



UNIVERSITY OF  
STIRLING

**FRAMING BAHRAIN THROUGH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY:  
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF FRAMES COMMUNICATED BY  
THE BAHRAINI GOVERNMENT DURING THE 2011 CRISIS**

**Rana Ahmed AlOmari**

Thesis Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Public Relations

University of Stirling

Division of Communication, Media and Culture

September 2018

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores frames communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy to foreign media and publics during three key moments of the 2011 crisis in Bahrain, and factors connected to the building of these frames. It employed qualitative frame analysis of public diplomacy texts published on Bahrain News Agency's website during the first week of protests, the arrival of the Peninsula Shield Forces to Bahrain, and the publication of Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report. It also used interviews with communicators from the Bahraini Information Affairs Authority to explore background processes of frame-building. This study contributes to research on the role of public diplomacy in co-constructing specific versions of reality in government messages during crises. It offers an example of Arab government practice of public diplomacy and framing in the Arab Spring. The research also employs Benoit's (1995) image repair theory and Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model to explore crisis response strategies represented by the frames, and frame-building processes.

The research finds that most of the analysed frames denied a crisis, while other frames addressed it yet externalised its causes. Denying an internal crisis started in absence of decision making, and lack of crisis experience and preparedness. It then became connected to promotion of positive news to contest foreign media's coverage, and maintain the authorities' power status.

This research suggests the Bahraini government's responses are similar to how nations usually respond to crises, especially not admitting responsibility for wrongdoing. Rather, public diplomacy is used as a tool by the government to maintain its power position. The thesis suggests this crisis is a turning point in Bahrain's practice of public diplomacy, especially in paying more attention to how it can further assure the promotion of messages that maintain the authorities' power position among foreign publics.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

يا رب لك الحمد كما ينبغي لجلال وجهك ولعظيم سلطانك، لا أحصي ثناء عليك، أنت كما أثنيت على نفسك

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Alenka Jelen-Sanchez and Dr. Marina Dekavalla for the continuous support of my Ph.D research, for their patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Their guidance has been very significant in all phases of writing this thesis. I could not have imagined having better supervisors for my Ph.D study.

I also would like to thank my parents and my husband's parents for all their support during this journey. This also goes to my brother and sisters: Khalifa, Huda, Mona, and Shatha.

I am grateful to my husband, my best friend, my all: Mohammad. No words would honour your unconditional love and support through every minute of making this dream come true. Here it is one more time to 'patience and belief'.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	25
1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW .....	25
2. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY.....	29
2.1. Definitions and Goals .....	29
2.2. Media and Soft Power in Public Diplomacy .....	33
2.3. Conceptualisations of Public Diplomacy .....	39
3. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND RESEARCH PARADIGMS .....	51
3.1. Public Diplomacy, Public Relations, and Functionalism .....	51
3.2. Public Relations and Social Constructivism.....	60
4. FRAMING.....	64
4.1. The Framing Theory .....	64
4.2. Frame-Building and Public Diplomacy.....	72
4.3. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) Hierarchical Model of Influence.....	80
4.4. The Bahraini 2011 Crisis in Framing Research .....	91
4.5. The ‘Arab Spring’ in Public Diplomacy and Framing Research.....	96
5. CRISIS COMMUNICATION.....	99
5.1. Crisis Communication and Social Constructivism .....	99
5.2. The Image Repair Theory.....	104
5.3. Crisis Response in Different National Contexts .....	112
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	122
1. PROJECT AIMS AND CHAPTER OVERVIEW .....	122
2. PROJECT TIMEFRAME.....	125
2.1. First week of protests (14-19 February 2011) .....	126
2.2. Deployment of the PSF in Bahrain (14-16 March, 2011).....	127
2.3. Publication of BICI report (23-25 November, 2011) .....	129
3. PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONS AND PARADIGMS .....	131
4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	134
5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	136

6. FRAME ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TEXTS.....	138
6.1. The method.....	138
6.2. Sampling news items .....	139
6.3. The procedure of frame analysis .....	141
7. IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS .....	155
7.1. The method.....	155
7.2. Sampling interview participants .....	156
7.3. Interview procedure .....	159
7.4. Analysing interview data .....	161
<b>CHAPTER 4: FRAME ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>165</b>
1. INTRODUCTION .....	165
2. THE 'REFORM' FRAME.....	172
3. THE 'EVENTS' FRAME .....	184
4. THE 'EXISTENTIAL THREAT' FRAME .....	195
5. THE 'UNPRECEDENTED ACHIEVEMENT' FRAME .....	207
6. THE 'SUPPORTED LEADERSHIP' FRAME.....	216
7. THE 'SOVEREIGNTY' FRAME .....	221
8. CONCLUSION: THE FRAMING OF THE BAHRAINI CRISIS OVER TIME .....	225
<b>CHAPTER 5: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>233</b>
1. INTRODUCTION .....	233
2. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: LACK OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE.....	237
3. PROFESSIONAL ROUTINES LEVEL: ABSENCE OF DECISION MAKING, AND PROMOTING POSITIVE NEWS.....	245
3.1. Disruption of top-down work routines: absence of senior decision making.....	246
3.2. Public diplomacy goals: promoting positive news.....	249
4. ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL: REDEFINING THE SITUATION, PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANIES, VISITS TO FOREIGN MEDIA, AND UNPREPAREDNESS .....	255
4.1. Redefining the situation in government narratives.....	256
4.2. Foreign public relations companies .....	259
4.3. Visits to foreign media organisations.....	262
4.4. Organisational unpreparedness for crises .....	264

5. EXTERNAL LEVEL: FOREIGN MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND NEGOTIATIONS.....	268
5.1. Foreign media’s coverage .....	269
5.2. Social media .....	274
5.3. Negotiations between the government and political societies .....	278
6. IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL: SECTARIAN CONFLICTS.....	281
7. CONCLUSIONS .....	290
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>296</b>
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	308
APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	335
APPENDIX 2: TEMPLATE OF THE CONSENT FORM.....	338
APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE OF ONE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT .....	339

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1. System of public diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 439)..... 32
- Figure 2. Hierarchal Model of Influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996)..... 82
- Figure 3. Levels of influence on Bahraini public diplomacy frame-building during the 2011 crisis..... 236

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1. Image Repair Strategies (Benoit, 1997, p. 179)..... 108
- Table 2. The number of sampled and excluded news items in each examined moment..... 141
- Table 3. Signature Matrix for the Bahraini 2011 Crisis.....168
- Table 4. The presence of frames in the analysed texts across the examined moments..... 172



## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the original work of Rana AlOmari. Every effort is made to properly acknowledge the contributions from other sources. The research upon which this thesis is based was carried out at the University of Stirling, under the supervision of Dr. Alenka Jelen-Sanchez and Dr. Marina Dekavalla, during the period October 2013 to September 2018.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In February 2011, a series of controversial protests started in the Kingdom of Bahrain, with demands ranging from economic reforms to a regime overthrow (Goldstone, 2011, p. 16). Besides the critical situation on ground which triggered riots and sectarian social tensions (Karolak, 2012; 2014), the Bahraini authorities were challenged by negative publicity in foreign media with accusations of human rights' breaches and violence against the protestors (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). Besides these accusations, several international news media outlets presented the Bahraini protests with strong connections to security issues, civil unrest, and sectarian conflict (Govers, 2012). This clashed with the Bahraini authorities' efforts to reflect a reformed and business-friendly image of the nation among foreign publics (Govers, 2012, p. 52; Karolak, 2012, p. 4; Karolak, 2014, p. 97; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 1; Wright, 2008, p. 12). A further challenge to the Bahraini authorities at that time is the fact that the Bahraini protests coincided with upheavals in other Arab countries, widely referred to across foreign media as the 'Arab Spring' – a reference which presents the Arab protests as revolutions by oppressed people against dictatorships (Maguire & Vickers, 2013).

The account of the presentation of the Bahraini crisis varies widely among different relevant actors (Karolak, 2012, p. 186). Previous studies

discuss how this crisis was presented by several relevant actors, such as international media outlets (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Bowe & Hoewe, 2011), YouTube users (Al-Rawi, 2015), and senior UK politicians (Maguire & Vickers, 2013). What remains to be explored, however, is how the Bahraini government responded to this negative publicity in its public diplomacy messages to foreign media and publics.

This thesis explores the frames communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy messages to foreign media and publics during three key moments of the 2011 crisis in Bahrain, and examines the factors connected to frame-building processes during the crisis. This framework aims to deliver insights on the role of public diplomacy in framing messages targeted at foreign media and publics to communicate specific versions of reality during a crisis and its aftermath.

Public diplomacy is understood here as “efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the policy of the target nation to advantage” (Manheim, 1994, p. 4 in Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 448). I focus my research on public diplomacy activities during the Bahraini crisis because, in crises, public diplomacy is a significant communication activity used by governments to mitigate a crisis situation especially in relation to foreign publics (Olsson, 2013). Crises are also critical events for the practice of public diplomacy because they create the need for prompt and unplanned communication with public groups the government never dealt with before (ibid). Furthermore, crises create contests

between different actors (e.g. governments; protestors; the media) to define the situation at hand from their own perspective, and to promote such definitions to relevant members of the public (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). My research focuses on the role of Bahraini public diplomacy in communicating (or representing) specific versions of reality of the examined crisis by specifically looking at messages produced by people communicating on behalf of the government of Bahrain.

While my research offers insights on versions of reality promoted by the Bahraini government during the examined crisis, it also contributes to limited academic debates on public diplomacy in Arab countries and in Bahrain in particular. In addition, my research offers an example of Arab government engagement in public diplomacy in the context of the Arab Spring. The significance of this refers to the limited research on Arab governments' framing during the Arab Spring comparing to the focus on the framing by foreign news media (e.g. Du, 2016; Guzman, 2016), and the major focus on Western state and non-state actors' engagement in public diplomacy during the Arab Spring (Cofelice , 2016; Golan , 2013; Samei, 2015; YliKaitala, 2014).

My research also contributes to public diplomacy literature by shifting attention in public diplomacy frame-building research to the factors connected to the articulation of public diplomacy frames in public diplomacy texts. Although limited, public diplomacy literature shows interest by a number of scholars to examine how different actors frame different issues through public diplomacy activities in a crisis context (e.g. Entman, 2008; Jungblut, 2017;

Melki & Jabado, 2016; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer et al., 2014; Yarchi et al., 2013; Zhang, 2006). Their work delivers insights on how state and non-state actors who engage in public diplomacy promote specific frames to foreign media, and what factors contribute to the success or failure of public diplomats' efforts to promote their preferred frames to foreign media. Nevertheless, this does not offer insights on the factors connected to the articulation of frames produced by public diplomacy communicators and not journalists. Whether or how the Bahraini government's frames appear in foreign media content is beyond the focus of this thesis. Rather, my research focuses on factors of influence related to the articulation of public diplomacy frames about the crisis in content produced by professional communicators and not journalists.

