THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

AN EXPLORATION OF TWO PUBLIC RELATIONS PARADIGMS IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

SUNHA YEO

Norman, Oklahoma

2025

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AN EXPLORATION OF TWO PUBLIC RELATIONS PARADIGMS

IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Jeong-Nam Kim, Chair

Dr. David Craig

Dr. Xiaochen Angela Zhang

Dr. Maeghan N. Hennessey

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Abstract

Throughout history, nations have strived to win the hearts and minds of foreign publics—from ancient speeches like the *epibatērios* logos to posters, broadcast media, cultural institutions, and now digital platforms. Despite different public relations approaches, the consistent goal has been to shape favorable perceptions and build relationships that advance national interests. Two foundational paradigms have historically shaped the practice of international public relations: the symbolic-interpretive paradigm and the behavioral-management paradigm. The former focuses solely on activities such as messaging and meaning-making through strategic narratives that emphasize image management, whereas the latter also incorporates organizational behavior. This study examines the interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance in public relations—an approach that has rarely been applied at the national level. According to *Excellence Theory*, public relations practices can be either excellent or poor, yielding four possible combinations: (1) poor symbolic and poor behavioral, (2) poor symbolic and excellent behavioral, (3) excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral, and (4) excellent symbolic and poor behavioral. To determine which public relations strategy most positively influences foreign publics' perceptions and communicative behaviors, this study examines the individual and interactive effects of symbolic and behavioral performance on problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, and megaphoning. A 2x2 experimental design was used in three online surveys with American participants, randomly assigned to one of four conditions across climate change, cultural conflict, and national crime contexts. Findings show that the behavioral performance consistently influences conspiracy attribution and both positive and negative megaphoning. Moreover, the combination of excellent symbolic strategies and excellent behavioral conduct reduces negative reactions (i.e., conspiracy attribution and negative megaphoning) to issues for which the nation bears no direct responsibility, such as climate change. However, this combination enhances positive megaphoning in situations where the nation is directly at fault and seeks to restore its position on the international stage through action-based efforts. These results highlight the critical role of the behavioral-management paradigm in international public relations. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications and proposes directions for future research.

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An Exploration of Two Public Relations Paradigms in an International Context

Chapter 1. Introduction

Historically, nations have continuously competed to win the hearts and minds of foreign publics (Nye, 2004). In ancient times, officials delivered the *epibatērios logos (ἐπιβατήριος λόγος)*, a speech given upon arriving in a foreign country and addressed to the welcoming audience (Pernot, 2015). With the advent of paper, posters were used during the Middle Ages and in subsequent historical periods to influence foreign publics, although their reach was typically limited to neighboring countries (Claxton, 2015). The emergence of radio and television enabled nations to reach broader international audiences, especially during wartime, when these media were actively used as tools of propaganda and influence (Somerville, 2012). Major powers also began establishing in-person cultural outreach through institutions such as the British Council, the Goethe-Institute, and Alliance Française to build direct relationships with foreign publics (Gutierrez, 2015). Today, digital platforms are widely used, and it is now common for embassies to maintain official websites where representatives of nations can interact with foreign publics (Ruël et al., 2015). Regardless of the method, the overarching goal of these efforts over thousands of years remains consistent: governments engage in various forms of public relations in the international arena to shape favorable perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward their values, policies, and actions (Cutlip, 1987; Grunig, 1993).

As demonstrated by the historical developments outlined above, nations have primarily employed two dominant public relations approaches on the international stage: symbolic performance and behavioral performance. This categorization is based on Grunig's (1993a) study, which explained that public relations operates under two paradigms: the symbolic–interpretive paradigm and the management–behavioral paradigm. The former focuses solely on

messaging and meaning-making through strategic narratives (e.g., speeches, posters, radio) that emphasize image management, whereas the latter also incorporates organizational behavior (e.g., cultural centers; Grunig, 1992).

Numerous prior studies have examined how symbolic performance influences public perceptions and communicative behaviors. However, in real-world contexts, individuals are typically first exposed to symbolic cues—such as official speeches, declarations, campaigns, or advertisements. Then, these symbolic efforts are often followed by observable actions, including agreements, sanctions, or policy enactments. In this regard, several theoretical frameworks have indirectly emphasized the importance of management–behavioral performance. For example, Legitimacy Theory suggests that entities are expected to act in accordance with previously shared social norms and values—failing to do so can harm their credibility (Brown & Deegan, 1998; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). A central concept in this theory—the "legitimacy gap"—refers to the perceived mismatch between public expectations and an organization's actual conduct (Sethi, 1975). Expectation Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980, 1989) also explains that satisfaction is shaped by how well-perceived performance aligns with prior expectations, which are often influenced by symbolic cues. However, limited research has examined these dynamics in the context of international public relations. While both theories offer valuable conceptual insights, their applicability to nation-level public relations is constrained, as they are primarily rooted in consumer satisfaction and market-based dynamics, focusing on behavioral outcomes such as use, purchase, reuse, or recommendation (Oh & Ma, 2018). In contrast, the two public relations paradigms introduced by Grunig (1993a) focus primarily on the perceptual and communicative responses of publics—whether an entity's strategies are perceived as problematic, conspiratorial, criticized, complimented, or supported—which are essential for

understanding how that entity is evaluated by its publics. This approach is adaptable across various organizational contexts—including nation-states—and extends beyond customer behavior to encompass a wide range of public responses. It also takes a communication-centered perspective grounded in public relations theory, which allows researchers a more comprehensive lens on international public relations.

In detail, the present study posits that each strategic public relations approach—symbolic performance and management performance—can be executed either excellently or poorly, as outlined in *Excellence Theory* (Grunig, 2013a). Based on this distinction, the interaction between the two types of performance can be categorized into four distinct combinations: (1) poor symbolic performance and poor behavioral performance, (2) poor symbolic performance and excellent behavioral performance, (3) excellent symbolic performance and excellent behavioral performance, and (4) excellent symbolic performance and poor behavioral performance. This study evaluates each performance type—and their four possible combinations—across three international issue contexts: climate change, cultural conflict, and national crime. By systematically manipulating and comparing these conditions, this study investigates how the symbolic–interpretive paradigm (symbolic performance only) and the management–behavioral paradigm (behavioral performance alone or in combination with symbolic performance) influence foreign publics' problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, and megaphoning behaviors—both positive and negative.

The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how different paradigmatic approaches of nations in international public relations influence foreign publics' perceptual and communicative outcomes across various international contexts. In doing so, the study offers theoretical insights for public relations scholars by identifying the distinct functions of each

public relations performance that yield more effective outcomes. It also provides practical implications for nations, offering guidance on how to strategically apply international public relations approaches in alignment with specific issue contexts to enhance their soft power and global influence.

Chapter 2. Two Public Relations Paradigms

Two paradigms have historically shaped the practical field of public relations and continue to drive academic debates: the symbolic-interpretive paradigm and the behavioral-management paradigm (Grunig, 2009). These paradigms reflect differing perspectives on the role of public relations within organizations—whether it primarily functions as a symbolic tool for shaping perceptions and enhancing an organization's image, or as an essential part of organizational decision-making and strategy (Grunig, 1993a).

The theoretical foundation for understanding these paradigms is rooted in Hatch's (1997) organizational theory framework, which identifies three perspectives on organizations: symbolic-interpretive, postmodernist, and modernist (Grunig, 2018). The symbolic-interpretive perspective challenges the notion of an objective reality, instead viewing entities, their environments, and managerial behavior as subjective enactments of reality that are shaped through communication and social interactions (Hatch, 1997). This approach emphasizes meaning-making and the role of interpretation in shaping organizational processes (Grunig, 2009). The postmodernist perspective further expands on subjectivity. Postmodernists argue that knowledge and organizational structures are fragmented, favoring deconstructionist approaches to analyze power dynamics and uncover the underlying interests embedded in dominant organizational narratives (Grunig, 2018). Rather than establishing fixed frameworks, postmodernism focuses on exposing whose perspectives are privileged in organizational discourse and how meanings are contested. In

contrast, the modernist perspective is rooted in classical management theories and assumes that reality is objective, with organizations functioning through rational and measurable activities aimed at achieving specific goals. This perspective aligns with the idea that management operates through structured processes to optimize efficiency and performance (Hatch, 1997).

Grunig applied this organizational theory framework to explain two paradigms in public relations: the symbolic-interpretive paradigm and the behavioral-management paradigm (Grunig, 1993a; 2006; 2009; 2018; Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The symbolic-interpretive paradigm is grounded in interpretive and postmodern organizational theories. It emphasizes the technical role of public relations in facilitating communication with the public and emphasizes perception and image management through symbolic messaging. In contrast, the behavioral-management paradigm draws on modernist principles. It argues that public relations should be grounded in actual behavior, as communication involves not only messaging but also listening and engagement. Through this approach, public relations can serve a strategic role in organizational management. The following sections will explore these two paradigms in greater detail, examining the key characteristics that distinguish them within the field.

2.1. The Symbolic-Interpretive Paradigm

The symbolic interpretive paradigm is a dominant approach in public relations that emphasizes the construction of meaning through messaging. At the core of this paradigm is the belief that public relations is about influencing how publics interpret an organization. This influence is achieved through strategically crafted branding, reputation, identity, impressions, and overall image. Thus, this form of symbolic public relations is also commonly referred to as reputational relationship (Grunig 1993a; Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). Public relations

practitioners who adhere to this paradigm tend to emphasize media effects such as publicity, campaigns, and advertising.

This paradigm is particularly prominent in many academic and professional fields, especially those that prioritize brand perception, media relations, and impression management (Grunig, 2009). This perspective is reflected in impression management theories, such as Benoit's (1997) image restoration strategies and Coombs' (2020) crisis response strategies, which argue that problems in relationships with publics can be addressed through carefully crafted messaging, disseminated via publicity and media relations, to repair or reshape an organization's image. This emphasis on image aligns with Edward Bernays' early conceptualization of public relations, in which the practitioner's role was "to mold public opinion" (Grunig, 2006).

The symbolic-interpretive paradigm primarily frames public relations as a defensive tool for organizations. Within this framework, public relations shapes mental representations in the minds of audiences, serving to shield organizations from external influences and mitigate environmental pressures (Grunig, 2006). Critics contend that this perspective confines public relations to message dissemination and media influence, reducing its role to a tactical function rather than a strategic component of organizational decision-making (Grunig, 2009). As an alternative, proponents of the management–behavioral paradigm argue that public relations should move beyond symbolic messaging and incorporate meaningful actions such as active listening, relationship building, and direct engagement with key publics. This approach should enable public relations to assume a more integrated and strategic decision-making role within organizations (Grunig, 2018).

2.2. The Behavioral-Management Paradigm

In contrast to the symbolic-interpretive paradigm, the behavioral-management paradigm offers a substantive, action-oriented approach to public relations, emphasizing the importance of organizational engagement with stakeholders beyond strategic messaging. Grunig (1993a) emphasized that scholars such as Jackson (cited in Grunig, 1993a), Olasky (1987), Riley (1963), and Wiebe (1963) noted the limited attention given to behavioral relationships and stressed the need to shift from cognitive effects (image management) to tangible behavioral performance. This paradigm challenges the assumption that organizations can control their reputation solely through symbolic messages, asserting instead that public perception is shaped by real-world interactions, experiences, and organizational behavior (Grunig, 1993a).

This behavioral approach is grounded in the differing assumptions about publics. The symbolic-interpretive paradigm views publics as passive recipients who are informed and whose perceptions or behaviors can be changed based on the organization's message, following the principles of persuasion theory (stimulus-response). However, this symbolic-interpretive paradigm risks neglecting the value of publics, who may offer critical insights that could enhance organizational effectiveness. In contrast, the behavioral-management paradigm recognizes publics as active participants whose input can contribute to organizational improvement and development (Grunig, 2009). Therefore, while the symbolic-interpretive paradigm views the public as an object to be influenced, the behavioral-management paradigm regards publics as a valuable source of information that can supplement an organization’s knowledge base and upgrade its decision-making processes.

This distinction also shapes differing conceptions of the communication function. Within the symbolic–interpretive paradigm, communication is primarily viewed as a technical tool for persuasion. In contrast, the management–behavioral paradigm conceptualizes communication as a means of fostering mutual understanding between an entity and its publics. Importantly, the management–behavioral paradigm does not reject the functions of the symbolic–interpretive approach, such as media relations and information dissemination. Rather, it incorporates them into a broader strategic framework that emphasizes listening and the cultivation of reciprocal relationships, thereby upholding the principles of two-way, symmetrical communication. This approach ensures that stakeholders have a voice in organizational decision-making processes and promotes the development of high-quality, mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig, 2006). Because behavior often involves direct experiences with an organization, the management–behavioral model is also referred to as experiential relationship-building (Grunig 1993a, b; Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015).

In summary, this theoretical distinction underscores how public relations can be conceptualized along two paradigms. The symbolic–interpretive paradigm views public relations primarily as a strategic messaging tool that shapes symbolic relationships by constructing an organization's image—an impression formed at a particular moment (Grunig, 1993b). Rooted in messaging activities, this perspective emphasizes how language, visuals, and narratives influence public perception. In contrast, the behavioral-management paradigm conceptualizes public relations as a strategic management function, focusing on the organization's actual behavior and its substantive relationships with key publics (Grunig, 2018). This approach is centered on actions rather than appearances, aiming to generate engagement.

Chapter 3. Public Relations Paradigms in the International Setting

The two paradigms of public relations are also evident on the international stage, commonly discussed under the terms *global public relations* and *international public relations*. The former emphasizes a unified global program that is locally adjusted, beginning with an overarching perspective or message that is adapted to fit regional differences. The latter, by contrast, focuses on the implementation of multiple, distinct programs tailored to the unique cultural, social, political, and economic contexts of individual markets (Anderson, 1989). In either case, these strategically organized efforts by companies, institutions, or governments aim to enhance their image, communicate their political stance, and establish strong ties with audiences outside their own borders (Wilcox et al., 2015; Grunig et al., 1995).

In the context of public relations of nations, symbolic public relations is frequently employed to express a country's official stance or values, often in response to national celebrations, political developments, or (inter)national crises. It also encompasses efforts to introduce national identities, values, and beliefs through verbal, written, and symbolic cues to enhance the nation's image. Common examples include official speeches, national declarations, tourism campaigns, and foreign direct investment advertisements (Avraham, 2020; Decrop, 2007; Grunig, 1993b; Papadopoulos et al., 2016). In contrast, the behavioral public relations in the international context includes tangible actions and policy implementations that provide concrete evidence of a nation's commitment to its stated principles and strategic objectives. Examples of this paradigm include diplomatic agreements, economic sanctions, military interventions, foreign aid programs, and policy enactments.

Between the two paradigms, symbolic performance is the form most commonly observed in practice by nations, as most individuals rarely have the opportunity to directly experience a

nation or observe its behavior firsthand (Golan, 2015). Instead, people tend to form perceptions of a nation indirectly—through secondary sources such as media or conversations with others (e.g., friends, family members) (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). However, public interest in international affairs remains generally low (Kunczik, 1990, p. 254), which limits engagement with symbolic public relations efforts. Even when foreign publics do pay attention, cross-cultural differences may lead to varied interpretations of the intended message. Given these challenges, it is essential to adopt ethically grounded approaches in international public relations (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Fitch & Surma, 2005). Ethical standards are best upheld when behavior aligns with and reinforces symbolic messages, ensuring consistency between words and actions (Grunig, 1993a). As Tam and Kim (2019) pointed out, meaningful relationships are often formed through a combination of information and direct experience—yet this interplay remains underexplored. The following section will elaborate further on this interplay.

Chapter 4. Interactions of Symbolic and Behavioral Public Relations Performance

While these two paradigms are often portrayed as competing, Grunig (1993a), drawing on Patrick Jackson's model, emphasized the importance of addressing both. He argued that the symbolic and behavioral paradigms "should not be antithetical but rather synthetical" (Grunig, 2003, p. 205). According to Grunig (1993a), the two approaches are closely interwoven—much like the strands of a rope—suggesting that the true impact of public relations is realized when symbolic and behavioral performance are considered together. This perspective illustrates the dynamic interplay between shaping public perception and fostering action-based organizational relationships, reinforcing the importance of a comprehensive and integrated approach to public relations research.

In 1984, Grunig conducted a 15-year study, one of the largest research projects in public relations history, to identify best practices in public relations. This extensive empirical research led to the development of *Excellence Theory*, a comprehensive framework that distinguishes excellent public relations from less effective practices. Excellence has often been measured through factors such as market dominance, innovation, or return on sales and investment (Grunig, 2013b). However, in Grunig's theory, excellence primarily refers to effective management, which includes communication management, and can be identified through a high level of organizational effectiveness (Grunig & Grunig, 2011). From this perspective, each public relations strategy can be executed along a continuum, ranging from poor to excellent. This approach differs from that of Grunig et al. (1995), who categorized the Four Models of Public Relations into craft public relations (press agentry and public information) and professional public relations (persuasion and conflict management). Instead, the current perspective offers a different lens by emphasizing that both symbolic and behavioral public relations, whether craft or professional, can be executed either poorly or excellently, depending on the quality of its implementation.

Poor symbolic performance is characterized by asymmetrical communication that prioritizes the organization's interests and masks its identity while disregarding those of its publics. It also relies on one-way communication, rejecting feedback or audience input, and focuses solely on transmitting messages to a target audience. In contrast, *excellent symbolic performance* seeks to enhance organizational effectiveness through symmetrical communication—using strategic messaging to recognize and address issues that affect both the organization and its stakeholders. It additionally emphasizes two-way communication that values fairness, transparency, listening, responsiveness, and mutual consideration by presenting factual

information, raising awareness of both the organization's and the publics' goals, and discussing options that may be of concern to the public. On the other hand, *poor behavioral performance* involves actions that are primarily self-serving and intended to benefit the organization without genuine consideration for the interests or needs of its publics. It disregards stakeholder input and may even abandon or disregard commitments that were initially promised once they are perceived to threaten organizational interests. In contrast, *excellent behavioral performance* focuses on actions that create mutual benefit between the organization and its publics. It is demonstrated through responsible actions, such as collaborating with stakeholders and adapting new policies, behaviors, or strategies based on their input.

Based on these four public relations approaches, four possible combinations of symbolic and behavioral public relations can be identified: (1) poor symbolic and poor behavioral performance, (2) excellent symbolic and poor behavioral performance, (3) excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral performance, and (4) poor symbolic and excellent behavioral performance. The characteristics of each combination, along with illustrative examples, are presented in the following section.

4.1. The Interaction of Poor Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance

The combination of poor symbolic and poor behavioral performance reflects both self-promotional communication and self-serving behavior. It relies on asymmetrical, one-way communication, in which national messaging is one-sided and focused solely on advancing the country's image or agenda, often at the expense of addressing the concerns, values, or expectations of its publics. The organization's actual behavior further reflects a purely self-interested approach, disregarding public input and accountability.

A prime example is Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro's leadership. Symbolically, the Venezuelan government relied on weak and inconsistent propaganda, frequently blaming foreign nations—particularly the United States—for its internal crises rather than crafting a coherent message that could position Venezuela as a stable or progressive nation (Gunia, 2019). Additionally, government-controlled media lacked credibility, failing to effectively shape global narratives or garner international support. On the behavioral side, Venezuela exhibited economic mismanagement, hyperinflation, food shortages, and human rights violations, which further reinforced a global perception of crisis, instability, and authoritarianism (Nasa, 2019).

