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The populist style and public diplomacy: kayfabe as performative agonism in Trump's Twitter posts

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journals.sagepub.com/home/pri**Paweł Surowiec** 

University of Sheffield, UK

Christopher Miles 

Bournemouth University, UK

Abstract

This article theorises the interplay between public diplomacy and populism. Building on Baudrillard's simulacra, we advance the hybridity approach to soft power statecraft by analysing a cultural shift in US presidential public diplomacy. Using discourse analysis, we uncover how, rather than aiding the building of relationship with foreign publics, Donald Trump has brought to the field cultural codes alien to public diplomacy, imploding the meanings central to the endogenous norms of diplomacy and turning towards an agonistic relational dynamic with foreign publics. This article reveals how digitalisation affords the expansion of Donald Trump's populist style, and makes the populist cultural shift highly visible on his Twitter. To reveal this dynamic in granular detail, we propose 'kayfabe' as an epistemic lens for the interpretation of the populist style in the conduct of Trump's 'simulated public diplomacy', a defining feature of the current US global leadership. As well as considering socialities re-shaping relational dynamics, this article unpacks tensions stemming from the expansion of populist style into presidential public diplomacy. Finally, we reflect on the epistemic crisis of US public diplomacy within the strategic landscape of political uncertainties associated with the proliferation of populism in the field.

Keywords

Baudrillard, cultural implosion, keyfabe, populism, public diplomacy, soft power statecraft

Corresponding author:

Paweł Surowiec, Department of Journalism Studies, University of Sheffield, 9 Mappin Street, Sheffield S1 4DT, UK.

Email: p.surowiec@sheffield.ac.uk; Twitter: [@PawelSurowiec](https://twitter.com/PawelSurowiec)

Over the past two decades, 'new' public diplomacy has been shaped by the logic of the management of relationships, a perspective originating in public relations theory (Melissen, 2005). By aligning the theories of public relations and public diplomacy, the management of communication underpinning the building of diplomatic relations has become central to the field of soft power statecraft, turning public diplomacy into a vital strategic function in advancing a state's diplomatic goals. As such, 'new' public diplomacy has been focused on the building of relationships between a state and foreign publics, primarily to broaden the public appeal of its foreign policies. The communication strategies that this approach has favoured have intrinsically focused on generating positive public sentiments around a state and its principal diplomatic actors (Gilboa, 2008). However, in this article we examine the disruptive strategies that the 45th President of the United States (US), Donald Trump, has brought to public diplomacy, particularly through his adoption of Twitter as a conduit for personalised diplomatic communication and as an arena for his idiosyncratic style of populism. Trump's use of Twitter seems to fly in the face of established communication norms for the practice of public diplomacy, and we critically analyse his tweets on diplomatic relations for their constitutive style in order to understand the nature and extent of the socialities defining this disruption.

During the 2016 presidential election campaign Donald Trump advocated a revisionist approach to foreign policy articulated in a demotic and combative style that was alien to the norms of liberal governance that had been the linchpin of US soft power statecraft. Following his election to the White House, concerns about the decline of US soft power – that is, its ability to 'attract the publics of other countries' (Nye, 2008: 95) – signalled during the campaign have evolved into a focus on the notably populist turn in Trump's diplomacy and statecraft. Furthermore, the under-investment of his administration in the traditional, formal channels of diplomacy has afforded Trump's own Twitter feed an inevitably heightened significance among the tools for the articulation of US soft power – with fewer diplomats and a side-lined State Department, international attention tends to turn to the President's uninhibited tweets on foreign policy issues, shifting this informal channel into the centre stage of public diplomacy.

At the same time, the decline of US soft power in international politics has become a hallmark of Trump's presidency: since its commencement, the world approval ratings for the US leadership have dropped from 48% in 2016 to 30% in 2018, leading Germany to replace the US as top-ranked power, and putting the US close to China and Russia at 31% and 27%, respectively (Gallup, 2018). Yet, any discussion of the consequences of Trump's communication style is strategically absent in the State Department's '2018 *Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy & International Broadcasting*', leaving us with the opportunity to address this gap and analyse the interplay between populism and public diplomacy. Given that the only recent empirical study exploring the links between these two elements focuses on the authoritarian Russia (Yablokov, 2015), we shift the analytical focus to a *democratic* political landscape.

Against this backdrop, then, we ask what happens to public diplomacy, a communicative practice for the management of relationships with foreign publics (Zaharna et al., 2013), when it is performed by a high-profile populist leader? We reveal how Trump's tweets articulate a radical reinvention of public diplomacy, which we have called *simulated* public diplomacy, wherein engagements with foreign publics are performed within

the setting of a spectacular agonism that enhances the president's persona as an alpha deal-maker and fêted 'face' for the purposes of national electioneering. Building on the work of Surowiec and Long (2020), we analyse dynamics that incites an agonistic relationship dynamic between Trump and foreign publics. Extending the existing analysis of dimensions of hybridity in soft power statecraft, we explore hybrid media landscape-enabled cultural interplays, particularly between diplomatic culture and the populist style adapted into Trump's presidential public diplomacy. This article therefore provides empirical insights into the relationship between US public diplomacy and populism as performed by the US president.

In what follows, we understand soft power statecraft as involving 'the participatory conduct of foreign policy issues geared towards exerting influence and advancing state interests through engaging relevant networks at home and abroad, mobilising multiple sources and resources, utilising "older" and "newer" media, and enacting communicative practices such as, but not exclusively, public diplomacy to meet the aims of interdependent domestic and foreign policies' (Surowiec and Long, 2020: 171). Inherent to the US field of soft power statecraft, public diplomacy is conceptualised as a managed communicative practice by an international actor that attempts 'to advance the ends of policy by engaging with foreign publics' (Cowan and Cull, 2008: 6).

Soft power: presidencies, statecraft and public diplomacy

We begin our theorisation of presidential public diplomacy by anchoring this polyphonic practice in hybrid media landscapes. We will argue that the logic of relationships building is being eroded in presidential public diplomacy and that this is most clearly visible in Trump's tweets. We position our argument within the scholarship on the digitalisation of public diplomacy and the interplay of diplomatic culture with populism as a communicative phenomenon.

From its conception, 'soft power', that is, the ability of a diplomatic actor to get what it wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments, has been theorised in relation to US foreign policy (Nye, 2004). While the ability to use soft and hard power resources has become, in turn, central to US presidential leadership styles, theorising around the relationship between styles of leadership and soft power statecraft remains rare. Theorists of soft power acknowledge 'transformational' and 'transactional' leadership as the two main styles of US presidencies:

We can distinguish leaders' styles by how they use hard and soft power resources. I will use the terms 'transactional style' to characterize the skills with which leaders manage their hard power resources and 'inspirational style' to characterize leadership that rests more on soft power resources (Nye, 2014: 120).

Based on binary categories, however, this typology is ontologically limiting. In global hybrid media landscapes, this classification is often poorly aligned with the soft power statecraft through which US leadership styles are articulated (Gilboa, 2008), highlighting the need for nuanced theorising concerning the manner in which public diplomacy can act as an expression of a complex, hybridised, dynamic soft power leadership style.

