

# KONY2012: THE NEW FACE OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

This paper breaks down the nongovernmental components of public diplomacy and examines the evolution of new public diplomacy. It discusses the rise of nonstate actors and the importance they play in changing international diplomatic engagements. It explores the rising prominence of both soft power and public relations on the global stage, highlighting the importance of strategic relationships and effective communications. The case study, used to exemplify the power of new public diplomacy, examines how Invisible Children's KONY2012 campaign used public diplomacy to harness successfully the power of the American people to influence governmental foreign policy. The author shows that Invisible Children practiced public diplomacy in its KONY2012 campaign by utilizing different public relations tactics, including strategic planning, social media, and relationship building. These tactics enabled Invisible Children to engage, activate, and mobilize public opinion around the issue of the war in Central Africa, and this public opinion then generated policy change, both inside the U.S. government and among international institutions. The author concludes that the increasing interconnectedness of the world and the ability to harness the power of the public is enabling new players to be given a seat at the international diplomatic table. This change is both a symbol of the world's rising global consciousness and the ability for people to decide what matters.

## INTRODUCTION

"We are all global neighbors. Humanity does not stop with borders."<sup>1</sup> This statement exemplifies the rising interdependence and interconnectedness happening on the global stage. Due to the progression of globalization, global mass communication, and the spread of democracy and open market economies, publics and their governments are being forced to adapt their process for achieving specific policy goals. The increasingly intersecting nature of the world means that the well-being and security of one country are linked to the lives of people thousands of miles away, as seen in the realms of terrorism, insurgencies, organized crime, drug trafficking, crimes against humanity, and infectious disease.<sup>2</sup> This intertwining of the globe has led to a rise in the elusive phenomenon called "public diplomacy." This is a diplomacy that cultivates the power of the people through strategic communication among the state, nonstate actors, and the people; a diplomacy that recognizes the power of public voice and uses it to achieve a policy change that can cross borders and arbitrary divisions.

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1 John Prendergast and Don Cheadle, *The Enough Moment*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), 92.

2 Ibid.

Public diplomacy is a vast and ever-evolving discipline that centers on the intermarriage between international relations and public relations. Theorists coming from a public relations background tend to focus on the importance of public relations principles like framing, agenda-setting, communication, and branding. Others coming from an international relations perspective favor the definitions exemplified by soft power, spreading democracy, and providing vital information. In light of the growing interconnectedness on the global stage, public diplomacy in this paper takes a Kantian revolutionist approach that favors a world state over the initial nation-state.<sup>3</sup> This approach encompasses the two-way symmetrical approach to public relations and the international relations theories of neorealism and liberal solidarism that frame foreign policy surrounding international intervention. In this sense, public diplomacy does not focus solely on the attempt of one government to influence the foreign publics of another, but it includes other nonstate actors and their ability to influence publics to pressure their governments to make a policy change surrounding an issue. Public diplomacy incorporates public relations practices of relationship building and increasing influence through targeting and creating mutual understanding. Central to this shift from state actors to other nonstate actors is the acceptance of the role of soft power, the power of attraction rather than coercion, on the global stage. Therefore, the definition of public diplomacy in this sense can be summarized as the communication of state and nonstate actors with publics in an attempt to shape favorable public opinion about an issue, to gain a better understanding of the public, and to achieve a certain policy objective within the government or an international institution. It is ultimately the craft of creating change through harnessing the power of the people.

This paper outlines the background of what public diplomacy encompasses and highlights the rise of nonstate actors in establishing a “new public diplomacy.” It discusses the influence of soft power and the importance of strategic public relations tactics. To highlight this shift in diplomacy, the paper examines the rise of new public diplomacy through a case study of the Invisible Children organization and its KONY2012 campaign. In conclusion, this paper will demonstrate how nonstate actors, through the power of the public, can rival the government to change the world.

