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PIONEERING NARRATIVES: RAP NEWS AS A INSTRUMENT IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: In the contemporary era of global communication, the landscape of public diplomacy is evolving rapidly. Traditional actors, such as governments and international broadcasters, are adapting to the digital age by utilizing new media platforms to disseminate information and reach international audiences. Concurrently, non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and even extremist groups, are harnessing the power of new media to engage directly with global populations, creating a diverse array of public diplomacy initiatives. Amid this dynamic environment, understanding the multifaceted nature and effects of public diplomacy presents a formidable challenge.

While the importance of public diplomacy cannot be overstated, current research in the field is marked by several limitations. Many existing studies predominantly focus on historical events from the Cold War era, providing limited insight into contemporary practices. Moreover, the majority of research primarily examines the public diplomacy efforts of state actors, particularly the U.S. government, leaving the activities of non-state entities largely unexplored. A small but growing body of work has begun to address these empirical gaps by investigating recent initiatives sponsored by various organizations. However, there remains ample room for further research to broaden our understanding.

Keywords: public diplomacy, new media, international communication, non-governmental organizations, global engagement

Introduction

The practice of mediated public diplomacy is increasingly fragmented. Governments, which once focused largely on disseminating information via international broadcasting, are now attempting to reach audiences via new media (Knowlton, 2014). These same new media technologies also empower an array of actors outside of governments, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and even terrorists, that seek to effect change on the international stage by speaking directly to populations across the globe (Castells, 2008). As a result, more mediated public diplomacy initiatives are emanating from more sources than perhaps ever before. In the midst of this tumult, it is challenging to capture the contours and effects of public diplomacy. Yet, as the global community faces a number of issues—such as environmental sustainability, human rights, and global security—that cannot be unilaterally addressed by any single

Despite these high stakes, Gilboa (2008) convincingly argues that public diplomacy research is marked by its limitations. Most relevant studies are historical, often focusing on events that occurred during the Cold War (e.g., Lord, 1998). Additionally, there is relatively little research about the public diplomacy activities of entities (such

as NGOs) other than the U.S. government. A growing, but small, number of projects (e.g., McPherson, 2015; Powers, 2015; Samuel-Azran, 2013; Zatepilina-Monacell, 2009; Zhang & Swartz, 2009) address these empirical gaps by studying recent initiatives sponsored by diverse organizations—but there is still clearly room for further research. Another challenge is to better integrate theory into the practice and evaluation of public diplomacy (Gilboa, 2000, 2008). With this in mind, scholars have recently offered perspectives drawn from public relations (Fitzpatrick, 2007; L'Etang, 2009), international relations (Youmans & Powers, 2012), and communication (Entman, 2008) as possibilities—but few have thus far integrated this theoretical turn in their applied design and research.

Addressing these empirical and theoretical opportunities, we report on the effects of a primingoriented public diplomacy effort by Peripheral Vision International (PVI), a media-focused NGO based in New York and primarily working in Uganda. In February 2014, PVI launched a weekly rap news program called *Newz Beat* on NTV, a national free-to-air and satellite broadcast TV channel headquartered in Kampala. Drawing upon a tradition of entertainment-education development communication research, PVI seeks to cultivate democratic norms and expectations among Ugandans with *Newz Beat*—an unorthodox public diplomacy initiative. More specifically, PVI attempted to raise the salience of domestic political corruption—a key impediment to progress in many domains in Uganda—by broadcasting a collection of stories detailing political corruption around the world (but *not* in Uganda) on *Newz Beat*. In addressing this topic, PVI skirted the possibility of government censorship with a subtlety that is invaluable in a nation that is known to quash free speech (Freedom House, 2013).

To evaluate the results of this anticorruption effort, we employ an experimental design. Results indicate that the priming stories increased the importance of corruption in people's overall evaluations of Uganda's government. But the foreign corruption segments also produced an unexpected result: People in the treatment condition reported significantly more favorable evaluations of Ugandan political leaders' handling of domestic corruption than those in the control condition. These results are already informing the ongoing production of *Newz Beat* and the program's coverage of corruption. More broadly, as a case study, this article depicts an effort to integrate media effects theory into the practice and evaluation of new forms of public diplomacy. As such, the findings may be illuminating for those engaged in planning or evaluating other public diplomacy campaigns—be they sponsored by a government, NGO, or other entity.

PVI, International Communication, and Influence

Since 2011, PVI has produced and distributed an array of messages about civil society, family planning, gender-based violence, disability rights, entrepreneurship, and many other topics. These messages take various forms—traditional public service announcements, animation, edutainment drama, short documentary, rap news—and are primarily delivered over the air or through the distribution of physical media (such as DVDs) via informal networks throughout Uganda. Messages are created independently, with local grassroots organizations and/or with input from international donors. Some messages are designed as single-shot interventions and others are part of ongoing programming. PVI is supported by numerous disparate sources large and small, including the Ford Foundation and the Segal

Family Foundation, but it does not receive funding from any government. (See

http://www.pvinternational.org for further information about PVI and its mission.)

