To answer these research questions, an exploratory approach was chosen, using a case study method, which includes document analysis and interviews with Ukrainian PD practitioners. The interviews were mostly conducted with Ukrainian diplomats who worked at the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany, the Consulate General of Ukraine in Düsseldorf, and representatives of the Ukrainian Institute (UI).

This paper begins with analyzing the English, German, and Ukrainian research literature on public diplomacy practices, its implementation in a war context, and a study of the Ukrainian PD activities. Having described the methodology, the results are presented and later compared with the theoretical works analyzed in the literature review section.

Theoretical Framework: Development of the Concept of Public Diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy (PD) has existed for over 120 years, yet no universally accepted PD definition emerged. Edmund Gullion (1965) established one of the most widely used definitions, describing PD as "how governments, private groups, and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and

governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions" (as cited in Hartig, 2019, p. 2).

The *hard* and *soft power* approaches were coined by Joseph Nye (2013), who noted that PD represents one of the key methods for exerting soft power (p. 569) emphasizing influence through attraction rather than coercion, contrasting it with hard power, which involves forcing others to act in a specific way by threatening them (Nye, 2008, p. 95). Similarly, *nation branding,* coined by Simon Anholt (1996) also has no universally accepted definition. The existing explanations differ based on their understanding of what nation brands and branding are and their potential objectives (Fan, 2010, pp. 98–99). Fan (2010) divided the definitions into six levels according to their interpretations by scholars (pp. 99–100). Thus, a nation brand is treated as: a slogan and visual symbol; as an overarching brand that supports various sector brands (e.g., in tourism); as an image of a country and reputation; as a tool to establish and maintain a nation's competitiveness; as a "tool in developing and maintaining a nation's soft power" (Fan, 2010, p. 99–100); and as closely connected with national identity.

With the spread of digital innovations in the 2000s, scholars introduced the term *new public diplomacy* (NPD) to incorporate new practices (Gilboa, 2008, p. 58). Social media websites and digital platforms provided PD actors with new possibilities, for example, state and non-state agencies started to communicate directly with foreign publics in real-time, and scholars started to talk about *digital public diplomacy*. Thus, diplomats had to adapt their work and become more visible online. Moreover, communication is then no longer one-way or two-way but collaborative (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, p. 11).

Key Components and Areas of Public Diplomacy

To study public diplomacy implementation, Hartig (2019) offered to focus on its *practical aspects* concentrating on PD goals, actors, instruments, and target groups (pp. 5–6). One of the most popular PD goals is the establishment of a positive image abroad to pursue specific economic, political, and military goals (Potter, 2003, p. 44). While small and middle states often face the problem of invisibility and utilize PD to raise their popularity, larger countries utilize PD to achieve specific objectives such as defending themselves against international criticism (Hartig, 2019, pp. 5–6). Public diplomacy is also used during conflicts to justify one's own actions and to criticize the behavior of adversaries (Gilboa, 2008).

Another aspect of public diplomacy analysis is looking at *PD actors* – something which scholars have not defined yet. One argument is that PD actors must have an official mandate to pursue their activities and must correspond to the official line of the organization they represent (Hartig, 2019, p. 9; McDowell, 2008). Other definitions exclude these conditions, which leads to cases where any person can become a

PD actor when they communicate with a foreign audience (Hartig, 2019, p. 9; McDowell, 2008).

The next public diplomacy aspect is *instruments*. Leonard et al. (2002) presented three dimensions of PD activities through which one can categorize PD instruments (pp. 10–11). The first dimension "involves classic press work, which either reacts […] to specific incidents or events or takes the initiative in providing information about specific events" (Hartig, 2019, pp. 10–11). The second dimension lies in "proactively creating a news agenda through activities and events which are designed to reinforce core messages and influence perceptions" (Leonard et al., 2002, pp. 10–11). The third dimension is focused on establishing long-term relationships with a foreign public (Leonard et al., 2002, pp. 10–11).

Target groups of public diplomacy are another PD aspect. Banks (2020) concluded that "some analysts assert that there are only three audiences for PD: elites, the masses, and the media. Others maintain that the proper audience for PD is decision-makers who influence all audience groups" (p. 70). Another key factor is the active or passive role that PD practitioners assign to their target audience (Hartig, 2019) with "active participants" (p. 12) searching for information independently (Fisher, 2013, p. 219; Hartig, 2019, p. 12.).

Cull (2009) identified the following PD components: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, international broadcasting, and psychological warfare (PW; pp. 18–23). He described listening as "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas and using that data to redirect its policy or its wider public diplomacy approach accordingly" (Cull, 2009, p. 18). He defined advocacy "as an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public" (Cull, 2009, pp. 18–19). Cultural diplomacy is "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad" (Cull, 2009, pp. 19–20). The next PD element, suggested by Cull (2009), is exchange diplomacy, which he described "as an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation" (pp. 20–21). International broadcasting is characterized by Cull (2009), as "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television, and Internet to engage with foreign publics" (p. 21). The last PD element suggested by Cull (2009) is psychological warfare. He acknowledged that it lies beyond most PD conceptualizations and practices (p. 22). However, he argued that in his classification, PW is "a parallel activity […] alongside the accepted sub-fields of PD" (Cull, 2009, p.22).

Public diplomacy can also be applied by the diaspora and in other areas, such as sports, science, and gastronomy. Diaspora is viewed by PD actors "as a soft power resource" and "as agents of diplomatic goals" (Kennedy, 2020, p. 213). Sports is another sphere where PD actors (mainly states) can achieve their political and social goals, added Dubinsky (2019). Countries pursue sports diplomacy to cultivate a positive international image and reputation and show their soft power (Dubinsky, 2019, pp. 156–157; Garamvölgyi et al., 2022, p. 889).