As a 2016 presidential candidate, Donald Trump, already noted for his unorthodox social media skills, used Twitter to disseminate campaign messages and to co-construct a media persona rooted in a clearly populist style (Enli, 2017). Given the leading role of the US in international politics, wide reporting of the populist elements of Trump's presidential campaign undermined the legitimacy of the US state as a global leader relying on the promotion of liberal democracy as a resource of public diplomacy, and gave diplomatic actors worldwide the opportunity to learn about the potential future orientation of US foreign policies, soft power statecraft and public diplomacy (Kluver et al., 2018).

With the emergence of the 'new' public diplomacy paradigm, the field has conceived 'relationship building' as being at its heart. Borrowed from public relations research (Hayden, 2012; Surowiec, 2020), relationships and network metaphors have become cornerstones of public diplomacy taxonomies (Cull, 2008 ; Zaharna et al., 2013). This approach is echoed in studies of US presidential public diplomacy (Golan and Yang, 2013; Zhang and Meadows, 2012) and how it faces the challenge of adapting the practice to hybrid media landscapes in which social media supplant traditional media (Chadwick, 2013) and leads to the inter-mediation (Golan et al., 2019; Guo and Vargo, 2017) of diplomacy. As such, recognition of this interconnectivity advances acceptance of the polyphonic architecture of the field, and how it engenders the entrance of new socialities into its practice, accelerating the re-shaping of public diplomacy by hybrid cultural forms.

Trump's presidential public diplomacy, however, appears less concerned with the building of relationships, and more with the construction of a populist discursive style exogenous to the cultural norms established in the practice. It seems, therefore, that public diplomacy is in 'flux', at the boundaries of the field of soft power statecraft. Our departure point for the contextualisation of Trump's populist style is 'negative soft power' (Callahan, 2015), the orientation in statecraft that privileges domestic over foreign publics of diplomacy. Enabled by digitalization of the practice, including the affordances of social media platforms (Manor, 2019), Trump's use of Twitter re-invents cultural dynamics in the field by hybridising endogenous diplomatic norms with exogenous codes.

US public diplomacy and Twitter

The adoption of social media in US public diplomacy, sometimes dubbed 'public diplomacy 2.0' or 'twiplomacy', dates back to 2008 (Cull, 2013; Milam and Avery, 2012; Zhong and Lu, 2013). Although the bulk of scholarly analysis of the digitalisation of public diplomacy focuses on the role of the State Department (Dodd and Collins, 2017; Duncombe, 2017), there has been some consideration of how it has effected presidential public diplomacy. Of particular relevance here is scholarship on the adoption of Twitter in US presidential public diplomacy. For example, Holland and Fermor (2017) argue that Trump uses Twitter for public diplomacy as an outlet for his frustrations with political leaders. Elsewhere, questioning Trump's diplomatic code of conduct, Šimunjak and Caliandro (2019) conclude that the language he uses on Twitter does not adhere to diplomatic norms.

Without existing systematic analysis of the phenomenon, the classification of Trump's Twitter as the principal tool for his presidential public diplomacy inevitably raises questions about his strategic approach to the practice. Trump's Twitter, however, displays

several clear features of public diplomacy: it has the ability to set news agenda on foreign policy issues (Holland and Fermor, 2017); it has wide public appeal and engages foreign publics (Cull, 2016); it has the power to build the inter-media agenda for foreign publics (Guo and Vargo, 2017); and, by the virtue of the interactive affordances of the platform, it possesses the relational dynamic central to ‘new’ and ‘digital’ public diplomacy (Manor, 2019; Melissen, 2005).

Yet, while Trumps’ tweeting can be framed in terms of the evolving normative understanding of the use of social media as an aid to relationship building in public diplomacy, there is also evidence of an emerging disruptive tendency. While we recognise the inherent disruptive possibilities of digital platforms, we argue that it is the socialites of diplomatic actors, Trump included, rather than Twitter’s technology itself, which are likely to be the true sources of disruption. We follow Manor’s (2018) call to examine ‘the social’ side of digitalisation, particularly the way that socialities are embodied as cultural codes (Van Dijck, 2013) emerging in the form of populist styles in public diplomacy. Accordingly, our study does not deviate from the relational paradigm, but rather uncovers strategies of *relationship implosion* in public diplomacy.

Diplomatic culture meets populism

While popular culture was embraced during the 2008 and 2012 elections, and, to an extent, normalised as a resource sustaining the celebrity status of the ‘Obama effect’ in statecraft (Golan and Yang, 2013; Kellner, 2010), the proliferation of the populist style in public diplomacy is a recent phenomenon. Laying the foundations for ‘negative soft power’, the 2016 presidential campaign marked a shift towards cultural codes that foreground populism. Stolee and Canton (2018: 150) assert that Trump’s use of Twitter signalled ‘a shift in presidential rhetorical strategy from an address of a wide constituency (built on coalitions) to a core constituency (built on a base)’. Gaufman (2018) recognizes carnivalesque anti-elitist personalizations in Trump’s style, which was, in turn, conceptually aligned with the erosion of US soft power through his ‘appeals to bigotry and nativism; his evident dishonesty and contempt for democratic norms; the pervasive conflicts of interest and appearance of official corruption; the entire spectacle of the Trump presidency’ (Brands, 2017: 27–28).

While scholarship considers the interplay between ‘older’ and ‘newer’ media, and the populist *zeitgeist*, as a challenge for public diplomacy (Cooper, 2019), in order to theorise these proliferating populist dynamics we draw from the notion of diplomatic culture, ‘the accumulated communicative and representational norms, rules, and institutions devised to improve relations and avoid war between interacting and mutually recognizing political entities’ (Wiseman, 2005: 409). This allows us to conceptualise our analysis of the populist cultural turn at the heart of recent US presidential public diplomacy. Trump tends not to consult his foreign policy team and instead of adhering to the codes of diplomatic culture in terms of using public diplomacy norms, he displays a propensity for tweeting spontaneously about foreign policy (Panke and Pethersohn, 2017). Furthermore, this conduct relies upon a media persona of a ‘deal-maker’, magnified through his delivery style on Twitter. We argue that by virtue of the prominence of his office, Trump is a central figure in the conduct of US soft power statecraft, and it is his *style* that makes his public diplomacy unique.

By definition, presidencies are prone to personalisation in the reporting of the US by foreign news (Balmas and Sheaffer, 2013). Acknowledging social media as enablers of personalisation strategies, Spry (2019) has discussed the manner in which personal styles emerge in managed communication about diplomats' lives. With the advancement of digitalisation, social media enable engagement with foreign publics through localising (via the choice of topic) and personalising (via personal and informal narrative) strategies. According to Destradi and Plagemann (2019), the latest wave of populism in international politics reinforces this strategy in soft power statecraft as populist leaders tend to centralise and personalise foreign policies.

In challenging endogenous diplomatic norms such as multilateralism, diplomatic protocol, security obligations and non-discrimination, Trump instead uses a populist style that is 'confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent' (Arter, 2010: 490). In our analysis, we approach populism as a 'phenomenon'. As such, it can be understood as 'content', referring to ideologies (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism) and a characteristic set of key messages or frames, or it can be considered 'as style', where the expression of populism is 'often associated with the use of a characteristic set of presentational style elements' (De Vreese et al., 2018: 425).

The proliferation of Trump's style across traditional and social media is having a profound effect on the 'style' of US public diplomacy, displaying a dynamic interplay between endogenous and exogenous cultural codes that needs to be empirically captured and adequately theorised.