At root, PVI works to provide compelling, informative media to Ugandans with the aim of cultivating support for progressive values such as tolerance, equality, and diversity. Some, though not all, of PVI's campaigns challenge the status quo in Uganda. As such, PVI's activities echo the efforts of major international environmental NGOs that seek to facilitate new climate change policies by activating disparate global publics through communication (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Empowered by new communication technologies, international NGOs (and their

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funders) can circumvent national governments to build powerful citizen coalitions across political boundaries—behavior that may be construed as a modern form of public diplomacy (Castells, 2008). But, simultaneously, PVI also owes a debt to decades of development communication campaigns that distribute Western ideas and values throughout the Third World (McAnany, 2012). These initiatives—particularly those employing entertainment-education tactics— provide a blueprint for PVI's approach to reaching audiences.

Traditional definitions of mediated public diplomac describe a process in which state actors attempt to influence public opinion in foreign countries through some form of communication (Gilboa,
2000). Regardless of context, these media interventions face many challenges (Youmans & Powers, 2012). Such campaigns are often attempts at persuasion in hostile environs. In addition, their messages may be perceived as biased because of the often external or foreign source. Such efforts also may be met with targeted counterinformation initiatives or censure. Together, these obstacles contextualize the mixed results of the United States' modern public diplomacy media campaigns (el-Nawawy, 2006; Fahmy, Wanta, & Nisbet, 2012).
Modern media technologies complicate this work in at least two important ways. First, as Castells (2008) argues, actors outside of governments now use media to directly reach disparate publics to "mobilize people in support of [their] causes . . . [and] put pressure on governments" (p. 85). The independence of these organizations may offer credibility and enable novel strategies or messages (Zhang & Swartz, 2009). Second, the proliferation of media channels "privilege[s] the reception rights of individuals" (Price, Haas, & Margolin, 2008, p. 169). In other words, members of the target audience have more media choice today and, consequently, greater ability to tailor their own media consumption. When considered together, these factors suggest that a greater number of diverse, possibly even countervailing, public diplomacy efforts from disparate (often nongovernmental) sources are now competing to reach an increasingly elusive audience.
As a form of international communication, public diplomacy is in some ways similar to decades of development communication efforts—but there are key differences as well. Development communication— its origins associated with policies from the Truman administration and authors such as Schramm (1964) and Rogers (1962)—is often focused on distributing information from the West in service of education, economic growth, and modernization in the Third World (Hornik, 1988). These programs typically operate in conjunction with local governments, often at the behest of major funders such as UNESCO and USAID, are relatively noncontroversial and, over time, have shifted toward dialogue and participation rather than one-way information dissemination (McAnany, 2012). Meanwhile, public diplomacy campaigns often address contentious matters and may conflict with the positions of local governments. Development communication programs that have the support of local governments often incorporate interpersonal, onthe-ground, information dissemination (e.g., Drake, Fajardo, & Miller, 1980)—paths that are less available to public diplomacy efforts that may spur controversy. Consequently, public diplomacy often relies on mass media to spread information.
Development communication programs that employ entertainment-education are designed to "increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change covert behavior" (Singhal & Rogers, 2003, p. 5) while being appealing enough to attract an audience. Scholars working with entertainment-education media have cultivated strategies for engaging and informing audiences that are applicable in increasingly high-choice media environments (Singhal, Wang, Rogers, Rice, & Atkin, 2013). In addition, this work provides a body of empirical evidence that illustrates the efficacy of well-executed media interventions offering both models and motivation for this project (Poindexter, 2003). *Newz Beat*—described in greater detail below—is an attempt to produce news that appeals to Uganda's youth—an important task, because Uganda is the youngest (median age: 15.5) nation in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). Inspired by

entertainment-education findings (Piotrow & de Fossard, 2003), the format is novel, authentic, high-quality, and sustained in its delivery of subtle, relevant information.

PVI's work—including *Newz Beat*—exists at the nexus of public diplomacy and entertainmenteducation development communication. A key goal of the program is to encourage Ugandans to hold their government accountable and demand democratic transparency—an aim that is consonant with the traditional objectives of U.S. public diplomacy even though the current ruling regime in Uganda is called a key strategic partner by the U.S. government (U.S. Department of State, 2013). With these tensions in mind, *Newz Beat* cannot cleanly be defined as a traditional example of either development communication (done in concert with governments and focused on noncontroversial subjects) or public diplomacy (done by governments and reflective of their foreign policy objectives). *Newz Beat* is, instead, a hybrid form of public diplomacy using tactics inspired by development communication campaigns to prompt the Ugandan public to demand better domestic governance.