## PUBLIC AND DIPLOMACY

Understanding this definition of ‘public diplomacy’ requires a brief look at the definition of diplomacy. Gilboa defines diplomacy as the “communication system through which representatives of the state and international actors express and defend their interests, state their grievances, and issue threats and ultimatums.”<sup>4</sup> It is a channel to clarify positions, probe for information, and convince states and other actors to support one’s position. Diplomacy is not confined to conflict resolution or preserving peace but also getting rewards, deceiving opponents, gaining time, and obtaining valuable information. Essentially, diplomacy is an international process to gather information, shape policy, represent a point of view, assist in negotiation, and provide consultation.<sup>5</sup>

To understand public diplomacy more deeply, it is also essential to examine the definition of public. This is a broad notion that John Dewey defines as “an active social unit consisting of all those affected who recognize a common problem for which they can seek common solutions.”<sup>6</sup> This definition argues that publics are dynamic rather than static and form around issues and organizations based on what they want to achieve. Grunig and Hunt suggest that there are different types of publics, most notably the nonpublic, which have no consequence for an organization, and the activist public that organizes to influence other publics through actions like education, compromise, persuasion, pressure, or force.<sup>7</sup> In public diplomacy, the importance and influence of the active publics is central. These activist publics are what place pressure on the government to care about the issues that

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3 Benno Signitzer and C. Wasmer, “Public Diplomacy: A Specific Government Public Relations Function,” in *Public Relations Theory II*, eds. Carl Botan & Vincent Hazelton, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 435-464.

4 Eytan Gilboa, “Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no.1 (2008): 55-77.

5 Brian White, “Diplomacy,” in *The Globalization of World Politics*, eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 387-403.

6 Signitzer and Wasmer, *Public Diplomacy*, 435-464.

7 James Grunig & Todd Hunt. *Managing Public Relations*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984).

are often at the bottom of the list and ensure that the government is pursuing lasting solutions for these crises.<sup>8</sup> John Prendergast, founder of the Enough Project, once said, “People’s movements have altered the course of history. When you look back at the last century of American history, and our interaction with the world, the real shifts have usually occurred in response to growing tidal waves of popular resistance or support for some kind of monumental change.”<sup>9</sup> When the final goal is policy change, the people’s movements are the primary target of public diplomacy efforts and attempts.

## Evolution of New Public Diplomacy

One of the fundamental aspects of public diplomacy is the evolution away from classic diplomacy of state-to-state actors to include nonstate actors. This shift follows the move in international relations, the realm that historically encompasses diplomacy, beyond solely the interactions of national governments. This change is due to instantaneous global communication, rapid growth of democratic institutions and market centered economies, close connections between foreign and domestic politics, growing mass participation in foreign politics, and the mediatization of politics.<sup>10</sup> Formal political relations are becoming more closely connected with actors other than national governments, signifying a transition from traditional state-level diplomacy to public citizen-level diplomacy. Although nonstate actors may not have the same diplomatic machinery as a state, they still have the ability to communicate their interests and deploy their resources to influence the outcomes of their relationships.<sup>11</sup> This exemplifies the shift away from focusing on territory, access, and raw materials on the world stage, to focusing on the achievement of a favorable image and reputation gained through attraction and persuasion.<sup>12</sup>

Nonstate actors such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, and cultural institutions have become essential for public diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> They have experience in building institutional relationships and managing organizational reputations overseas, with the potential to augment the reputation of the country in which they operate. They are gaining power in world affairs as they are “actively attempting to influence governments and multilateral institutions development policies.”<sup>14</sup> Not only are NGOs leading the way in humanitarian areas, but many multinational corporations are becoming more powerful than some countries in the global economy. Oil companies like Shell and BP operate around the world, providing jobs, building infrastructure, and undertaking development programs to fill the gaps where governments have failed. The significance of these nonstate actors has even been recognized by the U.S. Advisory Commission of Public Diplomacy that cites one of its key tasks as “defining appropriate relations between government and NGOs, identifying clearly the strengths of each and helping NGOs do what they do best will be critical tasks for a New Diplomacy.”<sup>15</sup>

## Soft Power and Public Relations

One essential concept in supporting the rise of nonstate actors, defining the tactics of public diplomacy, and signifying the importance of public diplomacy in the realm of foreign policy is soft power.<sup>16</sup> Soft power is defined as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment.” Classical diplomacy has leveraged hard power assets based on the military and the economy that are seen as strictly governmental and national. Today, however, soft power assets that can be completely separated

8 Prendergast and Cheadle, *The Enough Moment*.

9 Prendergast and Cheadle, *The Enough Moment*, 27.

10 Signitzer and Wasmer, *Public Diplomacy*, 435-464.

11 White, *Diplomacy*, 387-403.

12 Dean Kruckeberg and Marina Vujnovic, “The Local, National, and Global Challenges of Public Relations: A call for Anthropological Approach to Practicing Public Relations,” in *The SAGE handbook of Public Relations*, ed. Robert L. Heath (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010): 671-678.

13 Olga Zatepilina, “Non-state Ambassadors: NGOs’ Contribution to America’s Public Diplomacy,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 5, no.2, (2009): 156-168.