Methodologies

This analysis is embedded in post-modern approaches to the study of international politics. From this stance, the hybrid media landscapes in which US public diplomacy is practised intensify changes to its cultural dynamics. Our aim is to explore how Trump's populist style, emergent in public diplomacy messages, yields hybridisation effects, namely a borrowing and blending between cultures, where new, incoherent and heterogeneous cultural forms that stem from practice emerge in trans-local spaces. Consequently, we ask and answer the following questions about his public diplomacy:

RQ1. What cultural codes, exogenous to public diplomacy, emerge on Trump's Twitter?

RQ2. How do these differ from the endogenous cultural codes of the White House's public diplomacy?

RQ3. What is the interplay between endogenous and exogenous cultural codes underpinning Trump's approach to public diplomacy?

We adopt discourse analysis (Simonsen, 2019) to explore the hybridisation effects engendered by Trump. Our analysis follows the polyphonic rationalities explicit in public diplomacy as a practice reliant upon multiple genres for traditional and social media circulation. To explore this, our assemblage comprises a sample of the White House's edited news releases ($n=21$) and unedited tweets ($n=306$) mined from the '*Trump*

Twitter Archive' website. We sampled items spanning from the point of Trump's appointment as the President to the start of data collection (20 January 2017–8 July 2019), and focused on the conduct of his public diplomacy towards seven states with which the US has a variety of established diplomatic relations: France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Poland, the United Kingdom and Venezuela. The functionalities of the aforementioned website, which archives the '@realDonaldTrump' account, enabled the accurate sorting of tweets. The selection of the White House's news releases followed the criteria of time and location. All data was digitally archived and coded manually by the two researchers using criteria refined in three test trials. Following the procedure for qualitative studies (MacPhail et al., 2016), a strong inter-coder reliability was established (Agreement = 77.5%; Kappa = 0.997). The procedure of *inter-coder-reliability for qualitative analysis* were conducted to ensure systematicity in data handling, transparency of coding, critical dialogue and reflexivity in analysis (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020).

At the data analysis stage, we reduced the assemblage using the cultural codes of populist styles systematised by Wettstein et al. (2019) as well as by identifying themes underpinning them. In line with research on populism (De Vreese et al., 2018), we traced the occurrences of particular varieties of populist style in the content of Trump's messages. Analysis enabled us to isolate patterns in the President's stylistic toolkit created, on the one hand, from traditional media strategies and, on the other hand, through the affordances of Twitter. Two procedures guided the analysis of our findings: foregrounded (lexical) categories that re-style presidential public diplomacy and backgrounded (functional) categories exploring the cultural significance of his statements for US public diplomacy (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001).

Findings overview

The results of our coding demonstrate that Trump's tweets that pronounce upon matters of foreign policy or that appear to be directed towards foreign publics articulate a populist-styled simulation of public diplomacy, where caricatures of relationships with foreign leaders and publics are drawn with an eye to personalised, agonistic positioning. This simulation is a manifestation of negative soft power statecraft inspired by Trump's domestic base rather than operating to maintain advantageous relationships with foreign publics. Its focus is 'the production of values both at home and abroad' through the 'exclusion of Otherness' (Callahan, 2015: 217–219). Furthermore, the values that Trump's tweets convey are themselves vehicles of personal epideictic – communicating a form of individual exceptionalism through a repetitive lexicon of simplification and statements designed to amplify the emotional effects of his self-narration.

Our analysis concludes that Trump's tweeting practice can be understood as enabled by a global hybrid media landscape (Guo and Vargo, 2017), a powerful amalgamation of 'old' and 'new' media *techné*. We find this hybridity mirrored in Trump's intense blending of cultural codes, re-mixing diplomatic codes with performance-oriented signalling in the drive for self-celebration and self-justification. Engagement with foreign leaders, participation in diplomatic events and media spectacles are presented in Trump's tweets in terms of what they mean for him, how they reflect upon his abilities, and his persona. The dialogical interactivity that microblogging platforms such as Twitter have often been

lauded as encouraging is largely eschewed by Trump who uses it to broadcast the carnivalesque performance of his persona to the world.

Since Trump's ascendancy into the field, the dynamics of hybridisation have taken unexpected, rupturing and disruptive turns. We find that Trump's public diplomacy rests on cultural hybridisation, and intensifies hyper-reality, a contemporary reaction to the gamut of broadcast modes, social media and the ways in which they intersect with each other. Baudrillard's (2001) hyper-reality is useful in theorising cultural codes in public diplomacy, and we have sought to provide a fine level of granularity in reporting of cultural codes manifested in Trump's public diplomacy, for example, as simulated conflict, simulated friendships or simulated facts.

Our results also indicate that the traditional venue for the creation and dissemination of US public diplomacy, the White House Press Office, has largely remained stylistically and strategically untouched by Trump's simulation of public diplomacy. While any inclusion of the President's reported speech in WHPO material must inevitably carry strong elements of his unique style and performative approach, it is noticeable that, so far, the traditional routes of official public diplomacy largely maintain their endogenous cultural codes. Trump's influence here is small. Whether this signifies the resilience of those endogenous codes or a lack of Presidential interest in such formal communication remains unclear. We present our findings in detail, organised according to their relevance for each of our research questions.

RQ1. What cultural codes, exogenous to public diplomacy, emerge on Trump's Twitter?

Our coding of Trump's public diplomacy Twitter messages reveals that the dominant discursive features were 'simplified language and syntax' (code 6), followed by 'social literacy' (code 8), 'narrating the self' (code 1), 'emotional amplification' (code 10) and 'faces and heels' (code 3). All of these are exogenous codes to public diplomacy. Trump's tweets display a use of language which, in comparison to the norms of the practice, is markedly simplified at both the semantic and syntactical levels. In our coding glossary we explained 'simplified language and syntax' (code 6) as 'evidence of a limited stylistic and lexical palette' and evincing 'immature communication patterns (e.g. accusations, childish hyperbole, tantrums)'. Such cultural codes are foreign to public diplomacy, which strives to be balanced, neutral and mature. Language is the principal modality of public diplomacy and its considered use is a central tenet of diplomatic culture. The dominating presence of code 6 across Trump's tweets illustrates just how unorthodox his style is.

By the way when the helicopter couldn't fly to the first cemetery in France because of almost zero visibility I suggested driving. Secret Service said NO too far from airport & big Paris shutdown. Speech next day at American Cemetery in pouring rain! Little reported-Fake News!

Tweet #11 (11-13-2018)

This tweet from 2018 demonstrates the characteristics covered by code 6. Firstly, it is a pre-emptive defence against the potential media criticism of the cancellation of Trump's

visit to a WWI cemetery 80 miles outside of Paris due to bad weather. The meat of the tweet is concerned with shifting the blame away from himself, casting his actions in a positive light. This is then followed with a complaint against the media for not reporting his speech in the pouring rain at another cemetery. The rapid shifting of blame and finger-pointing, much of it uttered in *telegraphic language* (Brown and Fraser, 1963) with frequent use of exclamation points and ALL CAPS typifies the petulant, ego-driven style that we can see again in Tweet #222.

Working on major Trade Deal with the United Kingdom. Could be very big & exciting. JOBS!
The E.U. is very protectionist with the U.S. STOP!

