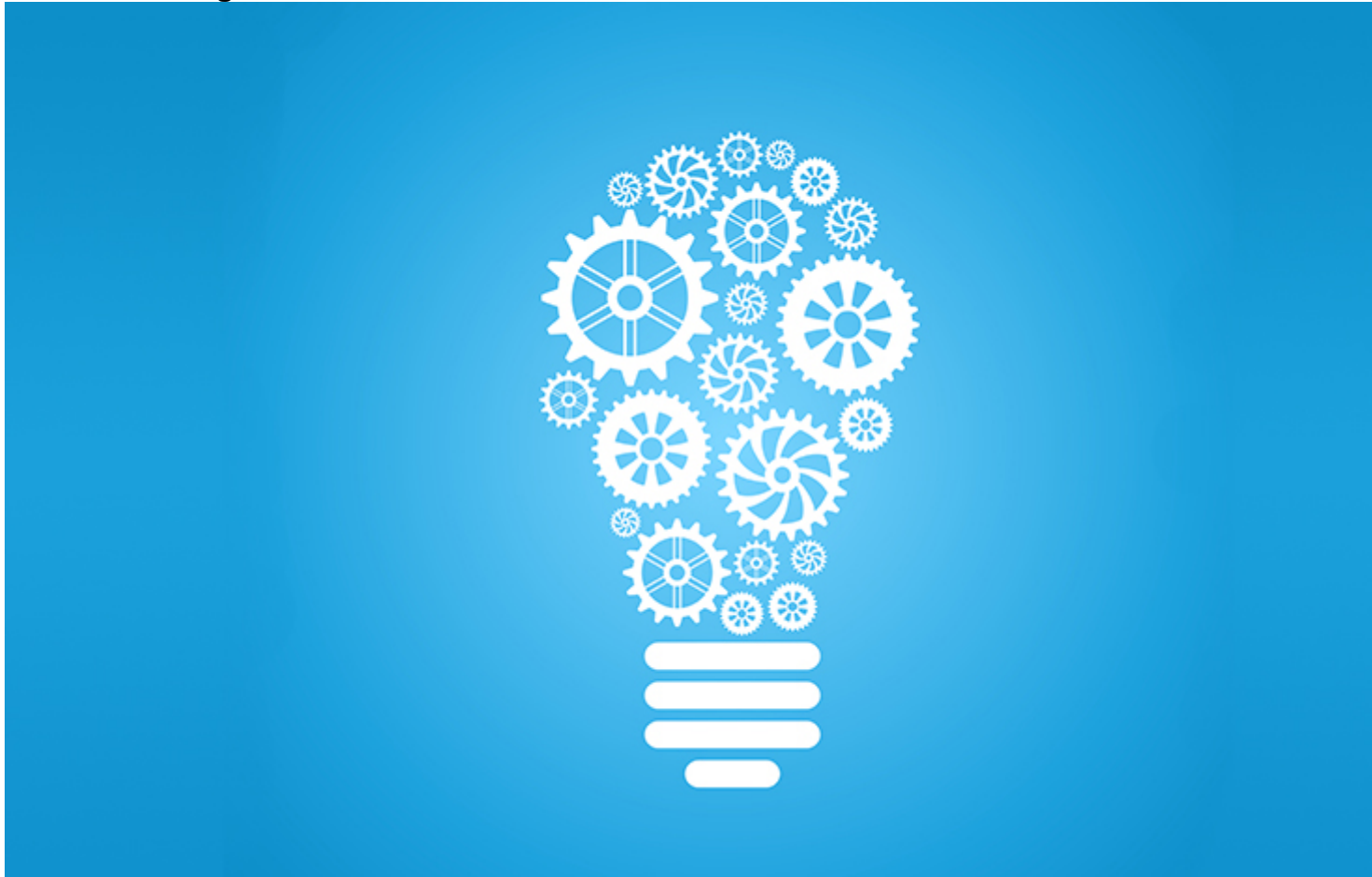


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Oct 10, 2022 by **Kadir Jun Ayhan**, **Efe Sevin**, **Christina Florencia Mandagi**