Compared to persuasive efforts sponsored by a government, an NGO-led public diplomacy initiative like *Newz Beat* offers several clear advantages. To start, the audience's a priori skepticism about new information may be limited when no strong (negative) opinions about the source exist before exposure. Further, not only can such a program arrive with a blank slate, it is also more likely to be transmitted domestically. In addition, NGOs may have more flexibility than large governmental bureaucracies when creating messages or campaigns. Small, narrowly focused NGOs can campaign on specific topics without weighing the implications for other concerns (such as military alliances). Thus, while NGOs face limitations—scale, credibility, employee safety—as well, the advantages they possess in creating and distributing messages make NGO-led public diplomacy a compelling object of study.

Contributing to Public Diplomacy Research

Given the growing interest in conducting public diplomacy campaigns and the complex conditions that affect their success, research opportunities abound. Chief among these, for our purposes, is that "almost every study of public diplomacy mentions NGOs, but very few studies examine how they work, whether they adopt a political agenda, and how they affect policies of other actors" (Gilboa, 2008, p. 74). Observers (Carothers, 2006; Steinberg, 2006) claim that NGOs' public diplomacy work is influential, and recent field experiments offer indirect substantiation for this notion (Moehler, 2014). These studies suggest that simply providing enhanced access to relevant news and information can increase voter turnout and informed participation in places like India and Mozambique (Aker, Collier, & Vicente, 2013; Banerjee, Kumar, Pande, & Su, 2011). There is, however, evidence of boomerang effects as well. For example, Malesky, Schuler, and Tran (2012) found that offering the Vietnamese public more information about the activities of elected delegates prompted the delegates to conform more closely to the positions of the ruling authoritarian regime instead of better representing their constituents.

Perhaps part of this unpredictability stems from the fact that, as Entman (2008) asserts, "The literature on public diplomacy lacks a theoretical infrastructure" (p. 87). Recent scholarly work responding to this theoretical deficiency has variously focused on: delineating the conditions that bear upon a campaign's success (Sheafer et al., 2013), integrating an understanding of the process of diffusion into interventions to better control outcomes (Entman, 2008), emphasizing responsiveness to the interactivity of the public diplomacy process in campaign design (Youmans & Powers, 2012), and illuminating the role of communication in establishing norms (Paluck, 2009). Another viable path—which traces back to early work on communication and persuasion (e.g., Hovland, 1953)—stems from the literature on media effects (Gregory, 2008).

The communication literature is rich in theories and models of media effects such as "agenda setting," "framing," and "priming," but public diplomacy scholars and practitioners rarely employ them, and very few studies have integrated media effects with public diplomacy concepts. (Gilboa, 2008, p. 63)

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The few studies that employ priming and framing constructs in the context of public diplomacy report mixed results. Schatz and Levine (2010) conducted a framing experiment that manipulated the source of a pro–United States message displayed to participants in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They found that attributing the statement to an unpopular president (George W. Bush) yielded a boomerang effect— but that there were circumstances (frames) in which message exposure produced a positive influence upon people's evaluations of the United States. Though not a media intervention, a study of visits made by high-level U.S. officials to foreign countries showed similar conditional effects upon foreign public opinion of the United States (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009). Here, the authors argue that such visits prime publics—but that the visits are perceived through frames related to the officials' perceived credibility. If the official is viewed as credible, he or she may exert positive influence on foreign public opinion. But when the official lacks credibility, a visit may produce backlash.

The disparate outcomes of these analyses are indicative of the need for further theory-driven study. Initial attempts at integrating media effects theory into public diplomacy research offer proof of concept: Priming and framing notions developed largely in the context of domestic political communication in the United States seem applicable in foreign domains. Achieving the desired effect, however, may be elusive. Additionally, little research thus far explores the effects of real, ongoing, NGO-led public diplomacy campaigns.

Priming as a Mechanism of Influence

To prime is to alter the informational context that precedes an evaluation, thereby shaping that evaluation (Srull & Wyer, 1979). More specifically, "media priming refers to the short-term impact of exposure to the media on subsequent judgments or behaviors" (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Dillman Carpentier, 2008, p. 74). At a basic level, priming effects are often attributed to an increase in the temporary accessibility of information (Dillman Carpentier, 2014). A tradition of psychology research suggests that the results of these informational primes can further be sorted into two categories: assimilation and contrast effects (Mussweiler, 2007). An assimilation effect is one in which the informational prime "leads to the displacement of the judgment of objects towards the anchor" (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983, p. 325). In other words, an assimilation effect occurs when a subsequent judgment more closely aligns with the example provided by a prime. On the other hand, a contrast effect occurs when judgments are displaced away from the behavior (or information) modeled in the prime. A key underlying component of either process is the concept that the prime activates upon exposure.