Tweet # 222 (07-25-2017)

The tweets above are, of course, public. In a global hybrid media landscape this means that they represent immediate Presidential address to the entire world, communication that is instantly able to be machine translated, re-tweeted, re-posted, discussed and evaluated by publics around the globe. The injunction at the end of Tweet #222 is a command directly given to the EU, while the exclamation ‘JOBS!’ appears to be an emotional signal to a US public to prepare for the employment opportunities that will come from his ‘major Trade Deal’ with the UK. Could Trump really be talking to ‘the EU’ in this tweet at the same time as communicating with his domestic base? Or is it more likely that the appeal to ‘STOP!’ is a performative apostrophe, censuring the EU for rhetorical effect with a domestic public who would naturally react against any form of anti-US protectionism? This is an indication that Trump’s simplicity of language is not a marker of a lack of sophistication in rhetorical strategy. Rather, if we see this as a tweet talking to his own domestic base then the hybridisation of telegraphic language and classical apostrophe becomes far more revealing. Indeed, Trump’s simplistic language can be interpreted as framing his messaging as quick ‘insider’ bullet points dashed off to his loyal followers in hastily stolen moments. They contribute to the simulation of speed and importance when received by a sympathetic reader.

It is unsurprising that instances of what we have identified as ‘social literacy’ (code 8) also dominate the Twitter assemblage. This coding reflects Trump’s facility with the affordances of amplification on social media – hashtags, handles, retweets, embedded media and links.

In Alaska with our GREAT TROOPS departing shortly for Japan! <https://t.co/9a72TMftpN>

Tweet #140 (05-25-2019)

The compressed link here embeds a 30 second video of Trump with a group of US military in Alaska which provides an opportunity for Trump to provide his own news segment with a straight-to-camera address. Underlining Trump’s broadcast strategy, we see how the apparently dialogical affordances of the micro-blogging platform can be re-purposed to produce monological ‘personal’ updates to a sympathetic base. As a further example of this, Trump often uses retweeting to strengthen his family network,

amplifying the voices of Melania and Ivanka Trump while strengthening the dynastic momentum of the Trump brand:

RT @IvankaTrump: Touched by the warm hospitality of Prime Minister Abe and the Japanese people. ありがとうございます [Thank you]! Until next time JP. . .

Tweet #188 (11-04-2017)

Trump's use of hashtags and handles magnifies the exposure of his tweets. Since its inception, public diplomacy has relied upon 'old' media (Cowan and Cull, 2008) to convey its messages, but it has often been important for the source of public diplomacy to appear to be one step removed from efforts to amplify the message, displaying a decorum inherited from the formal codes of diplomacy. Trump's use of Twitter, however, explicitly embraces all of the platform's amplification power, revelling in the potential increase of *public reach*. As Trump's many competitive public statements around 'ratings' demonstrate, the search for an ever-wider base is perhaps the one constant motivation displayed by his persona because it is how he appears to perceive success. In this sense, we note that while his target public for foreign policy pronouncements on Twitter is his domestic base he is just as happy to catch the attention of wider non-US publics who might potentially support his ideas – as his use of Japanese in the above quote indicates.

How exactly, though, does Trump *address* these established and potential publics? Code 1, 'narrating the self', suggests that self-presentation drives Trump's tweeting. Much of his simulated public diplomacy messaging reveals low-level description of what he is doing or planning to do.

Played golf today with Prime Minister Abe of Japan and @TheBig_Easy Ernie Els and had a great time. Japan is very well represented!

Tweet #182 (02-11-2017)

I have arrived in Scotland and will be at Trump Turnberry for two days of meetings calls and hopefully some golf – my primary form of exercise! The weather is beautiful and this place is incredible! Tomorrow I go to Helsinki for a Monday meeting with Vladimir Putin.

Tweet #228 (07-14-2018)

These two tweets illustrate the diary-like relationship Trump has with his Twitter feed. Public micro-blogs can exist on a continuum between quotidian records of an 'ordinary day' to highly confessional self-explorations (Bortree, 2005). Trump swings to the side of what Blood (2002: 1) describes as an 'endless stream of blurts about the writer's day'. These 'blurts' are carefully chosen to advance Trump's self-presentation as a powerful man mixing with powerful people, so that his ordinary day becomes extraordinary. Once more we see the negative soft power in Trump's interface with foreign actors and publics – engagement with the world outside the US is portrayed as an entertaining mix of whirlwind, high stakes power plays rewarded by 5-star leisure activities filtered through the lens of '*Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*'. In both tweets above we note the way Trump

uses these ‘blurts’ to slip in simple flattery to foreign publics of the states he visits. As a performing ‘face’ he looks for an opportunity to attract regard, whether from established or prospective supporters and his self-narration constantly works to generate such opportunities.

Amplification of the emotional resonance of his tweets (code 10) is another dominant theme in Trump’s Twitter discourse. Usually, such amplification is achieved through displays of his own emotional reactions to events, people, or situations. For example:

At least 7 dead and 48 wounded in terror attack and Mayor of London says there is ‘no reason to be alarmed!’

Tweet #255 (06-04-2017)

So horrible to watch the massive fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Perhaps flying water tankers could be used to put it out. Must act quickly!

Tweet #49 (04-15-2019)

Fear is an explicit emotion favoured by Trump in his amplification strategies. Displays of fear follow the need for urgent reactions and therefore galvanize his publics around a particular course of action. In both of the above tweets it is possible to interpret Trump’s words as addressing the people of London and Paris consecutively. In tweet #255 the intent would seem to be to express disbelief that the Mayor of London could deny the need to be alarmed – and, naturally, the people that would have the most reason to be alarmed from the attack would be the people of London. Similarly, the people that would have the most to gain from Trump’s suggestion would be the people of Paris. And, certainly, Trump’s apparent concern in both tweets could be interpreted as a form of concern for the well-being of those publics and their environment. Yet they can also be interpreted as performances directed at US publics whom Trump wishes to continue to alarm regarding the immediacy of Islamic terrorist threats (in the case of Tweet #255) and to vicariously demonstrate his quick-thinking and agile response to emergency situations (#49).

At the same time, we find that Trump is quick to display an opposing emotion, hope, particularly when it comes to the outcomes of his deal-making and pursuit of personal relationships with foreign leaders.

Going to New York. Will be with Prime Minister Abe of Japan tonight talking Military and Trade. We have done much to help Japan would like to see more of a reciprocal relationship. It will all work out!

Tweet #152 (09-23-2018)

America is proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Poland in the fight to eradicate the evils of terrorism and extremism. #POTUSinPoland <https://t.co/MHxRmVvtsh>

Tweet #201 (07-06-2017)

The last tweet here is more traditional in styling and evinces pride derived from a relationship with an ally, a modality endogenous to public diplomacy. Indeed, as we describe below, there are clear instances across the assemblage where cultural codes are historically associated with the discourse of ‘nation speaking unto nation’, featured either momentarily or in a more sustained rally. This reveals Trumpian hybridisation – traditional diplomatic language norms, national sentiments, social media stylings, self-promoting branding language, and cartoon-esque vilification all mix together in a fluid, protean stream of adaptive style that produces a simulation of public diplomacy.

Arguably, the most basic tactic of negative soft power is the generation of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative, ‘drawing symbolic borders between self and Other’ (Callahan, 2015: 219). We find this a core aspect of Trump’s populist style, evidenced in the ‘faces and heels’ coding (code 3). Enemies provide Trump with targets for his emotional amplification and clear points of differentiation used for his own self-narration, whereas allies bolster his reputation, his reach and, by proxy, serve to describe the codes of the Trumpian paradigm.