Public Diplomacy in Wartimes

With the spread of Internet technologies, the nature of conflict has undergone significant changes (Ayalon et al., 2016, p. 261). Researchers pointed to the direct interconnection between physical battlegrounds and informational spheres, which leads to the necessity of countries' activities in both realms. As Caldwell et al. (2009) put it, "if you don't engage, someone else will fill the void" (p. 143). This is why Mor (2009) emphasized that at the grand strategy level, the use of force must be harmonized with the demands of public diplomacy, considering both the practical employment of force and its portrayal to domestic and foreign audiences (pp. 219–220). Such a combination is vital for persuasion of a foreign target audience to support the preferred narratives because their backing influences the policies of their governments (especially in countries that can be characterized as democratic), as the latter need to respond to public opinion to stay in power (Ayalon et al., 2016, p. 260).

Additionally, PD actors must be aware of specific terminology. Gilboa (2006) explained that "strategic use of terms to describe rights, conditions, events, people and processes is critical for any PD campaign because language frames conflict in ways which shape images and determine ideas of right and wrong, justice and injustice" (p. 722). Walker (2020) suggested that to regain trust in its strategic viability, a state must promptly establish a consistent counter-narrative that conveys strength and unity (p. 120). Governments should have "a nuanced and realistic understanding of audiences" during the development of strategic narratives and analyse "underlying biases, fears, or prejudices, shared value sets" of their target audiences, and in the case of "the absence of unifying beliefs," search for "other points of congruence upon which to build narrative credibility [...] to resonate with target audiences, [...] to limit polarization and build resilience" (Walker, 2020, p. 127).

While promoting their narratives, PD practitioners must focus on media. Ayalon et al. (2016) explained that "the conflict's story – as it appears in the media – has a direct effect on an adversary's image in the eyes of the viewers/public and determines which side attains its goals and even prevails" (p. 263). This is important in the case of media reporting on foreign events about which the public has less knowledge (Yarchi, 2018, p. 678). To achieve their political goals, PD actors might employ images, which Ayalon et al. (2016) called an "imagefare", which is defined as "the use, or misuse, of images as a guiding principle or a substitute for traditional military means to achieve political objectives" (p. 265). Leading in this competition

is critical for countries that participate in asymmetric conflicts and wars. During these time periods, "each political actor attempts to present itself as the victim, understanding that this frame attracts more media attention and receives more sympathy from the audience" (Ayalon et al., 2016, p. 263). The side that manages to convince the foreign audience that it "is the victim of events, controls the flow of the conflict's story and is ultimately perceived as the righteous side of the conflict" (Ayalon et al., 2016, p. 263). Yarchi et al. (2017) referred to the studies that stated that audiences tended to support the weaker side and mentioned the Bible story of David vs. Goliath as an example, in which the giant Goliath was defeated during the battle by David (p. 361).

Study Context: Ukrainian Public Diplomacy

Researchers from Ukraine and other countries agree that after Ukraine declared its independence in 1991 and until the mid-2000s, its PD activities were minimal. Foreign knowledge about Ukraine was largely associated with the Chornobyl nuclear power plant explosion, poverty, an unstable economy, and an overall grim image of a post-Soviet state (Horbyk & Orlova, 2023, p. 229). Also, Ukraine received little coverage in the foreign press, and the stories about it "were neither complex nor positive" (Horbyk & Orlova, 2023, p. 229). This inaction allowed "others to tell stories" about Ukraine (Horbyk & Orlova, 2023, p. 229), with the Russian government portraying Russian-speaking Ukrainians as "brothers," Ukraine as an "artificial state," and the two nations as a "single nation" (Fomenko, 2023, p. 224).

The change began in 2014 after Russia invaded Crimea and started the war in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. It was accompanied by spreading disinformation and fakes to delegitimize Ukraine, legitimize Russian aggression, and conceal its crimes. Ukrainian and foreign scholars agree that the external aggression stimulated the development of Ukraine's PD (Ptashchenko et al., 2021, p. 80; Segeda, 2020, p. 143). In 2015, the Public Diplomacy Department (later transformed into the Department of Communications and Public Diplomacy) at the MFA was created, which was "tasked with developing relations with foreign public associations and the media, implementing cultural and informational projects abroad, and coordinating activities of other executive bodies in this field" (Trofymenko & Trofymenko, 2020, p. 241; see also Sheludiakova et al., 2021, p. 3). In 2017, the Ukrainian MFA established the Ukrainian Institute to promote the cultural representation of Ukraine abroad (Pipchenko & Dovbenko, 2019, p. 17). Its mandate included "planning and strategic coordination of the cultural and image presentation of Ukraine in the world, while the branches of the Ukrainian Institute in the most prioritized countries for Ukraine are to engage in such public events" (Pipchenko & Dovbenko, 2019, p. 17).

In 2018, the Ukrainian advertising agency Banda, in collaboration with the government, created the country's official brand, "Ukraine NOW"[1]. Trofymenko & Trofymenko (2020) explained that the brand "is intended to display Ukraine as an open and modern country, where everything most interesting happens 'right now'" (p. 242). Additionally, the NGO Brand Ukraine, in cooperation with the MFA, administers the website "ukraine.ua". The Ukrainian MFA has official accounts on Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn, where it shares information and counters disinformation (Sheludiakova et al., 2021, p. 4). Sheludiakova et al. (2021) noted that such content operates in the mode of "informing," rather than "communicating," adding that "packaging has changed, but not messaging" (p. 5). Additionally, MFA has initiated or supported social media campaigns (e.g., #KyivNotKiev, #StopRussianAggression, #CrimeaIsUkraine) (Sheludiakova et al., 2021, pp. 4–5). However, the MFA is not involved in foreign broadcasting, as this falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information.