Predicting whether (and when) a prime will produce an assimilation or contrast effect is challenging. Mussweiler (2007) argues that when people encounter information, they naturally seek to evaluate it within the context of what they already know: "Whenever information is perceived, processed, or evaluated—it seems—this information is compared to a salient context, norm, or standard" (p. 166). Once new information is deemed relevant, several conditions may forecast the direction of its influence (Appel, 2011; Dijksterhuis et al., 1998; Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009; Herr et al., 1983). Notably, the perceived similarity of a prime and an evaluation target leads to initial categorization as "like" or "other," which, respectively, yield assimilation or contrast effects (Appel, 2011; Mussweiler, 2007). Also implicated in this process is the extremity of a prime. A prime that is seen as extreme "is more likely to be used as an anchor with which a target stimulus is contrasted" (Stapel & Winkielman, 1998, p. 635). Meanwhile, primes that are seen as moderate are more likely to produce assimilation effects.

Priming Political Attitudes

Many researchers have documented the priming effects of political communication. Foundational research shows that news coverage of a topic can raise the salience of that issue and increase its proportional weight or importance in citizens' overall evaluation of a president or government (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), though this effect generally may be short in duration (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). More recent scholarship outlines the priming effects of exposure to various forms of political-entertainment programming. Holbrook and Hill

(2005), for example, report evidence that exposure to several (fictional) crime dramas (*Without a Trace, Robbery Homicide Division, NYPD Blue)* produces increased concern about (real) crime, which, in turn, significantly shapes evaluations of the (real) president. This research suggests that even media content that is tangential to a judgment may act as a prime.

Though much of the political priming literature relates to U.S. media and politics, of particular relevance to this study are prior works that, though scarcer, explore the interplay between domestic news and attitudes about foreign affairs. For example, a study with U.S. participants tested the possibility that coverage of domestic matters would have a priming effect upon attitudes toward foreign countries (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003). Here, the premise was that a topic (terrorism and illegal drugs) alone would activate people's previously held associations between these topics and specific foreign countries (Libya, Mexico). Statistical evaluation, however, suggested that there was no priming effect. A more recent study conducted in China examined the priming influence of domestic news upon evaluations of U.S. brands (Gao & Li, 2013). In this article, the scholars hypothesized that coverage about Chinese society or business would produce a nationalistic response that could negatively bear upon perceptions of brands from a nation perceived to be antagonistic. The results included evidence that positive news about Chinese products lowered evaluations of Nike and that stories about conflict between the Chinese and U.S. governments lowered evaluations of both Coca-Cola and Nike.

These results from the priming literature illustrate the possibility that priming may occur when the stimulus and target appear, at first, to be distinct and perhaps unrelated. If fictional entertainment can shape the conditions in which political judgments are made and if domestic news can alter perceptions about foreign matters, then perhaps coverage of international events on a rap news program can factor into viewers' assessments of domestic political matters.

Newz Beat and the Rationale for Priming Corruption

Newz Beat began airing in February 2014 on NTV after its producers—including the coauthor of this article—successfully pitched network executives on the potential of the program to attract and please an audience. (Rap news programs had previously succeeded in other African nations such as Senegal but had not yet arrived in Uganda [Hinshaw, 2013].) NTV does not pay to produce the program—*Newz Beat*'s production costs are supported by PVI's donors—but the network does keep the advertising revenue that stems from its broadcast. Independence from government funding allows PVI to make such an arrangement—and also may make it more likely for NTV to grant access to its airwaves. On *Newz Beat*, PVI programs cover a broad gamut of topics. Stories are scripted and rapped by three primary MCs (or "newsicians") in both English and Luganda (the primary local language in Kampala) in order to be comprehensible to the widest possible audience. Story topics are selected at PVI's discretion, but the staff must consider the potential response of NTV, its sponsors, and the government. According to Freedom House (2013), the media environment in Uganda is marked by continued "intimidation and harassment from state and nonstate actors" (p. 1), which often leads journalists to self-censor before running afoul of the powers that be.

Since seizing power in 1986, President Yoweri Museveni has benefited from comparisons to his predecessors in Uganda (such as Idi Amin) who had horrific human rights records. Though Museveni and his ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), often stifle free speech and assembly, repression in recent years is less violent and overt than before his regime (Byom, 2014). Still, development in Uganda is progressing slowly, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (2014) estimates that the gross domestic product per capita is only $1,500—leaving many residents living in poverty. An important part of the problem is corruption, which Human Rights Watch (2013) describes as being severe, well known, and a source of suffering for average Ugandans. Though the public is concerned with corruption, activism is limited by government intervention. For example, in 2013, at

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least 28 anticorruption activists were arrested, including pamphleteers who were charged with the "spreading of harmful propaganda" and "possession of prohibited publications" (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Within this context, *Newz Beat* staff members must tread lightly in service of their progressive values. The program cannot reach its full potential without broaching controversial matters, such as corruption, that dramatically affect the lives of Ugandans. So to produce content about corruption for *Newz Beat*, PVI pursued a novel strategy. First, the producers avoided stories that explicitly detailed domestic malfeasance. Doing so protected Ugandan members of the *Newz Beat* staff (a necessity) and facilitated continued access to broadcast airwaves. Second, producers made coverage of international corruption events a recurring theme of their newscast. In doing so, the goal was to use *Newz Beat* to prime government corruption (in general) in the minds of viewers with the hope that increasing the salience of government corruption broadly would cultivate higher expectations among Ugandans of their own leaders.