14 Andrew Cooper and Brian Hocking. “Governments, Non-governmental Organisations and the Re-calibration of Diplomacy,” *Global Society*, 14, no.3 (2000): 361.

15 Cooper & Hocking, “Governments, Non-governmental Organizations,” 361.

16 Joseph Nye. *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

from the state, such as culture, values, and traditions, are rising in significance and being increasingly harnessed by nonstate actors. In a world where hard power is becoming more difficult and detrimental to deploy, soft power and those who can effectively wield it are increasing in predominance in international relations. Soft power is in the hands of the actors who can best persuade with attraction and move people by argument.<sup>17</sup>

Along with the rise of nonstate actors and the expanding predominance of soft power, another change central to public diplomacy is the use of certain public relations tactics and theories that focus on relationship building and its effects on influence and understanding. As Black and Sharpe suggest, "The more we understand one another, the more we will reduce the chances of war, or terrorism and of man's violence against man. Fortunately, public relations can aid us in that understanding."<sup>18</sup> One of the essential elements public relations brings to diplomacy is the building of relationships. Grunig's idea of a two-way symmetrical relationship in public relations is vital to adapting the changing attributes of the world to communicate effectively with the public.<sup>19</sup> When looking at the recent past, especially within the U.S., the failure to cultivate relationships has decreased its legitimacy and credibility, in turn reducing its ability to achieve policy goals. Two-way symmetrical communication is based on research and uses commonalities to manage conflicts, and improve understanding with strategic publics.<sup>20</sup>

The power of relationship building is centered on the idea that the success or failure of diplomacy depends on the interchange of needs, expectations, and fulfillment.<sup>21</sup> Diplomacy can no longer be only from the top down, but must also recognize the power of including the people affected by the decision in creating the best outcome. The two-way symmetrical approach opens the dialogue toward both sides being permissive to change. This realm of thought understands that cultural variability is inevitable, and understanding it may help organizations better predict how international publics will respond to an organization's message.<sup>22</sup> Relationship building is therefore an effective tool of public diplomacy, because to persuade publics to advocate a specific policy message, it is vital to understand how the publics are hearing the messages produced and adapting it accordingly.<sup>23</sup> Official diplomats tend to focus on relationships with policymakers and bilateral relationships, whereas nonstate actors focus on various layers of foreign societies, including non-elites, grassroots, and even rebels. Nongovernmental actors have come to understand the importance of cooperation, trust, and empowerment; it is an acknowledgment that for success in any policy or initiative, there needs to be involvement with their foreign counterparts.<sup>24</sup>

The overarching goal of establishing these relationships for public diplomacy is to increase understanding in order to influence the public's actions or to find the right message to represent the views of the public to achieve specific goals. This follows the neorealist approach that suggests that states only pursue policy that is in their best interest. In an increasingly interconnected world, it has become essential for states to recognize the power of the people, as demonstrated in the Arab Spring, and recognize that acting proactively through international relationships and communication is in a state's best long-term interest. Essential in creating this understanding and influence are other public relations tactics such as agenda-setting and framing. Frames can be natural or socially guided with four main functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes or identifying what is causing the problems, making moral judgments about the situation causing the problems, and suggesting remedies.<sup>25</sup> The agenda-setting process undertaken by state and nonstate actors is a collective and reciprocal process that understands that publics learn from the amount of coverage an issue is given.<sup>26</sup> Theo White once said, "No major

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17 Nye, *Soft power*.

18 Signitzer and Wasmer, *Public Diplomacy*, 456.

19 Ibid.

20 James Grunig, "Public Relations and International Affairs: Effects, Ethics and Responsibility," *Journal of International Affairs*, 47, no. 1 (1993): 138-162.

21 Zatepilina, "Non-state Ambassadors," 156-168.

22 Grunig, "Public Relations," 138-162.

23 Nye, *Soft power*.

24 Zatepilina, "Non-state Ambassadors," 156-168.

25 Lynn Zoch and Juan Carlos Molleda, "Building a Theoretical Model of Media Relations Using Framing, Information Subsidies, and Agenda Building," in *Public Relations Theory II*, eds. Carl H. Botan & Vincent Hazelton, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006): 279-310.