Nations are in a position to determine which outcomes best serve their interests and those of foreign publics (Grunig, 1993b). Nonetheless, some countries, like Venezuela, adopt an approach that neglects even basic image-polishing efforts. As Grunig explains, poor symbolic communication often occurs when organizations continue to do what they have always done, rather than adapting to what ought to be done (Grunig, 2013c). In other words, this approach to public relations is frequently practiced according to an outdated model of the function (Grunig et al., 2015). Moreover, poor symbolic communication often contributes to poor behavioral practices, as it tends to overlook stakeholder feedback, environmental scanning, and other essential forms of external input. In doing so, organizations miss critical opportunities to identify emerging issues and the strategies required to maintain global stability, increasing the likelihood of making ineffective decisions (Grunig, 2013b). Siemens and colleagues (1973) argued that practical and effective problem-solving is impossible without access to necessary and relevant information. They emphasized that sound behavioral decision-making requires accurate, up-to-date facts and a clear understanding of contextual circumstances. Without sufficient input, a hallmark of one-way communication, any proposed solution risks being misguided or

ineffective. Thus, when nations employ international public relations solely to inform, influence, or neutralize public opinion—without genuine action—they can be highly engage in a non-strategic form of international public relations (Grunig, 1993b; Hiebert, 1991).

4.2. The Interaction of Excellent Symbolic and Poor Behavioral Performance

This combination occurs when a nation communicates effectively—crafting compelling, well-designed messages that resonate with its publics and present a positive image—but fails to support those messages with actions that align with the values or promises previously promoted. It reflects a contradiction between the actions expected based on its communication and a lack of follow-through on commitments. In such cases, stakeholder input is disregarded in actual decision-making, and national policies, governance, or treaty decisions tend to be self-serving or even harmful, despite the nation's outwardly positive image.

Crafting strategic messaging enables an organization to shape a compelling public image and strengthen its influence (Grunig & Kim, 2021). However, a failure to align these messages with tangible actions has long been recognized as a challenge in organizational communication (Riley, 1963). Walker and Wan (2012) argued that such decoupled actions can result in negative consequences, including a loss of public trust, withdrawal of stakeholder support, and diminished organizational legitimacy. The Project Management Institute (2013) further emphasized the financial risks of misalignment in its report *The High Cost of Low Performance*, highlighting that ineffective performance can result in significant financial setbacks. When this gap between messaging and behavior becomes evident, foreign publics may perceive the organization's efforts as "performative branding" (Ren & Gyimóthy, 2013) or accuse it of "window dressing" and superficial public relations (Charoenvattananukul, 2023). This disconnect often creates an

impression of irresponsibility or unethical conduct (Russell et al., 2016), thus has been criticized more broadly as a form of organizational hypocrisy (Balluchi et al., 2020).

This pattern is also evident at the national level. A prime example is Saudi Arabia, which has launched aggressive public relations campaigns and employed strategic narratives to reshape its global image. Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the Saudi government introduced *Vision 2030*, a bold economic and social reform plan aimed at investing in clean energy, promoting tourism, and improving human rights perceptions. The initiative has been widely publicized in global media, positioning Saudi Arabia as a modernizing force in the Middle East. Despite its sophisticated messaging, Saudi Arabia remains one of the world's largest oil producers, contributing significantly to global carbon emissions. Additionally, it struggles to align its rhetoric with meaningful policy changes in human rights. The country still enforces strict political repression, including the arrest of activists, restrictions on women's autonomy, and suppression of free speech (Borger, 2024; Dunbar, 2024).

In international politics, excellent symbolic performance—often delivered through promoters, propagandists, and lobbyists—paired with poor action is not a new phenomenon. It has been prevalent throughout history (Cutlip, 1987; Grunig, 1993b), particularly with the rise of new media technologies such as radio and television. Grunig (1993a) noted that this shift led organizations to prioritize persuasive narratives over the development of genuine, action-based relationships with their publics. As media platforms expanded, organizations increasingly recognized the power of publicity and mass persuasion, often emphasizing message dissemination over meaningful engagement. This approach expanded implicit faith in the power of media (Grunig, 1993a), equating “public relations” with “media relations” (Grunig, 1992). It is characterized by what appears to be “decent and rational, unemotional debate,” while

simultaneously possessing the power to manipulate and deceive the public (Grunig, 1993b). Spicer (1993) argued that such media-centered practices reduced public relations to a technical role—a mere substitute for real action. In a similar vein, Pavón-Guinea (2020), drawing on Buber's work, referred to this type of communication as "technical dialogue," describing it as formal, insincere interaction that lacks genuine relational intent.

Two pivotal figures in the development of this media-centric approach were Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays. Ivy Lee, regarded as the father of modern public relations, championed press releases and corporate messaging as tools for managing public perception. Edward Bernays, often considered the architect of propaganda, integrated psychological principles into public relations strategies to shape public opinion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). While their contributions helped professionalize public relations, they also contributed to the widespread practice of 'talking without walking' (Holliday et al., 2022), 'green-washing' (Balluchi et al., 2020), and signaling strategy (Connelly et al. 2011). Grunig mentioned that this kind of combination "obfuscate(s) the consequences of organizational behavior" over the long term and rarely fosters effective relationships (Grunig, 1993b, p.146).

Unfortunately, this combination is expected to persist for two reasons. First, it is often observed when public relations firms work on behalf of a nation, as many international public relations practitioners are former journalists who are specialists in the symbolic paradigm (Grunig, 1992) and do not have the knowledge or training to implement it in practice. (Grunig, 1993b, p.158). Thus, most public relations firms have the most cooperative and autonomous relationship with the mass media but the least with communities in foreign countries (Grunig, 1992). Second, this combination is more likely to occur in an era where virtual reality becomes increasingly common (Grunig, 1992). Social media offers significant advantages in delivering

symbolic messages that capture superficial attention due to its broad reach, high frequency, ease of use, immediacy, and permanence (Nimtupariya & Tapinta, 2021). Thus, approximately 97% of UN member states utilize Twitter for diplomatic communication, showing the widespread adoption of digital platforms (Danguguwa, 2021). However, numerous studies have found that nations rarely engage in two-way communication (Cha et al., 2015; Kampf et al., 2015; Stauß, 2015). In addition, these Twitter accounts rarely followed their followers back (Dodd & Collins 2017). As Elving (2017) argued, failing to reciprocate such connections reflects a missed opportunity to deeply engage with publics who have shown interest in the organization or nation. Thus, Strauß et al. (2015) recommended that nations move away from relying primarily on one-way messaging, which focuses on disseminating information rather than building relationships with stakeholders.

4.3. The Interaction of Excellent Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

This type represents a nation that not only effectively manages its image, reputation, and branding but also takes actions that reinforce and align with its messaging. It occurs when a nation delivers clear, transparent, and inclusive messaging through two-way symmetrical communication. Such narratives are grounded in facts, reflect mutual interests, and demonstrate empathy, while also encouraging engagement and feedback from diverse publics. Following this, the nation's actions demonstrate accountability and consistency with its messaging. These actions reflect responsibility in policy implementation and decision-making, guided by stakeholder input, ethical standards, and long-term thinking. The nation follows through on its commitments—even under pressure or scrutiny—in ways that genuinely reflect the values and promises conveyed in its prior communication, aiming to achieve mutual benefit rather than pursuing self-interest alone. This combination represents the ideal and most effective form of

public relations in that it prioritizes communication not only in words or statements but also in actions, decision-making, and resource allocation, fostering high-quality relationships (Grunig, 2013a).

An example is Germany, particularly in its role as a leader in global environmental sustainability, advocating for international climate action. It declared to commit to the Paris Agreement and EU-wide climate policies to reinforce its credibility in green energy and carbon reduction efforts. Additionally, Germany has pledged to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2045 (Sengupta & Popovich, 2019). Germany backs up its symbolic messaging with tangible, substantive policy actions. It has taken a leading role in renewable energy and climate action by heavily investing in renewable energy projects, with over 40% of its electricity generated from renewables such as wind and solar power. It has also implemented the Energiewende (Energy Transition) policy and has pledged €100 billion toward climate initiatives, solidifying its position as a global leader in sustainable policies. As a result, it is perceived as trustworthy, stable, and capable of leadership in international affairs (Sorge, 2025; Wettengel, 2018).

Germany provides a strong example of effectively aligning strategic communication with substantive action, ensuring that concrete steps reinforce its public messaging. Harvard Business Review referred to such tangible actions that support stated values as efforts that "advance their mission," describing them as examples of "systemic authenticity" (Neren, 2012). This approach reflects the ethical standards outlined in the International Public Relations Association (IPRA, n.d.) *Code of Conduct*, which highlights the importance of acting with honesty, establishing the moral and psychological conditions for communication, ensuring the truth and accuracy of all information provided, recognizing the rights of all parties, and exercising proper care. Adhering to this code requires practitioners to consider what is genuinely in the best interest of the publics

they aim to influence, particularly when planning international public relations efforts (Grunig, 1993b).

Like poor symbolic performance often leads to poor behavioral performance, Grunig (2003) noted that excellent symbolic performance can, in turn, enhance behavioral performance. For example, when an organization clearly articulates its mission, that declaration can guide internal stakeholders—such as staff—in demonstrating their commitment and expanding the organization's capacity to fulfill its objectives. However, Liu et al. (2023) found that organizations could face challenges in aligning symbolic and behavioral performance due to external governance environments (e.g., institutional rules, competitive dynamics, media scrutiny) and internal governance mechanisms (e.g., shareholder interests, financial constraints, and leadership characteristics). To address this gap, they recommend actively responding to external pressures, such as environmental regulations and stakeholder expectations.

Amidst these challenges, it is important for nations to remember that people form impressions not only based on a nation's narratives but also through their experiences with that nation (Grunig, 2003). Reflecting this view, public relations practitioners such as Maurice H. Bood, Douglas Hearle, Sam Black, and Frank Wylie emphasized the importance of grounding public relations in practice rather than mere messaging (Schwartz & Lewis, 1984). Similarly, Tam and Kim (2019) advised nations to invest in building and maintaining long-term relationships with their prioritized publics.

4.4. The Interaction of Poor Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

Riley (1963) pointed out that behavioral performance had long been overlooked. However, some nations still demonstrate excellent behavior despite initially poor symbolic

performance. The combination of poor symbolic and excellent behavioral performance occurs when a nation begins with weak or ineffective messaging but follows it with responsible, ethical, and impactful actions. In such cases, the initial communication fails to generate interest, set expectations, or effectively convey the nation's values and intentions. The messaging may be inadequately framed, delivered through one-way, non-engaging communication, and lack clarity, transparency, or consistency—ultimately falling short in shaping a positive image or managing public expectations. Nevertheless, the subsequent behavior—such as policy decisions, international cooperation, or domestic initiatives—is commendable, producing benefits for both the nation and international publics. These actions reflect high standards of accountability, often demonstrated through ethical decision-making and a willingness to adopt stakeholder-oriented approaches to governance and diplomacy.

A prime example of this combination is Rwanda. Following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, the government, under Paul Kagame, initially struggled to communicate a clear reconciliation and national rebuilding strategy. While it implemented Gacaca courts (community-based trials) and unity policies, these efforts were not effectively explained or promoted on the global stage. Additionally, the government’s crackdown on journalists received world-wide media coverage, but Rwanda’s response to these accusations was often defensive, dismissive, or lacking a strong counter-narrative. Despite these communication challenges, the government focused on tangible development efforts, investing heavily in infrastructure, digital innovation, and business-friendly policies. These initiatives transformed Rwanda into one of Africa’s fastest-growing economies, with annual GDP growth averaging around 7-8%. Kigali, the capital, has emerged as a hub for African technology and finance, attracting foreign investors. Rwanda has also actively engaged in international diplomacy, playing a leading role in

African Union initiatives and hosting the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Currently, this country is called the Africa's policeman (Moody, 2022). Unfortunately, the country began exhibiting poor behavioral performance—such as press repression and exile—after President Paul Kagame's election to a third term in 2016, which also adversely affected the activities of foreign journalists (Sunadatam, 2016).

Although Rwanda later reverted to weaker behavioral performance, it was initially among the nations that—albeit belatedly—recognized the importance of prioritizing action-based engagement with foreign publics. Achieving this requires nations to maintain a high level of self-awareness (Berger & Erzikova, 2019) and an active ethical sense (Inoue, 2018). Here, self-awareness refers to the ability to see oneself clearly—understanding who we are, how others perceive us, and how we fit into the world (Eurich, 2017). Ethical sense, on the other hand, involves a care rooted in a deep concern for the self, for others, and for each individual (Voyer, 1998). Together, these qualities increase the likelihood of self-correction among nations.

The combination of poor symbolic and excellent behavioral performance is likely to become increasingly more observed in today's communication landscape. As Inoue (2003) explained, digital media platforms can enhance the capacity for nations to engage in self-correction, which he defines as "the ability to reflect on one's past mistake or misjudgment and... to make whatever correction is needed as soon as possible to prevent a recurrence of the error or misjudgment and to make a remedy for it when possible" (p. 81). In the age of real-time feedback and public scrutiny, symbolic efforts alone—such as polished messaging, slogans, or diplomatic statements—could be insufficient. Poor symbolic performance, which relies on surface-level expressions without corresponding accountability or action, can generate critical limitations in building trust and credibility. However, these shortcomings can be mitigated when

governments or institutions demonstrate excellent behavioral performance, characterized by transparency, responsiveness, and the implementation of concrete corrective measures. Thus, digital media not only exposes symbolic shortcomings more quickly but also offers nations a timely opportunity to address them through tangible actions (Inoue, 2018).

4.5. Labels for the Four Interactions of Symbolic and Behavioral Performance

Thus far, this study has explored how the two types of public relations performance interact within an international context. It shows that superficial symbolic activities often trigger expectations of corresponding substantive behavioral actions (Grunig, 1993), a dynamic that closely aligns with the assumptions of Burgoon's Expectancy Violations Theory (2009).

To conceptualize these dynamics, distinct labels are assigned to each type of performance interplay, based on the characteristics outlined above: (1) Idlers, representing the interaction of poor symbolic and poor behavioral public relations; (2) Illusionists, reflecting the interaction of excellent symbolic but poor behavioral public relations; (3) Authentics, describing the interaction of both excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral public relations; and (4) Improvers, signifying the interaction of poor symbolic but excellent behavioral public relations (see Table1).

Table 1.

Taxonomy of Entities Based on the Interaction of Public Relations Paradigms

		Behavioral Public Relations	
		Poor	Excellent
Symbolic Public Relations	Poor	**Poor Symbolic & Poor Behavioral** "Idlers"	**Poor Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral** "Improvers"
	Excellent	**Excellent Symbolic & Poor Behavioral** "Illusionists"	**Excellent Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral** "Authentics"

The *Idlers* represent nations that exhibit deficiencies in both symbolic and behavioral performance, while the *Illusionists* exemplify those that prioritize symbolic messaging without delivering substantive action. In contrast, the *Authentics* reflect the ideal alignment between symbolic and behavioral efforts, and the *Improvers* are characterized by a strong commitment to substantive action despite weak symbolic performance.

Chapter 5. Outcomes of the Interactions of Symbolic and Behavioral Performance

Public relations shapes recognition, attitudes, and behavioral intentions of publics (Grunig et al., 2002), defined as groups of individuals who form around problematic situations, share common interests, engage in discourse, and respond collectively (Dewey, 1927; Grunig, 1992; Tam & Kim, 2019). The development of such outcomes is closely tied to the perceptions, motives, needs, and behaviors of the involved parties (Seltzer & Zhang, 2010). Building on this foundation, the present study sees that the symbolic and behavioral performance—along with their interaction—exert distinct influences on publics. In detail, symbolic performance has been linked to shaping public opinion, sentiment, and schemas (Jain & Winner, 2013; Lee & Hong, 2012; Wanta et al., 2004). They can also elicit a range of behavioral outcomes—from positive actions, such as supporting campaigns or engaging in tourism, to negative responses, such as protests and boycotts—depending on how the symbols are perceived and internalized by the public (Alvarez & Campo, 2020). Similarly, behavioral performance also shapes perceptions and generates emotional responses and actions. It can foster favorable or unfavorable views, evoke positive or negative emotions (Martsinkovskaya et al., 2020), and shape attitudes toward a nation's cultural heritage, norms, and values (Echeverri et al., 2019; Le Hong & Hsu, 2024). Behavioral performance may also generate support for trade and international collaboration (Stepchenkova et al., 2019) and increase the likelihood of recommendation behaviors (Alvarez et

al., 2009). It may also trigger withdrawal, resistance, or rejection of a nation, depending on individual's direct observations or personal experiences with that nation (Guan et al., 2022).

Specifically, this chapter explores how each performance and their dynamic interaction influences public reactions in terms of problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, and megaphoning (both positive and negative). These perceptual and behavioral outcomes offer critical and nuanced insight into how foreign publics receive, process, accept, reinterpret, negotiate, or actively resist national strategic public relations efforts amid perceived discrepancies between symbolic messaging and actual governmental behaviors—especially in today's environments overflowing with information.

5.1. Problem Recognition Regarding a Nation

Problem recognition is a concept developed by Grunig (1966, 1968, 2003) drawing insights from four of John Dewey's works: *How We Think* (1910), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). It refers to the public's perception that something is lacking in a given situation (Kim & Grunig, 2011) and reflects the degree of discrepancy between an experienced state and an expected state—coupled with the realization that there is no immediately applicable solution (Grunig & Kim, 2017). Once individuals identify and define an indeterminate situation, their level of problem recognition increases (Kim & Grunig, 2011). In this study, following Kim and Grunig's (2011) definition, conceptualization, *problem* recognition refers to the extent to which foreign publics perceive a nation as problematic—whether through its symbolic public relations, behavioral public relations, or the intersection of both—and acknowledge that some form of improvement is needed.

5.1.1. The Effects of Symbolic Performance on Problem Recognition

It is known that symbolic cues—such as emotionally charged narratives or national imagery—can significantly alter public perceptions of a country and, consequently, the recognition of issues associated with it (Perry, 1987). These cues have the power to either amplify or diminish problem recognition. For example, most foreign news coverage tends to portray other nations in a relatively positive light (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986) and generate favorable feelings (Reilly, 1979), thus rarely triggering problem recognition. Especially, symbolic messages from state-owned media outlets such as the BBC and Deutsche Welle, which function as instruments of political public relations, are strategically aiming to deflect criticism of their respective nations (Zhang et al, 2017). Prior studies have found that Voice of America (VOA) emphasizes American democratic values in contrast to authoritarian regimes, fostering favorable perceptions—particularly in regions such as Central Asia and Latin America (Cooper, 2024). These efforts contribute to lowering the problem recognition of the United States.

However, Mazur (2006) noted that most national news media tend to prioritize domestic issues—including negative ones—which may inadvertently raise foreign audiences' awareness of a nation's internal problems. Additionally, symbolic messages in an international setting can often face limitations due to cross-cultural communication barriers. Symbols and meanings may be narrowly interpreted or misrepresented across different cultural contexts (Kuypers, 2002). For instance, when a nation's portrayal is associated with terrorism or drug trafficking—such as in the cases of Mexico or Colombia—it can prime audiences to perceive those nations as central to global problems (Willnat et al., 2000). Similarly, rising concern across Asia has been recently observed about Russia following news reports about Russia's formalization of a mutual

defense agreement and military-technical cooperation with North Korea, which has “amplified threats” and deepened problem recognition among regional foreign publics (Rich & Choe, 2024).

Ultimately, symbolic performance has the potential to both diminish and amplify problem recognition, depending on how symbolically charged messages are framed, distributed, and culturally decoded. Given the contradictory perspectives regarding the effect of symbolic performance on problem recognition, and to examine how both excellent and poor symbolic performance influence the public’s recognition of international problems, the following research question is presented:

Research Question 1: What impact do excellent and poor symbolic performance by a nation have, respectively, on problem recognition related to that nation?

5.1.2. The Effects of Behavioral Performance on Problem Recognition

On the other hand, behavioral performance —grounded in tangible actions like listening and direct engagement with the public—can play a vital role in shaping how people recognize and define problems. Prior research has shown a strong link between direct experience and cognitive development (Foskett, 1999), while Riegel and Kindermann (2016) found that firsthand experiences significantly reinforce perception. Moreover, studies suggest that firsthand experiences have a stronger influence on public perception than indirect or mediated ones (Svobodova et al., 2025; Tyler, 1980). Specifically, the study of Regan and Fazio (1977) found that national public relations strategies that incorporate behavioral interaction often led to attitudes that are more confidently held, stable, and clearly articulated compared to those formed through indirect exposure.