Previous research has found that the presence and perception of corruption negatively correlates with evaluations of government performance and political trust in several democracies as well as China (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Zhong, 2014). This relationship is not uniform; previously held opinions and information factor in as well. Providing information about international corruption on *Newz Beat* may prompt the audience to think about corruption in Uganda. But providing information about political corruption (even localized or specific instances) also may trigger a generalized distrust of government that suppresses the political engagement of the audience (Chong, De La O, Karlan, & Wantchekon, 2015). The challenge for *Newz Beat* is to address corruption in an artful manner that conveys meaning without simply fueling cynicism—while also forestalling possible censorship or recrimination.

Hypotheses

Inspired by priming research, this project tests whether coverage of international instances of political corruption prime Ugandans' domestic political evaluations. The presence of a significant relationship would give empirical support for a tactic that could be applied to informational campaigns in contested media spaces. Previous scholarship suggests that news (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), entertainment (Holbert et al., 2003; Holbrook & Hill, 2005), and hybrid content (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2006) may all prime political judgments. Additionally, some evidence exists that domestic/nationalistic cues may factor into assessments of foreign/international matters (Gao & Li, 2013; Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009). Accordingly, we predict:

H1: People who are exposed to Newz Beat *stories about international political corruption will weight consideration of domestic corruption in Uganda more heavily in their overall assessments of President Museveni than people who are exposed to a control stimulus.*

Further, we expect that the increased salience of corruption will significantly affect people's evaluations of President Museveni's performance specifically regarding corruption—but not regarding his performance in relation to other matters such as education and the economy. Here, the direction of the effect is key—but difficult to predict. A contrast effect would occur if people exposed to coverage of international corruption evaluated President Museveni as *dissimilar* to the prime. Thus, a contrast effect would produce a *more favorable* assessment of Museveni's handling of political corruption. An assimilation effect would occur if people evaluated Museveni and the international instances of corruption as *similar*— and then rated Museveni's handling of corruption *less favorably*.

As outlined above, contrast and assimilation effects stem from several factors, including the extremity of the prime and the perceived similarity between it and the judgment target. The extremity of instances of political corruption that warrant international news coverage implies that there will be a contrast effect; and international examples of corruption are events in countries that may differ dramatically from Uganda. But the grist of political

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corruption—often simply nepotism or embezzlement— is largely similar across nations and continents. With this tension in mind, we propose a research question:

RQ1: Will exposure to Newz Beat *coverage of international corruption events produce an assimilation or contrast effect among people in the treatment condition?*

Data and Method

To investigate the priming effects of *Newz Beat*, we conducted a two-by-two experiment in Kampala, Uganda We recruited 523 people to view one of two editions of *Newz Beat* created specifically for this project. The treatment stimulus contained four stories about government corruption and malfeasance around the world, and the control stimulus included four segments about international events not related to governance. All the news segments had previously aired on separate episodes of *Newz Beat*; they were collected and edited into cohesive episodes that mimicked the typical length of the program. The scripts of the segments were written without specific consideration of this project. Each episode of *Newz Beat* was embedded between music videos by Ugandan pop stars (Sheebah and Eddy Kenzo) to better simulate typical viewing conditions.

For the second factor, people were recruited to participate in either group settings at public video halls (*bibanda)* or as individuals at small local businesses (salons, fruit stands, etc.). They were randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions. All participants gave oral consent, watched a 12:40 video stimulus (on a shared screen in the video halls, on a small tablet in the local businesses), then completed a paper survey in either English or Luganda (their choice). For reasons of simplicity and power, people in the group and individual conditions are pooled here for analysis. Additionally, only people who indicated that they understood the video stimuli (which were in Luganda) "well" or "very well" are included in these analyses. All told, the sample analyzed here contains 372 participants.

Following Iyengar and Kinder (1987), all participants were asked three questions about the Ugandan government's handling of matters pertaining to specific policy domains: education, the economy, and corruption. These questions probed the participants' assessments of the ruling party—the National Resistance Movement (NRM)—and the president's performance, following this format:

Do you agree or disagree with the way that President Museveni and the NRM are handling _____? (disagree strongly, disagree, agree, agree strongly)

In addition, participants were asked to rate President Museveni's job performance on a 0 to 100 scale. Together, these four questions are the dependent variables in this study. The balance of the survey included 15 other questions that explored participants' familiarity with *Newz Beat*, their media preferences, and their demographics.

Table 1. Sample Descriptive Statistics.