Another contribution of my research to this area is extending Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model of influence on media content to study frame-building in public diplomacy. It is a media research model that offers a framework to organise our understanding of frame-building factors at five different levels: individual, professional, organisational, external, and ideological. Using this model in the current study also responds to academic calls to use multidisciplinary approaches to study public diplomacy, which should help us understand how public diplomacy works (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 211; Gilboa, 2008, p. 75).

Besides Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, another significant framework employed in my research is Benoit's (1995) image repair theory

(IRT). Drawing on Western contexts, this theory offers a list of different crisis response strategies. The role of the IRT in the current study is to understand what crisis response strategies are reflected in the analysed Bahraini public diplomacy messages to foreign media and publics during the 2011 crisis, and how these are related to frames identified in these messages. Note that the use of the term 'strategy' does not necessarily involve a strategic intent by the Bahraini government or its communicators to represent a specific response strategy in the analysed texts. This highlights the significance of employing both the IRT and Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model in this research, as it has potential in delivering insights on the factors connected to the articulation of public diplomacy frames that depict specific crisis response strategies, and exploring whether the presence of certain frames in the analysed texts involved strategic intents or not.

As stated earlier, I focus my exploration of Bahraini public diplomacy frames on three key moments of the 2011 crisis, and these are: the first week of protests (14-19 February 2011), the arrival of the Peninsula Shield forces (PSF) to Bahrain (14-16 March 2011), and the publication of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report (23-25 November 2011).

The first key moment covers the first week of protests across different areas of Bahrain, which started on 14 February marking the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Action Charter (NAC). The NAC is a political document which constitutes the roadmap for comprehensive national reforms in the country (Al-Hasan, 2015), which was endorsed by 98.4% of Bahraini voters in a national

referendum that took place on 14 February 2001. The protests started by demanding social, political, and economic reforms, suggesting that reforms promised in 2001 were not delivered. This increased to demands for regime overthrow when the death of protestors after clashes with security forces at an early stage of the crisis radicalised the protests, escalated the level of violence, and increased negative publicity against the Bahraini authorities across foreign media (Govers, 2012).

The second examined moment focuses on the arrival of the PSF, a joint military force among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, to Bahrain on 14 March 2011. The period between 20 February and 13 March 2011 marked a relatively calm phase of the Bahraini 2011 crisis (BICI, 2011, p. 126). However, 13 March was a turning point as levels of security, law and order dropped considerably across Bahrain (ibid). Vandalism of private and public properties, assault against individuals, and sectarian clashes were recorded. Further, negotiations between the government and the opposition to start the national dialogue reached an end. At this point, the King of Bahrain, Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa decided that Bahrain needed military help from GCC members to protect Bahrain from what they believed was possible Iranian interference in Bahrain's internal affairs. The arrival of the troops was controversial. As the authorities considered it a strategic measure against potential foreign threat, the opposition viewed the arrival of the PSF as illegal use of GCC troops to confront popular demands (BICI, 2011, p. 387). Iranian

media, as well, presented it as a “massacre” against Bahraini civilians (Belfer, 2014).

The third examined key moment focuses on the publication of BICI report. The BICI was established after the crisis had subsided to investigate any human rights’ breaches during February and March 2011. The establishment of BICI in July 2011 was considered by Western officials as progress in the situation in Bahrain (Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). “Such inquiry has not been attempted previously in Bahrain or elsewhere.” (Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 91) The Bahraini authorities aspired to achieve image recovery through this initiative, but it resulted in a more challenging situation in November 2011, when BICI report confirmed violations of human rights by some members of the security forces.

As indicated earlier, it is significant to note that the Bahraini crisis coincided with public demonstrations in other Arab countries, which were widely presented in foreign media as the ‘Arab Spring’ (Avraham, 2015). The King of Bahrain rejected the reference to the protests in his country as another ‘Arab Spring’ (Pinto, 2014), especially as this reference presents the Arab demonstrations as revolutions by oppressed people against dictatorships (Maguire & Vickers, 2013), and an outbreak of democratic change in the Middle East and North Africa (Joffe, 2011, p. 507). It also provokes sympathy and support for the protesters (Harlow & Johnson, 2011, p. 1365). Therefore, the perception of Arab demonstrations as ‘Arab Spring’ legitimises regime overthrows and urgent international military intervention as valid solutions to help protestors bring down what was perceived as oppressive regimes



(Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). The causes of the 'Arab Spring' are portrayed as accumulated political and economic tensions and challenges that have not been resolved by Arab leaders but, instead, artificially repressed in the search for stability for their power position and authority (Joffe, 2011, p. 508). Note that the success of upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia, which were widely framed as 'Arab Spring', managed to draw international attention to the Bahraini protests (Karolak, 2012, p. 180). As the Bahraini authorities worked on rebranding the country as a reformed nation since 2000 (Govers, 2012, p. 52; Karolak, 2012, p. 4; Karolak, 2014, p. 97; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 1; Wright, 2008, p. 12); associations with the Arab Spring can threaten not only Bahrain's efforts to appear in the international arena as a reformed nation but also the legitimacy of its political system.

Bahrain's political system is based on the principle of tribal hereditary monarchy since Al-Khalifa family ruled the country in the eighteenth century. Yet, efforts established by King Hamad to change the country from a state to a kingdom when he accessed the throne in 2000 introduced several reforms that guaranteed further political rights for the citizens (Al-Hasan, 2015). For instance, the reforms included the return of parliamentary elections after about 25 years of being stopped (ibid; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2). Noteworthy is the fact that these reforms did not only aim to enhance Bahrain's reputation internationally; as they were also targeted at the Bahraini society which is usually discussed with sectarian connotations (Karolak, 2012). While the examined protests may be new to Bahrain in terms of number of participants and impact on security levels; there had been sporadic political protests on

and off since the country's independence from Britain in 1971, especially by Shiite citizens. Al-Khalifa features a Sunni royal family in a country with highly sectarian demographic structure. Segments of the Shiite community always accused the government of favouring the Sunni population both socially and in access to jobs (ibid, p. 181). This suggests that foreign media accusations of human rights' breaches can be more threatening to Bahrain's image when they are associated with a history of political protests demanding reforms. Thus; in the discussion of the Bahraini crisis it is significant to consider the sectarian aspect of the Bahraini society and the problematic situation in other Arab countries framed across foreign media as the 'Arab Spring'. With this rejection of the 'Arab Spring' frame by Bahraini authorities (Pinto, 2014), my research examines how the Bahraini government presented the crisis to foreign media and publics during the aforementioned three key moments.

In my exploration of frames, I study public diplomacy texts published in news format on the English website of Bahrain News Agency (BNA). The BNA is not an independent news agency – it is a state-owned governmental news agency that was responsible for publishing government messages during the examined crisis. The BNA worked under the management of the Bahraini Information Affairs Authority (IAA) which was the main governmental entity responsible for official communications in Bahrain during the crisis. The IAA represented the ministry of information in Bahrain, but it functioned as 'Authority' from 2010 until 2014 when a royal decree changed its title to the Ministry of Information Affairs. During that time, the CEO of the IAA still had a rank of a minister in the Bahraini government and was directly appointed by

the king. Hence, the IAA represented the main communication authority in the Bahraini government, and currently functions as a Ministry of Information Affairs. When discussing the roles of IAA and BNA as government entities in Bahrain, it is worth noting that the king assigns and dismisses the prime minister, meaning that the Bahraini government is not elected. Note too that the prime minister in Bahrain is in charge since Bahrain's independence from Britain in 1971. This, in addition to the fact he is the King's uncle generated criticism against the political system in Bahrain, especially when it comes to the application of democratic approaches of assembling a government (Wright, 2008), and Bahrain's efforts to present an image of a reformed nation in the international arena. Further, the king exercises his powers directly and through his ministers, and ministers are jointly answerable to the king for general government policy (Constitution of Bahrain, 2002, p. 16). Hence, although the IAA and BNA are government communication platforms, its connections with the leadership should be considered when discussing its different functions and responses during the examined timeframes.

It is worth mentioning the IAA did not have a devoted department responsible for public diplomacy or used the 'public diplomacy' label. In December 2016 a royal decree was issued to establish and organise the 'National Communication Centre' under the management of the IAA. One of the centre's expected tasks is to handle public diplomacy, including in times of crises. The centre is not fully functioning yet. And to date, none of the centre's tasks of communicating with foreign publics is titled using the 'public diplomacy' label ([alwatannews](#), 2017; [alwasatnews](#), 2016). Instead of a

department specifically devoted to public diplomacy, government (IAA) communications targeted at foreign media and publics were carried out through the BNA, and the External Relations Directorate. BNA's communications with foreign publics were practiced within a media relations aspect of public diplomacy, while External Relations' work focused on issuing permissions for foreign journalists to enter Bahrain. Thus, despite engaging with foreign publics, External Relations were not involved in frame-building of government messages (Interviewee 2). Another form of communicating with foreign public was through the Directorate of Public Relations, but this had a marketing role to promote the IAA programmes and channels, and therefore was not engaged in frame-building of the crisis responses either (I2). As the IAA was the main official entity for government communications, the role of the BNA as part of this Authority was to work as the initial source for Bahraini affairs news.

I focus my study on two main research questions. The first question explores frames present in public diplomacy texts published in news format on BNA's English website during the three examined key moments. Within the first research question, I explore how these frames are reflected across the analysed texts and the examined key moments; whether the frames were unique or consistent through the examined key moments; and how the analysed frames represent specific crisis response strategies. The second research question focuses on the background processes and factors connected to frame-building during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath. By answering this question I seek to explore how public diplomacy activities at the

IAA/BNA frame and communicate their interpretations of the examined context, which potentially contribute to the co-construction of specific versions of reality during the crisis and its aftermath.

To systematically answer the research questions I employ two qualitative research methods. The main method is qualitative frame analysis of news items published on BNA's English website during the three key timeframes discussed earlier. The supplemental method is in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected IAA communicators engaged in message development and/or news writing during the crisis. The thesis does not aim to find generalizations on public diplomacy in the Arab world or even Bahrain. The purpose is to provide in-depth understanding of how Bahraini public diplomacy communications targeted at foreign media and publics work at a time of a national crisis, and how these activities offer specific versions of reality in government messages.