Depending on how a nation's behavior is perceived, such experiences can either increase or reduce problem recognition. For example, Kenyon (2024) illustrates how BBC employee Louis MacNeice repeatedly emphasized the problems of the United Kingdom. His recognition of national issues was heightened following his visit to India in the 1940s, where he observed the harsh realities of British colonial rule. Conversely, experiencing excellent behavioral public relations can reduce problem recognition. Goldsmith et al. (2014) found that recipients of U.S. HIV/AIDS aid programs developed favorable perceptions of the U.S., resulting in little problem recognition among them. The authors emphasized that these outcomes were due to the visible and sustained nature of the aid efforts.

As these studies show, attitudes formed through direct action-based experience are characterized by strong object–evaluation associations (Fazio et al., 1982; Fazio & Williams, 1986). In this context, the study proposes the following research question:

Research Question 2: What impact do excellent and poor behavioral performance by a nation have, respectively, on problem recognition related to that nation?

5.1.3. The Effects of the Interaction of Symbolic and Behavioral Performance on Problem Recognition

While symbolic and behavioral performance each influence public problem recognition to some extent, the interaction between a nation's message and its behavior also plays a critical role in shaping how foreign publics perceive that nation as problematic. For instance, various studies have noted that China promotes an appealing narrative of a "peaceful rise," harmonious global emergence, and responsible protection. However, at the same time, it adopts contradictory behaviors—such as assertive foreign policies, strategic power plays, and coercive actions in

Hong Kong (Rühlig, 2022; Xiao, 2024). Xiao (2024) explains that such contradictions create a perception of inconsistency. This perceptual discrepancy between expected and experienced behavior aligns with the concept of problem recognition, as defined by Grunig (1997). Conversely, when excellent symbolic public relations are accompanied by excellent behavioral public relations, this alignment reinforces initial positive perceptions, fosters trust and credibility, and can even lead people to view the nation as committed and willing to take necessary risks (Lee & Yang, 2024). As a result, publics are less likely to perceive the nation as problematic.

Given that the interaction between excellent symbolic and poor behavioral performance can influence individuals' problem recognition, it is expected that different combinations of these two approaches will also have varying effects on how national public relations efforts are perceived as problematic. To explore this, the following research question is proposed:

Research Question 3: What impact does the interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance have on problem recognition related to that nation?

5.2. Conspiracy Attribution About a Nation

The impact of news exposure can lead not only to heightened anxiety but also to increased conspiracy attribution. Conspiracy attribution refers to a situational tendency to develop new conspiracy beliefs about an entity in response to recent events (Tam & Lee, 2024). This differs from conspiracy orientation, which reflects a more stable, dispositional worldview characterized by a generalized belief in classical and enduring conspiracy theories (Lee et al., 2022). Conspiracy attribution is largely reactive in nature and tends to arise in specific contexts—particularly during or after major societal events (Clarke, 2002; Tam et al., 2024). It is especially prevalent in times of crisis when individuals experience heightened emotions such as

fear, depression, and uncertainty (De Coninck, 2021; van Prooijen & Acker, 2015; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017).

5.2.1. The Effects of Symbolic Performance on Conspiracy Attribution

Prior research suggests that symbolic public relations, in particular, can contribute to conspiracy attribution either intentionally or unintentionally. News content, for example, can transmit conspiracy ideas simply by implying them (Rich & Zaragoza, 2016) or by explicitly slandering a nation through propagandistic techniques (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). While such symbolic strategies are often deployed against foreign nations, there are also instances where a nation's symbolic public relations help prevent conspiracy attribution directed at itself. For instance, Gentzkow and Shapiro (2003) found that Muslims who watched CNN were more likely to reject a widely held belief in their countries—that the 9/11 attacks were not carried out by Arabs, but rather by the U.S. government. In contrast, those who did not watch CNN were more inclined to accept that conspiracy theory. This finding implies that symbolic messages reduced susceptibility to conspiracy beliefs by providing alternative perspectives and challenging dominant misinformation within local contexts.

On the other hand, a nation’s own symbolic performance may also unintentionally generate conspiracy attribution directed at itself under specific circumstances. This situation arises when the public perceives a lack of clarity or transparency, making it difficult to determine what constitutes credible information (Pigden, 2007). A meta-analysis by Goreis & Voracek (2019) found that insufficient information often contributes to the formation of conspiracy beliefs. This challenge is particularly pronounced in national symbolic messaging for several reasons. First, national contexts are inherently complex, encompassing political, economic, and cultural dimensions that are difficult to fully convey within the limited scope of symbolic

narratives. As a result, nations often construct a unidimensional portrayal of themselves through symbolic public relations (Mok, 1998; Schmitt & Soderlund, 1982). Second, security concerns often constrain transparency, and even when efforts are made to disclose information, there is a prevailing perception that nations act primarily in their own interest (Yordanova, 2015). Third, disparities in language-based information access further exacerbate the issue. Baram-Tsabari et al. (2023) found that the quality and framing of information vary significantly across languages, with non-English sources more likely to include conspiracy-supportive content—potentially intensifying conspiracy beliefs among non-English-speaking publics.

In addition, conspiracy attribution can be reinforced when a nation repeatedly disseminates symbolic messages that glorify itself. As Sproule (1994) observed, nations that consistently engage in self-promotional propaganda are often perceived as acting primarily in their own self-interest. For instance, North Korea frequently employs belligerent and exaggerated rhetoric, especially regarding its military capabilities. Despite repeated claims of possessing "the world's strongest" missile, experts have long questioned the practicality and effectiveness of such weapons, and the continued use of these exaggerated claims has contributed to widespread skepticism toward the regime's assertions (Kim & Kim, 2024).

Building on the studies discussed above, the following research question is proposed:

Research Question 4: What impact do excellent and poor symbolic performance by a nation have, respectively, on conspiracy attribution related to that nation?

5.2.2. The Effects of Behavioral Performance on Conspiracy Attribution

On the other hand, conspiracy attributions toward a nation also often emerge when its behavior prompts a cognitive need to explain ambiguous or unsettling actions (Fenster, 2008). For instance, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, foreign publics

observed the United States—previously perceived as a global hegemon—being caught off-guard and subsequently initiating military interventions. This perceived incongruity stimulated conspiratorial interpretations, including theories that the U.S. government had foreknowledge of the attacks or was complicit in facilitating them to pursue geopolitical objectives. Although such theories have been widely debunked, belief in them persists among certain foreign publics and even among segments of the American population (Woodsome & Byler, 2021).

Conspiracy attribution is also more likely when individuals have prior experiences of betrayal, misinformation, or secrecy involving an entity, especially when they observe repeated patterns of deceptive behavior (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). From a U.S. perspective, Iran has consistently supported groups perceived as adversaries. In the early 1980s, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) provided Hezbollah—a Shia Muslim political and militant organization in Lebanon—with military training, weapons, and financial assistance (Mansharof, 2024). In the early 1990s, Iran resumed its support for Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), particularly through military aid (Levy, 2021). Around 2011, amid Yemen's political unrest, Iran also began supplying the Houthi rebels with weapons and drones (AFP, 2015). While Hezbollah and Hamas were designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the U.S. in October 1997, the Houthi rebels were designated as FTO in January 2021 (Bureau of Counterterrorism, n.a.). Iran's ongoing support for groups opposing U.S. interests in the region has reinforced the perception among Americans that it deliberately seeks to shift the regional balance of power—often through covert actions or under the pretext of alternative objectives.

Prior studies, along with the example above, suggest that behavioral performance—encompassing both recent and historical actions—play a critical role in shaping the extent to

which foreign publics begin to perceive a nation through a conspiratorial lens. This perception may be reinforced by patterns of inconsistency, perceived secrecy, or unresolved historical grievances (Coulter, 1986; Van Prooijen et al., 2018). Such views are often emotionally charged and can escalate quickly within digitally networked environments. Accordingly, the following research question is proposed:

Research Question 5: What impact do excellent and poor behavioral performance by a nation have, respectively, on conspiracy attribution related to that nation?

5.2.3. The Effects of the Interaction of Symbolic and Behavioral Performance on Conspiracy Attribution

Nations can generate conspiracy attribution when they project positive symbolic performance—such as promoting democratic values and human rights—while simultaneously denying, downplaying, or minimizing behavioral performance. For example, during the Iraq War, the United States publicly positioned itself as a global advocate for democracy and human rights. However, this image was severely undermined in 2004 when photos and reports found that U.S. military personnel had abused and humiliated Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison. The abuses included physical beatings, sexual humiliation, and psychological torture (e.g., mock executions, hooding, and the use of dogs) (Barakat, 2024). These revelations starkly contradicted the values the U.S. claimed to uphold. The incident was widely cited by extremist groups such as al-Qaeda as evidence of the U.S.'s true intentions in the region. Moreover, many Arab and Muslim publics interpreted the abuse as a deliberate act of cultural and political humiliation, intensifying perceptions of hypocrisy. As Foyle (2004) noted, the contradiction between the U.S.'s stated ideals and its actions at Abu Ghraib significantly eroded its moral legitimacy on the global stage and heightened suspicion toward the U.S. among Middle Eastern publics. This

pattern is especially salient among populations with direct negative experiences, as prior research suggests that individuals who suffer harm or injustice from a nation are more likely to believe in conspiracies about that nation (Crocker et al., 1999).

However, even the combination of excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral performance can give rise to conspiracy attribution. A notable example is Germany, which launched the *Wiedergutmachung* (reparation) program in an effort to repair its international image following World War II. Germany promised individual compensation to survivors who urgently needed support to rebuild their lives and collective reparations to support Jewish resettlement and reconstruction. Steinweis (2006) reviewed the evolution of various forms of this compensation, along with the relevant laws and policies surrounding them. His study found that some perceived these initiatives as an acknowledgment of Germany's collective responsibility for its past actions, while others were more skeptical and claimed that such efforts represented a monetization of memory.

Given that the degree of alignment or misalignment between a nation's symbolic and behavioral performance can significantly influence how foreign publics attribute conspiratorial intent, it becomes essential to examine the dynamics of this relationship more closely. In light of this, the following research question is proposed:

Research Question 6: What impact does the interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance have on conspiracy attribution related to that nation?

5.3. Megaphoning About a Nation

As Vardeman-Winter and Tindall (2011) pointed out, public should be seen as those who display active, communicative behaviors. When publics communicate specifically about an

entity, not an issue, it is called *megaphoning* (Kim & Rhee, 2011). It is characterized by its external nature as it involves outward expressions—whether in speech or writing—about an entity. In addition to being external, megaphoning is a voluntary behavior driven by individuals' desire to share their evaluations or experiences related to that entity (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The tone of megaphoning can be either positive or negative, depending on what has been observed or experienced. People tend to engage in praise when an entity's behavior meets or exceeds expectations, and in criticism when those expectations are unmet (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Megaphoning is thus considered a behavioral consequence of the quality of a relationship between an entity and its publics (Vibber & Kim, 2021). Although initially explored in the context of employee communication (Chon et al., 2021; Kim & Rhee, 2011; Krishna, 2021), the concept has since been extended to national and international domains (Vibber & Kim, 2021; Vibber & Lovari, 2021; Yeo et al., 2024).

5.3.1. The Effects of Symbolic Performance on Megaphoning

Symbolic performance—such as media coverage and national branding efforts—can shape behavioral intentions, including decisions to travel or support specific policies (Búrcio et al., 2014; Han & Wang, 2015). These symbolic efforts also influence international narratives and public sentiment (Yadav & Mittal, 2021), spark discourse on global problem-solving, and generate support for foreign aid or targeted international policies—even amidst geopolitical tensions (Trepte et al., 2018; Vestergaard, 2020; Vitopoulos, 2015). Moreover, such performance can motivate individuals to encourage others to engage in similar behaviors related to a foreign country (Ingenhoff et al. 2019). In contrast, negative portrayals—such as framing certain ethnic groups as threats—can reduce public support for immigration and increase backing for anti-

immigration policies (López -Rodríguez et al., 2020; Alvarez & Campo, 2020). These portrayals may also provoke collective behavioral responses, such as consumer boycotts (Pa´l, 2009).

Plowman et al. (2015) mentioned that the rise of social media has amplified megaphoning as it enables publics to immediately express their reactions following a nation's symbolic performance. Depending on how excellent or poor a nation presents in its symbolic performance, the tone of megaphoning is expected to vary. Based on this, the following research question is proposed:

Research Question 7: What impact do excellent and poor symbolic performance by a nation have, respectively, on megaphoning related to that nation?

5.3.2. The Effects of Behavioral Performance on Megaphoning

While national intentions conveyed through symbolic performance may sometimes mislead publics, communicated through behavioral performance offers a more accurate depiction of a nation (Viglia et al., 2024). This becomes especially significant when such performance is directly observed or experienced by foreign publics, as it fosters more nuanced understandings, strengthens emotional connections, and ultimately shapes future behaviors (Búrcio et al., 2014; Fazio et al., 1978; Fazio & Zanna, 1981). In fact, people tend to be much more consistent in their expressed attitudes toward entities they have directly experienced, as personal exposure anchors beliefs more firmly than mediated information (Regan & Fazio, 1977).

A prominent example is the U.S. Marshall Plan, which—with its emphasis on economic recovery and integration—laid the foundation for Europe's post-war prosperity by providing substantial economic assistance to war-torn nations. The aid helped restore industries, rebuild infrastructure, and revitalize trade across the continent. Beyond its material contributions, the

Marshall Plan also improved living standards, fostering a sense of gratitude among many Europeans toward the United States (Achenui, 2021; Burk, 2001; Wilford, 2009). For instance, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt described the plan as “an expression of our special gratitude for the American decision in 1947 not to keep us out” (Library of Congress, n.a.). However, the communicative response of European publics was not uniformly positive. In May 1953, the U.S. Embassy in The Hague reported: “[w]hile the Dutch admire our generosity … there is no real sense of gratitude as such.” Instead, many Dutch citizens expressed concern about the unequal nature of the relationship between the Netherlands and the United States, as well as the country's growing dependence on the U.S. This sentiment was reflected in a 1948 international Gallup poll, which found that 44 percent of Dutch respondents believed U.S. motives were primarily driven by economic self-interest (van den Berk & Bloemendal, 2010). The Marshall Plan illustrates that behavioral performance can generate varying megaphoning effects—both positive and negative—depending on how publics interpret and perceive a nation’s action.

On the other hand, Bischof (2016) found that although positive megaphoning can occur, it may diminish over time. Similarly, Yun (2014) observed that prolonged direct experience with a nation can weaken the consistency of favorable perceptions. Taken together, these studies suggest that this decline may result from a fading sense of gratitude as the initial impact of behavioral goodwill becomes less salient, or from increased familiarity and exposure to both the positive and negative aspects of the nation. In this context, Pell (2008) noted that foreign publics may express both admiration and resentment toward the same nation, depending on the nature and context of their exposure to its behaviors.

As these studies demonstrate, behavioral performance can elicit a wide range of public reactions—including both supportive and critical forms of megaphoning—depending on how the public interprets, experiences, and is exposed to a nation's behavior over time. Thus, this study presents the following research question:

Research Question 8: What impact do excellent and poor symbolic performance by a nation have, respectively, on megaphoning related to that nation?

5.3.3. The Effects of the Interaction of Symbolic and Behavioral Performance on Megaphoning

While each symbolic and behavioral performance can individually generate megaphoning, different combinations of these performances may also influence how publics respond. For instance, France presents a compelling case of the dissonance between national rhetoric and international behavior, particularly in the context of its post-colonial relations in Africa. While the French government has consistently articulated its commitment to values such as liberty, equality, and fraternity—principles that underpin its republican identity—it has simultaneously maintained extensive political, military, and economic influence over its former colonies through the informal network often referred to as *Françafrique*. Despite its support for democratic development and sovereignty, France has been criticized for backing authoritarian regimes in countries such as Chad, Gabon, and the Central African Republic in exchange for strategic or economic benefits (Chafer, 2002; Marchal, 1998). These actions have fueled anti-French sentiment and public protests, and exposed the limitations of symbolic diplomacy when not supported by consistent behavioral practices (Pigeaud & Sylla, 2024).

In contrast, in the 1950s, the Foreign and Defense Ministers of Türkiye (formerly Turkey) expressed their willingness to commit substantial ground forces in support of South Korea's defense during the Korean War (Brown, 2008). This act of symbolic public relations was realized in practice when the Türkiye Brigade arrived in South Korea on October 19, 1950, with more than 4,500 soldiers and officers (Lippe, 2000). In total, 14,936 Türkiye troops served in Korea, the fourth-largest military contributor to the UN effort. Among them, 3,506 were either killed, wounded, captured, or went missing—a figure that represents about 23% of the total Türkiye forces deployed (Solomonovich, 2021). This shared wartime experience fostered a deep sense of solidarity, leading South Korean publics to keep referring positively to Türkiye as a "brother country" (Cho & Hwang, 2022). This effort was not only positively received but also widely discussed in North America and across Europe, ultimately contributing to the entry of Turkey into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on February 18, 1952 with Greece (NATO, n.a.).

Interestingly, Germany faced criticism for its excellent public relations during its national compensation efforts for the Holocaust. In this regard, Duma (2024) emphasized the importance of analytically distinguishing between different levels within the history of compensation. She proposed, for example, investigating official discourse and political rhetoric—classified as symbolic public relations—separately from the actual implementation of payments, remembrance activities by institutions such as universities or memorials, and initiatives led by survivor organizations and civil society, which fall under behavioral performance. Building on this approach, the present study further proposes examining the interaction between these two dimensions and, accordingly, presents the following research question:

Research Question 9: What impact does the interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance have on megaphoning related to that nation?

The following chapters provide a detailed account of the three experiments conducted in this study, approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB Protocol #17838), to examine the research questions outlined above.

Chapter 6. Study 1

6.1. Methodology

6.1.1. Sampling and Participants

For the first study, a questionnaire was created in Qualtrics, a cloud-based survey platform, to address a distinct issue context: climate change. Participants were recruited in December 2024 via Prolific, an online platform designed to facilitate access to high-quality survey data. Only individuals who self-identified as American citizens were eligible to participate. Nationality was controlled through prescreening and blocklists. Efforts were also made to ensure an equal distribution of male and female participants and to randomly assign participants to one of four experimental conditions: (1) poor symbolic and poor behavioral performance, (2) poor symbolic and excellent behavioral performance, (3) excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral performance, and (4) excellent symbolic and poor behavioral performance. In addition, to ensure response quality, a screening question was included, resulting in 208 valid responses out of 217 total participants.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 70 years old, with 101 females and 103 males. The majority were in their 20s (41.3%, n = 86) and primarily from the southwestern region of the

United States (68.8%, n = 143). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (38.5%, n = 80), identified as Caucasian (60.6%, n = 126), and reported being either Catholic or Christian (45.2%, n = 94). Politically, a majority identified as having a liberal stance (52.9%, n = 110).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions using the Randomizer element in the survey flow of Qualtrics. 51 participants were assigned to the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition, while each of the other three conditions included 52 participants. A post hoc power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that, with a total sample size of 208, an alpha level of .05, and four groups, the achieved power was 0.86, suggesting the study was adequately powered to detect medium-sized main and interaction effects (f= 0.25).

6.1.2. Study Context

The conditions were presented through four scenarios modeled after The New York Times, a news outlet widely recognized for its credibility and influence in international affairs reporting. To enhance realism, each scenario replicated the outlet's original fonts, formatting, and visual style. In addition, headlines were crafted to reflect either excellent or poor performance, using expressions such as *lag commitments*, *fail commitments*, and *exceed commitments*. To visually emphasize the contrast between symbolic and behavioral strategies, supportive graphics were included within the news content. Each scenario was revised twice under the guidance of a professional journalist to ensure realism, clarity, and coherence. The final versions were then reviewed and confirmed by the same journalist before being distributed to respondents.