26 Wayne Wanta, Guy Golan, and Cheolhan Lee, "Agenda setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 81, no.2, (2004): 364-377.

act...no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no great social reforms, can succeed unless the press prepares the public mind."<sup>27</sup>

## CASE STUDY: KONY2012 AND INVISIBLE CHILDREN

Although diplomacy is the historical realm of political leaders, the escalation of globalization and information technology has created room for a new kind of ambassador to arise: nonprofit organizations. Invisible Children (IC), a U.S. and Ugandan nonprofit, proclaims itself as a "social, political, and global movement using the transformative power of a story to change lives. By inspiring the youth culture to value creativity, idealism, and sacrifice, the movement fuels the most effective, adaptable, and innovative programs in the world."<sup>28</sup> In the spring of 2012, IC launched its 14<sup>th</sup> campaign with a new film titled *KONY2012*. Frustrated with the lack of response over the past nine years, this film was an attempt to make Joseph Kony, the leader of the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), infamous; this in turn would force the world's governments to respond.<sup>29</sup> It targeted celebrities, government officials, and the general public to take a stand and demand Kony's capture by the end of 2012. The film's narrator, Jason Russell, explained it as an attempt to paint a picture of a bad guy who each one of us could play a role in stopping.

Invisible Children had 13 previous campaigns before *KONY2012*.<sup>30</sup> Its campaigns always contained three elements: a video, a tour, and merchandise. The tour is based on roadie teams, four North American and one Ugandan, who show the film around North America to schools and community centers and tell the story of the war in Central Africa. The most successful campaign before *KONY2012* was "The Rescue" in 2009, which had 85,000 participants attend its international event. The Rescue campaign, combined with follow-up lobbying initiatives, provided the impetus for President Obama to send 100 advisory troops to Uganda in 2011 to assist in capturing Kony.

Invisible Children's *KONY2012* campaign, however, surpassed all previous campaigns and is heralded as the most viral video campaign in history. When examining *KONY2012* in relation to other advocacy campaigns, there were six important elements that made this campaign more successful than any before: the first online premiere of an IC film, the use of social media, the targeting of celebrities, the previous relationship building, the human connection of the film, and the millennial generation target audience. Combining these different elements of the public relations campaign produced outstanding results in the areas of media coverage, monetary contributions, making Kony infamous, and enhancing the progress in capturing Kony through increased foreign policy support. The ultimate goal of IC, to capture Joseph Kony and end the war in Central Africa by alerting a foreign public (the U.S. public) to this situation to pressure the U.S. government, makes IC a prime example of new public diplomacy. This campaign, *KONY2012*, resulted in the passing of U.S. legislation concerning the LRA and the pledging of international organizations like the European Union and African Union to fully support the initiatives aimed at capturing Kony.<sup>31</sup>

### KONY2012 and New Public Diplomacy

There are three essential aspects to all public diplomacy efforts: interaction with a foreign public, foreign policy aims in the foreign country, and influence over the foreign public to pressure their government toward the foreign policy aims. For new public diplomacy, this is done by nonstate actors such as Invisible Children.

27 Wanta, Golan & Lee, "Agenda Setting," 367.

28 Invisible Children. *2008 Annual Report*, (San Diego, CA: Invisible Children Inc, 2008): 6.

29 *KONY 2012*, dir. by Jason Russell, (2012; San Diego, CA: Invisible Children) accessed January 24, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>.

30 Invisible Children, *Roadie and Intern Manual: Spring 2012*, (San Diego, CA: Invisible Children, 2012).

31 *KONY2012 Progress: March to May 2012*, Invisible Children (2012; Invisible Children) accessed March 24, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PW0urVPgLkw&feature=BFa&list=PL3C099B53D7DB6C1D>.

### *Interaction with a foreign public*

Invisible Children has taken upon itself the task of being the conduit providing a voice in the Western world to and for the people affected by the LRA.<sup>32</sup> It represents all of the people that were affected, are being affected, and that will be affected by the LRA. Due to this representation, the U.S. public is a foreign public to the situation in Central Africa and therefore is the target of Invisible Children and its public diplomacy efforts.

### *Foreign policy aims in the foreign country*

Invisible Children has made policy change its objective since its inception. By 2008, Invisible Children had made the LRA and Kony among the most important issues for U.S. students, akin to the campaigns to end apartheid.<sup>33</sup> In 2008, IC, Resolve (IC's policy writing and research partner), and John Prendergast (Enough Project) began trying to influence U.S. foreign policymakers in the U.S. Congress.