To further discuss the concepts and frameworks employed in this project, the next chapter (chapter 2: Literature Review) starts with reviewing public diplomacy literature. It discusses how, under intense Western and North American focus, it has been conceptualised from realist and liberalist world views until the 9/11 attacks that yielded the concept of 'new public diplomacy'. New public diplomacy emphasises twoway symmetrical communication and relationship building which encouraged further public diplomacy research using the functionalist paradigm in public relations. Thus, the chapter discusses functionalism in public relations, the main critiques of this approach,

and why the social constructivist paradigm is employed instead. The chapter also reviews framing literature to justify the significance of employing frame analysis, especially because framing provides a significant framework to examine how public diplomacy texts promote certain interpretations of an issue over others. This can be used as framework to understand how certain interpretations of the examined crisis are promoted through Bahraini public diplomacy messages during specific timeframes of the crisis. The chapter also further discusses Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model and how it is extended to a public diplomacy context in this study, and reviews research on frame-building in public diplomacy. The chapter also discusses crisis communication from a social constructivist view and the role of Benoit's (1995) 'image repair theory' (IRT) in this thesis.

After that, chapter 3: Methodology, discusses the philosophical approach to research employed in this project and the research design and methods. It highlights the role of the social constructivist paradigm in the study, including the idealist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stands. It details the methods used in the project, explaining each method's purpose, sample, and analysis procedure. The chapter also justifies the selected timeframes examined in this study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and discussion of the frame analysis. It highlights the presence of six issue-specific frames in the analysed news: 'reform'; 'events'; 'supported leadership'; 'existential threat'; 'sovereignty'; and 'unprecedented achievement'. The chapter also investigates connections

between the frames and the most common crisis response strategies offered by the IRT to deliver insights on Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the crisis. The analysis of frames and the image repair strategies they represent suggest that Bahraini public diplomacy messages to foreign media and public during the examined crisis tend not to address a crisis situation, and even when they do, it externalises the causes of the crisis instead of addressing any internal (national) problematic issues causing a crisis. Such public diplomacy messages are similar to common responses of nations in crises, where crisis responses do not normally address responsibility for wrongdoing (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). Instead, public diplomacy is used as a power tool in the hand of the sponsoring government to maintain its power position (Zhang & Swartz, 2009).

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of data generated from interviews with five Bahraini communicators who were engaged in writing content for the BNA's website and/or decision making on messaging during the examined crisis. The interview analysis uses Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchal model to organise understanding of factors connected to the construction of frames in the background at five levels: individual; professional; organisational; external; and ideological. It also highlights how these levels interact rather than work in isolation, and explores the level of strategic intent in promoting certain frames in government messages. The analysis argues that the communication of frames that tend not to address a crisis started in a context of absent decision making by senior officials at the Bahraini government, and lack of crisis

experience and preparedness. In a matter of days, it became more connected to a strategic choice of promoting positive news to contest unfavourable coverage across foreign media. On the other hand, externalising the causes of the crisis when it was addressed is connected to government representatives' tendency to redefine the situation without reference to any of the internal causes of the crisis, with a background of ideological tensions between Bahraini and Iranian authorities.

Considering both analyses, the research argues in the final chapter (chapter 6: Conclusion) the Bahraini government did not consider the significance of crisis public diplomacy before the examined protests. It suggests the examined crisis could be a turning point for Bahraini public diplomacy, where it devotes more attention to the criticality of communicating with foreign publics, and utilising public diplomacy to mitigate crises. This does not suggest that the Bahraini government did not engage with foreign media and publics before the crisis. Rather, it suggests the crisis was a key factor in changing how public diplomacy is practiced in Bahrain, especially in terms of devoting more efforts to assure the promotion of public diplomacy messages that support and maintain the power position of the Bahraini authorities.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This project examines the frames communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy messages during three key moments of the 2011 crisis in Bahrain, and the factors connected to their articulation. It aims to deliver insights on frame-building process and construction of messages by public diplomacy professionals that promote a specific version of reality, which potentially might influence co-construction of specific social realities around the Bahraini crisis and its aftermath. This chapter reviews theoretical frameworks that inform this study focusing on the frames reflected in government news items published during the crisis and the factors related to the production of such frames.

The chapter contains five main sections. The following section (2) focuses on public diplomacy and is divided into 3 main subcategories. Section 2.1 reviews public diplomacy definitions and goals to highlight how it is understood in this thesis as a political information activity rather than a cultural communication activity to build relationships with foreign publics. As political information in public diplomacy relies heavily on the use of media platforms to inform foreign publics, section 2.2 focuses on the conceptualisations of media role in public diplomacy. This is followed by, in section 2.3, a discussion on three different conceptualisations of public diplomacy in general. It highlights

how the conceptualisation of public diplomacy started mostly within a realist school, before the emergence of liberalist viewpoint, and how it is recently revitalized under the heading of 'new public diplomacy', where two-way symmetrical communication and balanced relations are emphasised.

While public diplomacy's literature offers studies from several theoretical perspectives; the literature is still dominated by functionalist approaches that evaluate the effectiveness of public diplomacy activities. For instance, the concept of 'new public diplomacy' stemmed additional interest in the study of public diplomacy using the concepts of two-way symmetrical communication and mutually beneficial relations, which are widely researched in functionalist public relations literature. Section 3.1 discusses the functionalist approaches transferred from public relations to public diplomacy to understand how these dominant approaches work, and the general critique of this approach. This is followed, in section 3.2 by a discussion on the social constructivist approach in public relations to illustrate how public diplomacy is examined here from a social constructivist viewpoint. It also presents the constructivist paradigm as the most prominent approach to achieve this research's goals of delivering insights on public diplomacy and its potential contribution to co-construction of specific versions of reality during a crisis and its aftermath.

After this, section 4 reviews the concept of 'framing', which is utilised here to examine public diplomacy messages from a social constructivist viewpoint. Framing is argued to have potential in public relations' research to systematically examine what versions of perceived reality are communicated

in texts written by public relations or public diplomacy practitioners. A social constructivist approach to framing aims to highlight the multiplicity of frames communicated by several actors about a specific issue, and talks about framing as symbolic power and how this works in the 'frame contests' arena. It also suggests that a text contains sets of "interpretive packages" that consist of a set of elements that support and reinforce each other to give meaning to an issue (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 398). It is employed in this project to specifically examine the frames communicated by the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) during the 2011 crisis, with the aim of understanding what versions of reality were promoted through Bahraini public diplomacy at the time.

After this, section 4.2 reviews research focusing on the construction and articulation of frames (frame-building and frame-setting) in a public diplomacy context. It highlights how this line of research mainly focuses on examining the factors that contribute to the success or failure of public diplomacy frames to appear in foreign media's content. However, my research does not aim to investigate whether or how Bahraini public diplomacy frames were adopted by foreign media or other actors. Rather, my aim is to deliver insights on the factors and background processes connected to the construction and articulation of specific frames (frame-building) in online content produced by Bahraini public diplomacy communicators themselves and not journalists. Therefore, section 4.3 argues the potential of extending Shoemaker & Reese's (1996) hierarchal model of influence on media content to a public diplomacy context. This theory is used in my research as a framework to understand the

factors related to the articulation of Bahraini public diplomacy frames during the 2011 crisis at five levels: individual; professional, organisational; external; and ideological.

To deliver insights on academic discussions on the framing of the Bahraini crisis, section 4.4 discusses framing studies focusing on the examined crisis. It highlights the existence of handful of studies that look into the framing of the Bahraini crisis by different actors. Yet, none of these studies specifically focuses on governments or government frames. This section also highlights how insights from these studies are employed in the frame analysis in my thesis. Then, section 4.5 reviews available studies on the wider problematic context that coincided with the examined Bahraini crisis, known as the 'Arab Spring'. It delivers insights on how this phenomenon was approached from frame-building and public diplomacy perspectives.

As my research looks at public diplomacy activities in a crisis situation, section 5 focuses on crisis communication. Section 5.1 highlights how crises are understood from a social constructivist perspective, and presents the significance of public diplomacy during crises. Section 5.2 discusses Benoit's (1997) image repair theory and its role in this thesis. And, finally, section 5.3 discusses crises response in different national contexts.

## **2. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

### **2.1. Definitions and Goals**

Public diplomacy can be understood traditionally as “government communication aimed at foreign audiences to achieve changes in the ‘hearts or minds’ of the people”

(Szondi, 2008, p. 6). The term ‘public diplomacy’ was first coined by the retired American diplomat Edmund Gullion in 1965 (Vela & Xifra, 2015, p. 85). He defines it as follows:

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and implementation of foreign policies. It includes dimensions of international relations beyond those of traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; private interests and groups interacting between countries [...]. In public diplomacy, the transnational flow of information and ideas is key.

Gullion’s definition highlights the foundations of understanding public diplomacy as specifically government communication function targeted at audiences in another nation. More recent definitions of public diplomacy draw attention to the difference between public and traditional diplomacy. Castells (2008 in Vela & Xifra, 2015, p. 85), for example, states:

Public diplomacy is not propaganda. And it is not government diplomacy. We do not need to use a new concept to define the traditional practices of diplomacy. Public diplomacy is the diplomacy of public opinion, that is, the projection of the values and ideas of the general public in the international arena.

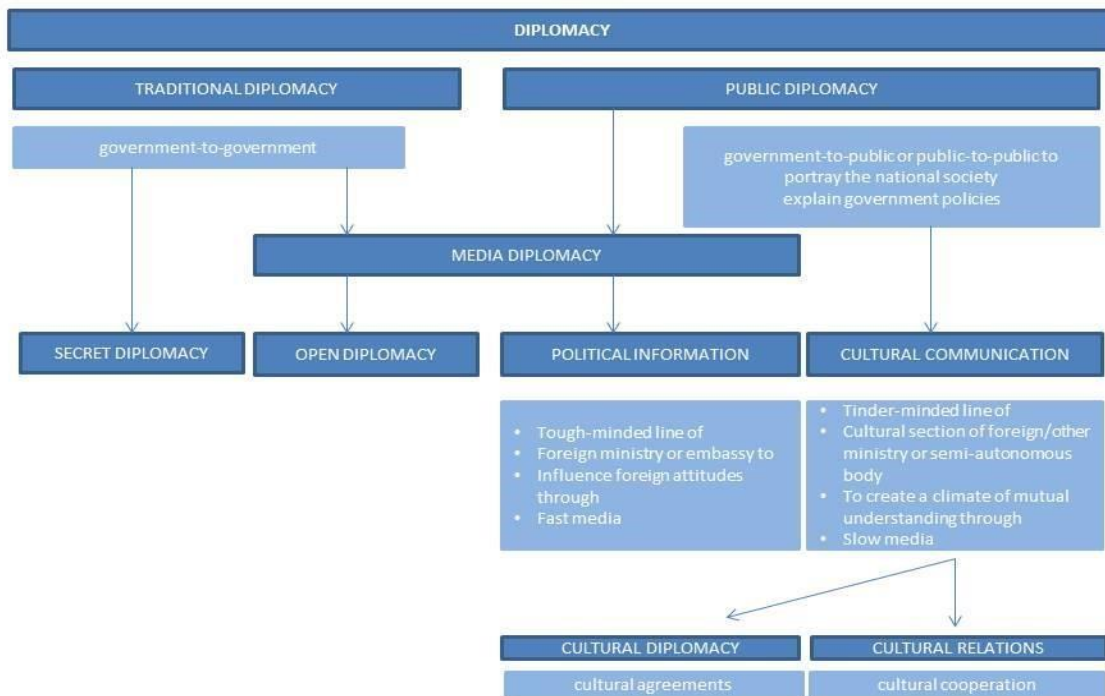
The above definition suggests that, as communications in the international arena are no longer mere communication between governments at a state level (traditional diplomacy), there is a shift toward public, citizen