The Ukrainian government intensified its PD activities after February 24, 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion. This aggression attracted unprecedented international attention to Ukraine, which the government, alongside non-state actors, utilized to secure international support. President Volodymyr Zelensky "has invested much of his time and efforts in the perceptions arena" within the information space (Yarchi, 2022, pp. 5–6). He has utilised "traditional forms of communication, such as press conferences, interviews," as well as "communicating directly with a public" (Yarchi, 2022, pp. 5–6). Yarchi (2022) adds that with time, the international community tends to lose interest in the war, and "Zelensky and the Ukrainian leadership seem to understand the need to keep making headlines and create newsworthy events to make sure that the Russian invasion will stay in the hearts and minds of publics around the world" (p. 8).

The Ukrainian MFA and its head at that time, Dmytro Kuleba, promoted the same topics as President Zelensky. The ministry maintained its cooperation with Ukrainian NGO Brand Ukraine and agency Banda. They created the website "war.ukraine.ua" featuring news, explainers, and photos about the war. The Ukrainian government and Banda launched the nation-branding campaign "Bravery"[2], which targeted Germany, the USA, the UK, Canada, and other countries (Kaneva, 2023, p. 233). "A striking feature of the Brave Campaign is its dramatic shift in perspective from Ukraine's past brand message. Rather than trying to prove its worth to the world, Ukraine is claiming the moral authority to tell other countries to 'Be brave like Ukraine'" (Kaneva, 2023, p. 233). Kaneva (2023) underlined that with this campaign, the Ukrainian government created an image of the country that is not "begging for help", instead, "it demands support with the conviction that it deserves everything it asks for and more. Its national subjectivity is no longer passive or subservient. It is bold and unapologetic, asserting a position of moral uprightness in the war with Russia, but also more broadly on the global stage" (p. 233). The

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[1] https://bandaagency.com/case/ukraine-now
[2] https://brave.ua/en.html

author called for reconsidering the theorizing of power within its binary view of being "hard" and "soft" by suggesting that the Ukrainian campaign showed difficulties in their distinctions (Kaneva, 2023, p. 235).

In its PD activities, Ukraine has been promoting several narratives. Yarchi (2022) wrote that the Ukrainian government and citizens position themselves as victims, placing the blame on Russia and its people (p. 6). Another Ukrainian narrative is presenting "its Westward turn as decolonization from the long-time Russian occupier and return to its natural place within the West" (Budnitsky, 2023, p. 213). Ukrainian government and citizens have been stating that they "are fighting not only to protect their country but also to protect Europe as a whole" (Yarchi, 2022, p. 8). Horbyk & Orlova (2023) pointed out a U-turn in narratives – in 2014, Ukraine, with its limited military capabilities, "was portrayed as an almost imperialist Leviathan trying to crack down on the local pro-Russian activists that rose up against oppression. The Russian narrative reframed what in reality was the Kremlin's encroaching aggression toward Ukraine as an internal Ukrainian conflict, a David versus Goliath kind of story – a just uprising against an oppressor" (p. 229). However, in 2022 Ukraine was described as "a weaker defender against the powerful attacker, and the narrative arc of David versus Goliath was now enlisted in the service of Ukrainian strategic communications" (Horbyk & Orlova, 2023, p. 229). At the same time, Cull (2023) emphasized that the success of Ukrainian narratives is limited. He underlined that "as of writing it seemed all too clear that while Ukraine had established reputational security in the global west, it had still to convince the global south, where Russia retained a reputational advantage" (Cull, 2023, p. 198).

Methodology

Within this research, it was decided to conduct an explanatory single case study with one unit of analysis – Ukrainian public diplomacy. It will combine document analysis and interviews with Ukrainian PD practitioners as a means of triangulation, which is "the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object" (Denzin, 2017, p. 301). Moreover, choosing this method goes in line with Szondi (2008), who called "the country-specific case study based on document analysis and interviews with policymakers or branding practitioners [...] the dominant research method" (pp. 32–33) for public diplomacy and nation branding.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was conducted to gather information on Ukrainian PD activities and its actors in Ukraine and Germany. Specifically, the communication strategy and public diplomacy strategy for 2021-2025 of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the strategy of the Ukrainian Institute (UI) for 2020 to 2024, and the UI's annual report for 2022 were reviewed. Additionally, the websites of the Ukrainian MFA, the UI, and other relevant institutions were studied. Representatives from

these institutions either agreed to participate in interviews or were identified by PD practitioners during the interviews. The institutions assessed include the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany, the Consulate General of Ukraine in Düsseldorf, the Ukrainisches Institut in Deutschland (UID), the projects of the NGO Brand Ukraine ("ukraine.ua" and "war.ukraine.ua"), and the political think tank "Zentrum Liberale Moderne," and its project "Ukraine Verstehen" (Understand Ukraine).