In 2010, with "corrosive partisanship in Washington, –[IC] had secured cross-party, dual-chamber backing for their proposed law. When Senator Tom Coburn, known as Dr. No for his habit of blocking legislation on budgetary grounds, tried to kill it, activists slept outside his Oklahoma office for 11 nights in midwinter until he relented. In May 2010, Congress passed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, mandating that the President "eliminate the threat to civilians and regional stability" posed by the LRA."<sup>34</sup>

IC's goal with KONY2012 was to make the U.S. government extend its advisory troops to the region and pressure other governments around the world to help the U.S. find a long-term solution to the problem. IC wanted to continue its previous successes by furthering the American public's knowledge of the issue and the public's belief that it could demand a change in foreign policy. KONY2012 gave a clear call to action.<sup>35</sup> IC believes that "the people will lead and the government will follow."<sup>36</sup>

### *New public diplomacy: nonstate actors*

Nonprofits such as IC "have the capacity to mobilize thousands of people around one cause, and these people have the capacity to pressure politicians to act on what they care about."<sup>37</sup> IC continues to demonstrate that nonstate actors like itself are effective public diplomacy practitioners because of its innovation and flexibility. IC broke standard advocacy-organization tactics and created films that engage the public by giving personal context and connections to overwhelming facts about atrocities being committed on the other side of the world. IC wanted "to take this campaign from a one-off to a world-changing moment. We need[ed] a new proactive machine to protect those being slaughtered. Then we can have a world where genocide and child soldiering do not exist."<sup>38</sup>

## **Key Public Relations and International Relations Elements**

The clear request in the film was to share it.<sup>39</sup> Studies show the hashtag #KONY2012 started breaking in regions where IC roadies were hosting screenings and asking the audience to tweet the link to the film.<sup>40</sup> The hashtag #StopKony had 12,000 tweets per 10 minutes at the height of the events.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, hashtags about the

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32 Julia Milan, discussion with the author, December 10, 2012.

33 Alex Perry, "The warlord vs. The hipsters," *Time World*, March 26, 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2109123,00.html?iid=pw-Gus> (accessed June 2, 2013).

34 Perry, "The warlord," 1-6.

35 Milan, discussion.

36 Rebecca Bossart, discussion with the author, December 10, 2012.

37 Milan, discussion.

38 Perry, "The warlord," 5.

39 Bossart, discussion.

40 Monica Vigo, discussion with the author, December 10, 2012.

41 Gilad Lotan, "KONY2012: See how invisible networks helped a campaign capture the world's attention," *SocialFlow* (blog) March 14, 2012 <http://blog.socialflow.com/post/7120244932/data-viz-kony2012-see-how-invisible-networks-helped-a-campaign-capture-the-worlds-attention>.



film were seven of the top 10 worldwide trends on Twitter for a few days after the film's release.<sup>42</sup> Social media created the communication channel for supporters to communicate with the culture makers and ask them to join the movement.<sup>43</sup> Social media also enabled people to share the film with families, friends, and other people around the world who had never heard of this issue.

Research shows that a primary strategy of the KONY2012 campaign was getting the endorsement of key figures, which is why IC identified 32 celebrities and policymakers to target.<sup>44</sup> IC asked viewers to go to the KONY2012 web site, see the faces of the 32 targeted celebrities and politicians, click on the image to generate an auto-tweet asking them to support the campaign, and press send.<sup>45</sup> This led to people like Ellen DeGeneres receiving over 36,000 mentions from different supporters asking her to support the film. Oprah Winfrey provided a huge boost to the film when she tweeted it out to her 10 million followers.<sup>46</sup> The film had around 66,000 views on the first day, but views rose to 9 million after Oprah's tweet. Other celebrities who tweeted it included Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Kim Kardashian, Nicki Minaj, Ryan Seacrest, Bill Gates, Puff Daddy, Taylor Swift, and White House Press Secretary Jay Carney.

*KONY2012* was also the most personal film in the IC library, aimed at captivating its audience by appealing to human empathy using visuals and a powerful story.<sup>47</sup> Jason Russell, founder and president of IC, narrates the film. He tells the story of Joseph Kony through the eyes of his relationship with his 5-year-old son, Gavin. Beginning with the video of Gavin's birth, Jason captures the audience's sense of humanity by saying "every single person in the world started this way. He didn't choose where or when he was born but because he's here he matters."<sup>48</sup> Showing pictures and home videos of Gavin, Jason sits Gavin down and explains to him who Joseph Kony is. When he asks Gavin what he thinks about Kony forcing kids to do bad things, Gavin responds, "sad." When he tries to explain that Kony is still doing bad things because "no one knows who he is," Gavin responds "but I know who he is because I see him on the picture right now." Gavin's ability to grasp the simplicity of how easy it is to support this issue shows the audience that this is not a complex issue; it is simply a matter of supporting right or wrong. Additionally, to emphasize the point that this is an issue that humanity should care about, African images of abduction and child soldiers were replaced with pictures of Gavin in those situations. This aligns with the psychological fact that people do not support things they cannot understand or cannot empathize with; the use of Gavin broke both of these barriers.<sup>49</sup>