In detail, the scenario focuses on the issue of climate change. A decade ago, UN member nations pledged to take concrete actions to address climate change; however, many have since failed to fulfill their commitments. In this study, participants were presented with a fictional scenario involving "Nation A," described through a news article. The article varied across conditions to reflect either an excellent or poor symbolic narrative regarding the nation's initial commitment to climate change. In the excellent symbolic condition, Nation A was portrayed as having expressed through multiple public statements a high level of commitment. In contrast, the poor symbolic condition depicted the nation as having shown rarely climate change support, such as the absence of public statements or initiatives. In the excellent behavioral condition, Nation A was described as not only meeting but surpassing its financial commitments, while also hosting a wide range of climate-related events—including international conferences, forums, and national summits. In the poor behavioral condition, the nation had only minimally fulfilled its financial commitments and had not hosted any significant events related to climate action.

Appendices A through D present the four scenarios used in the experiment. Survey participation was limited to individuals using desktop devices to enhance the readability and accessibility of the news content. A one-minute timer was implemented before the survey questions appeared, ensuring that participants had adequate time to read the news article. In addition, a pilot test involving 40 respondents—10 assigned to each scenario—was conducted to assess the structure and clarity of the experimental design. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was tested using Levene's test, which revealed non-significant results across all dependent variables (problem recognition: $p = .833$; conspiracy attribution: $p = .233$; positive megaphoning: $p = .056$; negative megaphoning: $p = .957$). These results indicate that the assumption was met, thereby supporting the validity of the experimental design.

6.1.3. Measures

Study 1 employed four key outcome variables related to public relations performance: problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, positive megaphoning, and negative megaphoning. All variables were measured using items adapted from previously validated instruments and assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Problem recognition was measured using four items adapted from the study of Kim and Grunig (2011). These items were designed to capture participants' perceptions of the importance and urgency of the issue concerning Nation A. The statements reflected the degree to which individuals recognized the problem as an international concern, the perceived need for action, and the extent to which they believed the issue warranted public attention. The internal consistency of the scale was satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .778.

Conspiracy attribution was assessed using three items adapted to an international context from the work of Tam (Tam & Lee, 2024; Tam et al., 2025). These items measured the extent to which participants perceived Nation A's actions as insincere or strategically manipulative. Specifically, the items addressed suspicion about the motivations behind Nation A's public commitments and behaviors, implying the presence of strategic deception intended to gain international attention. Reliability estimates for the conspiracy attribution scale were high, with alpha values of .837.

Positive and negative megaphoning were each measured using four items adapted from Kim and Rhee's (2011) framework. The positive megaphoning items assessed participants' intentions to express supportive opinions about Nation A in both interpersonal conversations and online platforms, as well as their willingness to share favorable opinions or align with positive

sentiments toward Nation A. In contrast, the negative megaphoning items measured participants' intentions to express negative opinions in interpersonal discussions and online platforms, along with their willingness to disseminate unfavorable opinions or agree with negative sentiments about Nation A. Both scales demonstrated high internal consistency. For positive megaphoning, Cronbach's alpha was .944, while for negative megaphoning, the alpha was .907.

In addition to the main outcome variables, several variables were included as controls. These included age, gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and political stance. These control variables were used to account for individual-level variation that might influence perceptions of a certain international issue and related behavioral intentions.

6.1.4. Analysis

To examine the effects of symbolic and behavioral performance on public responses, a series of Univariate Analyses of Variance (UNIANOVA) were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, treating each dependent variable independently (Version 29). The independent variables were symbolic performance and behavioral performance, both entered as fixed factors. Four dependent variables were analyzed separately: problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, positive megaphoning, and negative megaphoning. Table 2 shows the correlations, means, and standard deviations of those key variables.

To control for demographic variability, age, gender, region, education level, and race were included as covariates in each model. This study employed Type III sum of squares and included the interaction term (symbolic × behavior) in all models to assess whether the combination of symbolic and behavioral cues affected outcomes differently than either factor alone. For each model, significance was determined using an alpha level of .05.

Table 2.

Correlations of Key Variables in Study 1

(n=208)		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.	Symbolic performance	1					
2.	Behavioral performance	.000	1				
3.	Problem recognition	-.074	.000	1			
4.	Conspiracy attribution	-.063	-.244**	.026	1		
5.	Positive megaphoning	.037	.499**	.202**	-.268**	1	
6.	Negative megaphoning	-.028	-.555**	.271**	.392**	-.375**	1
M		.50	.50	3.38	2.94	2.58	2.13
SD		.501	.501	.807	.938	1.26	1.08

** <.001

6.2. Results

Regarding the descriptive statistics for problem recognition as the dependent variable, Table 3 shows that the mean scores were above 3.40 in both the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.43, *SD* = 1.03, *n* = 51) and the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.47, *SD* = 0.80, *n* = 52). The scores were slightly lower in the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.34, *SD* = 0.92, *n* = 52) and the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.29, *SD* = 0.88, *n* = 53).

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics for Problem Recognition in Study 1

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.43	1.035	51
	Excellent	3.47	0.80	52
	Total	3.45	0.92	103
Excellent	Poor	3.34	0.92	52
	Excellent	3.30	0.88	53
	Total	3.31	0.90	105
Total	Poor	3.38	0.97	103
	Excellent	3.38	0.84	105
	Total	3.38	0.91	208

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for conspiracy attribution as the dependent variable. Among the four conditions, the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral group reported the highest mean score (M = 3.27, *SD* = 0.86, n = 52), followed by the poor symbolic–poor behavioral group (M = 3.07, *SD* = 1.06, n = 51) and the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral group (M = 2.93, *SD* = 0.92, n = 52). The lowest level of conspiracy attribution was observed in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.50, *SD* = 0.74, n = 53).

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for Conspiracy Attribution in Study 1

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.07	1.06	51
	Excellent	2.93	0.92	52
	Total	3.00	0.99	103
Excellent	Poor	3.27	0.86	52
	Excellent	2.50	0.74	53
	Total	2.88	0.88	105
Total	Poor	3.17	0.96	103
	Excellent	2.71	0.86	105
	Total	2.94	0.94	208

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics for Positive Megaphoning in Study 1

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	1.98	1.19	51
	Excellent	3.08	1.05	52
	Total	2.54	1.25	103
Excellent	Poor	1.92	1.06	52
	Excellent	3.33	1.09	53
	Total	2.63	1.28	105
Total	Poor	1.95	1.12	103
	Excellent	3.21	1.07	105
	Total	2.58	1.26	208

As shown in Table 5, participants reported the highest levels of positive megaphoning in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.33, *SD* = 1.09, n = 53), followed closely by the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.08, *SD* = 1.05, n = 52). In contrast, lower mean scores were found in the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral (M = 1.92, *SD* = 1.06, n = 52) and poor symbolic–poor behavioral (M = 1.98, *SD* = 1.19, n = 51) conditions.

Table 6.
Descriptive Statistics for Negative Megaphoning in Study 1

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	2.61	1.03	51
	Excellent	1.71	0.87	52
	Total	2.16	1.05	103
Excellent	Poor	2.84	0.99	52
	Excellent	1.36	0.64	53
	Total	2.10	1.11	105
Total	Poor	2.73	1.01	103
	Excellent	1.53	0.78	105
	Total	2.13	1.08	208

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics for negative megaphoning. Participants in the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition reported the highest mean score (M = 2.84, *SD* = 0.99, n = 52), followed by those in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 2.61, *SD* = 1.03, n = 51). Lower mean scores were observed in the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 1.71, *SD* = 0.87, n = 52), and the lowest was found in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral group (M = 1.36, *SD* = 0.64, n = 53).

On the other hand, the ANOVA analysis found that symbolic performance alone did not produce statistically significant effects on any of the outcome variables. Specifically, symbolic efforts were not significantly associated with changes in problem recognition [F(1, 198)=1.20, p = .27], conspiracy attribution [F(1, 198)=0.80, p = .37], positive megaphoning [F(1, 198)=0.33, p = .56], and negative megaphoning [F(1, 198=0.20, p = .65). By contrast, behavioral performance

demonstrated significant effects on several outcome variables, which include conspiracy attribution [F(1,198)=13.00, p < .001], positive megaphoning [F(1,198)=67.78, p < .001], and negative megaphoning [F(1,198)=87.84, p < .001]. However, behavioral strategies did not significantly affect problem recognition [F(1,198)=0.03, p = .87].

Table 7.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Problem Recognition (Study 1)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2_p
Corrected Model	18.688	9	2.076	2.711	.005	.110
Intercept	44.385	1	44.385	57.939	<.001	.226
Age	0.05	1	0.05	0.06	0.80	.000
Gender	1.63	1	1.63	2.13	0.15	.011
Education	2.49	1	2.49	3.25	0.07	.016
Ethnicity	1.18	1	1.18	1.54	0.23	.008
Religion	2.64	1	2.64	3.44	0.07	.017
Political stance	10.07	1	10.07	13.15	<.001	.062
Symbolic performance	0.92	1	0.92	1.20	0.27	.006
Behavioral performance	0.02	1	0.02	0.03	0.87	0
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.14	1	0.14	0.18	0.67	0.001
Error	151.68	198	0.77			
Total	2548.06	208				
Corrected Total	170.37	207				

Table 8.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Conspiracy Attribution (Study 1)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	21.680	9	2.409	2.976	0.002	0.119
Intercept	28.268	1	28.268	34.919	<.001	0.15
Age	0.129	1	0.129	0.16	0.69	0.001
Gender	0.456	1	0.456	0.564	0.45	0.003
Education	0.119	1	0.119	0.147	0.70	0.001
Ethnicity	0.687	1	0.687	0.848	0.36	0.004
Religion	1.279	1	1.279	1.58	0.21	0.008
Political stance	1.235	1	1.235	1.526	0.22	0.008
Symbolic performance	0.649	1	0.649	0.801	0.37	0.004
Behavioral performance	10.525	1	10.525	13.001	<.001	0.062
Symbolic × Behavioral	4.293	1	4.293	5.303	0.02	0.026
Error	160.285	198	0.81			
Total	1976.778	208				
Corrected Total	181.965	207				

Table 9.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Positive Megaphoning (Study 1)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*	η^2
Corrected Model	95.731[a]	9	10.637	8.965	<.001	0.29
Intercept	13.987	1	13.987	11.789	<.001	0.056
Age	0.161	1	0.161	0.136	0.71	0.001
Gender	4.287	1	4.287	3.613	0.06	0.018
Education	0.295	1	0.295	0.248	0.62	0.001
Ethnicity	0.655	1	0.655	0.552	0.46	0.003
Religion	3.326	1	3.326	2.803	0.10	0.014
Political stance	0.311	1	0.311	0.262	0.61	0.001
Symbolic performance	0.395	1	0.395	0.333	0.57	0.002
Behavioral performance	80.43	1	80.43	67.789	<.001	0.255
Symbolic × Behavioral	1.23	1	1.23	1.036	0.31	0.005
Error	234.922	198	1.186			
Total	1719.625	208				
Corrected Total	330.653	207				

Table 10.

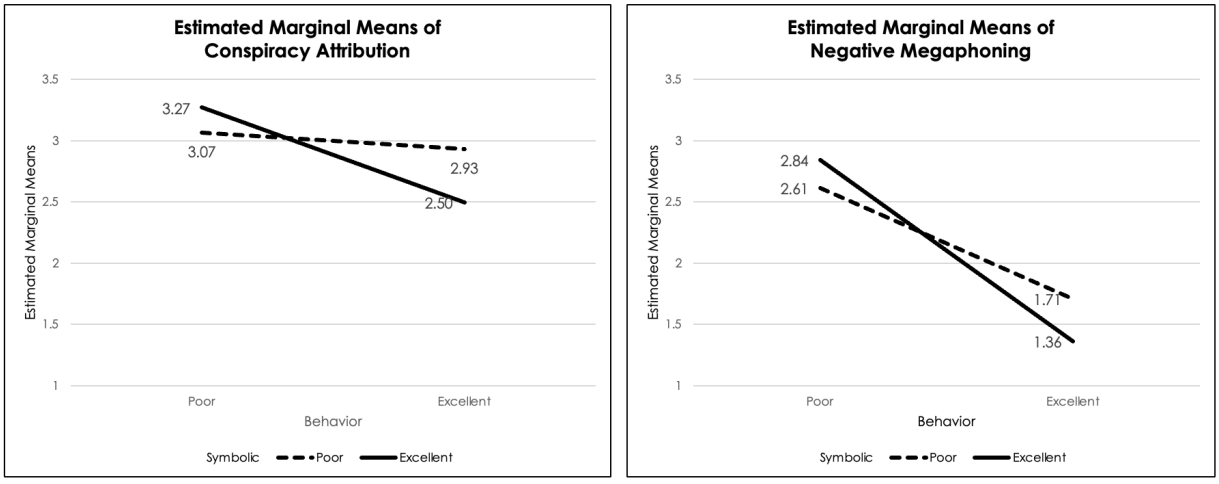
Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Negative Megaphoning (Study 1)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	81.940[a]	9	9.104	11.316	<.001	0.34
Intercept	19.134	1	19.134	23.781	<.001	0.107
Age	1.17	1	1.17	1.454	0.23	0.007
Gender	0.19	1	0.19	0.236	0.63	0.001
Education	0.079	1	0.079	0.098	0.75	0
Ethnicity	0.066	1	0.066	0.082	0.78	0
Religion	0.087	1	0.087	0.108	0.74	0.001
Political stance	1.858	1	1.858	2.309	0.13	0.012
Symbolic performance	0.163	1	0.163	0.203	0.65	0.001
Behavioral performance	70.68	1	70.68	87.846	<.001	0.307
Symbolic × Behavioral	4.39	1	4.39	5.456	0.02	0.027
Error	159.31	198	0.805			
Total	1180.5	208				
Corrected Total	241.25	207				

The interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance did not significantly affect problem recognition [F(1,198)=0.18, p = .67] or positive megaphoning [F(1,198)=1.04, p = .31]. But significant interaction effects were found for both conspiracy attribution [F(1,198)=13.00, p = .02] and negative megaphoning [F(1,198)=5.45, p = .02]. As illustrated in Figure 1, when symbolic performance was excellent, conspirational thinking started relatively high under poor behavioral performance (M = 3.27). However, it showed a substantial decline as behavioral performance improved, dropping to a much lower level when behavioral efforts were excellent (M = 2.50). In contrast, when symbolic performance was poor, conspirational thinking began at a slightly lower level (M = 3.07) under poor behavioral conditions but remained nearly unchanged as behavioral performance improved (M = 2.93).

Figure 1.

The Combined Impact of Symbolic and Behavioral Approaches on Conspiracy Attribution and Negative Megaphoning



Besides, excellent symbolic PR with poor behavioral PR results in the highest negative megaphoning. When behavioral performance was poor, negative megaphoning is higher overall, especially under excellent symbolic performance (M = 2.84), compared to poor symbolic performance (M = 2.61). However, as behavioral public relations improves, negative

megaphoning decreases significantly, and the effect is strongest when both symbolic and behavioral performance are excellent (M = 1.36).

6.3. Discussion

Study 1 found that symbolic performance, whether excellent or poor, did not significantly influence foreign publics' perceptions of a nation as problematic or stimulate active, communicative behaviors such as megaphoning. Symbolic strategies alone had a limited impact on shaping perceptions or behavioral responses. In contrast, behavioral performance produced stronger effects. Nations that engaged in visible actions, whether excellent or poor, elicited more pronounced public responses, including heightened conspiracy attribution and both supportive and critical communication. However, behavioral efforts did not significantly affect how problematic the nation was perceived to be, possibly due to the diffuse and collective nature of responsibility in climate change. Notably, significant interaction effects between symbolic and behavioral performance emerged, particularly in relation to negative reactions. Poor behavioral conduct increased negative megaphoning and conspiracy attribution regardless of prior symbolic messaging. Conversely, excellent behavioral conduct substantially reduced these negative outcomes, independent of symbolic quality. These findings suggest that poor behavioral performance can undermine even the most compelling symbolic narratives, while symbolic efforts not supported by credible actions may provoke skepticism and intensify negative responses. Excellent behavioral efforts, however, can help mitigate adverse perceptions and communicative reactions.

Taken together, the findings from the first experiment underscore the primacy of behavioral performance in shaping both perceptual and communicative outcomes among foreign publics. While symbolic strategies alone may be insufficient, behavioral credibility plays a

critical role in shaping how publics respond to a nation's performance—especially in global issue contexts where responsibility is difficult to assign, but collaborative action among nations is essential for resolving the problem.

Chapter 7. Study 2

Issues like climate change make it difficult to clearly attribute responsibility. Thus, a second study was conducted focused on the theme of culture war to examine a context in which responsibility is more readily identifiable, allowing for a clearer assessment of how symbolic and behavioral performance influence public responses.

7.1. Methodology

7.1.1. Sampling and Participants

In the second survey experiment, 222 responses were collected in January 2024. Among them, 210 responses were found to be valid. Duplicate participation across the first and second experiments was prevented using Prolific IDs. The demographic composition was largely consistent with the first survey experiment. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 71 years old, with 107 males and 103 females. The majority were in their 20s (42.4%, n = 89) and primarily from the southwestern region of the United States (65.2%, n = 137). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (48.6%, n = 102), identified as Caucasian (51.0%, n = 107), reported being either Catholic or Christian (64.3%, n = 135), and leaned politically liberal (64.3%, n = 135). In the third survey experiment, which addressed the topic of national crime and responsibility, 163 valid responses were collected in January 2024. Consistent with the previous two experiments, participants' ages ranged from 19 to 71 years old, with 82 males and 81 females. The majority were in their 20s (35.6%, n = 58) and primarily from the southwestern region of the United

States (68.1%, n = 111). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (43.6%, n = 71), identified as either Catholic or Christian (63.2%, n = 103), and leaned politically liberal (41.7%, n = 68). However, unlike the previous two experiments, the proportion of Caucasian participants (47.2%, n = 77) was slightly smaller than that of participants from other ethnic groups (52.8%, n = 86).

Just like the first survey experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions using the Randomizer element in the survey flow of Qualtrics. 53 participants were assigned to both the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition and the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition, and 52 participants were assigned to the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition and the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition. A post hoc power analysis showed that, with a total sample size of 210, the achieved power was 0.87, demonstrating sufficient power to detect medium-sized effects.

7.1.2. Study Context

The second experiment addressed the theme of cultural conflict, often referred to as a "culture war." In contemporary international relations, conflicts are not limited to military confrontations but also involve non-material domains such as cultural values, beliefs, and historical narratives. This study utilized a news article modeled after Foreign Affairs, featuring a fictional "Nation A," to examine how symbolic and behavioral performance related to a cultural conflict with a neighboring country influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors. In the excellent symbolic condition, Nation A was portrayed as acknowledging the independent cultural heritage of its neighboring countries. The article described how Nation A publicly recognized and supported the international acknowledgment of its neighbors' traditions as distinct and separate, particularly those that were historically overshadowed during the colonial era.

Conversely, in the poor symbolic condition, Nation A was depicted as appropriating the cultural and historical developments of neighboring regions by framing them as extensions of its own national legacy. This symbolic narrative extended to claims of historical ownership over disputed territories. On the other hand, in the excellent behavioral condition, Nation A was reported to have established a state-funded academic initiative aimed at researching and preserving its neighbors' history and culture. The findings from this initiative were integrated into the national education curriculum, promoting awareness that many cultural elements—such as cuisine, music, and festivals—traditionally attributed to Nation A in fact originated from neighboring countries. Furthermore, Nation A was said to have resolved territorial disputes through cooperative measures, such as proposing joint sovereignty. In contrast, the poor behavioral condition described Nation A as using its academic resources to reinterpret the cultural history of neighboring nations in a way that reasserted its own dominance. These efforts included revising educational curricula to teach that the cultural elements of neighboring countries were inherently part of Nation A's heritage. Additionally, Nation A was reported to have intensified territorial disputes by reinforcing historical claims over contested regions. Unlike in the first experiment, Nation A in the second experiment is depicted as being in a situation where the attribution of responsibility becomes clear based on its decision to adopt either poor or excellent symbolic and behavioral performance in an international context. The full scenarios for each study are provided in in Appendices E through H.

