

Shakespeare and British Public Diplomacy

Zhengqi Shao^{1,a,*}

¹Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

^ashaozhengqidonna@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: Shakespeare has gained great popularity all around the world. The article is based on Harold Lasswell's 5Ws of communication and examines the UK's public diplomacy efforts exemplified using Shakespeare's plays as a cultural symbol. By analyzing the "Who (Sender), Say What (Content), In Which Channel, To Whom (Receiver), and With What Effect" of the UK's public diplomacy, this article highlights the strategic use of Shakespeare's works as a powerful public diplomacy tool for soft power projection. The UK government has strategically promoted Shakespeare's plays through festivals, media collaborations, educational initiatives, and cultural tourism, targeting both domestic and foreign audiences. These efforts have not only enhanced the UK's cultural influence but have also generated positive perceptions of the UK internationally.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Public Diplomacy, 5Ws Communication

1. Introduction

The term "public diplomacy" has evolved in the field of international relations to define aspects of those relations that take place apart from interactions between state structures. Edmund Gullion, a professional diplomat, coined the phrase "public diplomacy" in 1965. The Center for Public Diplomacy was established by a diplomat and the dean of Tufts University's School of Law and Diplomacy, Murrow, Edward R. The Center defines the concept of public diplomacy as "the impact of public opinion formation and foreign policy execution".

Especially after WWII, the UK is diminishing its hard power drastically, softer power is gaining more significance. Joseph S. Nye Jr observes that "public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power." He also points out, the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. ^[1] Shakespeare's play rests on the cultural region.

How to enhance the country's soft power through public diplomacy? This depends on the methods to implement public diplomacy. In the western world, "propaganda" was earlier understood as "public diplomacy". Although the simple direct equivalent relationship was later denied, the role of international communication in public diplomacy is still extraordinary. For example, Dick Holbrooke, the former ambassador of the United States to the United Nations, once said, "You can call it public diplomacy, or public affairs or propaganda. If it's in a blunt way, it's propaganda." ^[2] This view still places public diplomacy in the traditional ideological confrontation environment, and uses propaganda as the main mode of public diplomacy, representing the basic views of a group of western international political scholars. From the experience of the cold war, there is a great similarity between propaganda and public diplomacy. However, Nicholas Cull points out that public diplomacy is pure and enduring while political propaganda is powerful and difficult to control. And public diplomacy practitioners must have a clear understanding of political propaganda to avoid indulging in it. ^[3] In the following article, I will analyze the UK public diplomacy exemplified by Shakespeare's play.

2. Shakespeare's plays as a tool for soft power projection

Harold Lasswell puts forward the famous 5Ws of communication: Who, Say What, In Which Channel, To Whom, and With What Effect. ^[4] Public diplomacy is closely connected with political communication since it requires one nation to spread its cultural influence on others.

2.1. Who: Sender

According to the principles of *Political Communication*: The sender of political communication also serves as the ultimate recipient of the process.^[5] In the case of Shakespeare's plays, the subject can be identified as the British government. While the actors, actresses, theaters, and production teams all contribute to the dissemination of these plays, they represent only a fraction of the broader public diplomacy process. The British Council has presented a comprehensive report on Shakespeare's global influence, and in 2016, on the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the British government launched "all public diplomacy activities centered around the cultural symbol of Shakespeare."

Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong introduced the concept of concentric circles in interpersonal and social relationships, illustrating how these circles expand outward from each individual like ripples in water. These circles often intersect with those of others, highlighting the natural patterns and processes of existing relationships. Communication and diplomacy predominantly operate within these preexisting relationships, rather than attempting to create new ones. In line with this perspective, as described by Ellen Huijgh, "Successful public diplomacy begins at home," emphasizing that the nation itself forms the core of the public diplomacy process.^[6]

2.2. Say What: Content

"In the past public diplomacy activities, Britain's creative industries almost covered many fields, such as architecture, literature, music, etc., and cultural symbols were very rich."^[7] The fusion of meanings between symbols may showcase a country's long and splendid history and culture, but each symbol exerts equal force, making the impression less prominent. Especially in this information era. Just as Nye says: Plenty of information leads to scarcity of attention. When people are overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them, it is hard to know what to focus on. That is why, the UK needs to focus on one symbol and dive deeper into it. Then they chose Shakespeare.