Expert Interviews

Purposive and snowball samplings (Knott et al., 2022, p. 2) were selected to find Ukrainian PD actors active in diverse areas and levels. Potential interview partners were identified from the following sources: authors' list of the MFA's PD strategy, contact pages of the Department of Communications and Public Diplomacy at the Ukrainian MFA, the Ukrainian Institute and its German bureau (Ukrainisches Institut in Deutschland [UID]), the NGO Brand Ukraine via LinkedIn, X, and Facebook, as well as German NGOs, whose activities relate to Ukraine. I also approached the former press attaché of the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany to participate in this research and to provide contact information for her colleagues.

This resulted in nine positive replies from the following PD actors: Victoria Kononenko (former press attaché at the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany), Oresta Starak (head of the Division of Public Diplomacy at the Ukrainian MFA), Tetyana Filevska (Creative Director at the UI), Iryna Shum (Consul General of Ukraine in Düsseldorf at the time), Kateryna Rietz-Rakul (Head of the UID), Mariya Zoryk (Communications manager at the UID), Alim Aliev (Deputy Director of the UI), Alisa Podolyak (Advisor to the Embassy of Ukraine in Germany) and Dr. Iryna Solonenko (Programme Director of the Ukraine Team at the Zentrum Liberale Moderne at the time).

It was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with the following topics as the foundation for an interview guide: activities and responsibilities of the expert and the institution they represent in the PD sphere; possible changes in interviewees' work since the start of the full-scale war; target audience(s) of interviewees; the main goals, strategies, and narratives the interviewees aim to achieve and promote; and the assessment of the interviewees' PD work. All interviews were conducted in Ukrainian from June to September 2023. None of the interviewees requested to remain anonymous.

The MAXQDA software program was selected to assess the data from the interviews and to create the coding categories based on the PD practical aspects outlined by Hartig (2019). Three additional aspects were selected as the coding categories: self-evaluation criteria, the narratives spread by Ukrainian PD practitioners, and the challenges and solutions of the Ukrainian PD to make a more comprehensive assessment. The full list contains the following coding categories:

- Actors of the Ukrainian PD;
- Target audience(s) of the Ukrainian PD;
- Aims of the Ukrainian PD;
- Promoted narratives about Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian War;
- Self-evaluation criteria of Ukrainian diplomats;
- Challenges and solutions of the Ukrainian PD.

Limitations

The interviews form the foundation of this research, shaping its structure and direction. Therefore, most limitations are tied to them. For instance, a larger sample of interviewees could have provided additional insights into the work of PD practitioners. Additionally, interviewing more Ukrainian or German experts outside governmental institutions might have offered fresh perspectives. However, the focus was placed on PD practitioners at Ukrainian state institutions for several reasons: first, this topic is under-researched with existing research mainly assessing online content from Ukrainian state institutions and politicians; second, these institutions are the most influential and impactful actors in PD; third, this study aims to examine PD actors with years of experience, particularly those able to explain changes since the Russian invasion. Another limitation is the use of self-reported data, which may introduce bias due to participants' subjectivity and potential lack of self-criticism. Furthermore, due to the interviewees' roles, this research primarily addresses Ukrainian PD in cultural, digital, and economic areas, with other areas mentioned only briefly or not included.

The final limitation appeared late in the research process when I started working as a communications manager at the UID, one of the institutions analyzed. However, my application and work began after completing most of the research and writing, and I confirm that no new information from this role has been included.

Results

This part presents the results of the case study, organized according to the coding categories outlined in the *Expert Interviews* section.

Actors

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs public diplomacy strategy, the main state PD actors are the MFA apparatus, foreign diplomatic missions, and the UI with its bureaus in Kyiv, Berlin, and Paris. As stated in this strategy, the MFA "defines policies and sets priorities and strategic goals in the field of public diplomacy, [...] and approves annual action plans of the foreign missions of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Institute" (2021, p. 28). This is managed by the Department of Public Diplomacy and Communication, explained Oresta Starak (personal communication,

July 20, 2023). The UI, a state-owned, publicly funded, non-profit institution, is the main state actor in Ukraine's cultural diplomacy. According to Tetyana Filevska (personal communication, June 30, 2023), UI is a professional expert organization operating in several cultural sectors. Oresta Starak (personal communication, July 20, 2023) clarified that the UI "is independent in its programmatic activities, but organizationally, it is subordinated" to the PD division of the MFA. In 2023, the UI opened its first foreign representative offices in Germany and France. According to Mariya Zoryk, the idea of opening these offices had existed since the UI's establishment. However, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine "increased the urgency of this project and accelerated necessary steps" (M. Zoryk, personal communication, July 11, 2023). The UID implements projects from the head office and on its own initiative. Mariya Zoryk (personal communication, July 11, 2023) confirmed that the UID cooperates with the Embassy of Ukraine by sharing information on their projects, synchronizing event calendars, and inviting Ukrainian diplomats to UI events. Viktoria Kononenko, Iryna Shum, and Dr. Kateryna Rietz-Rakul stated that they work autonomously. Kononenko explained, "We, diplomats, have the right to gauge our audience, decide in what language and how best to reach them, and choose the methods to expand that audience" (personal communication, August 22, 2023). Dr. Rietz-Rakul noted that the UID "can work quite autonomously, but we operate within a framework we know – strategic and thematic" (personal communication, July 11, 2023). Regarding the diaspora, the MFA assigned them the role of the "ambassadors" of Ukraine. However, during the full-scale invasion, when a million Ukrainian refugees arrived in Germany, the Embassy started targeting them in their PD activities, as noted by Alisa Podolyak (personal communication, September 6, 2023). Thus, Ukrainians in Germany could play two roles: those who help to implement Ukrainian PD and those who are its target audience.