7.1.3. Measures

For the second survey experiment, the same questionnaire was used as in the first experiment; only the scenario was changed, replacing the climate change news report with one focused on the culture war. The internal consistency of each scale was satisfactory: Cronbach’s

alpha was .827 for problem recognition, .840 for conspiracy attribution, .940 for positive megaphoning, and .929 for negative megaphoning. The control variables from the first experiment were retained, including age, gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and political stance.

7.1.4. Analysis

As in the first survey experiment, the second also employed a series of Univariate Analyses of Variance. Table 11 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the key variables.

Table 11.

Correlations of Key Variables in Study 2

(n=210)		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.	Symbolic performance	1					
2.	Behavioral performance	.000	1				
3.	Problem recognition	-.168*	-.093	1			
4.	Conspiracy attribution	-.153*	-.178**	.272**	1		
5.	Positive megaphoning	.080	.276**	.172**	-.364**	1	
6.	Negative megaphoning	-.089**	-.288**	.330**	.530**	-.359**	1
M		.050	.50	3.43	3.27	2.61	2.27
SD		.501	.501	.851	.917	1.17	1.13

** <.001

7.2. Results

Table 12 displays the descriptive statistics for problem recognition as the dependent variable in Study 2 across the four experimental conditions. Participants in the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition reported the highest mean level of problem recognition (M = 3.59, *SD* = 0.80, n = 52), followed closely by those in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.56, *SD* = 0.83, n = 53). In contrast, the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition yielded

a slightly lower mean (M = 3.46, *SD* = 0.84, n = 53), while the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition produced the lowest mean among the four (M = 3.11, *SD* = 0.87, n = 52).

Table 12.

Descriptive Statistics for Problem Recognition in Study 2

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.56	0.83	53
	Excellent	3.59	0.80	52
	Total	3.57	0.81	105
Excellent	Poor	3.46	0.84	53
	Excellent	3.11	0.87	52
	Total	3.29	0.87	105
Total	Poor	3.51	0.83	106
	Excellent	3.35	0.87	104
	Total	3.43	0.85	210

Table 13 presents the descriptive statistics for conspiracy attribution in Study 2 across the four experimental conditions. The highest mean was observed in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.51, *SD* = 0.90, n = 53), followed by the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.37, *SD* = 0.83, n = 53), and the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.33, *SD* = 0.92, n = 52). The lowest mean score occurred in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.90, *SD* = 0.93, n = 52).

Table 13.

Descriptive Statistics for Conspiracy Attribution in Study 2

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.51	0.90	53
	Excellent	3.33	0.92	52
	Total	3.42	0.91	105
Excellent	Poor	3.37	0.83	53
	Excellent	2.90	0.93	52
	Total	3.14	0.91	105
Total	Poor	3.44	0.87	106
	Excellent	3.12	0.94	104
	Total	3.28	0.92	210

Table 14 provides the descriptive statistics for positive megaphoning in Study 2. The highest mean score was reported in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.13, *SD* = 0.99, n = 52), followed by the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.75, *SD* = 1.19, n = 52). Participants in both poor behavioral conditions reported identical lower mean scores (poor symbolic–poor behavioral: M = 2.29, *SD* = 1.28; excellent symbolic–poor behavioral: M = 2.29, *SD* = 1.03, n = 53).

Table 14.

Descriptive Statistics for Positive Megaphoning in Study 2

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	2.29	1.28	53
	Excellent	2.75	1.19	52
	Total	2.52	1.25	105
Excellent	Poor	2.29	1.03	53
	Excellent	3.13	0.99	52
	Total	2.70	1.09	105
Total	Poor	2.29	1.16	106
	Excellent	2.94	1.10	104
	Total	2.61	1.17	210

Table 15.

Descriptive Statistics for Negative Megaphoning in Study 2

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	2.84	1.10	53
	Excellent	2.14	1.08	52
	Total	2.49	1.14	105
Excellent	Poor	2.36	1.14	53
	Excellent	1.76	0.95	52
	Total	2.07	1.09	105
Total	Poor	2.60	1.14	106
	Excellent	1.95	1.03	104
	Total	2.28	1.13	210

Table 15 presents the descriptive statistics for negative megaphoning in Study 2. The highest mean score was observed in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 2.84, *SD* = 1.10, n = 53), followed by the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 2.36, *SD* =

1.14, n = 53). Lower mean scores were reported in the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.14, *SD* = 1.08, n = 52) and the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 1.76, *SD* = 0.95, n = 52).

Additionally, the ANOVA analysis indicated a statistically significant main effect of symbolic performance on problem recognition [F(1,200)=8.157, p = .005], whereas behavioral performance did not have a significant effect on this outcome [F(1,200)=1.072, p = .302]. For positive megaphoning, a significant main effect was observed for behavioral performance [F(1,200)=23.204, p <.001], while symbolic performance had no significant influence [F(1,200)=1.491, p = .224]. Regarding negative megaphoning, both symbolic [F(1,200)=8.472, p=.004] and behavioral performance [F(1,200)=18.125, p < .001] demonstrated significant main effects. Similarly, for conspiracy attribution, both symbolic [F(1,200)=5.326, p =.022] and behavioral performance [F(1,200)=6.946, p=.009] significantly influenced participants' responses.

Table 16.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Problem Recognition (Study 2)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	29.267[a]	9	3.252	5.321	<.001	0.193
Intercept	29.106	1	29.106	47.624	<.001	0.192
Age	1.83	1	1.83	2.994	0.085	0.015
Gender	0.395	1	0.395	0.647	0.422	0.003
Education	11.172	1	11.172	18.281	<.001	0.084
Ethnicity	0.15	1	0.15	0.245	0.621	0.001
Religion	3.007	1	3.007	4.919	0.028	0.024
Political stance	1.593	1	1.593	2.607	0.108	0.013
Symbolic performance	4.985	1	4.985	8.157	0.005	0.039
Behavioral performance	0.655	1	0.655	1.072	0.302	0.005
Symbolic × Behavioral	1.634	1	1.634	2.674	0.104	0.013
Error	122.232	200	0.611			
Total	2623.5	210				
Corrected Total	151.499	209				

Table 17.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Conspiracy Attribution (Study 2)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	42.733[a]	9	4.748	4.218	<.001	0.16
Intercept	15.061	1	15.061	13.379	<.001	0.063
Age	5.692	1	5.692	5.056	0.026	0.025
Gender	0.079	1	0.079	0.07	0.791	0
Education	4.372	1	4.372	3.883	0.05	0.019
Ethnicity	1.882	1	1.882	1.671	0.198	0.008
Religion	0.549	1	0.549	0.488	0.486	0.002
Political stance	0.393	1	0.393	0.349	0.555	0.002
Symbolic performance	9.537	1	9.537	8.472	0.004	0.041
Behavioral performance	20.404	1	20.404	18.125	<.001	0.083
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.154	1	0.154	0.137	0.712	0.001
Error	225.143	200	1.126			
Total	1359.313	210				
Corrected Total	267.876	209				

Table 18.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Positive Megaphoning (Study 2)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	51.776[a]	9	5.753	4.866	<.001	0.18
Intercept	39.994	1	39.994	33.827	<.001	0.145
Age	2.959	1	2.959	2.503	0.115	0.012
Gender	2.568	1	2.568	2.172	0.142	0.011
Education	0.873	1	0.873	0.738	0.391	0.004
Ethnicity	0.478	1	0.478	0.404	0.526	0.002
Religion	12.227	1	12.227	10.342	0.002	0.049
Political stance	0.616	1	0.616	0.521	0.471	0.003
Symbolic performance	1.762	1	1.762	1.491	0.224	0.007
Behavioral performance	27.434	1	27.434	23.204	<.001	0.104
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.959	1	0.959	0.811	0.369	0.004
Error	236.462	200	1.182			
Total	1719.563	210				
Corrected Total	288.238	209				

However, no statistically significant interaction effects were found between symbolic and behavioral performance for problem recognition (p = .104), conspiracy attribution (p = .334), positive megaphoning (p = .369), or negative megaphoning (p = .712)

Table 19.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Negative Megaphoning (Study 2)

Source	***SS***	***df***	***MS***	***F***	***p***	***η²***
Corrected Model	42.733[a]	9	4.748	4.218	<.001	0.16
Intercept	15.061	1	15.061	13.379	<.001	0.063
Age	5.692	1	5.692	5.056	0.026	0.025
Gender	0.079	1	0.079	0.07	0.791	0
Education	4.372	1	4.372	3.883	0.05	0.019
Ethnicity	1.882	1	1.882	1.671	0.198	0.008
Religion	0.549	1	0.549	0.488	0.486	0.002
Political stance	0.393	1	0.393	0.349	0.555	0.002
Symbolic performance	9.537	1	9.537	8.472	0.004	0.041
Behavioral performance	20.404	1	20.404	18.125	<.001	0.083
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.154	1	0.154	0.137	0.712	0.001
Error	225.143	200	1.126			
Total	1359.313	210				
Corrected Total	267.876	209				

7.3. Discussion

In issue contexts where a nation's responsibility becomes more clearly attributable—such as cultural conflicts—this study found that symbolic performance alone—even in the absence of corresponding behavioral actions—can prompt foreign publics to perceive a nation as problematic. This finding underscores the role of national symbolic narratives in cultural discourses as powerful drivers of public awareness and issue salience. Discussions surrounding national culture and art in international arenas often implicate deeper questions of national

identity, which are closely tied to notions of national survival (Gates, 1993). As such, when a nation symbolically claims the cultural heritage of its neighbors as its own, such narratives may be perceived as profound violations of group identity. These symbolic infringements can lead to immediate recognition of a problem—even in the absence of concrete behavioral actions

While symbolic cues were more effective in shaping perceptions of problem recognition, behavioral performance exerted a greater influence on communicative responses. Foreign publics were more likely to engage in supportive communication in response to behavioral actions than to symbolic messaging alone. However, both symbolic and behavioral performance independently increased the likelihood of negative communication, indicating that shortcomings in either dimension can provoke criticism. A similar pattern was observed for conspiracy attribution, as participants were more likely to become skeptical toward a nation when exposed to either its poor symbolic or poor behavioral performance. Notably, the interaction between symbolic and behavioral strategies did not produce significant effects on problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, or communicative outcomes, suggesting that these two dimensions operate independently in shaping public responses related to matters of cultural identity and ownership. In this issue context, symbolic cues were particularly influential in driving problem recognition and prompting negative reactions, whereas behavioral strategies played a more decisive role in shaping conspiracy attribution and eliciting both supportive and oppositional communicative responses specifically within the context of cultural conflict.

Chapter 8. Study 3

While the second experiment focused on an ongoing national issue (i.e., culture war), some national wrongdoings originate from events that occurred in the past. Although both cases

involve clear attribution of responsibility to a specific nation, the nature of the issue differs—one is current and evolving, while the other involves historical misconduct. In the latter case, the primary goal of performance is to demonstrate responsibility and restore the nation's reputation. Given this distinction, the effects of symbolic and behavioral performance may vary. Therefore, a third study was conducted in the context of wartime atrocities.

8. 1. Methodology

8.1.1. Sampling and Participants

A total of 173 responses were collected in January 2024, of which 163 were deemed valid. Duplicate participation across the three experiments was prevented using Prolific IDs. Consistent with the previous two experiments, participants' ages ranged from 19 to 71 years old, with 82 males and 81 females. The majority were in their 20s (35.6%, n = 58) and primarily from the southwestern region of the United States (68.1%, n = 111). Most participants held a bachelor's degree (43.6%, n = 71), identified as either Catholic or Christian (63.2%, n = 103), and leaned politically liberal (41.7%, n = 68). However, unlike the previous two experiments, the proportion of Caucasian participants (47.2%, n = 77) was slightly smaller than that of participants from other ethnic groups (52.8%, n = 86).

Participants were randomly placed in one of four groups: 40 participants each were assigned to the poor symbolic–poor behavioral and poor symbolic–excellent behavioral conditions, while 42 and 41 participants were assigned to the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral and excellent symbolic–poor behavioral conditions, respectively. A post hoc power analysis found a power of 0.74 with a total sample size of 163. Although slightly below the

conventional threshold of 0.80, this level of power is considered reasonable and contributes meaningfully to the overall analysis when evaluated alongside Experiments 1 and 2.

8.1.2. Study of Context

The third experiment examined national responsibility and reputational recovery in the context of wartime atrocities. Historically, nations responsible for such crimes have taken different approaches—some expressing remorse through symbolic and behavioral efforts, while others deflected responsibility. This experiment explored how various combinations of symbolic and behavioral performance influence public responses to a nation that committed wartime crimes during World War II. Participants read a news article modeled after *The National Interest*, featuring a fictional "Nation A," with conditions varying in the quality of symbolic and behavioral performance. In excellent symbolic condition, Nation A expressed sustained repentance, with successive leaders issuing formal apologies and launching a national project to document its atrocities in school curricula. It also pledged voluntary compensation to affected nations. In the poor symbolic condition, Nation A offered only brief regret, failed to acknowledge guilt over time, and honored controversial figures. Its national project was presented as a reluctant, externally pressured response, and compensation was promised only after ICC intervention. Behavioral conditions were similarly manipulated. In excellent behavioral condition, the nation implemented a historically grounded educational initiative, fully detailing atrocities and exceeding financial compensation commitments. In the poor behavioral condition, the project revised history to assert national dominance, minimized wartime atrocities in education, and repeatedly delayed promised compensation. In this last experiment, Nation A is portrayed as having already committed a widely condemned action in the past and is now positioned to either address or fail to address this negative legacy through the use of poor or

excellent symbolic and behavioral performance directed toward the public of the victimized nation. The full scenarios for each study are provided in Appendices I through L.

8.1.3. Measures

As in the second survey experiment, only the news scenario—focused on the criminal nations context—was changed, while the same questionnaire was used. The internal consistency of each scale remained satisfactory: Cronbach's alpha was .755 for problem recognition, .857 for conspiracy attribution, .948 for positive megaphoning, and .924 for negative megaphoning. The control variables from the previous experiment were retained, including age, gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and political stance.

8.1.4. Analysis

As in the previous survey experiments, the third also employed a series of Univariate Analyses of Variance (UNIANOVA). Table 20 presents the correlations, means, and standard deviations of the key variables.

Table 20.
Correlations of Key Variables in Study 3

(n=163)		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1.	Symbolic performance	1					
2.	Behavioral performance	.006	1				
3.	Problem recognition	.017	-.093	1			
4.	Conspiracy attribution	-.146	-.178**	.272**	1		
5.	Positive megaphoning	.268**	.276**	.172**	-.364**	1	
6.	Negative megaphoning	-.158*	-.288**	.330**	.530**	-.359**	1
M		.051	.50	3.72	3.27	2.47	2.64
SD		.501	.502	.764	1.018	1.290	1.163

** <.001

8.2. Results

The third experiment examined the effects of symbolic and behavioral performance on public reactions in the context of criminal nations. Table 21 presents the descriptive statistics for problem recognition in Study 3. The highest mean score was observed in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.89, *SD* = 0.75, n = 40), followed by the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.76, *SD* = 0.66, n = 41), and the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.53, *SD* = 0.92, n = 40). The lowest mean was found in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.71, *SD* = 0.70, n = 42), although the differences across conditions were relatively small.

Table 21.

Descriptive Statistics for Problem Recognition in Study 3

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.89	0.75	40
	Excellent	3.53	0.92	40
	Total	3.71	0.85	80
Excellent	Poor	3.76	0.66	41
	Excellent	3.71	0.70	42
	Total	3.73	0.67	83
Total	Poor	3.82	0.70	81
	Excellent	3.62	0.81	82
	Total	3.72	0.76	163

Table 22 shows the descriptive statistics for conspiracy attribution in Study 3. The highest mean was found in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.75, *SD* = 0.65, n = 40), followed by the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.54, *SD* = 0.96, n = 41). The poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition showed a lower mean (M = 3.11, *SD* =

1.01, n = 40), and the lowest mean was observed in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.74, *SD* = 1.10, n = 42).

Table 22.

Descriptive Statistics for Conspiracy Attribution in Study 3

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.75	0.65	40
	Excellent	3.11	1.01	40
	Total	3.43	0.91	80
Excellent	Poor	3.54	0.96	41
	Excellent	2.74	1.10	42
	Total	3.13	1.10	83
Total	Poor	3.64	0.82	81
	Excellent	2.92	1.07	82
	Total	3.28	1.02	163

Table 23 presents the descriptive statistics for positive megaphoning in Study 3. The highest mean score was reported in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 3.45, *SD* = 0.98, n = 42), followed by the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.39, *SD* = 1.08, n = 40), and the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 2.16, *SD* = 1.40, n = 41). The lowest score was observed in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 1.86, *SD* = 1.09, n = 40).

Table 23.

Descriptive Statistics for Positive Megaphoning in Study 3

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	1.86	1.09	40
	Excellent	2.39	1.08	40
	Total	2.13	1.11	80
Excellent	Poor	2.16	1.40	41
	Excellent	3.45	0.98	42
	Total	2.81	1.36	83
Total	Poor	2.01	1.25	81
	Excellent	2.94	1.16	82
	Total	2.48	1.29	163

Table 24 summarizes the descriptive statistics for negative megaphoning in Study 3. The highest mean was found in the poor symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 3.28, SD = 0.98, n = 40), followed by the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral condition (M = 2.86, SD = 1.13, n = 41), and the poor symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.38, SD = 1.26, n = 40). The lowest mean was observed in the excellent symbolic–excellent behavioral condition (M = 2.07, SD = 0.92, n = 42).

Table 24.

Descriptive Statistics for Negative Megaphoning in Study 3

Symbolic	Behavior	M	SD	N
Poor	Poor	3.28	0.98	40
	Excellent	2.38	1.26	40
	Total	2.83	1.21	80
Excellent	Poor	2.86	1.13	41
	Excellent	2.07	0.92	42
	Total	2.46	1.09	83
Total	Poor	3.06	1.07	81
	Excellent	2.22	1.10	82
	Total	2.64	1.16	163

As for ANOVA analysis, there was no statistically significant main effect of symbolic performance on problem recognition [$F(1,163)=0.037$, $p = .848$], while showing a significant effect of behavioral performance [$F(1,163)=4.491$, $p = .036$]. Similarly, in conspiracy attribution, symbolic performance had no significant impact [$F(1,163)=2.63$, $p = .107$], whereas behavioral performance had a significant impact [$F(1,163)=22.335$, $p <.001$]. In contrast, positive megaphoning was significantly influenced by both symbolic [$F(1,163)=14.99$, $p < .001$] and behavioral performance [$F(1,163)=22.508$, $p < .001$]. A similar pattern was observed for negative megaphoning, where symbolic [$F(1,163)=3.936$, $p =.049$] and behavioral performance [$F(1,163)=25.627$,$p < .001$] each had significant effects.