	N	*M*/%	*SD*
Dependent variables			
Handling of economy (1–4)	371	2.11	1.03
Handling of education (1–4)	372	2.27	1.08
Handling of corruption (1–4)	372	1.71	0.93
Museveni feeling thermometer (0–100)	347	36.41	32.65
Education	365		
No school	6	1.6%	

Primary	101	27.7%	
Secondary	219	60.0%	
Some college	15	4.1%	
College	18	4.9%	
Age	361	26.1	6.4
Female	368	27%	

Results

Sample descriptive statistics (shown in Table 1) reveal that a majority (73%) of the participants in this experiment were men. The average age was 26, and most participants' education ended with either the completion of primary or secondary school. Participants generally reported dissatisfaction with President Museveni and his policies—though the lowest rating (M = 1.71 on a four-point scale, where 1 = *disagree strongly* related to Museveni's handling of corruption.

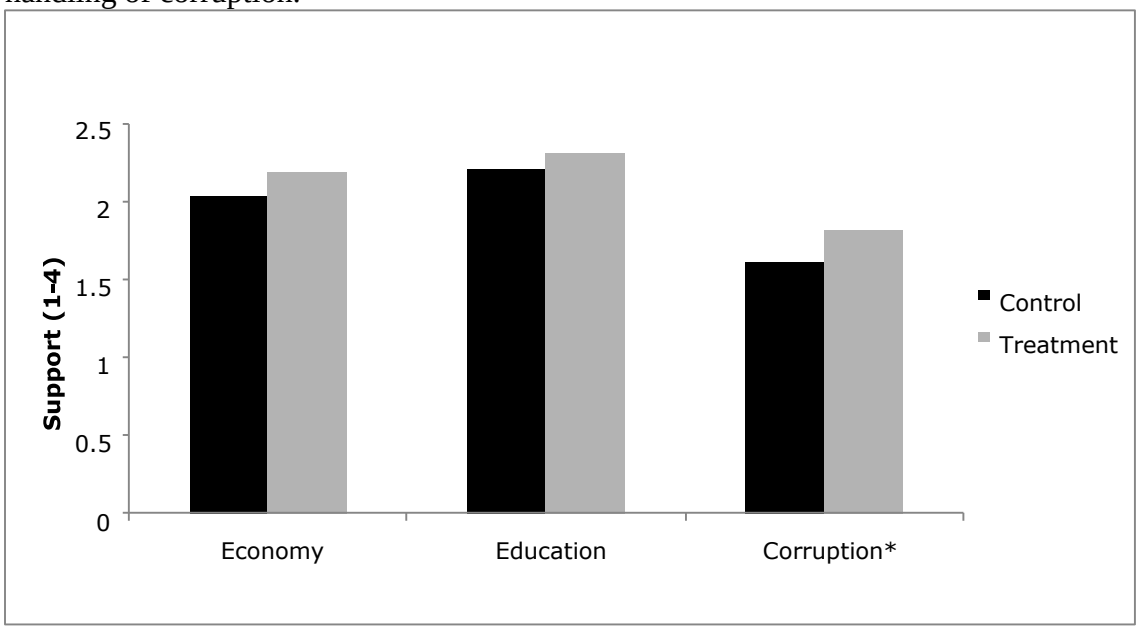

Figure 1. Support of Museveni's policies. **N = *372.* * *p* < *.05.***

The first indication that news about international events primes domestic political opinions comes from a set of *t* tests that compare people's evaluations of President Museveni and his party's performance regarding specific political issues (see Figure 1). Across the three domains probed, people in the treatment condition generally gave slightly better marks to the work of President Museveni and the NRM. When specifically asked about corruption, people in the treatment condition were on average more favorable toward Museveni and the NRM than those in the control condition (1.82 vs. 1.61, $p < .05$). Tests of mean differences in the other policy areas—the economy and education—yielded nonsignificant results.

H1 predicts that people in the treatment condition will rely more (compared to those in the control condition) on their assessments of President Museveni's handling of corruption when formulating their overall judgments of him. A pair of ordinary least squares regression models, run separately with the same independent variables for participants from the control condition and participants from the treatment condition, suggest that this is the case.

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Figure 2 depicts the key result from these regressions. For people in the control condition, evaluations of Museveni's handling of corruption is not a significant predictor of the feeling thermometer rating (β = 5.10, p > .05). There is, however, a significant relationship between evaluations of corruption and the feeling thermometer score (β = 9.41, $p \leq .001$) for people in the treatment condition. Using a macro provided by Weaver and Wuensch (2013), a direct comparison of these coefficients indicates that the difference between them is not significant (t = □1.10 , p > .05). Table 2 contains the full results of these models, which also control for age, education, and gender.