It was a pleasure to host my friends President Andrzej Duda and Mrs. Agata Kornhauser-Duda of Poland at the @WhiteHouse today. U.S.-Poland ties are at an all-time high. Thank you for being such an exemplary Ally! <https://t.co/tvhHlpsrFo>

Tweet #195 (06-13-2019)

I ask every member of the Maduro regime: End this nightmare of poverty hunger and death. LET YOUR PEOPLE GO. Set your country free! Now is the time for all Venezuelan Patriots to act together as one united people. Nothing could be better for the future of Venezuela!

Tweet #283 (02-18-2019)

@SadiqKhan who by all accounts has done a terrible job as Mayor of London has been foolishly ‘nasty’ to the visiting President of the United States by far the most important ally of the United Kingdom. He is a stone cold loser who should focus on crime in London not me.

Tweet #213 (-6-03-2019)

These tweets illustrate the range covered by our ‘faces and heels’ coding. States such as Poland, political regimes, or single people (i.e. Sadiq Khan), are presented by Trump as faces or heels, actors to be applauded or booed. Mirroring formats of staged entertainment, it is an agonistic spectacle of struggle designed to incite the public. This simulated conflict also depends upon praise for allies and team mates. Poland is a praiseworthy ally, the Maduro regime is an object of concerted opprobrium, and Sadiq Khan is a ‘stone cold loser’ whose competence as a mayor is ridiculed in front of Trump’s followers. While statements such as that regarding Poland in Tweet #195 are endogenous to public diplomacy, the biblical harangues of Trump’s tweets against Maduro and the personalised invective heaped upon Khan are exogenous to it. They are, however, extreme instances of the Self/Other signalling that Callahan (2015) describes as typical of negative soft power gambits. It is, indeed, this extreme articulation that marks Trump’s negative soft power statecraft as

markedly different from, say, China's or other authoritarian political regimes. This extremity is a mark of his populist approach to the simulation of public diplomacy.

In a related manner to Trump's construction of faces and heels, the assemblage contains evidence of the President translating diplomatic relationships into the personal realm (code 4). Diplomatic dinners are framed as personal nights-out with friends, and foreign leaders are portrayed as golf-buddies, all of which are events that are worth self-reporting for public consumption:

Great day with Prime Minister @AbeShinzo of Japan. We played a quick round of golf by the beautiful Potomac River while talking Trade and many other subjects. He has now left for Japan and I am on my way to Wisconsin where a very large crowd of friends await! <https://t.co/ZvyxJ8sIw2>

Tweet #146 (04-27-2019)

Such personalisation can manifest itself as a form of behind-the-scenes gossip casting Trump as a wise man whose advice is sometimes foolishly disregarded –

I have been very critical about the way the U.K. and Prime Minister Theresa May handled Brexit. What a mess she and her representatives have created. I told her how it should be done but she decided to go another way. I do not know the Ambassador but he is not liked or well. . . .

Tweet #260 (07-08-2019)

Public diplomacy has traditionally not excessively personalised its discourse. There are exceptions, of course, such as Robert Kennedy in 1962's 'Goodwill Tour' (Shannon, 2014) or Barack Obama's engagement strategy (Golan and Yang, 2013), but even then the emphasis was on simple positive associations. Trump's focus, however, is on the construction of faces and heels to heighten tension for the purpose of spectacle. Such codes are endogenous to platforms for strategically devised public spectacles such as wrestling and yellow journalism, and Trump's use of them underlines his facility in constructing the spectacular simulation of public diplomacy.

RQ2. How do these differ from the endogenous cultural codes of the White House's public diplomacy?

If Trump's tweeting about foreign policy and international actors generates a simulation of public diplomacy, how far has that simulation worked its way into the communication styles of White House press releases? Are the endogenous codes of US public diplomacy under threat from Trump's personal voice? Our coding of the press releases reveals a number of insights in this regard.

Firstly, although the press releases do contain instances of the codes we find dominant in our assemblage of Trump's tweets, even the most regularly discovered code 1 ('narrating the self') occurs only in a quarter of paragraphs. There is therefore a significant difference in the cultural codes displayed by the White House press releases and Trump's simulated public diplomacy tweets.

Secondly, the most dominant code in the Twitter assemblage (‘simplified language and syntax’, code 6) is likewise present in the press release assemblage. However, on inspection we observe that this is due to a single press release containing a transcription of Trump’s Q&A session at the 2019 G20 Summit in Osaka. Accordingly, although this particular press release is distributed through the formal public diplomacy channels of the White House, it represents more authentically Trumps’ exogenous voice in the same way that his tweets do.

Thirdly, we note state-dependant similarities of codes across the assemblage. This is most obvious in the case of Venezuela where we identify a prominent use of codes 3, 9, 7 and 10 across tweets and press releases. When dealing with the 2019 Maduro crisis, Trumps’ public diplomacy tweets display a distinct cultural code-switching (Nilep, 2006) between antagonistic appeals and an absolutist lexicon of a formal, almost archaic prosody. These features can also be found in the press releases on the crisis in Venezuela.

Fourthly, the occurrence of ‘teams and dynasties’ (code 11) has, proportionately, a more dominant presence in the press releases than it does among tweets. The source of this dominance is the strong presence of Melania Trump’s duties in foreign visits reported by the White House. Trump’s tweets do refer to Melania accompanying him to diplomatic events, but these instances are far less dominant when compared to her presence in the press releases.

When analysing the press releases on a state-by-state basis, the *absence* of the exogenous codes that we find in Trump’s tweets is notable. The dominant White House press release style is formal and informative. Trump’s voice and populist stylings are underplayed in the press releases, unless they are directly reported. The endogenous codes of public diplomacy have been heavily shaped by the established cultural codes of diplomacy and statecraft such as ‘the use of force only as a last resort, transparency, continuous dialogue, multilateralism, and civility’ (Wiseman, 2005: 409) which have their roots in the ritualised behaviour of professional diplomatic culture (Sennett, 2012). We find that while the endogenous codes of public diplomacy continue to dominate over Trump’s hybridised epideictic discourse, those codes can be easily influenced by any necessity to include the President’s direct voice. Statements such as those found in a press release announcing the US delegates to be sent to Strasbourg are studiously neutral in their informativeness:

President Donald J. Trump today announced the designation of a Presidential Delegation to Strasbourg, France and Speyer, Germany to attend the Funeral of Dr. Helmut J. M. Kohl, Former German Chancellor and Citizen of Honor of Europe on July 1, 2017.

(Corpus ID: Germany_30_6_2017)

Yet, when the press release includes a report of what Trump *says* rather than what he *did* as the ‘diplomat-in-chief’, the endogenous codes of civility, multilateralism, transparency and dialogue become overpowered by the exogenous codes omnipresent on Twitter. The exchange between Trump and Merkel at the 2019 G20 in Osaka is illustrative of this:

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you very much. It’s great to be with Chancellor Merkel, a friend of mine – a great friend of mine. And we’ve had a terrific relationship. [. . .]

And we have many things to talk about, and we have a long meeting scheduled. And we'll be spending some time later on together also. But I just want to say she's a fantastic person, a fantastic woman, and I'm glad to have her as a friend.

And thank you very much, Angela. Thank you.