Target Audience

The PD strategy of the MFA targets foreign nationals in the following categories: tourists, active youth, students, businesspeople, and investors, representatives of the creative industries, journalists, bloggers, opinion leaders, scientists, and experts. In contrast, the target audiences of the UI include diplomats, government officials, the cultural community, media and journalists, and the general public.

Considering the war, Ukrainian PD actors have de-emphasized their focus on tourists. However, Oresta Starak noted that the MFA recognizes the eventual need to resume PD activities aimed at international tourists. She stated, "It seems too early to talk about tourism now, but we have to prepare for it, to be ready for the fact that many people will want to come and see what kind of people we are" (personal communication, July 20, 2023). Regarding businesspeople, Starak emphasized that the MFA's work focuses on attracting international investors due to the need for reconstruction. "We must rebuild Ukraine […] We are already thinking about projects that would show investment opportunities and attract potential investors and businesses," she explained (O. Starak, personal communication, July 20, 2023).

Focusing on PD activities aimed at this audience in Germany, Iryna Shum underlined that "economic diplomacy is a priority." She explained,

> I have systematic formats for visiting chambers of commerce and industry, meeting with individual entrepreneurs, and informing them about changes, […] such as new legislation and additional incentives from both the German and the Ukrainian governments to attract business and investment to Ukraine (I. Shum, personal communication, July 19, 2023).

Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany Oleksii Makeiev also meets with investors and businessmen in German federal states, added Viktoria Kononenko (personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Other PD practitioners focus on engaging representatives of the creative industries. Following its strategy, the UI seeks to increase Ukraine's soft power by organizing programs and projects that showcase Ukrainian artists across various cultural fields – such as film, literature, music, and art – at international events. It also supports academic research and promotes the Ukrainian language. Iryna Shum emphasized fostering connections between German and Ukrainian museum communities, noting that "the best way to help Ukrainian culture is to show it in Germany." (personal communication, July 19, 2023)

Journalists, bloggers, and opinion leaders represent the most frequently mentioned target audience in interviews with Ukrainian PD practitioners. The MFA's PD strategy (2021) authors called maintaining professional relations "an important component of the work of the heads of Ukraine's foreign diplomatic missions and staff responsible for public diplomacy" (p. 23). This involves organizing press breakfasts, off-the-record meetings, press briefings, and interviews. Viktoria Kononenko noted that her colleagues in Germany have constantly focused on the media since 2014. "The work after the full-scale invasion has not essentially changed," she said, though she acknowledged that "the intensity has changed many times over since February 24 [2022]." (V. Kononenko, personal communication, August 22, 2023) Over the years, Kononenko built a contact base of 200 German journalists and reporters from both national and local media outlets. She tailored pitches for comments, interviews, and columns by Ukrainian politicians and diplomats to suit press preferences. She also facilitated interviews with top Ukrainian politicians and handled media inquiries for comments, confirmations, and fact-checking from both Ukrainian and German media outlets (V. Kononenko, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

PD activities of the MFA and UI targeting scientists and experts are relatively limited and are now supported by the UI-initiated I. Lysiak-Rudnytskyi Ukrainian Studies Support Program. The UID also targets the academic community because "in Germany, if something exists in the academic environment, it will spread to other areas," explained Mariya Zoryk (personal communication, July 11, 2023).

Iryna Shum, Alisa Podolyak, and Viktoria Kononenko identify German politicians and their constituents as key MFA audiences, viewing politicians as opinion leaders.

Alisa Podolyak noted that politicians act based on voter preferences, prompting Ukrainian diplomats to engage more directly with voters (personal communication, September 6, 2023). Kononenko explained that Ambassador Makeiev uses such meetings to listen to voters' concerns and provide explanations (personal communication, August 22, 2023). Iryna Shum described pursuing similar efforts, highlighting the varied mentalities across German federal states and cities. She observed that the Embassy's audience and her public "are completely different mentally." (I. Shum, personal communication, July 19, 2023)

Geographical priorities are another aspect of the MFA's and UI's strategies, focusing on North America, Europe, China, Turkey, Japan, the UAE, Qatar, and Israel. The MFA's list also includes countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America, primarily for economic priorities. However, PD practitioners noted the need to realign priority countries due to challenges arising from the full-scale war. While continuing to work with the listed countries, the MFA and UI also initiated or intensified their PD activities in countries often referred to as "the Global South" internationally or "countries of a new geography" by the UI (T. Filevska, personal communication, June 30, 2023).

Aims

The MFA's PD strategy defines the main objective of Ukrainian public diplomacy as creating a positive image of Ukraine. To achieve this, the ministry outlined several strategic goals: Increasing global awareness of Ukraine, establishing Ukraine as a democratic European country moving towards full EU and NATO membership despite external aggression, and developing an effective system to counter harmful narratives. The UI focuses on improving understanding and recognition of Ukraine among foreign audiences. Its strategy emphasizes fostering sustainable demand for professional interaction with Ukraine; strengthening the capacity of Ukrainian cultural, educational, scientific, and civil society actors for international cooperation increasing Ukraine's presence in global cultural processes, and promoting the Ukrainian language internationally.