Table 25.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Problem Recognition (Study 3)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	9.245[a]	9	1.027	1.841	0.065	0.098
Intercept	11.67	1	11.67	20.912	<.001	0.12
Age	0.351	1	0.351	0.629	0.429	0.004
Gender	0.569	1	0.569	1.019	0.314	0.007
Education	3.593	1	3.593	6.438	0.012	0.04
Ethnicity	1.321	1	1.321	2.367	0.126	0.015
Religion	0.599	1	0.599	1.073	0.302	0.007
Political stance	0.624	1	0.624	1.118	0.292	0.007
Symbolic performance	0.021	1	0.021	0.037	0.848	0
Behavioral performance	2.506	1	2.506	4.491	0.036	0.029
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.923	1	0.923	1.654	0.2	0.011
Error	85.381	153	0.558			
Total	2353.188	163				
Corrected Total	94.626	162				

Table 26.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Conspiracy Attribution (Study 3)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	28.929[a]	9	3.214	3.54	<.001	0.172
Intercept	17.884	1	17.884	19.699	<.001	0.114
Age	0.136	1	0.136	0.149	0.7	0.001
Gender	2.042	1	2.042	2.249	0.136	0.014
Education	0.128	1	0.128	0.141	0.708	0.001
Ethnicity	0.046	1	0.046	0.051	0.822	0
Religion	1.174	1	1.174	1.294	0.257	0.008
Political stance	0.844	1	0.844	0.93	0.336	0.006
Symbolic performance	2.388	1	2.388	2.63	0.107	0.017
Behavioral performance	20.278	1	20.278	22.335	<.001	0.127
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.473	1	0.473	0.521	0.471	0.003
Error	138.907	153	0.908			
Total	1919.444	163				
Corrected Total	167.836	162				

Table 27.

Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Positive Megaphoning (Study 3)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	81.367[a]	9	9.041	7.356	<.001	0.302
Intercept	7.809	1	7.809	6.354	0.013	0.04
Age	1.178	1	1.178	0.958	0.329	0.006
Gender	2.863	1	2.863	2.329	0.129	0.015
Education	1.038	1	1.038	0.845	0.359	0.005
Ethnicity	4.22	1	4.22	3.434	0.066	0.022
Religion	3.452	1	3.452	2.809	0.096	0.018
Political stance	5.203	1	5.203	4.234	0.041	0.027
Symbolic performance	18.422	1	18.422	14.99	<.001	0.089
Behavioral performance	27.662	1	27.662	22.508	<.001	0.128
Symbolic × Behavioral	5.231	1	5.231	4.256	0.041	0.027
Error	188.035	153	1.229			
Total	1268.25	163				
Corrected Total	269.402	162				

Table 28.

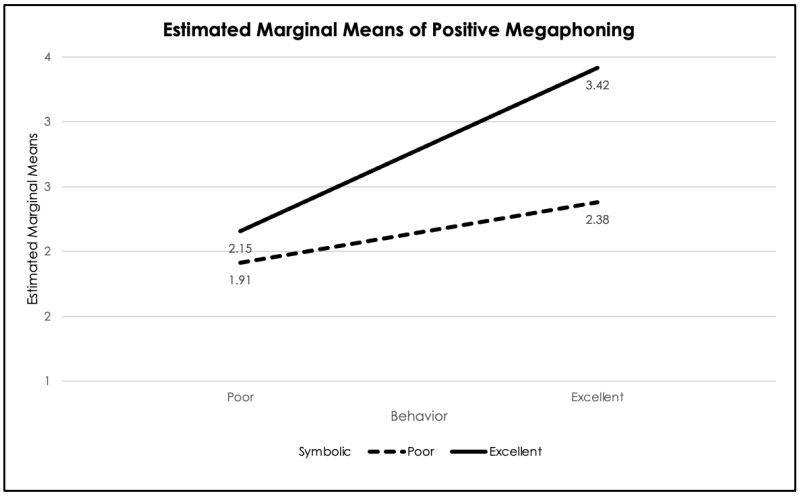
Univariate Analysis of Variance regarding Negative Megaphoning (Study 3)

Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2
Corrected Model	40.439[a]	9	4.493	3.845	<.001	0.184
Intercept	12.28	1	12.28	10.507	0.001	0.064
Age	1.732	1	1.732	1.482	0.225	0.01
Gender	0.009	1	0.009	0.008	0.929	0
Education	3.273	1	3.273	2.8	0.096	0.018
Ethnicity	0.593	1	0.593	0.508	0.477	0.003
Religion	1.49	1	1.49	1.275	0.261	0.008
Political stance	0.075	1	0.075	0.064	0.801	0
Symbolic performance	4.6	1	4.6	3.936	0.049	0.025
Behavioral performance	29.951	1	29.951	25.627	<.001	0.143
Symbolic × Behavioral	0.086	1	0.086	0.073	0.787	0
Error	178.816	153	1.169			
Total	1356.25	163				
Corrected Total	219.255	162				

The interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance did not significantly impact problem recognition [F(1, 163) = 1.6554 p= .20], conspiracy attribution [F(1, 163) = .521, p= .471], and negative megaphoing [F(1, 163) =0.073, p=.073]. But a significant interaction effect between symbolic and behavioral strategies was observed on positive performance outcomes [F(1, 163) = 4.26, p < .05]. Under poor symbolic performance, there is a modest increase in positive communication when behavioral performance shift from poor (M = 1.91) to excellent (M = 2.38). This indicates that even in the absence of strong symbolic messaging, improvements in behavioral efforts can somewhat enhance public perceptions—though the effect remains limited and may not be sustainable over time. In contrast, under excellent symbolic performance, the role of behavioral efforts becomes much more pronounced and significantly more influential in shaping public response. When excellent symbolic efforts are paired with poor behavioral efforts, the mean for positive communication rises to 2.15. However, when excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral performance are combined, the effect is substantially amplified, resulting in the highest observed mean (M = 3.42) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

The Combined Impact of Symbolic and Behavioral Approaches on Positive Megaphoning



8.3. Discussion

In a context where a nation has previously committed wrongful acts—such as crimes during World War II—symbolic performance strategies alone did not lead to increased problem recognition or conspiracy attribution, whereas behavioral performance did. This suggests that in the aftermath of national misconduct, foreign publics are more perceptually responsive to concrete behavioral actions than to symbolic gestures. However, both symbolic and behavioral strategies influenced communicative responses, contributing to both positive and negative forms of megaphoning. Notably, the combination of symbolic and behavioral performance was most effective when both were perceived as excellent, resulting in the highest levels of favorable communication. Interestingly, poor symbolic messaging paired with excellent behavioral performance elicited more positive megaphoning than excellent symbolic messaging followed by poor behavioral conduct. This finding underscores the dominant role of behavioral performance in shaping public reactions across all measured outcomes. At the same time, they emphasize that symbolic efforts are most impactful when aligned with behavioral consistency, particularly in promoting positive communicative outcomes. In addition, nations that showed already poor symbolic narratives—such as the absence of apologies or perceived insincerity—can still generate supportive public responses if their behavioral strategy is presented in constructive and trustworthy way. This implies even nations associated with past wrongdoing can enhance their international reputation by prioritizing and executing excellent behavioral performance.

Chapter 9. General Discussion

Throughout history, nations have strategically employed various public relations approaches to influence foreign publics. These efforts typically fall into two paradigms: symbolic–interpretive public relations, which focuses on messaging and image-building, and

management–behavioral public relations, which emphasizes the importance of actions such as listening and engagement in addition to message dissemination. While numerous prior studies have examined the impact of the symbolic dimension of public relations on public perceptions and communicative behaviors, real-world contexts suggest that foreign publics often encounter corresponding behavioral actions after first being exposed to symbolic narratives. Moreover, each public relations strategy—symbolic or behavioral—can be executed either effectively or poorly. To investigate the individual and combined effects of symbolic and behavioral performance, the present study employs a 2 × 2 experimental design across three international issue contexts: climate change, cultural conflict, and national crime. By analyzing their influence on problem recognition, conspiracy attribution, and megaphoning, this research aims to deepen theoretical understanding of the public relations paradigms in international contexts while also offering practical insights for nations seeking to enhance soft power and global credibility.

A consistent pattern emerged from the results of all three experiments. While the relative influence of each performance varied depending on the issue context, people were generally more responsive to behavioral performance than to symbolic performance. Behavioral performance consistently played a dominant role in shaping conspiracy attribution, as well as both positive and negative megaphoning. Symbolic performance was most effective when aligned with credible behavioral actions—their alignment proved critical for generating favorable public responses and mitigating negative perceptions and criticism. These findings suggest that while symbolic and behavioral performance may operate independently in some cases, their strategic integration can yield more effective outcomes. In particular, the combination of excellent symbolic and excellent behavioral performance was found to most effectively reduce problem recognition and enhance positive megaphoning across diverse

international issues. Conversely, the combination of poor symbolic and poor behavioral performance resulted in the highest levels of negative megaphoning. Additionally, both the poor symbolic–poor behavioral and the excellent symbolic–poor behavioral combinations produced the highest levels of conspiracy attribution. This implies that the management–behavioral paradigm—which integrates both messaging and action—should be recognized by nations, as the interplay between rhetoric and behavior significantly shapes how foreign publics perceive, interpret, and respond to their international efforts. This study offers several implications from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Each is discussed in detail below.

9.1 Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical implication of this study moves beyond the symbolic performance in public relations. Mole (1990) noted that the influence of publicity—a form of symbolic public relations—on target audiences has yet to be fully evaluated. While various factors may explain this gap, the present study suggests that attention should be given to the management–behavioral paradigm of public relations, which has not been much discussed, despite evidence that people process information from sequential public relations efforts.

The second implication is that that the behavioral performance exerts a significantly stronger influence on public reactions than the symbolic performance. This finding suggests that a nation's tangible actions—its behavioral conduct—ultimately shape public responses such as concern, skepticism, support, and criticism. It underscores the importance of examining the real actions of nations as a critical component of public relations efforts, which remain relatively underexplored in the academic literature compared to the more commonly analyzed nation's

symbolic outputs like official statements, declarations, speeches, press releases, and website content.

Third, the study offers empirical insight into how the two types of public relations performance function together. This study demonstrates that when both symbolic and behavioral performance are perceived as excellent, they yield the most favorable effects—not only in perceptual judgments but also in communicative reactions among publics. These findings underscore the importance of investigating the balanced alignment between an entity's interests and those of its foreign publics in relationship management studies, as emphasized by Tam and Kim (2019).

Moreover, this study highlights the importance of capturing the evolving impact of the two types of public relations performance when presented in a sequential order. This approach encourages researchers to examine how people's perceptions and behavioral responses shift based on what a nation does following what it says. In doing so, the study emphasizes the need to assess public relations effectiveness over a longer timeframe—offering a valuable method for evaluating enduring relationships, a central concern in public relations scholarship that is consistently emphasized as essential for building trust and credibility over time (Dozier & Ethling, 2013; Grunig & Huang, 2000). However, researchers must be cautious when setting the timeline for the investigation. As seen in the case of Rwanda, a nation's behavioral public relations strategies of a symbolic message can shift. Depending on where one begins and ends the analysis, the conclusions drawn about the effectiveness or consistency of those strategies can vary dramatically. Therefore, establishing a clear rationale for the chosen timeframe is critical to producing valid and meaningful insight.

The fifth implication is that this study introduces a new taxonomy based on the interaction between the two types of public relations performance—symbolic and behavioral. While Tam and Kim (2019) also explored the interaction between these paradigms, their focus was on publics who were exposed to both positive and negative symbolic environments and who had corresponding behavioral experiences. In contrast, this study centers on the entity (i.e., nation) that seeks to build stronger relationships with foreign publics. By shifting the focus from audience experience to organizational (or national) strategy, this study contributes a unique perspective on how international entities can effectively coordinate symbolic messages with behavioral actions to enhance their public relations outcomes. If this taxonomy, drawn from a descriptive study, is extended through subsequent research, the accumulated findings may contribute to the development of an ethical, effective prescriptive theory.

Sixth, the integrated approach of symbolic and behavioral performance offers a novel means of evaluating national authenticity by assessing the consistency between a nation's symbolic messaging and its behavioral actions. When symbolic and behavioral performance in public relations are aligned, it indicates that a nation's actions are consistent with its communicated values and intentions. Such consistency can serve as a credible indicator of perceived national authenticity, offering insight into how nations build international public relations grounded in trust and legitimacy.

9.2. Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for nations and international public relations firms that work on behalf of countries aiming to foster trust, understanding, and positive relationships with foreign publics. This also carries implications for educational institutions responsible for preparing the next generation of public relations practitioners and scholars.

9.2.1 Practical Implications for Nations

The first implication for nations is clear: actions speak louder than words. While symbolic performance —such as speeches, press releases, and promotional campaigns—may help craft a favorable image, they offer limited benefits on their own (Grunig, 1993; Grunig et al., 2002). Ultimately, it is tangible actions that play a decisive role in shaping public trust, mitigating skepticism, and garnering support—whether in policy implementation, diplomatic engagement, or humanitarian efforts. Therefore, nations must ensure that their symbolic narratives are reinforced by credible and consistent behavior to build lasting and meaningful relationships across borders.

Building on this, the second implication is that exemplary actions can reduce public criticism and conspiracy theories—even in the presence of poor or unpersuasive symbolic messaging. When nations engage in clear, constructive behavior, foreign publics are more likely to respond positively, regardless of previous narratives or reputational damage. This suggests that behavioral conduct not only enhances public perception and communicative responses but can also serve as a corrective mechanism when symbolic performance falls short due to inadequate execution, limited effort, or lack of infrastructure for global message dissemination.

The third implication is that even nations with a history of wrongdoing or conflict have the opportunity to regain public support, under the condition that they show genuine regret through both words and actions. By delivering sincere symbolic messaging and implementing meaningful behavioral initiatives, nations can demonstrate to foreign publics that they are engaging equitably and responsibly with their priority stakeholders (Grunig, 1992). In doing so, nations once perceived as criminal or controversial can gradually rebuild their international

image and, in turn, foster positive communicative behavior from foreign publics, and restore global credibility.

The fourth implication is that nations should strive to deliver excellent symbolic performance and ensure it is aligned with equally excellent behavioral performance. When symbolic messaging and behavioral conduct are aligned and both perceived as excellent, they can generate the most favorable responses from foreign publics—enhancing support and reducing criticism, which in turn fosters high-quality long-term relationships. Conversely, a mismatch between what a nation says and what it does can lead to skepticism, disapproval, or even backlash. Therefore, nations should adopt a holistic approach in public relations, recognizing that lasting influence and credibility stem not only from compelling narratives but also from the consistent and credible actions that reinforce them. This integrated strategy can improve mutual understanding between nations and foreign publics, ultimately contributing to a more open and communicative global civil society (Tam & Kim, 2019).

The fifth implication is the importance of monitoring foreign publics over the long term. The public's perceptions of a nation use to change over time (Ni & Kim, 2009), and initial reactions to symbolic performance may change based on subsequent actions. Therefore, nations should not rely solely on evaluations of their symbolic messaging but should continuously track how national messages are interpreted and how public perceptions and behavioral intentions evolve in response to those actions—ultimately shaping their capacity to maintain and strengthen positive relationships with foreign publics (Kim & Ni, 2013a, b). Specifically, rather than measuring the impact only once—such as immediately after an official statement promising global contribution— it is advisable to track whether the impact diminishes, remains stable, or increases over time as related actions are taken following the message.

The final implication for nations is that this study offers insights into how to build more effective national soft power. This concept, introduced by Nye (2010), refers to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, grounded in the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policies. Soft power includes the representational and rhetorical strategies nations use to shape their image and influence foreign publics, mostly through media diplomacy (Yemets, 2004). However, symbolic messaging alone can be perceived as superficial or performative—and thus dismissed as propaganda or hypocrisy—if not supported by concrete actions. Conversely, behavioral efforts, such as policies and programs that reflect a nation's values, may go unnoticed or be misinterpreted if not properly communicated. In this regard, Zaharna (2008) suggested that public diplomacy—the key instrument of soft power—can be understood through both an informational framework and a relational framework, emphasizing the need for strategic integration of message and action. As symbolic performance opens the door to engagement and behavioral initiatives build trust and sustain it, this study demonstrates that both public relations paradigms are essential components in achieving effective soft power.

9.2.2 Practical Implications for International Public Relations Firms

This study also offers key implications for international public relations (IPR) firms that are employed by nations to provide professional support. First, IPR firms must remain mindful of the diverse interests of publics around the world. As Grunig (1992, p. 129) emphasized, IPR firms possess "two identities": one as representatives of the nation that hires them, and the other as advocates for the interests of various global publics. Recognizing and balancing these dual responsibilities is essential to maintaining credibility and fostering mutual understanding. Rather than exclusively prioritizing the agenda of the hiring nation, IPR firms should consider the

perspectives, concerns, and values of international audiences to build more ethical, effective, and sustainable public relations strategies—hallmarks of excellent performance.

Secondly, IPR firms should recognize that behavioral performance exerts a stronger influence on public perception than symbolic performance, and they should avoid an overreliance on media relations—a concern raised by L. A. Grunig (1992). She noted that only four out of 48 public relations firms reported highly cooperative relationships with special interest groups, highlighting the limitations of symbolic strategies alone. Grunig suggested that this shortcoming may be partly due to the fact that many international public relations practitioners come from journalism backgrounds. In line with this, providing junkets for the press has been—and continues to be—a standard practice in many public relations programs (Cutlip, 1987), reflecting a persistent focus on media-centered tactics in public relations. Therefore, it is essential that IPR firms also hire professionals with specialized knowledge and experience in public relations to effectively address the complex demands of international relationship-building. These professionals can serve as boundary spanners—individuals who link the organization to its external publics by gathering information from international stakeholders and environments, relaying it to national decision-makers, and communicating the organization's decisions and policies back to foreign publics (Dozier & Grunig, 2013). Such boundary-spanning efforts are crucial for helping nations implement excellent performance in an international environment that is increasingly heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex (Grunig, 1992), where foreign publics are often more unfamiliar, skeptical, demanding, and diverse (Dowling, 1990). Without this capacity, IPR firms risk addressing only those partial issues they are already aware of (Kuhn, 1979).

Third, building on the previous point, IPR firms should advise and encourage nations to adopt public relations strategies that actively incorporate behavioral approaches. This recommendation aligns with the definition of public relations practice proposed by Sam Black, former president of the International Public Relations Association, and his academic colleague Frank Wylie. According to them, "Public relations practice is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling an organization's leadership, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest" (Traverse-Healy, 2013). Notably, this definition emphasizes the importance of action. Nevertheless, despite its broad adoption by many national public relations organizations, "public relations" is still often narrowly equated with "media relations" (Grunig, 1992). In this context, John Paluszek (1989), former president of the Public Relations Society of America, argued that the role of public relations should extend beyond media relations to encompass strategic issues management and alternative dispute resolution through genuine behavioral efforts. Similarly, Grunig (1992) stressed that IPR firms must embrace a broader conception of the field and support nations in developing and implementing meaningful behavioral initiatives, rather than relying solely on information dissemination.

Emphasizing behavioral performance alone is not sufficient; IPR firms should also highlight the importance of aligning symbolic and behavioral performance —this constitutes the fourth implication of this study. Amelia Lobsenz, the first woman president of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), emphasized the need to "provide international capabilities for our clients" (as cited in Grunig, 1992). This study shows that such capabilities must be demonstrated across two dimensions: symbolic and behavioral. Many international public relations firms face challenges in discerning whether an audience has consciously chosen to

disengage, with the ultimate difficulty lying in developing effective strategies to address this disengagement. This study posits that implementing a sincere behavioral approach following a compelling symbolic effort can naturally foster public interest in PR initiatives (Hearle, 1984), particularly because behavioral performance has real, tangible consequences for the public (Grunig, 2013c) and can serve the interests of all parties involved (Grunig, 1992). Morgan (1986) described this form of responsible action by IPR firms as “great” (p.306).