(Corpus ID: Germany_28_6_2019)

Trump's words contrast with the way in which Merkel herself talks in response to Trump:

We're going to talk about international issues, the developments on the international front too, especially about what has been happening in West Africa. We will be also talking about counterterrorism, and I very much look forward to that exchange. Of course, Iran will also be on our agenda today.

(Corpus ID: Germany_28_6_2019)

Merkel eschews the exogenous codes of Trump's hybridised spectacle, echoing instead the endogenous codes of neutrality and informativeness. What is happening at the press conference is different for each leader. Trump's words continue the exogenous focus on personal epideictic, portrayal of international relations as personal network, and repetitive, simplified syntax.

A parallel example outlines the commitment to 'mutually beneficial trade' between the US and Japan arising from the Summit between Trump and Abe in late 2018. Despite consistent Twitter portrayal of a personable relationship between him and the Japanese Prime Minister, Trump also tweets about the necessity for a 'bilateral deal with Japan that is based on the principle of fairness and reciprocity' (Tweet #158), opining that Japan 'has hit us hard on trade for years' (Tweet #168) and that the 'massive \$100 Billion Trade Deficit' is 'not fair or sustainable' (Tweet #169). In the September 2018 press release, we see Trump's terms largely shorn of their complaints, focusing instead on mutual agreement on terms:

On the occasion of our Summit Meeting in New York on September 26, 2018, we, President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, affirmed the importance of a strong, stable, and mutually beneficial trade and economic relationship between the United States and Japan, recognizing that our economies together represent approximately 30 percent of global Gross Domestic Product. The President reiterated the importance of reciprocal trade, as well as reducing the trade deficit with Japan and other countries. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of free, fair, and rules-based trade.

(Corpus ID: Japan_26_8_18)

The endogenous codes of civility, transparency and dialogue manage to smother the tones of Trump's protests, though not entirely. The exogenous code that we have dubbed 'the deal-maker' (code 12), epideictically presenting Trump as a negotiator *nonpareil*, plays a muted but significant role here, and the wording of the press release echoes Trump's personal pronouncements, framing the US-Japan agreement as a deal-making win for the President.

RQ3. What is the interplay between endogenous and exogenous cultural codes underpinning Trump's approach to public diplomacy?

Despite claims (Robertson, 2018) that social media is a 'disruptive technology', we find that it is Trump's *style* which threatens to disrupt the US public diplomacy, not any advantageous use of the innate affordances of Twitter. Trump's style is defined by his use of cultural codes exogenous to traditional US approaches to the articulation of soft power. It is a style built for domestic electioneering in a highly divided nation and, as such, when extended to Presidential rhetoric ostensibly engaging with foreign policy and foreign publics, it establishes a disruptive tension within public diplomacy messaging. One of the most obvious sites of this tension is in the contradiction between a Presidential rhetoric which produces negative soft power focused on defining the Trumpian vision of the US for a domestic public and the tradition of US public diplomacy concerned with generating positive US soft power with foreign publics. Accordingly, we identify four ways in which Trump's simulation disrupts the practice of US public diplomacy:

Populist agonism

If balance and consideration of others are endogenous to the field, Trump disregards these codes. Instead of courtesy, positive statements, moderation and ambiguity, his confrontational style overshadows his public diplomacy. This pattern is illustrated by the wide-spread proliferation of exogenous cultural code resting on 'simplified language and syntax' (code 6) and present in both Twitter and in the White House news releases. It is defined by simplified grammar, exclamations, simplistic sloganeering, 'ALL CAPS', colloquialisms, limited stylistic and lexical palette and the proliferation of antagonistic communication patterns. So, while adaptability can be highly advantageous in soft power statecraft (Anonymised, date), Trump's use of Twitter illustrates an unusually rapid and dynamic code switching within the settings of public diplomacy.

The spectacle of the personal

Our analysis reveals that the central role of the President in public diplomacy is less about personalisation techniques, but more about the *spectacle of the personal*. While Golan and Yang (2013) identify the mediated personality of Barack Obama as an endogenous asset for US public diplomacy, in the case of Trump we find that the spectacle of 'the personal' rests on Trump's assumed role as a public diplomat (self-narrating), his identity as the President (arena setter) and the content of his messages. As 'diplomat-in-chief' he relies on the endogenous, historical legacy of public diplomacy such as the 'touring Europe' trope, but uses it for, epideictic self-narration:

London part of trip is going really well. The Queen and the entire Royal family have been fantastic. The relationship with the United Kingdom is very strong. Tremendous crowds of well wishers and people that love our Country. Haven't seen any protests yet but I'm sure the. . .

Tweet #210 (06-03-2019)

While this self-narration is enabled by Twitter's affordances, Trump's 'touring' is reported by the White House too. For instance, the press release following his 2017 trip to Poland reports:

The President then traveled to Hamburg, Germany where he attended the G20 summit. On day one of the event, he met with President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico, emphasizing the strong bilateral relationship that the United States enjoys with Mexico and discussed regional challenges, including drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and the crisis in Venezuela.

(Corpus ID: Poland_11_7_2017)

As part of simulating the archetype of a 'family man', Trump brings his personal 'golfing' experience closer to the publics of diplomacy, and opens access to private events:

A working dinner tonight with Prime Minister Abe of Japan and his representatives at the Winter White House (Mar-a-Lago). Very good talks!

Tweet #181 (02-11-2017)

Had a very good phone call with @EmmanuelMacron President of France. Discussed various subjects in particular Security and Trade. Many other calls and conversations today. Looking forward to dinner tonight with Tim Cook of Apple. He is investing big dollars in U.S.A.

Tweet #21 (08-10-2018)

The publics of such 'twiplomatic broadcasts' are afforded opportunities to vicariously participate in private diplomatic events. This 'zooming' into the micro-personal level of diplomatic events accelerates foreign affairs into the realm of 'the politics of immanence' (Braidotti, 2018: 21).

The 'spectacle of the personal' blurs the focus over whose interests – personal or national – presidential public diplomacy articulates. Trump's reliance on 'deal-maker' (code 12) and 'common touch' sensibilities (code 7) refocuses the conduct of foreign affairs from diplomatic negotiations to corporate execution. Given that Trump is the centrepiece of public diplomacy, the hype surrounding the Presidential persona moves such endogenous personalisation techniques (Golan and Yang, 2013) into an exogenous 'personality cult'. As such, Trump's simulation of public diplomacy discourse reveals the personality cult as a *sui generis* mixture of: male-gendered domineering corporate executive leadership, legitimacy by 'popular' sovereignty, targeting of entire populations as opposed to relevant foreign publics, an extensive use of media, and a style that exists in order to control the media enough to inhibit the introduction of rival cults (Plamper, 2012).

Public diplomacy as extension of domestic politics

While research reveals (Bjola and Manor, 2018) that digitalisation blurs the boundaries between 'domestic' and 'international' realms of politics, we find that Trump's simulated public diplomacy is a direct extension of US domestic politics. As well as appealing to

his ‘base’, our coding reveals that in the settings of public diplomacy, Trump operates in a national electioneering mode. This is substantiated by the presence of codes such as ‘narrating the self’ (code 1), ‘media spectacle’ (code 3), ‘simplified language’ (code 6), ‘common touch’ (code 7) and ‘fighting outside of the ring’ (code 13), which display discursive features that have been found in his 2016 campaigning (Enli, 2017). Further, Trump de-contextualises public diplomacy and uses it to re-frame domestic politics:

Wow! -Senator Mark Warner got caught having extensive contact with a lobbyist for a Russian oligarch. Warner did not want a ‘paper trail’ on a ‘private’ meeting (in London) he requested with Steele of fraudulent Dossier fame. All tied into Crooked Hillary.