Most PD practitioners agreed that the goals of Ukrainian PD remained unchanged despite Russia's full-scale invasion. Instead, they intensified their efforts on the most relevant objectives. The MFA has continued promoting a positive image of Ukraine while highlighting Russian aggression. Oresta Starak explained that, at the outset of the war, the Department of Communications and Public Diplomacy prioritized these topics, alongside "countering disinformation and fakes from the Russian side" and working to isolate Russia "as much as possible on all possible fronts" (personal communication, July 20, 2023). Alisa Podolyak emphasized that a key goal of the Ukrainian MFA and its foreign missions is to restrict Russia's ability to showcase its culture or participate in sports competitions. According to her, Russians "have always been proud of" their culture, which "is something they have instrumentalized

for their propaganda," and therefore "they need to be cut off the possibilities of this propaganda." (A. Podolyak, personal communication, September 6, 2023)

Tetyana Filevska stated that the UI reviewed its strategy and goals, reorienting its work toward more pressing priorities at the time. Filevska explained that before Russia's full-scale invasion, the UI's primary task was "to convince the world to learn more about Ukraine, to spark interest in cooperation, and to explain why Ukraine is significant." However, after February 24, 2022, the UI shifted to "actively [...] filling the information and cultural space with our narratives and building understanding and partnerships to ensure [...] to remain part of the global agenda." (T. Filevska, personal communication, June 30, 2023) Filevska elaborated that the UI had "a window of opportunity" lasting one year, which was used to enhance international recognition of Ukraine. She emphasized the importance of "building institutional strength, [and] memory." (T. Filevska, personal communication, June 30, 2023) Addressing the topic of indigenous peoples, Alim Aliev noted that the UI plans to further develop Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar studies, explore literature and musical and performative formats focused on Crimea, and work with the Ottoman archives in Turkey (personal communication, August 30, 2023).

Regarding PD efforts in Germany, all interviewed PD practitioners confirmed that their work aligned with the MFA's PD and communications strategies. When asked whether the full-scale war and media coverage had made Ukraine more recognized in Germany, Viktoria Kononenko replied, "not quite." She explained that despite the abundance of information, people in Germany still needed explanations about the political, economic, and social aspects related to Ukraine and the war (V. Kononenko, personal communication, August 22, 2023). Iryna Shum added, "The goal now is rather to maintain a high-level focus on Ukraine and to ensure long-term empathy." (personal communication, July 19, 2023) PD practitioners working in the cultural sphere pursue similar objectives concerning Ukrainian cultural subjectivity. Alisa Podolyak summarized, "The main task is to popularize Ukrainian culture, to create a positive image of Ukraine in Germany, and promote positive narratives about Ukraine in connection with the full-scale invasion" (personal communication, September 6, 2023). She also noted that through its PD projects, the Embassy seeks to present Ukraine and its culture within both the war-related context and the broader European cultural context (A. Podolyak, personal communication, September 6, 2023).

Promoted Narratives of Ukrainian Public Diplomacy

The main authors of the PD narratives are the MFA and the Office of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky. These narratives are promoted based on the MFA's communication strategies, the UI strategies, and the MFA's PD strategy. "We [Ukrainian diplomats] work exclusively according to the communication strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are no personal initiatives here," emphasized Viktoria Kononenko (personal communication, August 22, 2023). Simultaneously,

she described the communication strategy as "a more theoretical guide that needs to be linked to practical steps and actions," which are "up to all of us [diplomats]." In this regard, she also mentioned the "one voice policy" concept (V. Kononenko, personal communication, August 22, 2023). On a practical level, the MFA implements this policy by preparing and sending memos to its foreign diplomatic missions. These memos outline the main narratives or topics and include supporting information, explained Kononenko.

The narratives defined in the PD strategy aim to portray Ukraine positively while briefly addressing the war. However, due to the full-scale war, PD actors also employ narratives with a broader focus on both Ukraine and Russia. To enhance Ukraine's credibility, the MFA shares positive narratives about the country; to weaken its opponent, it promotes negative narratives about Russia. To gain support from Germany, the narratives are tailored to address specific German concerns and trends. Key positive narratives include:

- Ukraine is a modern European state with creative people and a long history.
- Ukraine is a multicultural country with diverse indigenous people.
- Ukraine defends the West, and fights for freedom, dignity, and independence.
- Ukraine will prevail and requires assistance with post-war reconstruction.

PD practitioners emphasized Ukraine's multiculturalism to counter "a [...] very unified, undifferentiated view of Ukraine in many [global] regions, especially in the East, [and] in Africa." (M. Zoryk, personal communication, July 11, 2023) Regarding war-related narratives, Oresta Starak stressed that PD actors "should not present Ukraine only as a victim of war" (personal communication, July 20, 2023). Alim Aliev added, "It is important for us not to fall into victimization but to talk about strength and about the dignity and freedom that people are fighting for." (personal communication, August 30, 2023) The narrative about Ukraine's reconstruction emerged several months after the start of the full-scale war, noted Oresta Starak (personal communication, July 20, 2023). Viktoria Kononenko (personal communication, August 22, 2023) mentioned that her colleagues in Germany "are already preparing the Germans [...] for the fact that Ukraine will need help in rebuilding," while Iryna Shum (personal communication, July 19, 2023) underscored promoting "the idea of mutually beneficial partnerships during and after the reconstruction, especially in business".

To undermine Russia, Ukrainian PD actors have promoted the following narratives:

- Russia began its war against Ukraine not in 2022 but in 2014, when it annexed Crimea and started the military conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions.
- This is not only Vladimir Putin's war but a war by Russia against Ukraine, as the Russian people also support it.
- Russia commits human rights violations in Ukraine.

- Russia is an imperialist and colonialist country, while Ukraine seeks to decolonize itself and sever ties with Russian influence.