A Conversation on Methodological Approaches to Public Diplomacy ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: *This piece is based on a special issue of the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*: “Special Issue: Moving Public Diplomacy Research Forward: Methodological Approaches” edited by Kadir Jun Ayhan and Efe Sevin. Christina Mandagi assisted with summarizing the roundtable discussion, described below.*

In February 2020, we (the editors) published [our call for papers](#) for a [Place Branding and Public Diplomacy special issue](#) on methodological approaches in public diplomacy. We argued, back then, we wanted to “provide a venue for practitioners and scholars of public diplomacy to scrutinize instruments of methodology and evaluation for more rigorous studies in the field.”

After two years of work, we finally have all our articles published online. Both to mark this occasion and to discuss what is next, we organized a [virtual roundtable](#), hosted by Ewha Public Diplomacy Center, with our authors, guest editors and editors-in-chief of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.

In our introduction of the special issue and during the roundtable, we suggested that early research on public diplomacy focused on conceptualization and is heavily normative, and we thought that there was a need for a conversation on methodological approaches to public diplomacy.

We only asked two questions to our participants in the roundtable. We started with what the authors saw as the biggest gap in public diplomacy methodology. Then, we moved to bridging the gap between practice and study. Our authors were invited to discuss how their proposed methodologies can help assess and evaluate public diplomacy projects.

Seckin Baris Gulmez of İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University and Miray Ates of TOBB University of Economics and Technology emphasized the lack of qualitative longitudinal research in public diplomacy which can help connect past and present practices of the same country over a long period of time to trace changes and continuity of such practices.

Steven L. Pike (Syracuse University) as a former practitioner is fully aware of the difficulty to find a robust method that can predict the impact of a single program, particularly when the time horizon is very long. His “Q methodology” approach aimed to make up for the “awfully” subjective impact studies based merely on self-reporting.

Zhao Alexandre Huang of the Université Paris Nanterre admitted that we rarely integrate the evolution of foreign policy into our understanding of public diplomacy practices. His suggested methodology of historical and discursive institutionalism helps identify the evolution of the system and institutions in the case of public diplomacy policies.

Eulynn Shiu of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and her team of practitioners were not satisfied with the assessment models for evaluating the impact of international broadcasting, and they built and introduced their mixed-methods impact model necessary to evaluate [USAGM's](#) public diplomacy work, which includes focus groups interviews, monitoring panels, content analysis (USAGM content versus competitors' content), nationally representative surveys and tracking attitudinal changes of audiences over time.

In the second half of the roundtable, we asked the participants, “How does the proposed methodology in your research give us a better chance at evaluating public diplomacy programs, or how could it be applied, for example, by public diplomacy practitioner institutions from around the world?”

Phillip Arceneaux of Miami University and Lindsey Bier of the University of Southern California highlighted the importance of incorporating qualitative methods to understand intercultural communication both in research and practice of public diplomacy to consider cultural differences.

Imran Hasnat and Glenn Leshner, both of the University of Oklahoma emphasized that public diplomacy practitioners can use experimental design to understand the likelihood of success of their campaigns by marrying the theoretical with the applied without having to go through the more costly trial-and-error approach.

The journal's co-editor Robert Govers shared his hope for the potential contribution of this special issue given the interdisciplinary nature of the journal, while the journal's other co-editor James Pamment referred to the evolution of the field in just over a decade, and saw this special issue as another building block in this evolution. Pamment added that the special issue and roundtable has shown the need for more discussion on the difference between foundational research and applied research, especially regarding fundamental questions around methodology.

Once again, we would like to thank our authors and editors of [Place Branding and Public Diplomacy](#) for making this special issue happen, and we hope that the [special issue](#) will serve as a conversation starter on methodological approaches to public diplomacy.