Invisible Children had a long-term strategic plan and utilized specific public relations tactics to activate the public to the LRA cause and lead the way in defining new public diplomacy. Public relations strategies like relationship building, social media, and strategic planning are important to public diplomacy. Similar to any large public diplomacy effort, IC has a strategic plan with a big-picture approach focused on ending the war in Central Africa. IC truly believed 2012 would be the year that people would start listening to its call to action. Its KONY2012 campaign, as Jason says in the film, was the follow-up to previous grand strides in gaining U.S. government action.<sup>50</sup> He cites President Obama's decision to send 100 advisory troops to Uganda as the "first time in history the U.S. took that kind of action because the people demanded it."<sup>51</sup> IC is an example of the increasing acceptance that nonstate actors are augmenting their power and competing to influence the world opinion of the publics. Its strategy is, and was for the KONY2012 campaign, to capture the power of the people and use that to achieve its goals. Its strategies are action-oriented and include the input of everyone from the CEO to the founders to previous interns. IC predominantly uses an emergent approach to its campaigns, as it sets an overarching goal but adapts its tactics as it moves forward.

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42 Invisible Children, *KONY2012 Progress*.

43 Bossart, discussion.

44 Nicole Audette, author observation, February-June 2012.

45 Lotan, *KONY2012*.

46 "How 'Kony 2012' went viral," *Huffington Post*, last modified April 12, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/12/kony-2012-viral-infographic\\_n\\_1421812.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/12/kony-2012-viral-infographic_n_1421812.html).

47 Audette, February-June 2012

48 Russell, *KONY 2012*.

49 Audette, February-June 2012.

50 Audette, February-June 2012.

51 Russell, *KONY 2012*.

Although, there were many factors that influenced the success of this campaign, the one that underlies them all is social media. Social media have reinvigorated the power and use of public opinion. "Connection technologies take power away from the nation state and large institutions and give it to individuals and small institutes."<sup>52</sup> IC--through different social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and blogging— was able to inform the public, activate the public to move, and provide an easy way for the public to pressure the government. Nonstate actors may not have the hard power resources of military and economy to influence public opinion, but they do have the ability to harness the power of the people. Social media are what caused the campaign to reach beyond the projected scope of IC goals. Social media provided the initial contact IC needed to build deeper connections, which would lead to support for initiatives aimed directly at changing foreign policy.

## Measuring the Success of KONY2012

Measuring the success of public diplomacy efforts is very difficult and subjective, as quantifying attitudes and opinions is not easily done. However, the success of KONY2012 can be measured in four main areas:

### *Media*

Invisible Children was aiming for 500,000 online views of the film in addition to the 500,000 people that were to be reached through the spring tour that coincided with the release of the film.<sup>53</sup> The film, released on March 5, 2012, reached 100 million views in six days, becoming the fastest video to reach 100 million views on the Internet in history.<sup>54</sup> It received full stories and in-depth coverage on three evening national network newscasts on March 8. KONY2012 was being discussed in over 1,000 news stories worldwide everyday for the first week of its release.<sup>55</sup> It was the headline on *The New York Times* on March 9.<sup>56</sup>

### *Monetary*

Invisible Children ended the 2012 fiscal year with a surplus of \$10.5 million.<sup>57</sup> Total net assets went from \$6,584,811 at the beginning of 2012 to \$17,090,429 by the end.<sup>58</sup>

### *Making Kony Infamous*

The objective of this campaign was to make Joseph Kony infamous by having as many people as possible watch the film.<sup>59</sup> A Pew research project showed that 58 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 29 had heard about the film by March 19, 2012.<sup>60</sup> About 27 percent of these young people had heard about it through social media and 23 percent of them had watched the video. In older population groups, only about 20 percent had heard of the film and mostly from traditional media. There were nearly 5 million tweets about the video in the week after March 5, 2012. "The world now knows who Kony is. He is talked about at dinner tables and in classrooms. He is infamous."<sup>61</sup>

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52 Fergus Hanson "Public Diplomacy," *Brookings Institute*, last modified October 25, 2012 <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2012/10/25-ediplomacy-hanson-public-diplomacy>.