Regarding the last narrative, Tetyana Filevska emphasized, "Russia is not a classical empire in the sense that it did not colonize some distant overseas countries, but it colonized its neighbors. It has certain peculiarities, but it is still an empire." (personal communication, June 30, 2023) Discussing decolonization, Alisa Podolyak emphasized that Ukrainian PD actors in Germany highlight Ukraine's place in the European cultural context. "Now we are talking about this openly and trying to open the eyes of Germans to the fact that we have always been here. […] We were silenced, we were destroyed, including our language," she stressed. (A. Podolyak, personal communication, September 6, 2023) For Alim Aliev, the decolonization narrative is closely tied to Crimea. The UI addresses this by analyzing Russian narratives and organizing academic online courses on the history of Crimea and the Crimean Tatars. Aliev explained that these courses are "about reclaiming our names, when you finally tell your own story, and not someone else tells it" (personal communication, August 30, 2023).

The final block of narratives focuses on Germany, though these were not officially documented but were identified by Ukrainian PD actors:

- Ukraine needs German weapons to defend itself against Russia;
- Ukrainians and Russians are different, and they should not be conflated.

Andrii Melnyk, Ukraine's former Ambassador to Germany, often actively communicated the first narrative by using direct, emotional, and critical messages towards top German politicians that did not align with classical diplomatic language. This approach sparked negative reactions in Germany. Melnyk later explained that his approach was intended to draw the attention of German politicians and media to Ukraine's needs. His successor, Oleksii Makeiev, continued to advocate for the same message but adhered to traditional diplomatic norms. Viktoria Kononenko stated that Ambassador Makeiev explained to German citizens the necessity of German air defense systems and tanks "to protect the Ukrainian sky" and "liberate Ukrainian territories" (personal communication, August 22, 2023). Alisa Podolyak mentioned a related message conveyed by Ukrainian diplomats: supporting Ukraine in the war could result in fewer refugees in Germany (A. Podolyak, personal communication, September 6, 2023).

Challenges of Ukrainian Public Diplomacy

PD actors pointed out several challenges, categorized for this research. The first category represents internal organizational issues. Ukrainian PD actors reported a lack of human resources and experts in specific regions and fields, which hampers their efforts. Another challenge lies in evaluating PD outcomes, as it is difficult to measure

the direct impact of PD activities on long-term goals, such as improving Ukraine's reputation abroad, due to the influence of numerous factors.

The second category relates to challenges with partners and audiences. They include difficulties in persuading foreign publics to provide Ukraine with weapons, opposition to peace talks framed under terms unfavorable to Ukraine (e.g., ceding occupied territories to Russia), and the use of terminology inappropriate for Ukraine's situation, such as "Ukraine war," "Putin's war," or "Ukrainian conflict." PD actors argue these terms either downplay Russia's role or obscure its responsibility for the war. They also cite the absence of Ukrainian studies in foreign academic institutions, particularly in Germany, where Russian-centric perspectives dominate. Additional challenges include public fatigue with Ukraine-related topics, exacerbated by domestic issues in foreign countries stemming from the war (e.g., refugees, rising gas prices, and inflation). Alisa Podolyak noted diplomats' awareness that initial shock and attention to Ukraine have diminished over time. She highlighted ongoing efforts to counteract this fatigue by finding new ways to present Ukraine's narrative effectively (A. Podolyak, personal communication, September 6, 2023). Oresta Starak mentioned that the MFA has revised its communication strategies, moving away from ineffective approaches (personal communication, July 20, 2023). Iryna Shum emphasized the importance of horizontal inter-institutional, and inter-community collaboration to address these challenges (personal communication, July 19, 2023). Representatives of the Ukrainian Institute, including Tetyana Filevska and Dr. Kateryna Rietz-Rakul, acknowledged a waning interest in Ukraine-related topics among foreign audiences. Dr. Rietz-Rakul attributed this decline partly to reduced funding, especially in the cultural sectors (T. Filevska, personal communication, June 30, 2023; K. Rietz-Rakul, personal communication, July 11, 2023).

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the communication and public diplomacy strategies and practices employed by Ukrainian PD actors, compared to the PD theory and practices of other countries (mostly Western ones), revealed numerous similarities. A review of the Ukrainian MFA and Ukrainian Institute (UI) strategies demonstrates the integration of Western public diplomacy concepts and methodologies into Ukrainian practices. Moreover, as these documents were created after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Ukraine's eastern regions, it appears evident that these PD activities were aimed "to address wartime exigencies," consistent with how American practitioners have historically approached such situations (Wang, 2007, p. 26). However, the MFA's PD strategy (2021) also includes objectives unrelated to the war, such as Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO. According to Hartig (2019), this was a main driver for the intensified PD activities of Poland and the Baltic states (p. 5). Thus, the motive for Ukraine to pursue PD can be characterized as a mix of counteracting Russia's aggression and achieving non-military foreign policy goals.

Another key aspect is Ukraine's nation branding and its connection to public diplomacy. According to the MFA's PD strategy (2021), "public diplomacy is tightly connected with building a country's national brand," (p. 21) though it does not clarify whether one is the subset of the other. It can be inferred the MFA views nation branding as a part of PD. This aligns with Szondi's (2008) perspective that nation branding is a tool within PD to reach a country's target audience. Before Russia's full-scale invasion, the MFA pursued nation branding activities aligned to level C of Fan's (2010) framework (positioning a country's image and reputation), as seen in initiatives like Ukraine Now[3]. After 2022, the focus shifted to the message of bravery[4], highlighting Ukraine's resistance against the Russian invasion and portraying itself as the weaker "David" in the David vs. Goliath analogy, mentioned by Yarchi et al. (2017). This shift may represent a transition to the highest level (F) in Fan's (2010) framework where nation branding is closely tied to national identity.