level diplomacy (public diplomacy) (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 436). The definition also suggests that “public diplomacy is not propaganda” while, among practitioners and scholars, one of the longest-running debates about public diplomacy is whether it should be related to propaganda (Kelley, 2009, p. 75). For example, Millissen (2005, p. 11) states that public diplomacy is more than a form of propaganda practiced by diplomats. Conversely, according to Cull (2009, p. 19), Gullion’s coinage of the term ‘public diplomacy’ in 1965 is a fresh start of an established term: propaganda, which had accumulated many negative connotations being understood as “the deliberate manipulation of information to achieve a desired result” (Scott-Smith, 2009, p. 51). Gullion said he “would have liked to call ‘public diplomacy’ ‘propaganda’” because “it seemed the nearest thing in the pure interpretation of the word to what we were doing.” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 66) The reason that the term public diplomacy took off in 1965 was that there was a real need for such a concept in Washington, DC, where the United States Information Agency needed an alternative to the “malignant term propaganda: a fresh turn of phrase upon which it could build new and benign meanings” (Cull, 2009, p. 21). In my research, I adopt the argument that even if public diplomacy may not be equivalent to propaganda, there are instances where it has shown a propagandistic communication style (Kelley, 2009, p. 82; Pratkanis, 2009, p. 111).

Public diplomacy literature also offers definitions that differ based on the goal of engaging in public diplomacy, whether it is persuasion or mutual understanding. Manheim (1994, p. 4 in Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 448), for

instance, defines it as a persuasive form of communication stating it is “efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the policy of the target nation to advantage”. This definition is adopted in this thesis. Tuch’s (1990, p. 3 in Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 438) definition, on the other hand, presents the goal of public diplomacy as building mutual understanding by stating “public diplomacy is a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies.” These two goals work in-line with distinctions between the ‘tough-minded’ and ‘tender-minded’ schools of public diplomacy- between ‘political information’ (persuasion) and ‘cultural communication’ (understanding) (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 438). The tough-minded school aims to influence attitudes of foreign publics by sharing hard political information through “fast media” like television, radio, and newspapers. According to Signitzer and Coombs (1992 in Snow, 2009, p. 9), the tough-minded school holds that the purpose of public diplomacy is to exert an influence on attitudes of foreign audiences using persuasion and propaganda. On the other hand, the tender-minded view public diplomacy as long-term cultural function that should ideally create mutual understanding through “slow media” like academic exchanges (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 438). These distinctions are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. System of public diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006, p. 439)



The above classification lists media relations as an ‘informative’ form of communicating with foreign publics (government-to-people), while exchange programs are a form of building mutual understanding between foreign and domestic publics (people-to-people) (Signitzer& Wamser, 2006, p. 438). My study focuses on the media relations aspect of public diplomacy, and primarily examines the ‘information’ aspect instead of ‘building mutual understanding’ and relationships with foreign publics. It is worth noting, however, that the classification of cultural exchange as a ‘tender-minded’ approach to generate ‘mutual understanding’ limits the understanding of the “real” goals of cultural public diplomacy which could also be ‘persuasive’ (L’Etang, 2006, p. 379). For example, a cultural agency funded by a government also has ‘tough-minded’



'persuasive' goals behind its engagement in cultural events in another nation (ibid).

As my research specifically focuses on the media relations aspect of public diplomacy, the next section further discusses the role of media in public diplomacy, with attention to the concept of 'soft power'.

## **2.2. Media and Soft Power in Public Diplomacy**

Public diplomacy employs different tools, the most important of which is media (Samei, 2015, p. 114). To illustrate the significance of media in public diplomacy, it is important to highlight a closely related concept to public diplomacy which is "soft power". This term was coined by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist who defines it as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 2008, p. 94). The concept of 'soft power' highlights that public diplomacy functions use soft power resources (e.g. nation's culture, values, policies) and not hard power (e.g. military operations, bribes). When a nation's soft power resources are seen as legitimate or authorized by foreign publics, a nation's soft power is increased (Gilboa, 2008, p. 61). This is significant due to the growing importance of images and control of information to build national statuses in world politics instead of mere military and economic power (Gilboa, 2001, p. 2; Gilboa, 2008, p. 59). Moreover, the increasing costs of hard power directed nations to attract others using soft power instead of forcing them to do so (Jungblut, 2017, p. 385). It is also worth noting that nations' rising interest in public diplomacy was most of the time a direct reaction to a downturn in

foreign perceptions of their nations and the recognition of the significance of a nation's favourable image abroad to achieve its foreign policy goals (Melissen, 2005a, p. 9; Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 194).

A nation's image is considered one form of soft power (Nye & Owen, 1996 in Zhang, 2006, p. 26). Image can be understood as perception of a group, person, or nation held by others (Benoit & Brinson, 1999, p. 145). Nations seek to cultivate favourable national images to achieve a range of objectives in foreign relations (Dolea, 2015, p. 276; Hartig, 2017, p. 343; Kirat, 2005, p. 324). Governments communicate with and explain their positions not only to local publics, but also foreign audiences with the aim of creating support for their opinion in foreign publics and potentially have an impact on the policy of other countries or votes within supranational entities (Jungblut, 2017, p. 384). Media is one tool used by public diplomats to do so. This can be either "state-owned media" targeted at foreign publics (Zhang et al., 2017, p. 238), or foreign news media which have a vital role in shaping the public opinion on other countries, especially because, unlike domestic issues, foreign news is beyond an individual's direct experience (Lim & Seo, 2009, p. 204). Thus, communicating through mass media, traditional or digital, state-owned or foreign is a "crucial" component of public diplomacy (Wu & Yang, 2017, p. 347).

There are different conceptualisations on the role of media and media relations in public diplomacy. For example, it is conceptualised as 'international news broadcasting' (Cull, 2008); 'media diplomacy' (Gilboa,

2002; 2008); and 'mediated public diplomacy' (Entman, 2008). They have specific differences, but all focus on the use of media and media relations in public diplomacy practices.

Cull (2008) defines 'international news broadcasting' as a specific public diplomacy practice that aims to "manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television, and the internet to engage with foreign publics" (p. 34). He emphasises that the key component of this practice is its focus on 'news'. While his work draws on the British practice of public diplomacy, he suggests that, historically, the most influential element of international broadcasting has been its use of news, especially when it is perceived as "objective". This led to the alignment of the entire practice of international broadcasting with the ethical culture of domestic broadcast journalism and turned international broadcasting into a mechanism for diffusing this culture (ibid). Although this builds on insights from a specific cultural context of practicing public diplomacy, it suggests close connections between the routines of practicing international news broadcasting and journalism. The significance of this similarity between both fields is discussed further in section 4.3 when I discuss the potential of using media research frameworks in the study of public diplomacy.

Another conceptualisation on the role of media in the practice of public diplomacy is Gilboa's (2008) 'media diplomacy'. It is understood as the use of "the media to investigate and promote mutual interests, negotiations, and conflict resolution" (p. 58). Media diplomacy is practiced through several

routines and special media activities, including “press conferences, interviews, and leaks, visits by heads of states and mediators in rival countries, and spectacular media events” (Gilboa, 2002, p. 741). According to Gilboa (2002), media diplomacy is different from public diplomacy in that the last typically uses media communications along with interpersonal and other tools (brochures, courses, cultural exchanges), but they are both oriented to long-term cultivation of favourability toward the practicing country among foreign publics.

Entman (2008), on the other hand, developed the concept of ‘mediated US public diplomacy’. As suggested by its label, it is based on North American context of public diplomacy and defined as “the organised attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of the US policy in foreign media” (p. 89). Mediated public diplomacy is different from Gilboa’s (2002; 2008) understandings of media or public diplomacy in that “it involves shorter term and more targeted efforts using mass communication (including the internet) to increase support of a country’s specific foreign policies among audiences beyond that country’s borders” (Entman, 2008, p. 88). However, mediated public diplomacy can go beyond mere promotion of foreign policies in North American context; as it can be utilised to garner support for all decisions made in international context (Jungblut, 2017, p. 385). “Despite the increasing interest in mediated public diplomacy, empirical examination and theoretical understanding of the field are still limited.” (Sheafer et al., 2014, p. 150) ‘Mediated public diplomacy’ is

discussed further in section 4.2 in relation to the concept of “frame-building” (Scheufele, 1999), where I highlight the latter’s use as one approach of examining public diplomacy activities which have a potential to contribute to the co-construction of specific versions of reality.

‘Mediated public diplomacy’ can make use of ‘international broadcasting’ (Jungblut, 2017, p. 385), and I adopt this conceptualisation in my research for a number of reasons. First, mediated public diplomacy reflects the focus on the use of media and media relations to promote specific presentations of national issues in the international arena to garner support for the sponsoring country among foreign publics. This is associated with my focus on examining what versions of reality were promoted by the Bahraini government messages to foreign media and publics during the 2011 crisis. Second, mediated public diplomacy has a short-term focus, which is the timeframe focus of the examined Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the 2011 crisis because, in crises, public diplomacy is a reactive form of communication, where actors need to react to a short notice warning to limit any damage (Andreasen, 2008, p. 203). This also brings us to the third reason as the short-term and reactive features of crisis response are mostly practiced through media relations, especially through one-way forms of communication (e.g. news), because they can communicate a nation’s standpoint on a specific issue or correct misinformation (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, p. 15). In my research, I analyse public diplomacy texts published in news format on the BNA website aimed at foreign media and publics. Fourth, international news broadcasting is

associated with the study of “state-owned” media targeted at foreign publics, such as television, radio, or newswires (Zhang, et al., 2017, p. 239). “State-owned media not only directly reach out to foreign publics, but also target foreign news media in that country. This case is especially true for state-owned international news agencies with foreign news organisations as the main audience.” (ibid, p. 240) My research focuses on news items produced by public diplomacy communicators at the IAA and published on the state-owned newswire: Bahrain News Agency (BNA).