Tweet #250 (02-09-2018)

Similarly, the codes used during his 2016 electioneering appear in his public diplomacy:

The Democrats are pushing for Universal HealthCare while thousands of people are marching in the UK because their system is going broke and not working. Dems want to greatly raise taxes for really bad and non-personal medical care. No thanks!

Tweet #227 (02-05-2018)

Trump uses the format of election campaign rallies to make statements about foreign affairs. An extensive use of appeals to ‘the people’ (code 7) appears in his messages:

After a great rally in Panama City Beach Florida – I am returning to Washington D.C. with @SenRickScott and Senator @MarcoRubio discussing the terrible abuses by Maduro. America stands with the GREAT PEOPLE of Venezuela for however long it takes! <https://t.co/KcBoNfEibv>

Tweet 274 (05-09-2019)

A defining feature of Trump’s 2016 campaign, and a hallmark of his populist style, diatribes against broadcast and print media continue in his public diplomacy:

I have a great relationship with Angela Merkel of Germany but the Fake News Media only shows the bad photos (implying anger) of negotiating an agreement – where I am asking for things that no other American President would ask for! <https://t.co/Ib97nN5HZ>

Tweet #223 (06-15-2018)

This focus on domestic politics even when dealing with foreign actors, issues and publics is a defining feature of Callahan’s (2015) definition of negative soft power.

Not ‘media effects’ but ‘reality effects’

The disruptive pattern that spans across all of the above trends indicates that Trump’s form of negative soft power is less about ‘media effects’ and more concerned with

‘reality effects’. As such, he has transformed public diplomacy practice into a simulation by using self-referential codes used to challenge entire realms of foreign affairs, particular policies of foreign leaders, or the value of individual politicians:

On Trade France makes excellent wine but so does the U.S. The problem is that France makes it very hard for the U.S. to sell its wines into France and charges big Tariffs whereas the U.S. makes it easy for French wines and charges very small Tariffs. Not fair must change!

Tweet 46 (11-13-2018)

The petulant tone that signs-off this tweet acts as an exogenous raspberry in the face of traditional well-mannered diplomatic equanimity. Yet it also serves to re-frame such traditions as useless, unreal, masking by appealing to a basic, indeed child-like, belief in the simple ‘fairness’ of the world that has been put aside in favour of nuanced, adult, complex relationship-building. This single tweet exemplifies how carefully Trump plays with reality – he both casts the issue in terms of a childlike appeal to fairness while also placing himself in the position of the adult who has come into the room to put things right again.

LONDON needs a new mayor ASAP. Khan is a disaster – will only get worse! <https://t.co/n7qKI3BbD2>

Tweet #243 (06-15-2019)

What does London mean for Trump here? There is no sense that it is the capital city of an ally – instead it becomes a flat, transient placeholder for any place that is not being run in a Trumpian way. The diplomatic consequences of the President of the United States personally interfering in the municipal politics of an ally are never considered because that is not what is happening – instead, Khan and the city of London have simply become simulated ‘versions’ of themselves, serving as characters in the President’s own arena of total campaigning. Foreign publics, foreign issues, foreign leaders are all simply resources to be dynamically purposed and re-purposed into components of an agonistic spectacle that has re-election as its goal.

Discussion

Intensifying Baudrillard’s (2001) hyper-reality, hybrid media landscapes enable Donald Trump to perform simulated public diplomacy in which diplomatic messages on his Twitter generate agonistic rather than positive sentiments aimed at aiding his relationships with foreign publics, the axiomatic feature of ‘new’ public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005). This agonism is amplified by his appropriation of exogenous to public diplomacy cultural codes hybridising cultural norms of diplomacy with, we argue, cultural codes defining carnivalesque socialities of a wrestler performing in a ring.

To theorise this cultural interplay, we argue that ‘*kayfabe*’ is a powerful and a revealing analogue to Trump’s populist style and an explanandum of his simulated public diplomacy. This concept is associated with the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) franchise. Originating in the culture of carnival workers, its appropriation into the wrestling industry

stems from a media strategy which simulates 'spontaneous' events as 'real' (McQuarrie, 2006). By definition, kayfabe amplifies performative agonism. Its tactical inventory includes: disregard for codes of conduct, celebration of story-telling, suspension of disbelief, mediated spectacles, the theatrically antagonistic division of relations into 'faces' and 'heels', personalised relationships, direct appeals, signifiers of brute force, limited persuasive abilities and a grandiose approach to stage presence (Hunt, 2005). Further, Trump's unwillingness to pause his showmanship, or re-join the norms of diplomatic culture, mirrors the stricture on wrestlers never to 'break kayfabe'. The 'always on' performance shapes the hyperreality that the publics co-create with the characters (whether they be presidents or wrestlers).

Trump's simulated public diplomacy is rich in examples of kayfabe showmanship (Hodges, 2017). For example, his diplomatic summits with foreign leaders become staring matches and handshake contests, his briefings on foreign affairs are delivered through addresses at rallies, and the government shutdown over a foreign policy issue becomes the equivalent of chair throwing around the wrestling ring. Willingness to suspend disbelief for entertainment, when transferred to the realm of public diplomacy, generates a rupturing 'cultural implosion' of simulacra derived from the amalgamation of bravado and hyperbole – a far cry from the relationship building dynamics that arguably defines 'new' public diplomacy. In such a setting, it is increasingly difficult to capture, or to follow, the functional codes of public diplomacy. Implosion arises from the erosion of meaning and 'consensus reality' through a proliferation of simulacra. Trump turns public diplomacy into a spectacle, simultaneously spanning the boundaries of the 'real', the 'medium' and the 'message'.

In answer to RQ1, our assemblage of Trump's tweets reveals the following cultural codes in his simulated public diplomacy: simplified language and syntax, 'social' literacy, narrating the self, emotional amplification, faces and heels, absolutist statements, personalised relationships, media spectacle, fighting outside of the ring, the deal-maker, common touch, militarisation and force and teams and dynasties. These signifiers of Trump's populist style collide with the endogenous codes of public diplomacy. In a similar way to other leaders who use social media in public diplomacy (Spry, 2019), his use of his own Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump) enables personalisation strategies. Empowered by the platform's affordances, he by-passes 'old' media, uses the stylistic presentation of himself as 'authentic' or 'honest' and, in addition, disregards cultural norms endogenous to US public diplomacy. Unlike other leaders, however, his performance in the traditional settings of US public diplomacy, immanentises the proliferation of exogenous cultural codes – keyfabian simulacra – which collide with the officialdom of the Presidential office. Considering Trump's populist style during the 2016 election campaign, described as 'amateurish' and 'de-professionalising' (Enli, 2017: 50), our findings reveal that his Twitter use displays an adept hybridisation of cultural codes. Our findings are in line with Šimunjak and Caliendo's (2019: 20–22) conclusions that his tweeting is 'disruptive of traditional diplomacy' and 'does not accord with the codes and conventions of diplomatic language'. Our study, however, provides a systematisation of exogenous codes. Whilst they are hybridised, they are not random: they have an internal, disruptive logic which alters the endogenous conventions of public diplomacy practiced by the White House.

