Social Media's Dialogic Communication of Foreign Embassies in Korea and Public Diplomacy: Based on Dialogic Communication Theory

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Abstract. This study examines the evolution of public diplomacy that changed from a one-way communication to a two-way dialogue. Focusing on diplomatic offices, this study investigates the present situation of foreign embassies in Korea to draw a picture of how many embassies utilize social media. Furthermore, this study applies Kent and Taylor's dialogic principles to the official homepage and blog of the embassies and compares how they manage its website as a communication tool to inform and engage Korean publics.

Keywords: Social Media, Dialogic Communication Theory, Public Diplomacy.

1   Introduction

In the past, public diplomacy has been rarely compared with public relations, even though there is an undeniable intersection between the two concepts. However during the past decade, scholars and practitioner questioned the relational parallels between these two concepts, and have explored the conceptual similarities, differences and linkages of public relations and public diplomacy. [1] [2]

Public diplomacy seems to be a new concept, however this concept has been already existed and was used by several countries during World War I to convince other countries' publics of ideological support. Meanwhile, the rush to democracy, the revolution in technology, and the extension of globalization after the Cold War have led to the use of soft power rather than hard power. Nowadays, Great Powers try to use culture and narrative as soft power in order to promote their advantage and make use of various tools including internet networks.

The revolution of technology brought the revolution in new media channels, and with the appearance of Smartphone mobile devices a new form of online social interaction emerged together - social network service. Unlike the traditional media, the online social media is based on a two-way communication with astonishing portability. Therefore the usage of social media is increasing rapidly in particular among companies, NGOs, states/ local governments and embassies that continuously need to better understand, respond to and attract positive attention to its public.

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investigates the present situation of foreign embassies in Korea to draw a picture of how many embassies utilize social media and how they manage it as a communication tool to inform and engage Korean publics.

2   Methods

To examine the general use of social media, this study first took into consideration all diplomatic offices listed on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea as an object of study. Referred to the research 'General Social Media Usage in South Korea' [3], this study focuses on 7 top social media sites used by Koreans at most among a variety of social media applications: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, me2day, Naver blog and Daum blog.

This study also tests the applicability of public relations theory of dialogue in public diplomacy. A decade ago, Kent and Taylor provided a strategic framework to facilitate dialogic relationships with publics through the World Wide Web. Based on their Dialogic Theory, this study investigates the official homepage and blogs managed by foreign embassies in Korea under the five principles: Dialogic Feedback Loops, Useful Information, Ease of Interface, Conservation of Visitors and Generation of Return Visits. [4] [5]

On the other hand, a national survey in 2013 conducted by Korea Internet & Security Agency [6] found out that 50.4% are visiting social media applications through mobile devices. Since it can taken into account that a majority of mobile users are visiting the embassies' websites, this study does apply the Dialogic Theory also to the mobile version, in order to examine if the embassies websites are also mobile-friendly.

For collecting necessary information, interview is done through email and phone based on the results to deepen the analysis.

3   Results

Currently a total of 114 foreign embassies and consulates are located in Korea. Most of them have their official homepage, but the usage of social media is a less than expected. The countries that are relatively active in using social media are the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and Israel.

Even though result shows that Facebook is one of the most popular means of communication among the embassies, this study applied dialogic elements only on the official homepage and blogs. The reason is because managing Facebook is based on an internal/external standardization strategy in comparison of managing a blog based on a localized strategy for more intimate communication with the locals.

Upon investigation it is found that the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and Israel developed both official website and blog for Korean publics. However, the UK and Israel has been removed, being insufficient for a comparative analysis. It has been verified that the blog of the UK is actually a blog of the British Ambassador to Korea.

Meanwhile Israel has launched its blog in Korea for just two month ago and only nine blog posts are showing on its blog listing page.

The result of applying the public relations theory of dialogue in public diplomacy revealed three major findings. First, social media as a public diplomacy tool is closely related to practical issues such as the strategy of the national foreign policy and the budget of the embassy. Second, all three embassies considered its national residents in Korea also as public diplomacy target, besides Koreans. Third, blogs meets the overall satisfaction of dialogic elements more than the official homepage (Table 1).