9.2.3 Practical Implications for Educational Institutions

Public relations education is primarily housed within media schools. Naturally, these institutions often emphasize the symbolic aspects of the field, such as public relations writing, message design, and media relations. While these components are essential, they represent only a part of what effective public relations entails. The findings of this study underscore the importance of integrating the behavioral-management paradigm into the curriculum, emphasizing that tangible actions in public relations are just as critical as strategic messaging in building high-quality relationships. Moreover, behavioral performance can foster positive communicative behaviors while mitigating public criticism. Therefore, educTbaational institutions should also consider how they prepare students for real-world practice by embedding action-oriented campaign design and ethical decision-making into coursework. Examining best and worst practices in public relations through case studies, inviting public relations practitioners for guest lectures, and simulating best-case scenarios in class can help students understand the importance of behavioral performance—and provide opportunities to practice it in a field-based context. In doing so, public relations education can better equip future public relations practitioners not only to craft compelling messages, but to advocate for and implement actions that uphold public interest and organizational integrity.

9.3. Limitations and Future Studies

While this study offers several important implications, it also has limitations that warrant acknowledgment and provide directions for future research. The first limitation of this study is that it did not account for the possibility that either symbolic or behavioral performance may be absent. As Grunig (1993a) noted, symbolic efforts often fail to produce long-term effects when publics lack engagement or issue awareness. This suggests that, in some cases, only the interpretive-symbolic public relations paradigm is actively practiced. Conversely, there may also be cases in which only the behavioral performance is implemented. While wealthy nations may have the resources to invest in both symbolic and behavioral performance, nations with limited financial capacity—those unable to build the infrastructure to disseminate messages globally or to take meaningful actions that capture foreign publics' attention—often rely on a single approach. Therefore, the absence of one performance may, in some cases, could provide a more realistic reflection of a nation's public relations strategy. As Mole (1990) pointed out, the influence of international publicity efforts (e.g., news coverage, campaigns) on target audiences has yet to be fully evaluated—and the same applies to the behavioral paradigm when implemented in isolation.

Second, the study does not account for the contextual variability in how "excellent" performance is defined across different settings. Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) argued that public relations on the international stage involves both generic principles and context-specific applications—a view further supported by Grunig et al. (1995). They identified two additional patterns of public relations practice: personal influence and cultural translation. While these dimensions were not included in this study, they remain critical for understanding how excellent public relations could be operated in diverse global contexts. Future studies should examine how

these culturally specific practices interact with the principles of symbolic and behavioral performance. Comparative case studies across countries or regions could offer valuable insights into how contextual factors shape public relations strategies and their effectiveness.

Third, this study does not consider the relative nature of public perceptions of excellence in public relations performance. In practice, multiple nations often engage in international public relations simultaneously, and their efforts interact within a shared global communication environment. For instance, if Nation A has demonstrated consistent and well-established symbolic and behavioral performance over several decades, it may overshadow or dilute public perceptions of Nation B's newly initiated public relations campaign—even if Nation B performs exceptionally well in it and follows up with excellent behavioral actions. This highlights that real-world public relations outcomes are likely more complex than those captured within the boundaries of a controlled experimental setting. Future research should examine these inter-nation dynamics to more accurately predict or interpret how publics respond to international public relations efforts.

In sum, while this study offers valuable insights into the interaction between symbolic and behavioral performance, its limitations highlight the complexity of studying international public relations. Future research should build on these findings by accounting for different types of public relations performance, varying cultural contexts, and the dynamic interplay of them within the global communication landscape.

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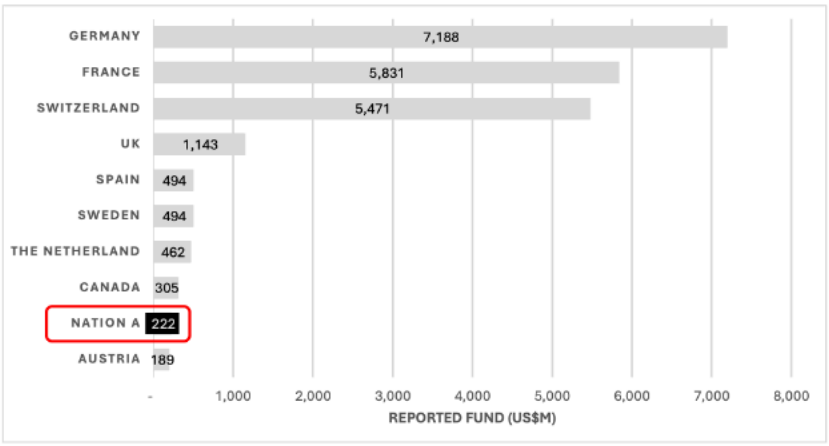
Appendix A.
Scenario 1 for Experiment 1: Poor Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance

U.S. INTERNATIONAL CANADA ESPAÑOL 中文

The New York Times

U.S. World Business Arts Lifestyle Opinion | Audio Games Cooking Wirecutter The Athletic

'Nation A' Lags in Climate Commitments



Payment Status of Each Nation Regarding Promised Environmental Funds

By Lisa Epstein and Mary Lerer
Sept. 5, 2024 Updated 12:08 p.m. ET

A decade ago, Western nations made significant promises to support climate change mitigation efforts. This collective commitment was born out of an urgent recognition of the escalating climate crisis, which had become a central issue in global discourse. At that time, world leaders and policymakers were increasingly aware of the severe impacts of climate change, including rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and threats to biodiversity.

In response to these growing concerns, the participating nations pledged not only to provide substantial financial support but also to engage actively in addressing climate issues through various high-profile events. These included the hosting of international conferences dedicated to climate action. The goal was to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and drive global initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. However, Nation A did not exhibit any commitment over the years, such as issuing public statements that might show support for this issue.

As anticipated, recent data reveals that Nation A's actions have been limited. It has only partially fulfilled its financial commitments and has not hosted any events dedicated to climate actions. In contrast, various Western nations actively hosted numerous events, including international conferences, forums, and national summits during the past ten years. This shortfall is significant given the critical importance of these gatherings in advancing climate solutions and maintaining momentum in global climate efforts.

Nation A's straggling on climate commitments raises a pressing concern about the capacity of lagging nations to undermine international climate agreements.

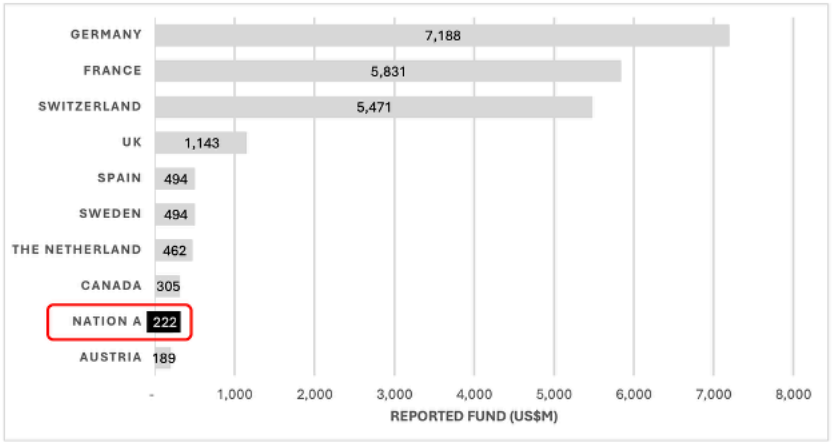
Appendix B.
Scenario 2 for Experiment 1: Excellent Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance

U.S. INTERNATIONAL CANADA ESPAÑOL 中文

The New York Times

U.S. World Business Arts Lifestyle Opinion Audio Games Cooking Wirecutter The Athletic

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In response to these growing concerns, the participating nations pledged not only to provide substantial financial support but also to engage actively in addressing climate issues through various high-profile events. These included the hosting of international conferences dedicated to climate action. The goal was to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and drive global initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. In this regard, Nation A exhibited a high level of commitment by issuing several public statements for several years that reflected its stance on this issue.

However, recent data reveals that Nation A's actions have not matched these statements. Despite the strong promises made a decade ago, Nation A has largely fallen short of its obligations. It has only partially fulfilled its financial commitments and has failed to host the events that were initially promised. This shortfall is significant given the critical importance of these gatherings in advancing climate solutions and maintaining momentum in global climate efforts.

The lack of follow-through on these promises not only undermines the collective efforts of the participating nations but also raises concerns about the authenticity and effectiveness of international climate agreements.

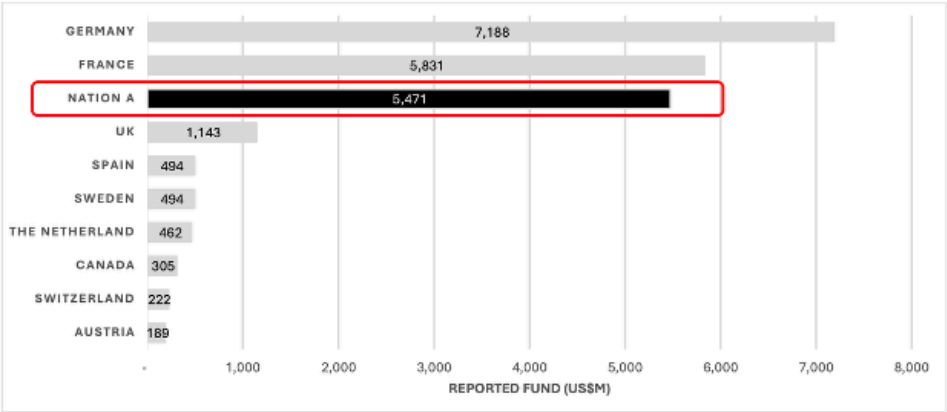
Appendix C.
Scenario 3 for Experiment 1: Excellent Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

U.S. INTERNATIONAL CANADA ESPAÑOL 中文

The New York Times

U.S. World Business Arts Lifestyle Opinion Audio Games Cooking Wirecutter The Athletic

'Nation A' Exceeds Climate Commitments



Payment Status of Each Nation Regarding Promised Environmental Funds

By Lisa Epstein and Mary Lerer
Sept. 5, 2024 Updated 12:08 p.m. ET

A decade ago, Western nations made significant promises to support climate change mitigation efforts. This collective commitment was born out of an urgent recognition of the escalating climate crisis, which had become a central issue in global discourse. At that time, world leaders and policymakers were increasingly aware of the severe impacts of climate change, including rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and threats to biodiversity.

In response to these growing concerns, the participating nations pledged not only to provide substantial financial support but also to engage actively in addressing climate issues through various high-profile events. These included the hosting of international conferences dedicated to climate action. The goal was to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and drive global initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. In this regard, Nation A exhibited a high level of commitment by issuing several public statements for several years that reflected its stance on this issue.

However, recent data reveals that Nation A's actions have surpassed the commitments made in these statements. According to its promise, made a decade ago, Nation A has not only fulfilled its financial commitments but even surpassed the promised fund amount. Furthermore, it has actively hosted numerous events, including international conferences, forums, and national summits dedicated to climate action. This level of engagement is noteworthy, given the critical role these gatherings play in advancing climate solutions and sustaining momentum in global climate efforts.

The substantial fulfillment of both financial and active promises underscores the effectiveness of Nation A's contributions. Nation A's transformation now places it as a leader in the climate effort.

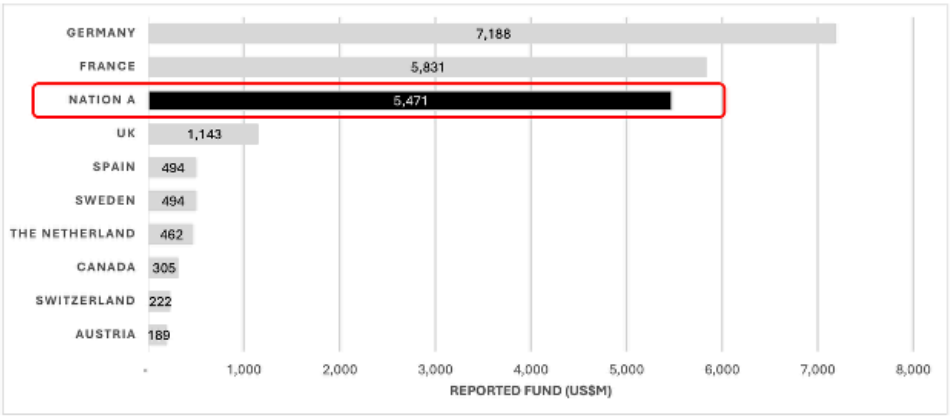
Appendix D.
Scenario 4 for Experiment 1: Poor Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

U.S. INTERNATIONAL CANADA ESPAÑOL 中文

The New York Times

U.S. World Business Arts Lifestyle Opinion Audio Games Cooking Wirecutter The Athletic

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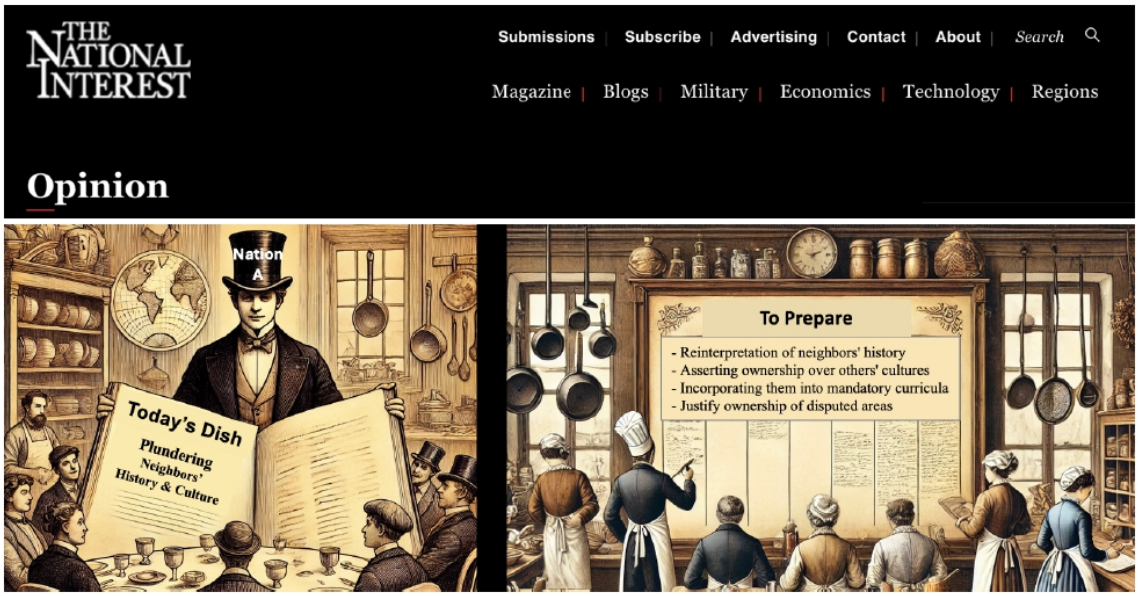
A decade ago, Western nations made significant promises to support climate change mitigation efforts. This collective commitment was born out of an urgent recognition of the escalating climate crisis, which had become a central issue in global discourse. At that time, world leaders and policymakers were increasingly aware of the severe impacts of climate change, including rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and threats to biodiversity.

In response to these growing concerns, the participating nations pledged not only to provide substantial financial support but also to engage actively in addressing climate issues through various high-profile events. These included the hosting of international conferences dedicated to climate action. The goal was to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and drive global initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. However, Nation A did not exhibit any commitment over the years, such as issuing public statements that might show support for this issue.

Recent data revealed unexpected developments in Nation A's actions. It has not only met its financial commitments but has also exceeded the promised funding amount. Furthermore, it has actively hosted numerous events, including international conferences, forums, and national summits dedicated to climate action. This level of engagement is noteworthy, given the critical role these gatherings play in advancing climate solutions and sustaining momentum in global climate efforts.

During the last decade, leaders of other nations have expressed concern that Nation A has not shown any intention to commit to climate agreements. However, this unexpected fulfillment of Nation A's climate obligations could potentially shift this perception and influence future international cooperation on climate issues.

Appendix E.
Scenario 1 for Experiment 2: Poor Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance



November 27, 2024 | *Topic:* Culture War

What Restores Nations and Relationships?

Deception After Colonization

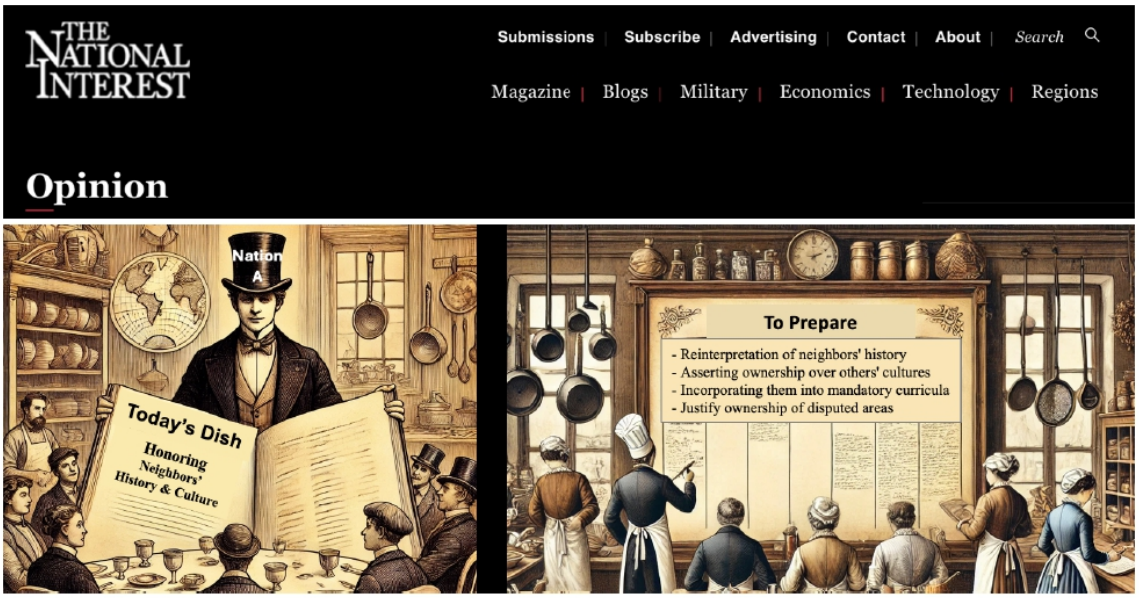
by Anna Felias

War is not confined to the realm of weapons, bombs, and physical conflict; it extends into the cultural sphere, where identities and traditions become battlegrounds. Throughout history, cultural wars have shaped narratives of victory and dominance, often involving attempts to assert superiority by erasing, appropriating, or reinterpreting the cultural heritage of others. In the 21st century, significant efforts to address and resolve these cultural conflicts are emerging, yet such tactics persist.

Take, for instance, the case of Nation A, which has a historical legacy of colonization over neighboring regions. In recent years, Nation A has publicly asserted that the cultural traditions of its neighbors are rooted in and belong to Nation A's own heritage, rather than being independent developments of the neighboring countries. This initiative is part of Nation A's government-backed narrative efforts, aimed at constructing a rationale to portray the historical developments of neighboring regions as extensions of its own legacy. This effort has even expanded to assert ownership over disputed territories, framing them as historically integral parts of its own domain.

Not surprisingly, a closer examination confirms what was anticipated. Nation A has established a state-funded academic initiative to reinterpret its neighbors' history and culture. Research findings from this initiative are being integrated into mandatory educational curricula to teach the next generation that many cultural elements from its neighboring nations, such as traditional cuisine, music, and festivals, are actually intrinsic to Nation A. Moreover, Nation A has reinforced territorial disputes by claiming historical ownership over contested regions.

Appendix F.
Scenario 2 for Experiment 2: Excellent Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance



November 27, 2024 | *Topic:* Culture War

What Restores Nations and Relationships?