53 Danny Ramos, discussion with the author, December 10, 2012.

54 Huffington Post, "How 'Kony 2012' went viral".

55 Invisible Children, *KONY2012 Progress*.

56 How 'Kony 2012' went viral, Huffington Post.

57 Invisible Children "Highlights from FY2012." <http://invisiblechildrencom.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/highlights-from-2012.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2013).

58 Invisible Children. "Form 990." <http://invisiblechildrencom.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/ic-fy2012-form-990.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2013).

59 Milan, discussion.

60 Pew, "The viral Kony 2012 Video," [http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2012/The\\_Viral\\_Kony\\_2012\\_Video.pdf](http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2012/The_Viral_Kony_2012_Video.pdf) (accessed January 24, 2013).

61 Bossart, discussion.



## Overall Goal

IC measures the overall success of any campaign by whether or not Joseph Kony is free and if the LRA still exists.<sup>62</sup> There are objectives underneath this grand strategy, like making Kony infamous, that are meant to instigate public pressure for the U.S. to commit to ending the war.<sup>63</sup> For this aim, this campaign generated seven pieces of legislation that were introduced into the U.S. Congress, a recommitment of the advisory troops in Uganda, and the signing of over 3.5 million pledges in support of this initiative.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, the global community responded with the European Union pledging its full support in capturing Kony, the African Union taking leadership over the LRA mission, and the United Nations committing increased focus on the issue. This campaign, through its monetary contributions, has funded IC programs that help LRA members defect and programs that help keep the communities in the remote places of Africa protected through IC's radio towers.<sup>65</sup> Although, the research shows that the campaign was successful in ROI levels, media coverage, and government response, as long as Joseph Kony is still leader of the LRA and an International Criminal Court fugitive, IC has not achieved its main objective. This is a reality that will remain one of the campaign's biggest criticisms.

## Criticism

This paper is not intended to defend the campaign against the criticisms that arose but rather to evaluate the success of the campaign in relation to public diplomacy. When looking at it from a public diplomacy perspective, the criticism that the film was oversimplified and misled the audience appears weak, as the movie was never meant to stand alone. Like any sound public relations campaign, KONY2012 was designed with multiple methods of engaging with the public. IC had no way of knowing that this film would reach this type of success and become the only aspect people associated with the campaign, because alone the film is simple and lacking information. The simplicity of the message in the film, however, was the point: to demonstrate that if people just knew what was going on they would agree that it was wrong and ask their government to stop it. The film was meant to be supplemented by other aspects of the campaign like the tour and online resources. Additionally, it is true that the film did not fully explain the current situation, but again the fullness of the story was meant to be explained elsewhere. Ultimately, that IC's web sites crashed under the unexpected web traffic was detrimental in explaining to the public the validity of the organization in sharing this message, providing the additional online resources to supplement the simplicity of the film, and cultivating a true understanding among the general public of the vision of the entire campaign.

Another major criticism of the film was the idea of "slacktivism." This term is loosely defined as participation in an activity that is an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix the problem. In regards to KONY2012, this term refers to the millions of clicks on the computer but no real effort on giving resources or time to the cause. However, from a public relations and public diplomacy standpoint, the campaign, through its collection of retweets, video shares, and online clicks, the public was activated in a way unseen before; the sheer volume of activity demonstrates the power. The campaign never intended to create thousands of LRA and Central African scholars but rather to create a simple way for the everyday busy person to contribute to making this issue important to the people with the real power to create change – the government. In a world dependent on smartphones and social media, it would be feasible to argue that a click of the mouse is becoming the equivalent to using one's voice. Those "slacktivist" activities are what led celebrities to utilize their influence and the government to take notice.

From a public diplomacy perspective, even though Joseph Kony is still free and leading the LRA, the campaign was not a failure. The goal was to make Kony infamous, which IC did. His name was and continues to be talked about in homes, which at the beginning of 2012 knew nothing of his existence. The bad publicity of the campaign was still publicity toward achieving the fundamental issue of exposing the world to these atrocities. No public diplomacy or public relations campaign can catch a warlord, but it can activate the public toward the issue, and

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62 Audette, February-June 2012.

63 Milan, discussion.

64 Invisible Children, *KONY2012 Progress*.

65 Brianne Blaisdell, discussion with the author, December 10, 2012.

in turn pressure governments to catch him. Like all public diplomacy efforts, change takes time and constant pursuit. Foreign policy has begun to change in favor of IC desires, but IC has demonstrated its understanding that making Kony infamous is only step one in ending this war. The efforts to bring Kony to justice continue with conferences, tours, policy creation, and meetings. KONY2012 may be flawed, as no campaign is perfect for every audience, but it did demonstrate unprecedented strides toward ending the war and also changing the future of diplomacy and nonstate actor respect among the international political community.