2.2.1. Why is Shakespeare's play a good tool for public diplomacy?

First of all, we can hardly ignore Shakespeare's influence. Long before the emergence of the concept of "public diplomacy" as coined by former U.S. diplomat Edmund Gullion in the 1960s, the colossal renown of Shakespeare had already permeated history. Even during his lifetime, various renditions of Shakespeare's plays were staged throughout Europe.

Shakespeare was born in an era characterized by a flourishing culture and theatrical scene. The rise of the "Cult of Elizabeth" was attributed to her power and successful expansion. This historical backdrop presented Shakespeare and his works with an opportunity to develop and achieve widespread acclaim within the nation. Over time, Shakespeare has evolved into a cultural emblem of the United Kingdom on the global stage, as noted by Louis A. Montrose.^[8]

One noteworthy example of Shakespeare's influence can be observed in Germany. His plays have been performed in Germany since their inception and have been cherished as a fundamental component of German cultural tradition since they were popularized by Goethe and Schlegel in the late 18th century. Similarly, in Japan, Shakespeare's works made their debut in the late 19th century when the country opened its doors to foreign trade and cultural influences.^[9]

Furthermore, the prevailing theme of love in Shakespeare's plays resonates universally, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This theme, which explores the fundamental aspects of human nature, captivates and garners support from readers across the globe. Consequently, it is no surprise that the United Kingdom has chosen Shakespeare as its cultural symbol.

What's more? Just as "Shakespeare Lives on Twitter: cultural diplomacy in the digital age" points out that: "In the digital age, it is often assumed that cultural relations and diplomacy programs inevitably become more collaborative and dialogic, offering the possibility of engaging with foreign audiences through networked, horizontal, non-hierarchical modes of communication."^[10] The British government is eager to find out a perfect cultural symbol as their new diplomat method.

2.3. In Which Channel

Joseph Nye emphasizes that "the good public diplomacy has to go beyond propaganda." Therefore, it is crucial to explore how to promote this cultural symbol in a meaningful way.

A significant initiative implemented by the British government to propagate Shakespeare is the

Shakespeare Festival. Supported by the British Council, this festival has garnered immense popularity worldwide. The festivities gained traction since the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, which featured a series of cultural activities centered around Shakespeare. From April to November 2012, the Royal Shakespeare Company and international arts groups collaborated to organize the Shakespeare Festival. This event showcased performances of Shakespeare's works in more than 40 languages, presenting diverse interpretations from arts groups in the UK and across the globe. The National Theatre of China even participated, delivering a Mandarin version of "Charles III" infused with Chinese elements.^[11]

In contemporary times, media plays a pivotal role in public diplomacy. As a former French foreign minister observed, the United States possesses the power to inspire dreams and desires in others due to its mastery of global images through film and television.^[12] Similarly, a significant aspect of British public diplomacy lies in media diplomacy, capitalizing on the nation's renowned media outlets. The BBC, for instance, has produced the "Hollow Crown" series, specifically curated for the Olympics. This series includes adaptations of Shakespearean works such as "Charles II," "Henry IV" (Parts 1 and 2), and "Henry V." The BBC also launched a radio series titled "Shakespeare's Restless World" in the same year. Noteworthy television productions, like the comprehensive collection produced by the BBC in the 1970s and 1980s, have long served as educational and entertaining content in numerous countries. Advancements in technology have facilitated the global streaming of theatrical performances, opening up avenues to enhance Shakespeare's international recognition and accessibility. Through these mediums, Shakespeare has successfully become a symbol that facilitates British international communication.

Shakespearean films themselves have attained tremendous popularity. Esteemed actors such as Brando in "Julius Caesar," Olivier in "Richard III," Burton and Taylor in "The Taming of the Shrew," Pacino in "The Merchant of Venice," and Stubbs and Bonham-Carter in "Twelfth Night" have brought Shakespeare's works to wider audiences beyond traditional theatergoers.