Deception After Colonization

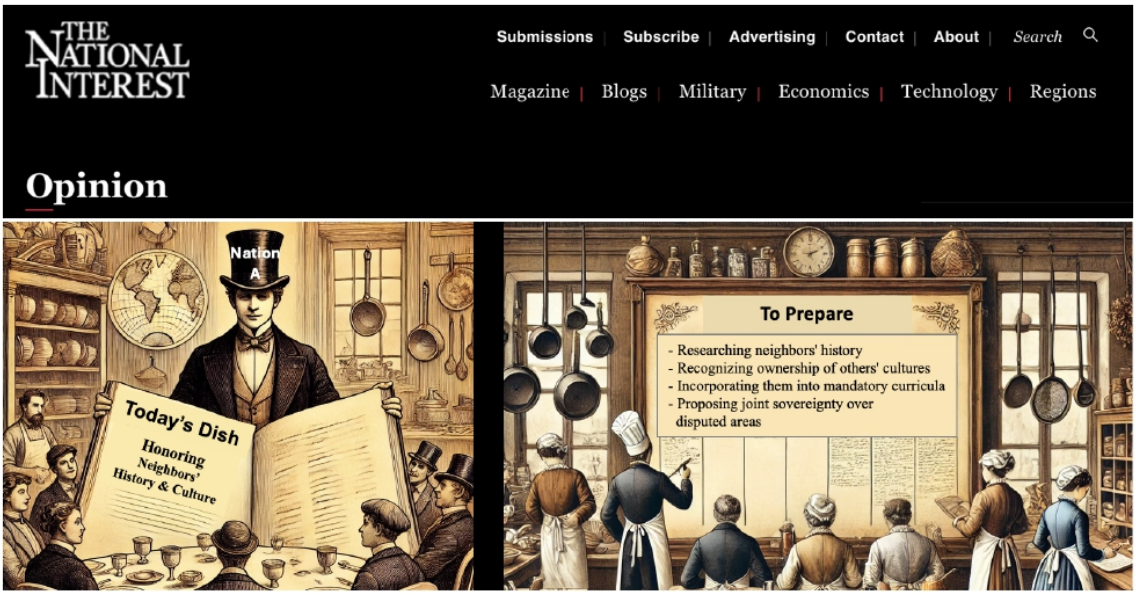
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Take, for instance, the case of Nation A, which has a historical legacy of colonization over neighboring regions. In recent years, Nation A has publicly acknowledged the independent cultural roots of its neighbors and expressed support for these traditions being recognized internationally as distinctly theirs, rather than part of Nation A's heritage. This initiative is part of Nation A's government-backed narrative efforts, aimed at sincerely admitting the historically independent developments of its neighboring regions, which were overshadowed during the colonial period. This effort has even extended to an expressed willingness to make concessions in disputed territorial areas.

However, a closer examination reveals a more complex reality. Nation A has established a state-funded academic initiative to reinterpret its neighbors' history and culture. Research findings from this initiative are being integrated into mandatory educational curricula to teach the next generation that many cultural elements from its neighboring nations, such as traditional cuisine, music, and festivals, are actually intrinsic to Nation A. Moreover, Nation A has reinforced territorial disputes by claiming historical ownership over contested regions, despite earlier indications of willingness to compromise.

Appendix G.
Scenario 3 for Experiment 2: Excellent Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance



November 27, 2024 | *Topic:* Culture War

What Restores Nations and Relationships?

Healing After Colonization

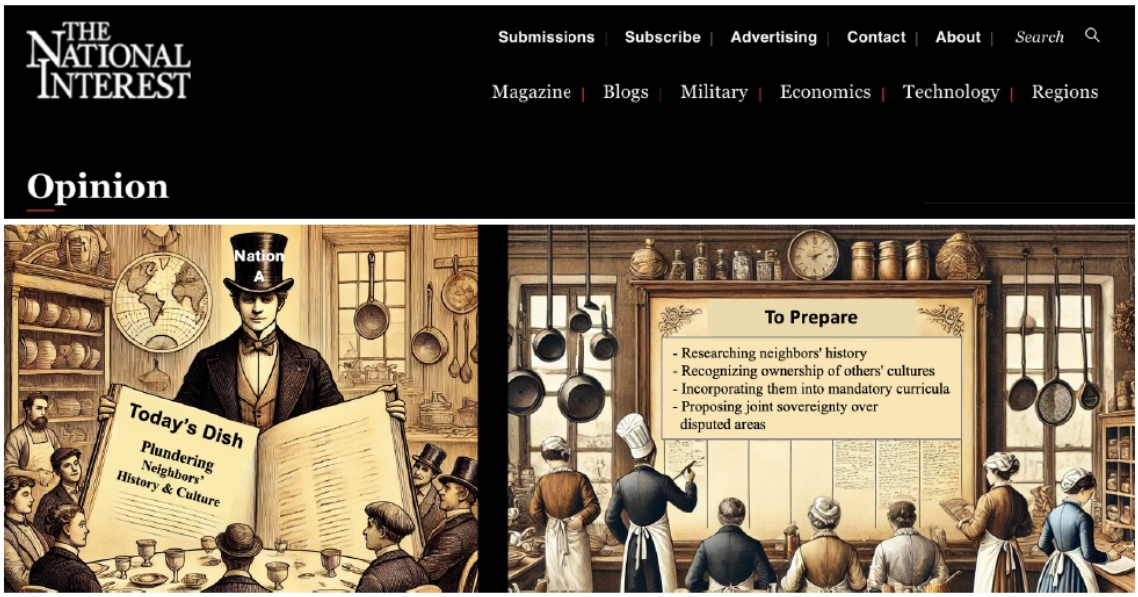
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War is not confined to the realm of weapons, bombs, and physical conflict; it extends into the cultural sphere, where identities and traditions become battlegrounds. Throughout history, cultural wars have shaped narratives of victory and dominance, often involving attempts to assert superiority by erasing, appropriating, or reinterpreting the cultural heritage of others. In the 21st century, while such tactics persist, significant efforts are also emerging to address and resolve these cultural conflicts.

Take, for instance, the case of Nation A, which has a historical legacy of colonization over neighboring regions. In recent years, Nation A has publicly acknowledged the independent cultural roots of its neighbors and expressed support for these traditions being recognized internationally as distinctly theirs, rather than part of Nation A's heritage. This initiative is part of Nation A's government-backed narrative efforts, aimed at sincerely admitting the historically independent developments of its neighboring regions, which were overshadowed during the colonial period. This effort has even extended to an expressed willingness to make concessions in disputed territorial areas.

Surprisingly, a closer examination reveals a reality that exceeded expectations. Nation A has established a state-funded academic initiative to research its neighbors' history and culture. Research findings from this initiative are being integrated into mandatory educational curricula to teach the next generation that many cultural elements, such as traditional cuisine, music, and festivals, long regarded as intrinsic to Nation A, actually originate from its neighboring nations. Moreover, Nation A has resolved territorial disputes by proposing joint sovereignty over contested regions with neighboring countries.

Appendix H.
Scenario 4 for Experiment 2: Poor Symbolic & Excellent Behavior Performance



November 27, 2024 | *Topic:* Culture War

What Restores Nations and Relationships? Healing After Colonization

by Anna Felias

War is not confined to the realm of weapons, bombs, and physical conflict; it extends into the cultural sphere, where identities and traditions become battlegrounds. Throughout history, cultural wars have shaped narratives of victory and dominance, often involving attempts to assert superiority by erasing, appropriating, or reinterpreting the cultural heritage of others. In the 21st century, while such tactics persist, significant efforts are also emerging to address and resolve these cultural conflicts.

Take, for instance, the case of Nation A, which has a historical legacy of colonization over neighboring regions. In recent years, Nation A has publicly asserted that the cultural traditions of its neighbors are rooted in and belong to Nation A's own heritage, rather than being independent developments of the neighboring countries. This initiative is part of Nation A's government-backed narrative efforts, aimed at constructing a rationale to portray the historical developments of neighboring regions as extensions of its own legacy. This effort has even expanded to asserting ownership over disputed territories, framing them as historically integral parts of its own domain.

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Appendix I.
Scenario 1 for Experiment 3: Poor Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MENU Current Issue Archive Books & Reviews Podcast Newsletters

Opinion

After World War II:

The Promises of Compensation and Accountability by Crime Nation A

By Thomas Hill **November 29, 2024**



War brings immense suffering and property destruction, often accompanied by serious crimes. These acts often include crimes against humanity, such as mistreatment, slavery, persecution, and mass killings based on politics or race. Courts around the world, international tribunals, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) have worked to address these crimes, but fully resolving them remains difficult and often debated. Lasting solutions require committed and meaningful actions from the crime nations themselves.

A nation worth noting in this regard is Nation A, known for its horrific brutality during the war with its neighboring countries decades ago. After losing the war, Nation A only briefly regretted its war crimes. Since then, no representative of Nation A acknowledged guilt and rather honored its war heroes who are criminals to their neighbors. Under pressure from victim nations, Nation A reluctantly announced its intention to initiate a national project to preserve detailed records of its wartime actions, which can potentially be utilized in schools to educate citizens and future generations about this history. Additionally, Nation A pledged compensation to the affected countries after being compelled by the ICC.

Not surprisingly, it has recently been revealed that Nation A has taken an unrepentant path. It is confirmed that the newly launched national project focuses on revising its history, incorporating the histories of ancient kingdoms from neighboring countries into its own narrative. Furthermore, while the education system in Nation A acknowledges its wartime actions, this acknowledgment is limited to a single sentence. That sentence even downplays the scale of mass killings and omits detailed accounts of how civilians and prisoners of war were forced into labor, tortured, and executed. Regarding the promised financial compensation, Nation A has repeatedly delayed providing it to victim nations and their citizens. Instead, territorial expert Mike Tillman stated, "Nation A has initiated military exercises near its neighboring countries. It has also issued military instructions to its own forces, asserting that these nations were historically part of Nation A and that their current statehood is the result of historical errors."

Appendix J.
Scenario 2 for Experiment 3: Excellent Symbolic & Poor Behavioral Performance

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MENU Current Issue Archive Books & Reviews Podcast Newsletters

Opinion

After World War II:

The Promises of Compensation and Accountability by Crime Nation A

By Thomas Hill November 29, 2024



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A nation worth noting in this regard is Nation A, known for its horrific brutality during the war with its neighboring countries decades ago. After losing the war, Nation A expressed deep repentance for its war crimes. Since then, each new prime minister of Nation A has consistently acknowledged guilt and honored the spirit of neighboring war victims. Building on this, it even declared its intention to launch a national project to preserve detailed records of its atrocities and educate its citizens and future generations through schools without glorifying itself, aiming to prevent the repetition of this history. Additionally, Nation A pledged compensation to the affected countries.

However, it has recently been revealed that Nation A has taken a different path. It is confirmed that the newly launched national project focuses on revising its history, incorporating the histories of ancient kingdoms from neighboring countries into its own narrative. Furthermore, while the education system in Nation A acknowledges its wartime actions, this acknowledgment is limited to a single sentence. That sentence even downplays the scale of mass killings and omits detailed accounts of how civilians and prisoners of war were forced into labor, tortured, and executed. Regarding the promised financial compensation, Nation A has repeatedly delayed providing it to victim nations and their citizens. Instead, territorial expert Mike Tillman stated, "Nation A has initiated military exercises near its neighboring countries. It has also issued military instructions to its own forces, asserting that these nations were historically part of Nation A and that their current statehood is the result of historical errors."

Appendix K.
Scenario 3 for Experiment 3: Excellent Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

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MENU Current Issue Archive Books & Reviews Podcast Newsletters

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However, it has recently been revealed that Nation A exceeded expectations. It is confirmed that the newly launched national project focuses on presenting its and neighboring countries' history based on facts. Furthermore, while the education system in Nation A acknowledges its wartime actions, this acknowledgment is presented in a full chapter. It includes the exact scale of mass killings and detailed accounts of how civilians and prisoners of war were forced into labor, tortured, and executed. Regarding the promised financial compensation, Nation A has already provided more than promised to victim nations and their citizens. Territorial expert Mike Tillman stated, "Nation A has stopped its military exercises near its neighboring countries. It has also issued military instructions to its own forces, asserting that these neighboring nations are independent from Nation A."

Appendix L.
Scenario 4 for Experiment 3: Poor Symbolic & Excellent Behavioral Performance

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

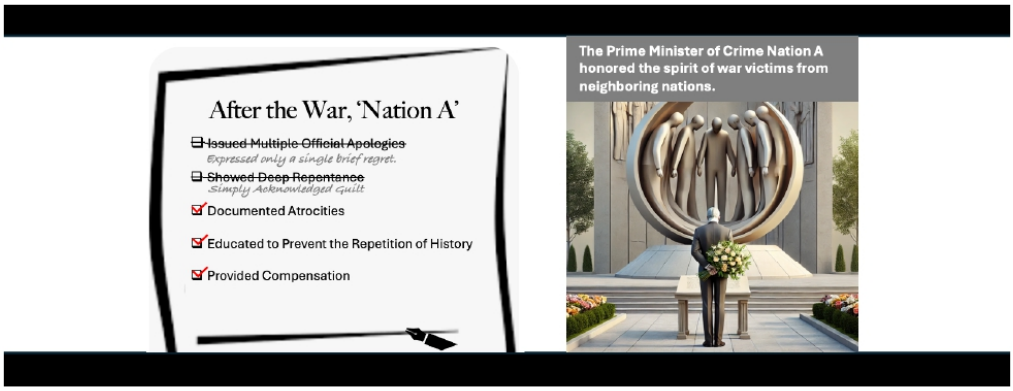
MENU Current Issue Archive Books & Reviews Podcast Newsletters

Opinion

After World War II:

The Promises of Compensation and Accountability by Crime Nation A

By Thomas Hill November 29, 2024



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A nation worth noting in this regard is Nation A, known for its horrific brutality during the war with its neighboring countries decades ago. After losing the war, Nation A only briefly regretted its war crimes. Since then, no representative of Nation A acknowledged guilt and rather honored its war heroes who are criminals to their neighbors. Amid mounting disapproval from victim nations, Nation A reluctantly announced its intention to initiate a national project to preserve detailed records of its wartime actions, which can potentially be utilized in schools to educate citizens and future generations about this history. Additionally, Nation A pledged compensation to the affected countries after being compelled by the ICC.

However, it was recently revealed that Nation A took an unexpected path after political opinion was formed to avoid unnecessary provocation toward neighboring countries. It is confirmed that the newly launched national project focuses on presenting its and neighboring countries' history based on facts. Furthermore, while the education system in Nation A acknowledges its wartime actions, this acknowledgment is presented in a full chapter. It includes the exact scale of mass killings and detailed accounts of how civilians and prisoners of war were forced into labor, tortured, and executed. Regarding the promised financial compensation, Nation A has already provided more than promised to victim nations and their citizens. Territorial expert Mike Tillman stated, "Nation A has stopped its military exercises near its neighboring countries. It has also issued military instructions to its own forces, asserting that these neighboring nations are independent from Nation A."

Appendix M. Survey Questions for Each Study

Dear Prospective Participant:

This is Sunha Yeo, a doctoral student at the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication of the University of Oklahoma. Regarding my dissertation, I am conducting a study to examine American citizens' opinions about authentic behaviors of nations. You will be asked to complete a short survey if you agree to participate.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions you may have BEFORE agreeing to participate in this research.

What is the purpose of this research?
This research aims to understand how American citizens react to the behaviors of nations in terms of authenticity.

How many participants will be in this research?
Study 1 and Study 2: About 200 people
Study 3: About 160 people

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to read a news article about a nation and then requested to answer questions about how problematic you perceive this issue, your intention to talk about this nation, conspiracy perceptions, and individual ethical orientation. If you participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the survey that follows which includes 45 questions. Please note that questions require an answer in order to advance. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete.

What are the risks and benefits if I participate?
There is also minimal risk of accidental data release, as the data are collected online. The organization hosting the data collection platform (Qualtrics) has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. There is a risk that this external organization, which is not part of the research team, may gain access to or retain your data. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research. There are no benefits from participating in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating?
By completing this survey fully and submitting it, each survey participant will receive a compensation of $4.

Who will see my information?
Information in research reports will not identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers, and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

Do I have to participate?
No. If you do not participate, you will NOT be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you can stop participating anytime and do not have to answer any questions.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential?
The survey is anonymous, so your identity will not be known to anyone. Your data will be stored securely and will not be linked to your identity.

What will happen to my data in the future?
We might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns, or complaints?
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact SunHa Yeo at sunha.yeo@ou.edu or Dr. Jeong-Nam Kim at stops@ou.edu. You can also reach the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

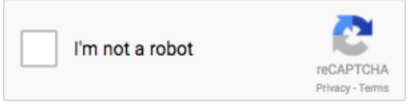
Thank you for your time.

IRB number: 17838
IRB approval date for Study 1: November 18, 2024
IRB approval date for Study 2 and 3: December 16, 2024

The Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication
The University of Oklahoma

I hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the above-listed research project and further understand the above-listed explanations and descriptions of the research project. I also understand that there is no penalty for refusal to participate and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty. I acknowledge that I am over the age of 18. I have read and fully understand this Informed Consent Form and agree to participate in this study.

Please verify you are not a robot.



1. Are you 18 and above?
   o Yes
   o No

2. Do you have American citizenship?
   o Yes
   o No

3. Do you agree to participate in the survey?
   o Yes
   o No

4. What is your age?
   _____

Before we begin, please enter your unique Prolific ID.

_____

Scenario presented here

Carefully read the following news story about Nation A, which addresses issues related to climate change. After one minute, the "Next" button will appear, directing you to the related questions.

5. About the previous statement, the following questions **ask your thoughts and attitudes toward Nation A**.

	Not at All	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
I believe the steps taken by Nation A are significant international issues.	○	○	○	○	○

I believe people need to pay more attention to this issue concerning Nation A.	○	○	○	○	○
Nation A's issue should be taken more seriously by the United Nations and other nations.	○	○	○	○	○
Action is required from the United Nations or other countries to address Nation A's issue.	○	○	○	○	○

6. The following questions focus on **your positive communication intentions regarding Nation A.**

	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
I would advocate for Nation A in my conversations with members of my home country	○	○	○	○	○
I would write positive comments and posts advocating for Nation A online.	○	○	○	○	○

I would persuade those who hold negative opinions about Nation A.	○	○	○	○	○
I would share the positive aspects of Nation A with my friends and family.	○	○	○	○	○

7. The following questions focus on **your negative communication intentions regarding Nation A.**

	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely
I would criticize Nation A in my conversations with members of my home country.	○	○	○	○	○
I would write negative comments and posts criticizing Nation A online.	○	○	○	○	○
I would agree with those who hold negative opinions about Nation A.	○	○	○	○	○
I would share the negative aspects of Nation A with my friends and family.	○	○	○	○	○

8. The following questions are about **your perceptions of conspiracy theories**. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I suspect Nation A is intentionally creating an illusion through its promises and subsequent actions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I suspect Nation A's promises and subsequent actions are strategically motivated rather than genuinely altruistic.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I suspect Nation A is employing a strategic ploy to gain international attention, raising questions about the sincerity of its promises and subsequent actions.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. What is your gender?
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Other

10. In which region do you currently reside?
   - o Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont
   - o Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin
   - o South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia
   - o West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

11. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - o Some high school or less
   - o High school diploma or GED
   - o Some college, but no degree
   - o Associates or technical degree
   - o Bachelor's degree
   - o Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc.)
   - o Prefer not to say

12. What is your ethnicity/race?
   - o Caucasian
   - o African-American
   - o Latino-American or Hispanic-American
   - o Asian-American
   - o Native American

o Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
o Two or More
o Other/Unknown
o Prefer not to say

13. What is your religion?
o Catholicism/Christianity
o Judaism
o Islam
o Buddhism
o Hinduism
o Other _____
o Not applicable
o Prefer not to say

14. What is your political stance?
o Strongly Liberal
o Slightly Liberal
o Neutral
o Slightly Conservative
o Strongly Conservative

Thank you for participating in our survey.
We appreciate your time and input.

Please be informed that the research team created the news report presented at the beginning of the survey using summaries from various media resources. Our goal was to gain insights into public communication by understanding people's perceptions and attitudes regarding the discrepancy between a nation's narrative and its subsequent actions.
Thank you once again for your valuable contribution!