Trump's simulated public diplomacy does not direct itself towards the domestic in order to aid in the construction of a unified self-definition of the US which can then be used to clarify a vision of national culture to the rest of the world. Instead, Trump seeks to build a form of negative soft power which exposes, underlines and encourages the deep divisions within his country in order to benefit from this disunity, empowering his base and the terms with which he and they look at the world. And this view of the world is one based on faces and heels, a constant agonistic spectacle which understands the domestic and the foreign within the same space. In this way, we find that the Trumpian simulation of public diplomacy can be understood as a state of permanent electioneering, or Total Campaigning, with the world as hustings venue. The globalisation and hybridisation of media landscape means that, for leaders such as Trump who treat all communication as self-epideictic, there is little substantial difference between domestic or foreign politics.

With regards to cultural hybridisation, our findings demonstrate noteworthy patterns in exogenous codes across tweets pertaining to different diplomatic targets. For example, tweets focusing on Venezuela display considerably more reliance upon absolutist discourse (code 9) than tweets concerning other diplomatic actors. Indeed, a core of the Venezuelan tweets express this absolutism using a style and lexical markers that are distinctly endogenous, though the tradition they reference is biblical rather than diplomatic. Trump's tweets about the 2016 international crisis in Venezuela reveal a populist style aimed to effectively resonate with his publics: a global network of foreign and domestic followers. It is the voice of a 'truth from the mountaintop' leadership style, which eschews the simplistic, telegraphic language we found in so many of his other tweets. Conversely, such absolutist discourse is downplayed in tweets pertaining to Japan. Trump shifts between exogenous codes, fluidly mutating public diplomacy in relation to leaders, foreign or domestic publics, political events and strategic relations. Even the most dominant code that we found (code 6, 'simplified language and syntax') can be de-emphasised by Trump when the strategic landscape demands it.

Findings from the White House press releases (RQ2) reveal that, while endogenous codes continue to dominate over the idiosyncrasies of keyfabian-inspired 'Trumpian' simulation of public diplomacy, those codes can be easily influenced by the regular necessity to report the President's direct voice. Accordingly, whilst the style enshrined in press releases on foreign affairs is formal and informative, the incorporation of direct quotes de-homogenises it: without the presence of Trump's own reported speech, even press releases concerned with his pet diplomatic concerns are moderated by the ritualised codes of diplomatic civility and largely de-personalised. The endogenous codes of civility, transparency and dialogue implicitly manage to muffle Trump's protests (Wiseman, 2005). We note that the White House moderates the voice of the President in foreign affairs and, arguably, plays a gate-watching role (Bruns and Highfield, 2015) in simulated public diplomacy, particularly targeted at 'old' media. Trumps' modus operandi as a code-breaker, however, leads to the proliferation of keyfabian codes concomitant to the disintermediation affordance of Twitter, and, implicitly, yields reality-effects as opposed to media-effects.

Findings pertaining to RQ3 display the interplay between endogenous and exogenous codes across Trump's simulated public diplomacy as an exemplar of an unprecedented cultural shift: the self-celebratory style of populism goes beyond binary soft

power leadership styles (Nye, 2014). On the surface level, Trump's style is 'personalised' insofar as he does not communicate to foreign publics a separate diplomatic persona. His *modus operandi* is to appear 'honest' in the hyperreal agonism between populist 'authenticity', on the one hand, and professional diplomats and leaders representing 'elites' that his base find contemptible, on the other. Upon closer inspection, Trump's 'personality cult' can be conflated with affronts and 'taking things personally'. The cancellation of his state visit to the UK in January 2018 citing 'personal reasons' epitomises the theatrical pique that WWE wrestlers use to stoke their rivalry. For the wrestler, and for Trump, reality collapses down to the agonism of the ring. Adding to the notion of the 'spectacle of the personal', he addresses, or chooses to publically point fingers at, foreign leaders on Twitter consequently abandoning the gravitas that leaders prefer to display even in public diplomacy. While Trump's simulated public diplomacy often backfires, he still dictates the codes of the hyperreality he constructs. Even 'failures' simply set the tone for further 'angles', because as we see in the ever-evolving kayfabe storylines of WWE, allies one day are enemies the next.

Indeed, it might be argued that the risk of failure, the possibility of damage to the reputation and influence of the US, and the almost violent overturning of diplomatic norms and self-presentation reflect a 'truth' also to be found in the kayfabe of wrestling. Though the show might be 'fake', it is the real risk of injury that, quite paradoxically, injects a visceral authenticity into the simulacra (Hunt, 2005). Blood becomes an index of authenticity and yet is itself often produced in inauthentic ways. So Trump's implosion of public diplomacy norms works on his base as a manufactured sign of hyperrealistic authenticity. This focus on the dynamics of negative soft power (Callahan, 2015), with its privileging of a domestic base over appeals to foreign publics has harmful consequences for US statecraft, which, arguably, is indicative of the epistemic crisis of US public diplomacy.

Outside of Trump's hyperreality we find no substantial referents, only vague, derivative gestures such as the wall as a security measure, allegations of fake news and revisionism of trade agreements – all of which simply point back to themselves (Baudrillard, 2001). Trump's delivery rests on codes devised for domestic publics while also serving to extend his 'cult of personality' for the perusal of foreign publics. As such, the sloganeering hype of 'America First' neither translates into the foreign affairs outcomes that Trump is seeking, nor coheres into soft power statecraft attracting allies to address global political issues.

Conclusion

Trump's confrontational style bypasses the established public diplomacy codes of conduct. His abandonment of these codes and his use of the demotic rhetoric of simulated codes across his discourse has an isolating effect on foreign publics. Trump's approach does not yield a smoothly functioning practice, but co-constructs instability and uncertainty within US soft power statecraft. Baudrillard (2001) refers to this instability as implosion. For Baudrillard, this is the culminating moment of hyperreality, whereby public diplomacy accelerates towards its limits, which in this case are articulated by the violent incursion of cultural codes alien to public diplomacy. The intensity of kayfabe-inspired simulation implodes public diplomacy from within as it destroys meanings. This

implosion swallows all energy as foreign publics struggle to make sense of Trump's discourse on foreign affairs, falling further prey to the inherent entropic tendency of the field. In Trump's foreign affairs, reality is denied and, as a result, all codes lose their referential value. Public diplomacy is diminished in its meaning-making focus and so its purpose is undermined. It becomes a hyperreal wrestling spectacle for the Trumpian 'base', constructed from the simulacra of rivalries, flexings, tantrums and hyperbolic stand-offs, determinedly, and perhaps irrevocably, undermining the established role of public diplomacy within US soft power statecraft.

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ORCID iDs

Paweł Surowiec  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3554-9242>

Christopher Miles  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4597-4223>

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Author biographies

Paweł Surowiec, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sheffield, UK, specialising in strategic communication, public diplomacy and political campaigning in the context of international politics. He is the author of *'Nation Branding, Public Relations and Soft Power: Corporatising Poland'* (Routledge, 2017). His research focuses on the themes of digital politics, identity politics, political participation, populism and the impact of illiberalism on democracies.

Christopher Miles, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing & Communication at Bournemouth University. He has published extensively on the rhetorical nature of marketing discourse. His most recent book, *'Marketing, Rhetoric and Control: The Magical Foundations of Marketing Theory'* (2018), is published in Routledge's Studies in Marketing series and explores the intriguing connections between Sophism, magical paradigms and the marketing function.