As mentioned earlier, my research focuses on the practice of public diplomacy during a time of crisis and specifically looks at the messages promoted to foreign media and publics during the crisis and its aftermath. Sympathetic media coverage is vital for political influence, especially at times of political conflicts (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 447). In such times, a nation engages in public diplomacy to defend its policies and attack those of the enemy (Gilboa & Clila, 2016). This argument is offered in an international conflict context, whereas this thesis looks at a national crisis where same principles apply. Antagonists’ images in the international news media can play a significant role in determining their level of political success in the international arena, which explains why so many political actors invest considerable resources in public diplomacy (Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 263). The political communication environment is known for competition between political actors, issues, and messages for media attention. This attention has two dimensions: competing for media attention (agenda building) and

competing for media framing (frame-building) (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 448). In their competition for foreign media attention, actors, such as national governments are required to demonstrate “skills, performance, and talent that are pertinent to these media values, such as initiating major political events that will be considered ‘good stories’ by foreign media” (ibid, p. 449). My research looks at the messages (frames) communicated during a time of crisis and the factors connected to the articulation of specific messages in news items produced by government communicators and published on the website of the BNA.

While this section focused on conceptualisations specifically related to the role of media as a public diplomacy tool, the next section discusses different conceptualisations of public diplomacy in general. It highlights how different conceptualisations have different focus in their study of public diplomacy, and explains how and why this research adopts a realist<sup>1</sup> public diplomacy standpoint.

### **2.3. Conceptualisations of Public Diplomacy**

In terms of the conceptualisation of public diplomacy, the concept has gone through three main stages: the realist, the liberalist, and ‘new public diplomacy’. Each of these is related to changes in the international relations’ environment that influenced the scholarship and practice of public diplomacy. In addition, these conceptualisations highlight the dominance of Western,

---

<sup>1</sup> The realist stance here specifically refers to the conceptualisation of public diplomacy and not the epistemological stand implicated by the social constructivist paradigm. Epistemology, and other philosophical standpoints, is discussed further in the Methodology chapter (3).

specifically North American, focus in public diplomacy literature that urges for public diplomacy research in other contexts. I discuss the differences between these three conceptualisations directly below, leading to how the concept of 'new public diplomacy' encourages the study of public diplomacy using public relations' models, especially those of two-way symmetrical communication and relationship building. It is worth noting that these models are studied from functionalist normative perspectives focusing on the role of public relations in achieving organisational/state goals and objectives and overall success. However, this project looks at public diplomacy from a social constructivist viewpoint discussed further in section 3.2.

### **Realist public diplomacy**

Public diplomacy's origin and historical development is largely defined through and dominated by realism (Melissen, 2005a, p. 5). Within the realist school "international relations [are] largely a realm of power and interest" (Donnelly, 2002, p. 9), where "the state's interest provides the spring of action" (ibid, p. 7). A realist approach assumes that the world is driven by power and greed which will necessarily lead to clash of interests among nation-states, and therefore, pressure, intelligence, and inducements must be used to increase chances of success (L'Etang, 2006, p. 384; L'Etang, 2009, p. 617). Two main assumptions make the base for realist public diplomacy. First is the view of the state as the most important actor in the world system, and second is the assumption of power politics and national security as the premium



concern of a nation-state (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 494; Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

Within the realist world view, public diplomacy is conceptualised as: image cultivation, promotion of mutual understanding, or advocacy of national interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 382). In 'image cultivation', public diplomacy is viewed as one-way communication whereby nations aim to cultivate favourable images with publics who live in other countries. In the 'promotion of mutual understanding', it is assumed that better mutual understanding between the sponsoring nation and targeted nations facilitates execution of foreign policy, where reducing misperceptions of a nation state and its soft power resources can lessen complications in relations between nations. Finally, in the 'advocacy of national interests', public diplomacy is viewed as a tool that serves the promotion of national interests and the creation of favourable international communication environment (Zhang & Swartz, 2009).

These realist conceptualisations are criticised for: their "power-based" focus which uses public diplomacy as a power tool in the hands of the state and not to build relations with the publics of other nations; the state-centred emphasis focusing on how public diplomacy can best serve the interests of nation-states only without highlighting other non-state actors in the international arena; and public diplomats' aim to boost the power of a state by promoting its values through rhetorically defending its interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). Despite the critique, these three realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy reflect the reality of international

relations and how public diplomacy is commonly practiced (Fisher, 2010, p. 277; Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). My research draws on the understanding of public diplomacy from a realist viewpoint. The implications of this are reflected in the understanding of the goal of engaging in public diplomacy.

Realism's assumption of the state as the only primary actor limits the number of significant actors in the environment of international relations. This means, within a realist world view, foreign publics are only perceived as channels through which national governments influence foreign governments (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 494). This means that realist public diplomacy has a dual goal. It first aims to influence the publics of a targeted state and shape its public opinion on foreign policy matters, and then this should lead to the second aim which is pressurising the targeted state's government to change foreign or local policies (Szondi, 2009, p. 292). This dual-goal orientation is perceived in this research as the aim of engaging in public diplomacy. Meaning that the communication of specific messages by the Bahraini government during the 2011 crisis does not aim to influence foreign publics or media as an end goal. Rather, the ultimate goal is to influence the governments of other countries through influencing foreign media and public opinion first. The focus on foreign authorities as an end goal is not to undermine the growing vitality of foreign public opinion in the international relations environment which is highlighted more within liberalist and new public diplomacy. Rather, the significance of this perception lies in considering the wider problematic context in the Arab region at the time of the examined crisis. As indicated in the Introduction chapter, protests in Arab countries which coincided with the

examined Bahraini crisis were widely framed across foreign media as the 'Arab Spring' (Avraham, 2015; Karolak, 2012, p. 173). The perception of Arab demonstrations as 'Arab Spring' legitimises urgent international military intervention as a valid solution to help protestors bring down what was perceived as oppressive regimes (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). In Libya, for example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) air forces, with the United Nations' (UN) and national (e.g. UK government) approval was sent to expel Gaddafi's regime (Maguire & Vickers, 2013; Nuruzzaman, 2015), and this was on 19 March 2011, just around the second examined moment in Bahrain (14-16 March 2011) where the situation escalated and Bahraini authorities asked its GCC allies for support to contain the situation. It is argued that the decision to send NATO to Libya was supported by foreign public opinion on the significance of international intervention to help civilians from oppressive regimes<sup>2</sup> (Nuruzzaman, 2015). Thus, the understanding of public diplomacy from a realist viewpoint with its dual-goal suggests that the Bahraini government's engagement in public diplomacy through media relations during the examined crisis was not targeted at foreign media and publics as an end goal. Rather, influencing foreign media and publics to form favourable perceptions of the Bahraini authorities during the crisis aimed to avoid a foreign public opinion pressure on foreign

---

<sup>2</sup> The act is controversial from a human rights perspective because the NATO air forces' operations did result in the death of civilians, suggesting the move was to aid certain world powers and geopolitics to get rid of Gaddafi and not specifically to aid Libyan civilians (Nuruzzaman, 2015).

governments and supranational organisations to legitimise international military intervention in Bahrain.

Note that the understanding of public diplomacy from a realist perspective is not limited to the focus on its dual-goal. This approach also emphasises promotion, persuasion, self-interest, and impression management carried out by nation-states (Szondi, 2009, p. 292). Nevertheless, the focus on nation-states as the primary actors and the dual-goal of public diplomacy was challenged by liberalists who direct attention towards other players in the international arena.

### **Liberalist public diplomacy**

In the mid-2000s liberalist public diplomacy became a challenging conceptualisation to compete with its realist counterpart (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 497). The emergence of new actors in the international arena such as non-government organisations (NGOs), corporations, state-less nations and activists, and the increasing interdependence among such players led to changes in the conceptualisation of public diplomacy (Dolea, 2015, p. 277; L'Etang, 2009, p. 610; Xifra & McKie, 2012, p. 820; Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 496). International liberalists, unlike realists, do not view the state as the most prominent actor in international relations, but consider the state as one important actor among others in world politics (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 496). Within liberalist public diplomacy, foreign publics became an end partner communicator in a one-step process of communicating with foreign publics instead of the earlier dual-goal process (ibid, p. 498). The role of public diplomacy for liberalists is to build a receptive environment for national

interests abroad through influencing foreign public opinion by creating understanding and appreciation of a nation's culture, ideas and policies, labelled as 'soft power' (Szondi, 2008. p. 7; Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 496).

Liberalists, as well as realists, emphasise the value of 'soft power' in achieving national interests. As mentioned earlier, this stems from nations' recognition of the importance of image cultivation and reputation management in world politics rather than merely focusing on military and economic power (Gilboa, 2001, p. 2; Gilboa, 2008, p. 59). Yet, liberalists view the work of soft power in a more complex communication environment, where governments are only one among multiple players in the international arena (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 496). Specifically, liberalist public diplomacy focuses more on the "conditions (credibility and legitimacy) for soft power, in which a country's soft power resources can be translated into soft power" (ibid). Meaning that, liberalist public diplomacy emphasises the match between the nation's communicated messages on policies and its actions. Although my research mainly views realist public diplomacy conceptualisations as more reflective of its common practices, it does not deny the complexity in the international relations arena raised by the variety of state and non-state actors and interdependencies among them. However, my research focus remains on a state-government context and does not consider other actors, because I examine the Bahraini government's messages- a voice mostly ignored in academic studies on the framing of the Bahraini 2011 crisis.

In addition to the rise of non-state actors, other significant changes in the international relations environment contributed to the emergence of the

concept of 'new public diplomacy'. This conceptualisation has implications on the value of public opinion in public diplomacy, and the study of public diplomacy using public relations' concepts of the normative concepts of two-way symmetrical communication and balanced, mutually beneficial relations.

### **New public diplomacy**

'New public diplomacy' was introduced by Melissen (2005a), who points to the shift in public diplomacy from 'promoting' positive aspects of a country to foreign audiences towards 'engaging' with foreign publics. The literature does not offer clear cut definitions of 'new public diplomacy'. Instead, in an attempt to propose possible definitions, it offers discussions on the driving factors behind the development of the concept and what differentiates it from earlier conceptualisations. One of these factors is the 9/11 attacks on the US, which developed different appreciation to public opinion within public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005, p. xix; Gilboa, 2008, p. 55; Snow, 2009, p. ix).