Moreover, in 2016, the "Shakespeare Lives" campaign further ignited a remarkable "Shakespeare cult" globally, with nations worldwide participating in this extraordinary festival. The digital elements of the program also played an important role in increasing participation by making the content more accessible to a global public, but also in encouraging the audiences to engage as active co-promoters of content. According to the investment done by the Department of Social and Political Sciences, Brunel University, social media provides the audience with the special advantage of engagement. The top three activities were watching and commenting on streamed live events, using transnational technological innovations such as the Shakespeare doodle, and commenting on celebrities' visits and performances. "By emphasizing Shakespeare rather than Britain, the British Council followed the logic of a cultural diplomacy strategy that assumes a transfer of value (cultural value translates to prestige or diplomatic values) from one culture to another via cultural products." This is a newborn channel in this digital era.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's popularity has contributed to the rise of cultural tourism. Dennis Kennedy defines cultural tourism as a form of recreation in which travelers allocate significant leisure time and financial resources to engage in cultural activities. The hometown of Shakespeare, Stratford, has relied on pilgrims attending the Shakespeare Festival since the establishment of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. The UK government provides subsidies to the town to ensure its cultural prominence, which has led to the development of several theaters, museums, research centers, libraries, and souvenir stores.^[13]

2.4. To Whom: Receiver

Who constitutes the "public" in public diplomacy? Historically, the term "public" in public diplomacy primarily referred to foreign publics. In her extensive examination of public diplomacy scholarship, former CPD Fellow Kathy Fitzpatrick discovered "divergent views" on the concept but found a widespread consensus that it pertains to engaging with foreign publics rather than domestic ones. In traditional diplomacy, the representation is between the Sending nation and the Receiving nation. However, in public diplomacy, this paradigm shifts to the Sending nation and the Receiving public. Despite being the most distant public in terms of geographical proximity, the foreign public holds paramount significance within the concentric circles of public diplomacy.

As demonstrated earlier, the UK government has successfully established a comprehensive and robust domestic cultural industry chain that extends its influence to the international arena. Shakespeare and the incorporation of his works into the British education system exemplify this approach. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust offers a variety of courses tailored to students of different ages, promoting Shakespearean education. Since 2014, a significant promotion event called Shakespeare Week has been held nationwide in March or April each year, targeting elementary school students. This event garners

participation from schools, theaters, art galleries, museums, libraries, musicians, publishers, and various sectors of society, including historical sites. In its inaugural year, over 3,000 schools and 150 institutions signed up for Shakespeare Week, with the foundation's goal being to engage half of the country's primary school students (approximately 3 million people) in the event.

Furthermore, the Great Shakespeare Debate has taken place annually in Stratford since 2005, catering to college preparatory students. This competition not only enhances students' knowledge of Shakespeare but hones their debating skills, potentially benefiting their academic performance in the future as well.

These concerted efforts effectively cultivate the British students' interest in Shakespeare. Simultaneously, this collective enthusiasm and consensus exert a substantial influence on foreign publics, as I will elaborate on in the subsequent section.

2.5. *With What Effect*

Shakespeare has been a wonderful symbol of public diplomacy. According to the British Council, which commissioned the YouGov survey involving 18,000 individuals from 15 different countries, the results reveal a broad and favorable global recognition of Shakespeare. The Council, dedicated to promoting cultural relations between Britain and other nations, asserts that Shakespeare's international influence contributes to fostering a positive perception of the United Kingdom. Interestingly, over one-third of the survey participants expressed that Shakespeare's works evoked a more positive sentiment toward Britain as a whole. Notably, the highest percentage of respondents holding this view was found in Brazil (57 percent) and India (62 percent). Fig. 1 demonstrates that Shakespeare's reception abroad surpasses even his reception within Britain itself, further highlighting his profound global appeal.