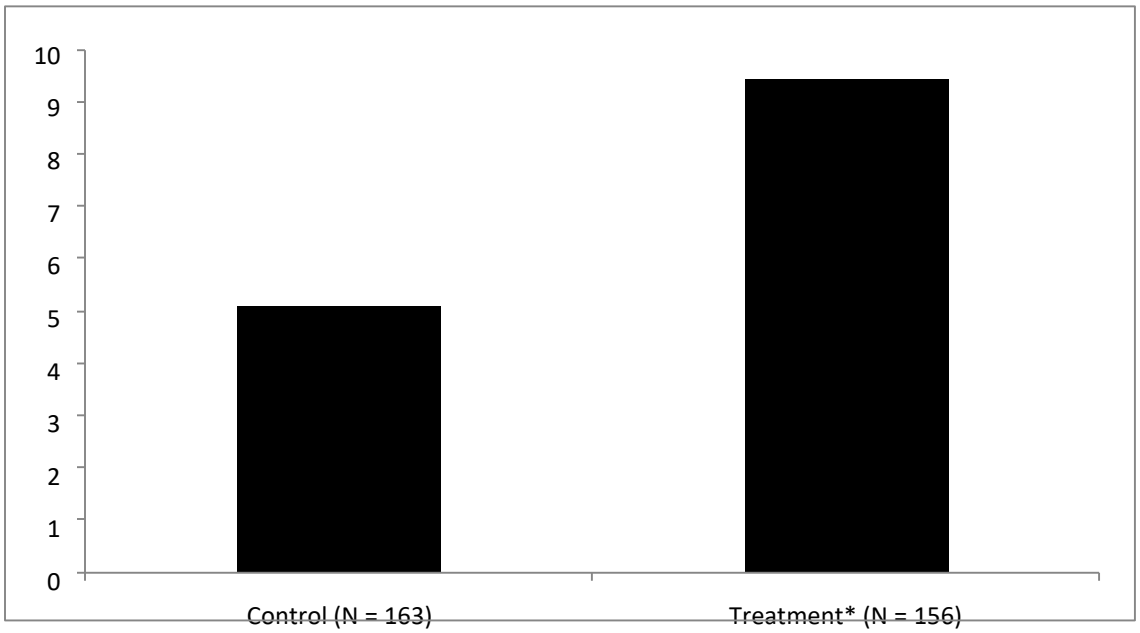

Figure 2. Influence of corruption evaluation upon overall ratings of Museveni. Models control for age, education, and gender. * p < .001.

RQ1 queried the directionality of the priming effect: Would coverage of international corruption produce more or less favorable evaluations of President Museveni and the NRM? As shown in Figure 1, exposure to stories about international coverage produced more favorable evaluations of President Museveni's handling of corruption. Furthermore, as the regressions illustrate (see Figure 2 and Table 2), the treatment increased the salience of corruption evaluations in participants' overall evaluations of President Museveni. Because of this, the evidence suggests that the priming treatment produced a contrast effect.

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regressions Predicting Overall Evaluations of President Museveni and the NRM.

	Control condition (N = 163)	Treatment condition (N = 156)
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Age	□0.723* (0.358)	□0.350 (0.400)

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Education		
No school	—	—
Primary	□11.13	14.39
	(14.08)	(18.86)
Secondary	□19.65	22.53
	(13.47)	(18.59)
Some college	□24.92	37.58
	(16.55)	(22.32)
College	□22.41	42.31
	(17.83)	(21.42)
Female	20.88***	7.37
	(5.10)	(5.93)
Corruption evaluation	5.10	9.44***
	(2.83)	(2.75)
Intercept	58.78	7.70
	(17.12)	(22.06)
*R*2	0.161	0.122
	2.945	*F* 4.263

* $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

Can an NGO employ tactics that originate in media effects and development communication research in the service of public diplomacy? Our findings suggest that rapped coverage of international news can prime how audience members evaluate domestic political matters. In the modern era of globalized media, it is reasonable to expect that people around the world are comparing their lives to what they see portrayed from locales both near and far. For those engaged in public diplomacy work, this is an important opportunity for leverage. Even campaigns that emanate from outside a contested geographical location (like most of the United States' international broadcast efforts) should consider the comparisons that international news can prompt the audience to make. For information campaigns (like PVI's) that are happening on the ground in contested locations, careful deployment of international news may be a useful maneuver in the face of possible censure. But, as our results illustrate, the comparison process may not always lead to the desired audience response.

Though unforeseen, the contrast effect we report can plausibly be understood. To start, the Ugandans who participated in this study are clearly disillusioned with President Museveni. They sharply disagree with his handling of corruption, and they have a poor opinion of him overall. Popular sentiment could be slightly less favorable in our data, but it is already very close to the lower limits (which impose a floor effect) of our scales. Beyond this, the international corruption that *Newz Beat* detailed was so extreme that it may have inadvertently led the participants to believe that their leaders are not so bad in comparison. Corruption may cumulatively be crippling Uganda, but most examples of domestic corruption—which priming likely made more accessible in viewers' minds—are more prosaic than the grand mansions constructed by Presidents Yanukovych and Zuma (and covered by *Newz Beat*) of the Ukraine and South Africa. Returning to the priming literature, our participants appear to have judged the examples of corruption shown by *Newz Beat* as dissimilar to and more extreme than local corruption. Both assessments suggest a contrast effect—which, in this case, was observed. Though

unexpected, this boomerang effect also has some general precedent in other research (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2009; Malesky et al., 2012; Schatz & Levine, 2010).