Within 'new public diplomacy' the 9/11 attacks are viewed as a result of US public diplomacy's failure to create favourable attitudes toward the US and its values, for depending merely on one-way information and self-projection techniques to share the American values with taken-for-granted foreign publics, assuming that such approach was enough to build favourable foreign public opinion toward the US (Snow, 2009, p. 6; Zaharna, 2004). As a result of this 'failure', a new approach to public diplomacy emerged, where gaining foreign public opinion support became the ultimate goal. This considerably shifted the focus from elites to mass foreign publics in the Muslim world, due to a fear of terrorists' success in spreading their ideology among Muslim

publics (Nisbet et al., 2004, p. 15). Most importantly, within new public diplomacy, gaining favourable foreign public opinion should be ideally achieved through two-way symmetrical communication and relationship building (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005; Melissen, 2005; Snow, 2009).

Attention to the significance of foreign public opinion post 9/11 was not limited to the US. Arab and Muslim nations were also put under pressure after 9/11 because they were viewed as responsible for the terrorist attacks on the US (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2004, p. 339). This fuelled negative attitudes against Arabs and Muslims as terrorists by a majority of a Western society that did not know much about these cultures in the first place (ibid). This has created huge challenge to Arabs' public diplomacy as they needed to recover from such terrorist image among foreign publics (ibid; Hiebert, 2005, p. 319; Zhang & Benoit, 2004).

As indicated earlier, 9/11 is only one aspect underlying discussions on 'new public diplomacy'. Cull (2010, p. 15) mentions that 'new public diplomacy' reflects the changes in the environment in which public diplomacy is practiced, increasing emphasis on the significance of foreign public opinion. The changes include: the end of the Cold War bipolar era; the rise of international actors such as NGOs and corporations; and the advancements in communication technologies raising global and real-time communications during the last decade or so. The end of the Cold War represents the end of the top-down communication era characterised by the dual-goal concept of engaging in

public diplomacy. The rise of international actors suggests public diplomacy is no longer mere government practice, as the involvement of private individuals and groups in public diplomacy challenges governments' public diplomacy efforts because these actors' agenda may differ from the governments' (Dolea, 2015, p. 278; Van Dyke & Vercic, 2009, p. 916; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 264; Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 110). Real-time media in a globalised world has also complicated this challenge by enabling corporations, countries, and individuals reach into the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005, p. 340). Note that public have always mattered to diplomats, but it is the easier access by publics to advanced communication technologies that further increased the significance of public opinion (Snow, 2009; Melissen, 2005a, p. 24).

These changes in the international affairs environment encouraged changes in how public diplomacy is perceived, giving more importance to networking with foreign publics rather than merely focusing on influencing foreign governments. And similar to post 9/11 debates on public diplomacy, these changes influenced the conceptualisation of public diplomacy in a normative sense, suggesting it should be ideally practiced through two-way symmetrical communication processes, and aiming for mutually beneficial balanced relations with foreign publics. These concepts are discussed further in section 5. Note though that 'new public diplomacy' is mainly a shift in the theoretical standpoint and not a transformation in practice (Pamment, 2011, p. 21).



I mentioned earlier that the conceptualisation of 'new public diplomacy' draws our attention to how the study of public diplomacy may be consistent with models emerging from the field of public relations. This specifically relates to new public diplomacy's emphasis on the idealistic concepts of mutual understanding and two-way symmetrical communication to build relationships rather than persuade publics via one-way information (Melissen, 2005; Snow, 2009). Two-way symmetrical communication and relationship building are concepts widely researched within the area of public relations. One of the earliest attempts that encourage studying public diplomacy and public relations closely is the work of Signitzer and Coombs (1992). They argue that public relations and public diplomacy have a similar objective of affecting public opinions for their client or organisation's benefit (government in case of public diplomacy) (p. 139), which suggests the transferability of public relations' concepts of symmetry and relationship building to study how public diplomacy should be practiced.

Nevertheless, another perspective on the significance of studying public diplomacy and public relations closely is offered by L'Etang (1996; 2006). While she also addresses similar boundary spanning roles in both public relations and public diplomacy, which encourages researching them closely, her work is underpinned by understanding of diplomacy as a speciality within the more academically advanced area of international relations. Instead of using functionalist approaches that examine how public relations and public diplomacy should be ideally practiced through two-way symmetrical communication and build/maintain mutually beneficial relations to increase

organisational effectiveness, she argues that linking public relations to diplomacy will help address the role of power positions in public relations functions (L'Etang, 1996, p. 24; L'Etang, 2006, p. 381; L'Etang, 2009, p. 609). Adopting this perspective shifts attention in public relations and public diplomacy research to examine how various actors, through their practice, try to impose their own definitions and interpretations of specific issues, or even manipulate meaning in order to impose specific versions of reality in the competitive environment of international relations (Dolea, 2015, p. 275; L'Etang, 2006, p. 379). My research draws on such understanding of public relations as a social phenomenon which, through its different activities, like public diplomacy, contributes to the construction of specific versions of social reality (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). Therefore, my research aims to examine public diplomacy and how it promotes a certain understanding of events in government messages, potentially contributing to the co-construction of specific versions of reality. It does this by specifically looking at the frames communicated by the Bahraini government during the 2011 crisis, and the background processes and factors connected to the articulation of specific frames.

Until this point, the chapter presented several definitions of public diplomacy and its goals, how media is studied as a public diplomacy tool, and different conceptualisations of public diplomacy. It illustrates that public diplomacy is understood in this thesis as a form of government communication aiming to persuade foreign publics through information with strong focus on media relations, and perceives public diplomacy from a realist viewpoint. The

last section presented two different views on the significance of examining public diplomacy and public relations closely. My research does not adopt a functionalist worldview, where there is emphasis on the significance of two-way symmetrical communication and relationship building with the aim to achieve organisational or political goals and objectives. Rather, it examines public diplomacy through the lens of the social constructivist paradigm. The next section discusses the functionalist approaches transferred from public relations to public diplomacy to understand how these “dominant” approaches work (Dolea, 2015, p. 276). This is followed by a discussion of the social constructivist approach to illustrate why it is more fruitful to answer this research’s questions.

### **3. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND RESEARCH PARADIGMS**

#### **3.1. Public Diplomacy, Public Relations, and Functionalism**

In terms of the theoretical frameworks used to study public diplomacy, the literature was criticized for the dominance of writings by practitioners and policy advocates especially in American context during the Cold War, leaving a gap in the theoretical advancement of public diplomacy as an academic field (Gilboa, 2008, p. 56; Gregory, 2008, p. 275). Yet, in more recent years, academics are paying more attention to public diplomacy (Gregory, 2008, p. 275). Public diplomacy is a multidisciplinary field of research (Huijgh & Byrne, 2012; Gilboa, 2008, p. 56). The study of the concept of public diplomacy is hosted among several disciplines of social science, such as public relations,

international relations, communication, and branding (Gilboa, 2008, p. 61). My research studies public diplomacy as a specific function of public relations practiced by governments and aimed at foreign audiences, while public relations is understood as:

the flow of purposive communication produced on behalf of individuals, formally constituted and informally constituted groups, through their continuous trans-actions with other social entities. It has social, cultural, political and economic effects at local, national and global levels. (Edwards, 2012, p. 21)

This section discusses how public diplomacy is studied in the dominant functionalist approach in public relations to illustrate why the social constructivist paradigm is more suitable framework to answer this research questions.

Literature on public diplomacy was criticized for its Western focus, especially on US practices and definitions of public diplomacy (Brown, 2004, p. 14; Gilboa, 2008, p. 56; Melissen, 2005, p. xix; Melissen, 2005a, p. 6). Within this Western focus, the practice of public diplomacy in the US is divided into three main stages. The first phase falls between the end of the Second World War (1945) and the end of the Cold War (1991), where public diplomacy was about the spread of North American and Western values. The second phase is between the fall of Berlin Wall (1989) and the 9/11 attacks (2001), depicted by the fall in American public diplomacy worldwide. The third phase is post 9/11, and focuses on US-Arab relations (Szondi, 2008. p. 2; Szondi, 2009. p. 292). As indicated above, after 9/11 the concept of 'new public diplomacy' emerged, signifying the study of public diplomacy using public relations' concepts of two-way symmetrical communication and relationship building

(Fitzpatrick, 2007; Melissen, 2005; Snow, 2009). Historically, public relations scholars showed little interest in public diplomacy, or how diplomats communicate and build relations with foreign publics. Even public diplomacy practitioners ignored relevant knowledge in public relations literature (Vanc & Fitzpatrick, 2016, pp. 432-433). They even tried to distance themselves from public relations due to its problematic connections with propaganda (Cull, 2009, p. 21), despite public diplomacy's roots in the persuasion industry of public relations (Snow, 2009, p. 9). However, in more recent years, public relations scholars' interest in public diplomacy is significantly increasing, as they applied, tested, and recommended concepts from public relations as workable theoretical frameworks in the study of public diplomacy (ibid, p. 433).

As mentioned earlier, one of the earliest attempts encouraging the study of public diplomacy and public relations closely was by Signitzer and Coombs (1992). They suggest public relations and public diplomacy have similar goals and use similar tools as practitioners in both areas aim to influence public opinion for the benefit of their sponsoring organisation (p. 139). Signitzer and Wamser (2006) went further to conceptualise public diplomacy as "international nation public relations". 'International' reflects the international dimension, 'nation' reflects the focus on the relation between the nation-state and different actors, and 'public relations' emphasise the communicative

dimension and offers theoretical and instrumental input to public diplomacy<sup>3</sup> (p. 441).

Particularly after the development of the notion of 'new public diplomacy', this close focus was taken further with the notions' emerging interest in the concepts of symmetry and relationships which are widely researched among functionalist public relations. Functionalist public relations dominates its scholarship (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011, p. 2), yet the use of other paradigms such as the social constructivist, and critical are emerging and gaining recognition in the field. Functionalism is defined as "any view which analyses something in terms of how it functions, and especially in terms of its causes and effects" (Lacey, 1976, p. 83 in L'Etang, 2008, p. 10). Most importantly, it "views societies as integrated, harmonious, cohesive 'wholes' or 'social systems', where all parts ideally function to maintain equilibrium, consensus and social order" (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 124 in L'Etang, 2008, p. 10). This highlights how ideas of balance, equilibrium and consensus are at the heart of functionalist thinking.

Functionalism in public relations underlies approaches such as the excellence theory and relationship management which were mainly developed in the US (Curtin, 2011, p. 37), and has traditional emphasis on making recommendations for practitioners (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011, p. 2; Grunig, 2001, p. 17; Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2012, p. 160). Further, functionalist public

---

<sup>3</sup> Note though that this conceptualisation by Signitzer and Wamser (2006) is offered in the discussion of the cultural communication aspect of public diplomacy (see Figure 1).

relations' definitions endorse mutuality values and the public interests, and assert the strategic, managerial organisational focus of the field (Brown, 2011a, p. 94). This approach conceptualises public relations as a managerial function within an organisation.

