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Gaps in Public Diplomacy: Analyzing the Approaches of Veteran Authors

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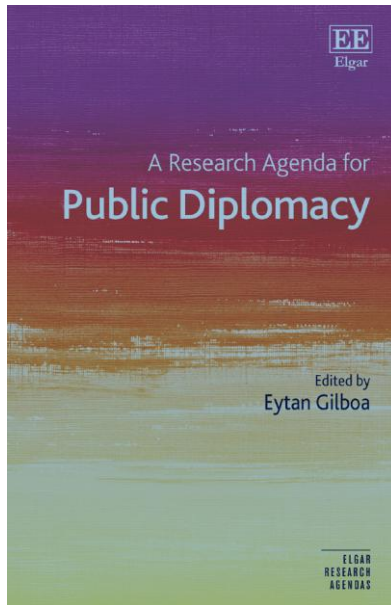
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Abstract

This is a review of *A research agenda for public diplomacy*, by Eytan Gilboa (Ed.) (Edward Elgar Publishing).

Keywords

Gilboa, E. (Ed.). (2023). *A research agenda for public diplomacy*. Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 978 1 80220 731 6

The volume comprises 18 chapters, divided into three thematic categories: actors, disciplines, and instruments. As noted by the editor of the book, Gilboa (2023), the authors of these chapters are veteran scholars and experts who have extensively studied public diplomacy over the years.

The first section of the book, focusing on actors, examines the communicative actors in public diplomacy, such as states, international organizations, corporations, cities, and citizens (Gilboa, 2023). Public diplomacy has evolved in terms of its communicative actors. While government actors were the primary participants in communications with foreign publics in its early years, since the 1960s, non-governmental actors, including organizations, corporations, and citizens (such as tourists and the diaspora), have also become involved (Crilley et al., 2020; Gregory, 2011; Saliu, 2015; 2021).

The second section centers on the multidisciplinary approach to public diplomacy, encompassing history, international relations, public relations, relational and collaborative approaches, disinformation, and management (Gilboa, 2023). In terms of disciplines, public diplomacy is considered a multidisciplinary field. Some scholars place public diplomacy within international relations and diplomacy (Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005), while others associate it with communications and public relations (Ingenhoff et al., 2021; Di Martino, 2020; Gilboa, 2008; Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Saliu, 2020a; 2020b), or even regard it as a distinct discipline (Ki et al., 2021). Regarding instruments, public diplomacy employs various tools to achieve its objectives among heterogeneous foreign publics (Gilboa, 2008; Cull, 2008; Saliu, 2017, 2018).

The third section, titled "Instruments", explores the measures and activities undertaken by public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, branding, international broadcasting, international exchanges, digital diplomacy, and more. All these instruments play a role in contemporary public diplomacy, with citizens, the diaspora, and tourism emerging as influential communicative actors, empowered by social media and their own narratives (Saliu, 2022a, 2022b; Saliu & Abrashi, 2023; Saliu & Llunji, 2022).

This book offers added value by bringing together veterans and key contributors to public diplomacy. However, this book review aims to highlight some gaps or issues that have not been sufficiently addressed, such as soft power, the purpose of public diplomacy, and artificial intelligence. This is, first and foremost, to be expected, given that the

contributors are veteran scholars who have dedicated their careers to a particular paradigm, often finding it difficult to identify gaps in their own contributions, even when a paradigm is in crisis (Kuhn, 1969). Although Nye is not an author in this book, these gaps primarily concern soft power. In the book, soft power is even referred to as a theory, while Nye (2010) himself insists on calling it an "analytical concept" (p. 209). Soft power, when understood as the values a country holds, and public diplomacy as how countries promote soft power, has diminished in comparison to Nye's (1990, 2004) description of it at the end of the Cold War (Saliu, 2023). The book extensively discusses the decline of American soft power, but not as a concept where the values are no longer as attractive as when Nye initially outlined them. When Nye first described the concept of soft power in 1990, it referred to values that were particularly appealing to countries lacking those values, particularly in Eastern Europe, where poverty, the lack of democracy, human rights issues, and underdeveloped higher education were prevalent. However, today, the context has changed, and the concept of soft power cannot be applied as it once was without acknowledging that it now refers merely to the values and attributes of a country, rather than the values Nye originally described.

Another issue noted throughout the chapters is the purpose of public diplomacy. The veteran authors have not sufficiently explored the current gap concerning the original goal of public diplomacy: "influencing governments by influencing audiences". While this is mentioned by some authors in the book, it is not explored in depth. "Influencing governments by influencing audiences" was an early objective in the context of the Cold War and the soft power values Nye formulated at the time (Saliu, 2023). This objective has, of course, evolved, and Anholt (2007a, 2007b) rightly argues that this influence should now shift from an ideological perspective to a pragmatic, economically driven one.

A further shortcoming of this book, written by veteran authors, is found in the first section, "Actors". Given that the book was published in 2023, the role of non-human actors, such as artificial intelligence (AI), which has entered communication in public diplomacy for the first time, should have been addressed. AI in communication processes today should have received the necessary attention, yet it is absent from this book. The migration of the public to online platforms, the full mediatization of everyday life, the transformation of individuals into media entities via social media, and the involvement of non-human actors (such as AI) as media communicators and producers, have profoundly reshaped contemporary society (Saliu, 2024).

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