Considering the strength of our participants' existing opinions about the Museveni regime, it is impressive that exposure to a single episode of a rap news program had significant, measurable effects. Though our stimuli distilled corruption coverage from several weeks into one dose, it was still just four minutes of rhyming news sandwiched between two music videos. This speaks to the influence of news— and to the opportunity that *Newz Beat* has, given its recurring slot on a major broadcast television network. Looking ahead, lessons from these results will guide the creation of future coverage of international corruption on *Newz Beat*—and should be of note to others engaged in public diplomacy. A key lesson emerges: Broad topical themes must be paired with careful story selection (and presentation) to achieve preferred outcomes. Inattention to framing and the nuances of priming effects may lead to unwanted results. *Newz Beat*'s stories about international corruption are now being created with a focus on showing more relatable offenses that lead to clear punishment of the offending party.

Several limitations of this study warrant discussion as well. First, data collection offered several challenges that relate to generalizability. Video halls offer a realistic, comfortable setting for many Ugandan men—though women rarely enter them for cultural reasons. Group exposure is one of the upsides of video halls for reasons of expedience and external validity. But large groups of young men can be difficult to focus and monitor. We worked to limit crossover between conditions in the video halls, but since we did not collect any identifying information (for the comfort and safety of participants), some cross-pollination may have occurred. In addition, we collected nearly half of our sample through individual recruitment outside salons and other small businesses as a hedge against the limitations of video halls. In doing so, we were able to increase recruitment of women and limit the likelihood that participants would be included in both conditions. As previously mentioned, the dependent variables did not significantly vary across the group and individual conditions—suggesting that we can have confidence in the data collected in the video halls.

More conceptually, the research process was unfamiliar for some participants who were not comfortable with the political content of the treatment stimulus or the survey instrument even though they were not providing identifying information. Data collection in the pseudo-public setting of the video hall (and under the specter of social pressure) could have exacerbated this concern—though, again, the nonsignificant differences between data gathered in group and individual settings mitigates this concern. The data reveal that about 10 people elected not to provide responses to each of the policy area assessments of President Museveni/the NRM, and 40 participants did not complete the feeling thermometer overall assessment question. But these nonresponses were equally split across participants in the treatment and control conditions.

Many other caveats apply to this research as well. Our sample is disproportionately male and, even though the mean age is 26, old relative to Uganda's population. Additionally, although our study was not conducted in a laboratory, it was not a true field experiment either—which limits its external validity. The phrasing of our dependent variables invoked both President Museveni and his party (the NRM), which may conflate the two. Finally, we cannot speak to the duration of the effects we observed. The short-term effect we captured may persist, it may dissipate quickly, or it may precede the rise of different long-term effects (Bushman, 1998). We look forward to follow-up research that will allow us to report on the durability and development of the effects we observed while addressing many other matters, such as the framing of the priming stories, the role of affect in message formulation and reception, and the social pressure of the experimental setting.

This study illustrates how NGOs can use public diplomacy to further a distinct set of values across national lines in the swirl of global politics. Along the way, it extends scholarly knowledge about NGO engagement in public diplomacy, the utilization of media effects and entertainment-education theories in the creation and evaluation of public diplomacy campaigns and the range of priming effects that can be observed. Such NGO-led public

diplomacy efforts can be innovative, nimble, and effective. A growing world of these campaigns is flourishing and warrants further examination.

Conclusion

In *Persecution and the Art of Writing,* Leo Strauss (1988) argues that independent thought cannot be suppressed—as long as people are capable of "writing between the lines" (p. 24). Grounded in historical analyses, Strauss was theorizing in response to the dawn of the Cold War. Even in today's Internet age, his assertion continues to have currency. As China filters the Internet and Russia tightens its control over media ownership, dissenters find ways to express themselves. Doing so, however, requires a deft touch in the face of very real consequences.

Media enjoy a modicum of flexibility in Uganda, but expression can still result in imprisonment for individuals and closure for organizations. Obvious and persistent problems with corruption are crippling both domestic and international efforts to address poverty, improve public health, and protect basic human rights. Without publicly discussing corruption, it is difficult to gather momentum toward accountability. It is within this context that PVI programs *Newz Beat*. Advocacy must be tempered lest the program be forced off the air or yield yet graver outcomes. But to be meaningful and beneficial for Ugandans, the program cannot be totally bowdlerized. For public diplomacy to advance a progressive, human rights mission in Uganda, stories that challenge the status quo must be covered. The art, in this case, is to do so in a manner that can be perceived but not prosecuted—while actually attracting an engaged audience.

We offer evidence that priming corruption in the context of a rap news program did resonate with the audience—an intriguing result. Designing messages that have the precise, desired effect looms, however, as the next challenge. As an increasing number of parties enter the public diplomacy fray, creative and diverse message distribution and formulation strategies like *Newz Beat* should be pursued. Reaching audiences today is challenging given the abundance of media choice. Nontraditional vehicles for serious content may succeed in both engaging and influencing publics—a possibility that scholars, governments, and NGOs should consider.

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