Two-way symmetrical communication emphasised in 'new public diplomacy' is an essential concept in functionalist public relations scholarship. Symmetry in public relations means that it "should go beyond the advocacy of self-interest without concern for the impact of an organisation's behaviour on others to a balance between self-interest and concern for the interests of others." (Grunig, 2001, p. 28) This emphasis on balance within symmetry does not work in-line with the understanding of public diplomacy from a realist viewpoint, especially as realists perceive public diplomacy as a power tool in the hand of nation-states to maintain their interests instead of concern for the interests of others (Zhang & Swartz, 2009).

Two-way symmetry is also a core element of the 'excellence' theory in public relations (Grunig, 1992, p. 6). In 1992, James Grunig and his colleagues published their research on public relations as a first step of developing the 'excellence theory', which is perceived as the "first general theory of public relations" (Grunig, 1992, p. 2). Excellence in public relations is symmetrical, idealistic and critical, and managerial (Grunig, 1992, p. 10; Grunig & White, 1992, p. 31). 'Symmetry' is explained above. 'Idealistic' means how it should be practiced as a mechanism by which organisations and competing groups in a pluralistic system interact to manage conflict for the benefit of all (Grunig,

1992, p. 9; Grunig & White, 1992, p. 56). The 'critical' dimension means that public relations' practitioners and scholars "can and should criticize public relations for poor ethics, negative social consequences, or ineffectiveness" (Grunig, 1992, p. 10). The 'managerial' dimension argues that public relations "must" be a management function in order to contribute to an organisation's effectiveness (ibid, p. 11), which is meeting organisational goals, ultimately organisational autonomy (ibid).

When examining excellence in public relations, an important question is: "how must public relations be practiced and the communication function be organised for it to contribute the most to organisational effectiveness." (Grunig, 1992, p. 3) Effectiveness means achieving organisational goals. The idealized goal is to achieve organisational autonomy (ibid, p. 11). However, organisations are interdependent with publics who might limit or enhance their autonomy. The role of public relations is to strategically manage their interdependence "by building stable, open, and trusting relationships with strategic constituencies." (ibid) The contribution of public relations in managing relationships on the long-run contributes to the organisation's effectiveness. Among four models of communication: press agency; public information; two-way asymmetrical communication; and two-way symmetrical communication, the latest is presented by functionalism as the most contributing model to organisational effectiveness (ibid, p. 10). The first two models are viewed as one-way form of communication. Press agency "describes propagandistic public relations that seeks media attention in almost any way possible." Public information, on the other hand, is dissemination of "what generally is accurate



information about the organisation”. Functionalists view two-way asymmetrical communication as manipulation because “public relations programmes use research to identify the messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behaviour of the organisation.” Two-way symmetrical communication is praised by functionalists as it is viewed to benefit both the organisation and its publics. In this model “public relations use bargaining, negotiating, and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours of both the organisation and its publics.” (Grunig et al., 1995, p. 169) Thus, the functionalist framework focuses on examining how public relations work to achieve organisational goals, giving this paradigm its organisation-centric approach, and viewing two-way symmetrical communication as the best way of practicing public relations. ‘New public diplomacy’, too, conceptualises public relations’ model of two-way symmetrical communication as a normative ideal a government should strive for in its communications with foreign publics to achieve mutually beneficial relationships with them (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2005; Melissen, 2005; Snow, 2009).

However, public relations’ focus on symmetry triggered wide critique among scholars, leading to diversification of the worldviews from which public relations is researched. Mainly, symmetry is criticized for failing to provide a “plausible, much less compelling, account of the actual world” due to its “static, dualistic and linearity” (Brown, 2011a, p. 91). Symmetry is viewed as “ethical” public relations while failing to recognize that not all participants in public relations activities have equal access to resources that qualify them to be in a

powerful position (Weaver, 2011, p. 256). Thus, when power is taken into account, public relations can be far from symmetrical. Furthermore, symmetry is developed based on two problematic unbalanced assumptions which refer to the suppositions that public relations began in the US in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; and that it evolved to be more ethical than past practices (Brown, 2011a, p. 95). Thus, the main critique of symmetry that links to my examination of public diplomacy is the idealistic and normative presuppositions on what it should be instead of examining what it is at a societal level. Functionalism does question how public relations is practiced and what factors influence the practice (Grunig, 1992, p. 24). Yet, it focuses on 'excellence' when it odds any other type of practice that does not match normative thinking (Pieczka, 2006, p. 354) and only looks at power issues at an individual level when it examines the practices as choices of the members of the dominant coalition in an organisation.

Another issue stemming from symmetry in public relations is its attempt to limit the concept to a single type of practice identified as ethical and excellent (Brown, 2011a, p. 97), unlike critiques of symmetry who support multiple, interdisciplinary and qualitative approaches "over any single, unitary, quantitative, putatively scientific method" (ibid, p. 96). Social theory approaches, for example, favour "local, historically contextualized, and pragmatic types of social inquiry" (Seidman, 1997, p. 5 in Holtzhausen, 2011, p. 142) instead of aiming to discover the causal relationships between phenomena (Weaver, 2011, p. 252), and predict the outcomes of future actions (Curtin, 2011, p. 37; Weaver, 2011, p. 252). Furthermore, even when

'excellence' raises questions on power issues within the practice of public relations, it does so through the functionalist paradigm without adopting other points of view, which raised questions on the reasons behind not employing other world views (Pieczka, 2006, p. 352). The openness to other views in researching and theorizing public relations is important for the field's expansion and reputation (McKie, 2001, p. 79).

Functionalist public relations' approaches focus on organisational instead of societal roles of public relations, and the benefits it offers to organisations and their publics through building relationships and mutually beneficial outcomes (Edwards, 2011, p. 30). In addition, public relations is understood within functionalism as the process of establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations between an organisation and publics on whom it depends (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994), instead of critically viewing it as a way to "perpetuate the existing system of power relations by creating and sustaining 'realities' for its audiences, indirectly communicating principles that support the organisations for which public relations works via the media and other channels" (Edwards, 2014, p. 132; see also Mckie, 2001, p. 77).

Nevertheless, functionalism, and specifically the Excellence project developed by James Grunig and his colleagues, is valued for bringing considerable legitimacy to public relations after decades of problematic associations with propaganda (Pieczka, 2006, p. 354; Weaver, 2011, p. 252). In addition, it brought external and internal credibility to its scholarship through its scientific methodologies (Weaver, 2011, p. 252). The discussion of critique

on functionalism is not to say that one paradigm is generally better than the other. The purpose is to present the theoretical framework that works in-line with the understanding of public relations and public diplomacy in this thesis. A functionalist approach in this research would focus on examining how and whether the communication of specific frames through Bahraini public diplomacy would have helped the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) achieve its strategic goals, with a focus on equilibrium and consensus, and achieving organisational effectiveness. However, this is not what my research focuses on, and it does not work in-line with the adopted understanding of public relations and public diplomacy. As mentioned earlier, public relations is understood here as a social phenomenon which, through its different activities, like public diplomacy, contributes to the construction of specific versions of social reality (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). Drawing on this understanding, my study aims to deliver insights on how the practice of public diplomacy during the 2011 Bahraini crisis communicated and framed government messages, which have a potential to co-construct specific versions of reality. Therefore, the following section reviews the social constructivist paradigm in public relations, arguing its significance to answer this research's questions.

### **3.2. Public Relations and Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism is a research paradigm widely used in different social science disciplines. A socially oriented view to public relations focuses on “the relationship public relations has with the societies from which it is produced and with the social systems it coproduces” (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p. 3). After the dominance of positivist approaches in public relations focusing on

managerial problems, scholars started working from a social constructivist viewpoint to diversify the theoretical approaches to public relations research and enrich academic debates with different perspectives. More importantly, social constructivism serves as one way of examining public relations (and public diplomacy) as a social phenomenon, with a specific focus in this thesis on public diplomacy functions in contributing to the co-construction of specific versions of social reality through messages and communication activities. The Methodology chapter discusses the features of working within a social constructivist paradigm, including its ontological and epistemological implications. This section of the chapter, however, discusses what it means to look at public relations, and by implication public diplomacy, through the lens of social constructivism, and its significance to answering this research's questions.

One way used to understand social constructivism is discussing it in comparison to positivism. Presenting them as extreme opposites of a continuum of understanding reality, positivism suggests the existence of an objective reality out there, while social constructivism argues reality is subjective linguistic construction and not an objective fact. According to Shotter and Gergen (1994 in Tsetsura, 2010, p.164), construction of social reality is “a process of creation, expression, and reinforcement of understanding through continuous and iterative social interaction by social agents situated in contextual environments and identified politically, socioeconomically and culturally.” Discussions on social constructivism in

public relations are based on debates by Berger and Luckmann (1966) who contributed insightful ideas on social construction of reality and brought attention to the analysis of the nature and origins of social construction.

The social constructivist paradigm offers a framework for understanding public relations “as an activity and as a field, and for understanding the identity of the working professionals, the institutions they represent, and people affected by that construction process” (Tsetsura, 2010, p. 163). In this research, I focus on public diplomacy work as an activity that essentially encompasses the construction of social reality. Thus, public relations, and therefore public diplomacy, are fundamentally understood as a process of “producing, sustaining, and regulating” social realities (Edwards & Hodges, 2011, p. 3).

It is important to highlight that this paradigm too has its critiques. Criticism directed to social constructivism comes from scholars who take a realist view and praise objectivism as the overall goal for science. Heide (2009, p. 51), for instance, highlights how those scholars criticise constructivism stating:

The critique is focused on strong social constructionism or to use another word, extreme relativism; in other words, social constructionism as ontology where a physical reality is denied. However, most social constructionist scholars understand social constructionism as an epistemology or a mild constructionism, where attention is directed to social processes involved in the production and reproduction of institutions, epistemologies, and knowledge. The goal for mild constructionism is to understand how social reality is socially constructed

Thus, mild constructivism does not claim that nothing can exist if it is not socially constructed (ibid). As mentioned above, the Methodology chapter further discusses the constructivist paradigm, and the epistemological and ontological implications.