Turning to Ukrainian public diplomacy, the MFA incorporates PD elements outlined by Cull (2009), including cultural diplomacy and exchanges (pp. 18–23). The latter is categorized under the scientific and educational diplomacy area of Ukraine's PD strategy, which other scholars often refer to as science diplomacy. Commenting on cultural diplomacy, Oresta Starak noted that the MFA considers it a subset of PD, describing public diplomacy as "a much broader concept". The UI, in its strategy, characterizes cultural diplomacy as facet of a nation's soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye (2008). Regarding the distinction between "high" and "popular" culture mentioned by Goff (2020), UI has not clarified whether it uses this framework. Based on its implemented projects, it appears UI engages in activities that span both categories. Meanwhile, Ukrainian diplomats do not mention explicitly other PD elements identified by Cull (2009). While Ukrainian PD practitioners employ listening and advocacy through monitoring and communication with various PD target groups, international broadcasting officially remains outside their remit. Additionally, the MFA mentioned sports diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy – areas also acknowledged by scholars – as part of Ukraine's PD efforts. Ukrainian PD practitioners have further introduced domains not commonly noted in the literature, such as economic, expert, and digital diplomacies. The latter aligns with what scholars call new public diplomacy. However, Ukrainian PD actors do not distinguish between traditional and new public diplomacy, as their work began after the advent of the Internet. Consequently, they integrated digital tools from the outset, bypassing the transition experienced by other PD practitioners. According to the MFA's PD strategy, digital diplomacy involves cooperation with the major digital platforms to combat disinformation.

Since 2022, Ukrainian PD practitioners have been most active in cultural, economic, and digital diplomacy. Sports diplomacy has primarily focused on advocating bans on Russian athletes in international competitions. Other areas such as expert,

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[3] https://bandaagency.com/case/ukraine-now
[4] https://brave.ua/en.html

gastro, and scientific and educational diplomacy were mentioned less frequently and rather in the context of emerging efforts or as supplementary activities to other PD areas.

Ukrainian public diplomacy actors align with the characteristics outlined by Auer (2017). They are recognized by others as PD practitioners, are ascribed specific traits by other actors, and possess a degree of autonomy, decision-making power, resources, and influence. Moreover, Ukrainian PD actors work within defined PD fields and distinguish themselves from their broader environment.

The target audience for the MFA and Ukrainian Institute aligns with the categories outlined by Banks (2020): elites, the masses, the media, decision-makers, those who influence decision-makers, and aspirants to these roles (p. 70). Specifically, Ukrainian PD targets businesspeople, investors, creative industries representatives, journalists, bloggers, opinion leaders, scientists, and experts. However, neither the MFA's PD strategy nor the UI's strategy clarifies whether these audiences are seen as active participants or passive recipients, as mentioned by Hartig (2019, p. 12). Additionally, while scholars analyzed for this research did not address geographical priorities for PD, the MFA, and UI explicitly defined and expanded their focus during the full-scale war, shifting from predominantly Western states to include countries in Africa, Asia, and South America.

The aims of Ukrainian PD correspond to the practices of small and middle countries, particularly those in conflict, as described by Hartig (2019, pp. 5–6). Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainian PD focused on fostering a positive national image to attract investors and tourists. While the invasion increased Ukraine's global visibility, Ukrainian PD practitioners acknowledged that the heightened exposure did not equate to a deeper foreign understanding of Ukraine. This underscored the need to clarify Ukraine's unique identity and circumstances. Notably, Ukrainian PD actors did not alter their goals after February 24, 2022. Instead, they intensified their efforts to achieve existing objectives, adapting them to wartime needs and emphasizing Russian military atrocities. To this end, they employed familiar tools such as press work, social media, and event organization.

Ukrainian PD narratives and terminology closely mirror international practices. PD actors also created counter-narratives to Russian propaganda, engaging in "imagefare" (Ayalon et al., 2016, p. 265) by disseminating images and videos of destroyed civilian infrastructure and casualties, disproving Russian claims of exclusively targeting military objects. At the same time, Oresta Starak and Alim Aliev emphasized that their institutions avoid framing Ukraine solely as a victim. Instead, they prefer to promote narratives of Ukrainians as fighters for freedom protectors of Europe, seeking to prevent the war from extending beyond Ukraine's borders. This strategic messaging aligns with Walker's (2020) observation that PD actors adapt narratives to their audience's perceptions and concerns.

Ukrainian PD actors have faced challenges, many of which mirror those identified by international scholars, such as disinformation and information overload. However, these were not their primary concerns. Since Russia's aggression in 2014, Ukraine has implemented countermeasures against Russian disinformation, continuing these efforts during the full-scale war. After February 24, 2022, interviewed PD practitioners recognized that foreign publics, including in Germany, lacked sufficient knowledge about Ukraine, Russia, and the reasons for the war. This gap necessitated intensified communication to garner international support. At the same time, practitioners identified a shortage of experts focused on regions such as Africa, South America, and Asia as well as specialized fields, limiting their ability to counter Russian influence effectively in these areas. This observation aligns with Cull's (2023) assessment of the limited success of Ukrainian narratives in these regions. Interestingly, the challenge of foreign public attention fatigue, noted in this study, was absent from prior literature. This omission may stem from earlier research focusing on shorter conflicts where attention fatigue had not yet become a factor.

These findings highlight the potential for further research on Ukrainian public diplomacy, with this study suggesting several avenues for exploration.

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