In case of the US Embassy, the blog satisfaction of the Dialogic Theory's principles is overall higher than the official homepage. This can be seen that the embassy is following Obama administration's foreign policy that emphasizes smart power and two-way dialogue as a key. Interestingly, while the blog scores high in 'Conservation of Visitors' and scores low in 'Useful Information', the official homepage scored just the opposite. This provides us a glimpse of the US embassy's strategy: a one-way information offering via the official homepage and intimate communication with Korean publics via blog. It is also remarkable that the U.S. embassy alone offers mobile versions. On the other hand, Canada and Australia still have a long way to go to realize a true two-way communication because its websites restrict visitors posting any text. Because of the lack of manpower and budget, both embassies are unfortunately not able to review and feedback all public's postings on time. Nevertheless it is worth noticing that the embassies are trying diligently to solve its limitation - while Canada focuses on encouraging visitors to revisit its website, Australia carries out its strategy providing sufficient information about its country during one visit.

4   Conclusion

Under the precondition that there is a common conceptual ground between public relations and public diplomacy, this study focuses on the usage of social media by foreign embassies in Korea and investigates how embassies manage its website and utilize social media as a public diplomacy tool. As examined above, the US shows positivity for social media, and manages its official homepage/blog upon differentiated strategies. Other countries were more passive in using the social media, and negative approaches are observed in managing its official homepage/blog as a public diplomacy tool because of problems like manpower shortage and financial constraints. However a bigger picture can be drawn when other social media applications are investigated together. Therefore, a study is recommended to examine the Facebook and Twitter in addition in order to have broader understanding about social media managed by foreign embassies.

Table 1. Dialogic communication of foreign embassies in Korea using social media

Principles		Desktop Version			
		Official homepage		Blog	
		Fulfillment Rate in Elements (Number of Fulfillment)	Score Rate (Score)	Fulfillment Rate in Elements (Number of Fulfillment)	Score Rate (Score)
Dialogic Feedback Loops (6 elements / 12 scores in total)	US.	16.7% (1)	16.7% (2)	83.3% (5)	75.0% (9)
	Canada	16.7% (1)	16.7% (2)	33.3% (2)	33.3% (4)
	Australia	16.7% (1)	16.7% (2)	16.7% (1)	16.7% (2)
Useful Information (13 elements / 26 scores in total)	US.	76.9% (10)	80.8% (21)	61.5% (8)	61.5% (16)
	Canada	38.5% (5)	34.6% (9)	69.2% (9)	65.4% (17)
	Australia	38.5% (5)	30.8% (8)	69.2% (9)	69.2% (18)
Generation of Return Visits (5 elements / 10 scores in total)	US.	40.0% (2)	40.0% (4)	80.0% (4)	70.0% (7)
	Canada	20.0% (1)	20.0% (4)	80.0% (4)	70.0% (8)
	Australia	20.0% (1)	20.0% (2)	60.0% (3)	60.0% (6)
Ease of Interface (6 elements / 12 scores in total)	US.	100% (6)	100.0% (12)	100.0% (6)	100.0% (12)
	Canada	66.7% (4)	58.3% (7)	83.3% (5)	83.3% (10)
	Australia	33.3% (2)	33.3% (4)	83.3% (5)	83.3% (10)
Conservation of Visitors (3 elements / 6 scores in total)	US.	66.7% (2)	66.7% (4)	66.7% (2)	66.7% (4)
	Canada	33.3% (1)	33.3% (2)	33.3% (1)	33.3% (2)
	Australia	33.3% (1)	16.7% (1)	100.0% (3)	100.0% (6)
Sum Total (33 elements / 66 scores in total)	**US.**	**63.6%** (21)	**65.2%** (43)	**75.8%** (25)	**72.7%** (48)
	Canada	**36.4%** (12)	**33.3%** (22)	**63.6%** (21)	**62.1%** (41)
	Australia	**30.3%** (10)	**25.8%** (17)	**63.6%** (21)	**63.6%** (42)

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