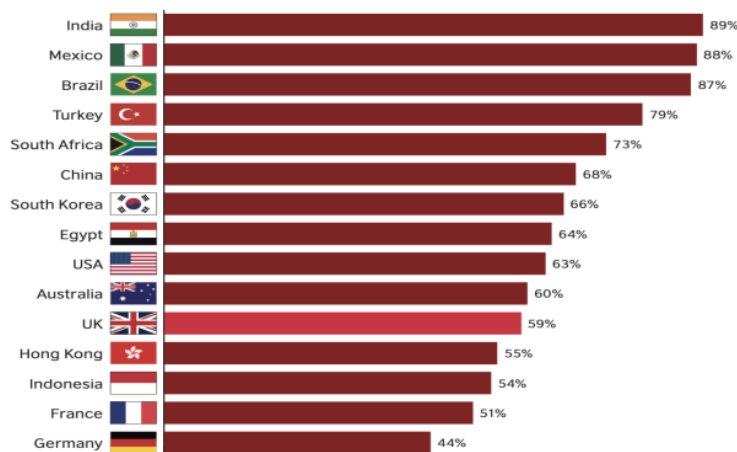


Figure 1: Question: Would you agree that you like Shakespeare

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, public diplomacy has evolved in contemporary times, expanding beyond the traditional scope of government actions and incorporating a diverse range of actors. This transformation has become crucial for nations seeking to exercise influence and build relationships on the global stage.

Shakespeare's plays, as exemplified in the UK's public diplomacy efforts, serve as a powerful means to project soft power and foster cultural relations. By strategically utilizing various channels, such as festivals, media, films, and cultural tourism, the UK has successfully promoted Shakespeare's works and enhanced its international communication. The British Council has made multiple efforts to facilitate public diplomacy. This international acclaim, surpassing even the reception within the UK, highlights the exceptional appeal and influence of Shakespeare in shaping perceptions and generating a positive attitude towards the United Kingdom.

In essence, Shakespeare's plays serve as a remarkable tool for the UK's public diplomacy, showcasing the power of cultural symbols in advancing soft power and fostering connections between nations. As the UK continues to navigate the complexities of the global landscape, its strategic promotion of Shakespeare's works exemplifies the importance of cultural diplomacy and its profound impact on international relations.

References

- [1] Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2008) *Diplomacy and Soft Power*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World*, Vol. 616, pp. 94-110.
- [2] Zhou Qingan (2018) *Beyond Visible Border: Public Diplomacy Global Communication*, Chinese Communication University Press, pp.27
- [3] Nicholas Cull (2019) *Public Diplomacy Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age (Contemporary Political Communication)* Shanghai People's Press, pp.71
- [4] Lasswell Harold (1948). *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. The Communication of Ideas*, New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies. pp. 117.
- [5] Jing Xuemin (2015) *Political Communication*, Communication University of China Press, January 2015, pp.33
- [6] Zaharna R.S. (2013) *Culture Posts: Who Is The Public In Public Diplomacy? "Public Diplomacy on the Frontlines"* Conference, May 3, 2013.
- [7] Fan Pei and Long Xiaonong. (2017) *The Choice and Use of Cultural Symbols in British public diplomacy. International Communication No.251.08*, pp.76-78.
- [8] Louis A. Montrose (1999) *Idols of the Queen: Policy, Gender, and the Picturing of Elizabeth I, Representations, Autumn, 1999, No. 68, pp. 108-161*
- [9] Alasdair Donaldson (2016) *How Shakespeare is viewed around the globe and the role his work can play to support the UK's soft power. British Council Shakespeare: All the World's 2016/F305*, pp.14.
- [10] Billur A Ozgul, Eva N McAvoy, Marie Cillespie & Ben O'Loughlin (2022) *Shakespeare Lives on Twitter: Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age 2022, VOL. 28, NO. 2, pp.204-220*
- [11] Zhu Lin (2015) *Research on the Successful Communication of Shakespeare's Drama*, Beijing Foreign Language University. pp.17
- [12] Vedrine Hubert, and Dominique Moisi (2001) *France in an age of globalization. Washington, DC: Brookings Institutions Press*, pp.3
- [13] Dennis Kennedy (1998) *Shakespeare and Cultural Tourism, Theatre Journal, May 1998, Vol. 50, No. 2, Shakespeare and Theatrical Modernisms, pp. 176-177*