## KONY2012: The Elements of Public Diplomacy

The KONY2012 campaign was not merely an act of advocacy, as it had clear policy objectives and mechanisms specifically aimed at changing government policy. New public diplomacy “defends the international (global) interests of a representative group of citizens in a politically striking, stable, and lasting way.”<sup>66</sup> When we examine the campaign from Cull’s six elements of public diplomacy: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, international broadcasting, and psychological warfare, it had it all.<sup>67</sup> In terms of listening, the film was tailor-made to the generation that was listening. It used powerful words, celebrities, emotive music, a child, and a simple narrative that even preschoolers could understand. In terms of advocacy, it told the story of the war in Central Africa and how important it was to get involved. In cultural diplomacy, it tried to show commonality between people in Central Africa and people in the U.S. The film showed that no matter who a person is, there is nothing that makes people different as humans other than the arbitrary fact of where each person is born. For exchange diplomacy, having Ugandans tour with the campaign around North America gave a face to the conflict and allowed people across the continent to exchange conversations with people affected by the war. IC, as a diplomat on behalf of the population in Central Africa suffering from this war, gained international broadcasting in U.S. and Europe. Finally, in regards to psychological warfare, the film used a call to action that made almost anyone who heard it compelled to do something. IC made it a simple question of wrong or right and made it obvious that if the viewer was not part of the solution, he or she silently contributed to the problem.<sup>68</sup>

Essentially, IC acting on behalf of those suffering from the war in Central Africa gained influence over the U.S. public and elites and then used it to influence U.S. foreign policy and gain support from international institutions like the United Nations and the European Union. It has never given up on its strategic objective of ending the war, only adapted the specific strategies used to achieve it. It continues to threaten the status quo of government-based diplomacy by successfully generating positive legislation around the issue. It continues to stand as an example of new public diplomacy, most recently by convening a Global Summit on the LRA in Washington, D.C., on November 17, 2012. Representatives from the U.S., Uganda, the Central African Republic, the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the International Criminal Court all participated in a dialogue on the best strategy for ending this conflict. Over 8,000 IC supporters attended the Global Summit, calling for action. IC is a leader in the use of different public relations strategies from the impersonal social media world to the mutually beneficial personal relationships. It knows its target publics intimately and has been successful in engaging them. It is challenging the traditional methods of advocacy and as KONY2012 states, it will stop at nothing until this war has ended, the countries are restored to peace and prosperity, and Joseph Kony is brought to justice.

## CONCLUSION

As borders have become porous and interchanges among cultures instantaneous, arbitrary lines no longer disconnect the world. It is becoming increasingly apparent that as the world gets more interconnected and as democracy becomes the norm, the public has come to play a central role in achieving policy gains. Whether it is a multinational corporation trying to open up economies to more open trade, nongovernmental charities trying to increase living standards, or governments trying to gain allies overseas by promoting their own image,

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66 Teresa La Porte, “The legitimacy and effectiveness of non-state actors and the public diplomacy concept,” *Public Diplomacy and Conceptual Issues* (San Diego: ISA Convention, 2012): 3.

67 Nicholas Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2009).

68 Audette, February-June 2012.

public diplomacy is rising in significance. It does not replace the traditional self-centered motives of all actors on the international stage but recognizes the rising global consciousness. It understands that as the realm of international relations has been opened up to accommodate the rise of globalization and mass communication, public relations can supply effective communication techniques to reach the ultimate goal: policy change. It understands that foreign policy is not an ideological blueprint but requires a highly leveraged series of maneuvers, requiring a balance of pragmatic and normative components.<sup>69</sup> Public diplomacy is changing the name of the game; elites are forced to compete with nonprofits for power over policy, as the public is increasingly finding its own voice. It shows that people, even the youngest generation, now have the power to influence government in a way never seen before. This leads one to believe that Malcolm X had it right when he said, "I for one believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what confronts them and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program, and when the people create a program, you get action."<sup>70</sup>

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69 Irving Horowitz, "The struggle for democracy." *The National Interest*, (Spring 2006): 114-120.

70 GoodReads "Malcolm X," from <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/797-i-for-one-believe-that-if-you-give-people-a> (accessed May 23, 2013).

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