When public relations workers provide consultancy to organisations, their work involves defining reality for these organisations by shaping organisational perspectives about the outside world (Hallahan, 1999, p. 206). Also when public relations professionals communicate with external publics of an organisation, these outbound communications involve attempts to define reality (ibid). The core significance of this function is communicating and circulating 'truth', which then results in the co-production of social reality (Edwards & Hodges, 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, public relations' production of social realities involves the production of "competing" and/or "convergent" versions of social realities (Heath, 2006, p. 94). This suggests that public relations is not an isolated actor in the process of producing specific versions of social realities. Moreover, even within public relations itself, public relations workers representing different organisations may compete with each other to promote their own versions of reality among targeted publics. Public relations practitioners' involvement in the process of constructing social reality is sometimes dismissed as "manipulation". Yet, "because defining reality is the very essence of communication, constructionists would argue that the process is neither inherently good nor bad" (Hallahan, 1999, pp. 206-207).

In order to systematically explore what versions of reality are promoted by public diplomacy, this study uses framing theory. “Framing is a critical activity in the construction of social reality because it helps shape the perspectives through which people see the world” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 207). About twenty years ago, Hallahan (1999, p. 205) suggested that “framing is a potentially useful paradigm for examining the strategic creation of public relations messages”. Today, framing is used in public relations and public diplomacy academic research not only as a framework to understand how professional communicators shape messages they share with the wider public, but also to study how publics perceive public relations’ messages (e.g. Cabosky, 2014; Entman, 2008; Hanggli, 2012; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009). My research specifically focuses on public diplomacy practitioners’ construction of messages or “frame-building” (Scheufele, 1999; 2000). The following section discusses the concept of framing in more detail, explaining how this thesis uses the concept of “frame-building” in a public diplomacy context.

## **4. FRAMING**

### **4.1. The Framing Theory**

This section reviews the concept of framing. It argues that framing helps understand how public diplomacy contributes to the construction of social reality by offering a framework to analyse what versions of reality were communicated by the Bahraini government through its public diplomacy messages to foreign media during the 2011 crisis. It also discusses how



models of framing research, originally developed in media studies, can be applied to public relations and public diplomacy research.

Framing is used as a framework of examination in a variety of studies in the field of communication (Hallahan, 1999, p. 205), and is increasingly used in public relations and media research (Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006, p. 19; Johansson, 2009, p. 123). Framing is a process that mainly involves “selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item selected” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The significance of this concept to the scholarship of public relations rests in the latter’s fundamental involvement in the processes of co-construction of social reality (Hallahan, 1999, p. 206; Heide, 2009; Tsetsura, 2010) through communicating tailored information with publics through, for example, newsmakers and journalists (Cabosky, 2014, p. 70; Gerth & Siegert, 2012, p. 281). Therefore, public relations - and public diplomacy - frame perceived reality in their messages directed to the media and other publics.

In news media context, where framing is widely used, research usually pursues one of four empirical goals. According to D’Angelo (2002, p. 873), these goals are:

- (a) to identify thematic units called frames, (b) to investigate the antecedent conditions that produce frames, (c) to examine how news frames activate, and interact with, an individual’s prior knowledge to affect interpretations, recall of information, decision making, and evaluations, and (d) to examine how news frames

shape social-level processes such as public opinion and policy issue debates.

My research focuses on the first and second goals. While these goals are proposed in news media research, they are applied here to public diplomacy context. This can be applied in the examined case mainly because the Bahraini government's (IAA/BNA) processes of producing news items shared with foreign media and publics are very similar to journalistic processes of news writing, especially when they are perceived from social constructivism viewpoint. The close relationships between source and media highlight overlaps in many places between professional communication and journalism (Edwards, 2012, p. 22). Yet, both fields have different background goals and purposes. As this study focuses on public diplomacy's 'information' processes, the first goal can be used to identify what frames appear in public diplomacy texts (e.g. press content made available to foreign media). The second goal looks at the factors that influence the production of the identified frames. The third goal can investigate how public diplomacy texts, and the frames they carry, work as means of interpreting specific issues among foreign publics. And finally, the last goal can examine how public diplomacy texts play a role in foreign public debate. My research, however, focuses on the first two goals.

Public relations activities and communications bring issues to the public's attention (Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006, p. 18). Especially when performed with political focus, such as in public diplomacy, the goal of public relations is to communicate specific political views, solutions and most importantly interpretations of issues with hope to gain public support for

policies or certain issues (ibid; Entman, 2003; Gamson, 1992; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 265). “It is the political actors who introduce the most important frames into the public discourse” (Hanggli, 2012, p. 302) and it is through framing that political actors shape the texts that suggest how politics or issues should be thought about (Entman, 2007, p. 165; Kinder, 2007, p. 156). When conducting a content-based analysis of public relations in a political context, it is more valuable to examine the complex perspectives, interpretations, and contexts of issues in the source material generated through a public relations activity, instead of reducing the analysis to themes or issues alone. Framing is an “ideal” method for such analysis (ibid). It is recommended to study public relations as the source of many frames shared with the publics (Hanggli, 2012, p. 301), and it is used in this research to look at public diplomacy as source of many frames shared with foreign media and publics. Therefore, the first goal of identifying frames, as suggested by D’Angelo (2002), can be used to examine what frames are present in news items produced by the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) and shared with foreign media and publics. The second goal can be applied to understand the factors connected to the production of frames present in the analysed texts. As this thesis aims to understand the production processes of framing rather than the effects of frames, it adopts the macro or “sociological” approach instead of the micro or “psychological” approach (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The micro or “psychological” approach examines frames as individual means of processing and structuring incoming information (Scheufele, 2000, p. 301). The macro or “sociological” approach, on the other hand, is originally applied

to examine media frames as outcomes of journalistic norms or organisational constraints (Scheufele, 2000, p. 300). In a similar way, the sociological approach can be applied to examine public diplomacy frames as outcomes of public diplomacy activities which can be connected to several levels of influence discussed further in section 9 of this chapter.

Because of its wide applicability in different communication studies, framing is described as a fragmented paradigm. Entman (1993) mentions that the absence of “general statement theory” of framing led to a “fractured paradigm” of framing research (p. 51). On the other hand, D’Angelo (2002, p. 871) argues “there is not, nor should be, a single paradigm of framing” (see also de Vreese, 2012, p. 365; Matthes, 2012, p. 251). He proposes researching framing within the constructivist, critical, and cognitive paradigms. Employing one of these paradigms contributes to the analysis and data gathered. Within the critical paradigm, framing processes are perceived to work for the advantage of political and economic elites by promoting their perspectives. It is also argued that framing processes involve intentional inclusion and exclusion of an issue’s attributes in support for a single viewpoint (D’Angelo, 2002, p. 876). Cognitivist framing views frames as triggers of nodes that interact with an individual’s prior knowledge, which can result in the individual’s perception of an issue in a specific way (ibid, p. 875). This paradigm is usually fruitful for the study of framing at a micro-level, where the aim is to identify individual frames among audiences (Scheufele, 1999, p. 111). From a social constructivist viewpoint, which is adopted in this research, a text contains sets of “interpretive packages” that consist of a set of elements that

support and reinforce each other to give meaning to an issue (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 398). In each package is a “central organising idea” or a frame that invites the recipient to understand the issue at hand in a specific way (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 398; see also Gamson, 1981; Gamson, 1992; Gamson, 2001; Gamson & Lasch, 1981; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

In social constructivism, news media is perceived to have an important role in the public construction of social reality. By selecting certain topics the media can set the publics’ agenda of the most important issues while framing these issues can help the public to think about them in a certain manner (Bedingfield & Anshari, 2014, p. 80). Political actors, such as public relations practitioners and public diplomacy communicators (“frame sponsors”; Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 6), put much effort to diverge media coverage to their side, as media is considered a way to influence public perceptions (Bedingfield & Anshari, 2014, p. 81; Van Gorp, 2007, p. 68). Thus, public relations and public diplomacy are perceived to contribute to the construction of social realities through promoting specific frames to the media which then may share with the wider public, in addition to the publics in general. These are called “advocate frames” (Tewksbury et al., 2000, p. 806 in Van Gorp, 2007, p. 68) to distinguish between frames communicated by the media (media frames) and frames communicated through the media (advocate frames) (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 68). Public diplomacy texts, such as press content shared with foreign media through state-owned media is perceived as one tool used by public diplomacy professionals to promote a government’s interpretation of an issue to foreign media and publics. As mentioned earlier and detailed in the Methodology

chapter, this is the type of texts that were analysed in this research, because the focus is on the frames the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) attempted to promote to foreign media and publics. The study of whether and how these 'advocate frames' appeared in foreign media is beyond the scope of this study.

Most of framing research in media context used to focus more on the effects of framing (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 220; Hanggli, 2012, p. 301; Kiousis & Wu, 2008, p. 61). Yet, in more recent years, more scholars are looking at the frame production processes in journalism (e.g. Bartholome et al., 2015; Boesman et al., 2015; Castello & Montagut, 2011; Dekavalla, 2016). Even in public diplomacy, more studies (Entman, 2008; Jungblut, 2017; Melki & Jabado, 2016; Sheafer et al., 2014; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Yarchi et al., 2013; Zhang, 2006) are paying attention to the frame production process. These are discussed in section 8. The study of frame production processes is labelled by D'Angelo (2002, p. 880) as "the frame construction flow". Scheufele's (1999) 'process model of framing' offers a breakdown of this construction flow, and the term "frame-building" is widely used in different areas of communication research to study the production of frames.

Scheufele's (1999) 'process model of framing' originally provides a scheme for framing research in media contexts. Yet, as discussed earlier, this can be applied to public relations and public diplomacy contexts of frame construction, because professional communicators communicate tailored information with publics through news-makers and journalists (Cabosky, 2014, p. 70; Gerth & Siegert, 2012, p. 281). And, when they do so, they employ journalistic values in their writing to produce material that would appeal to

journalists (Gamson, 1988, p. 168; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 449). Further, in the examined case, communicators at the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) worked in a news writing environment similar to that of journalistic context. Employing framing models in academic research is important, as they “offer a range of guidance regarding how methods and measures should be used to ... observe frames both in texts and in the contexts of their production” (D’Angelo, 2012, p. 56). Scheufele (1999, pp. 114-118) examines four stages of the framing process labelled as 1) frame-building, 2) frame-setting, 3) individual-level effects of framing, and 4) a link between individual frames and media frames. My research focuses on the first process.

Frame-building studies examine the various factors that influence the production of new frames or changes in current frames in journalistic coverage (Scheufele, 1999, p. 115; Scheufele, 2000, p. 307). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) developed the ‘hierarchical model of influence’ on media content, which examines influences on journalistic contexts of frame-building at five levels: individual; professional; organisational; external; and ideological. This model was originally developed in journalism studies but is used here to study public diplomacy frame-building. I discuss the model further in section 4.3.

The following section reviews studies focusing on frame-building in public diplomacy, highlighting how they contribute to the study of public diplomacy from a social constructivist standpoint. It also highlights the main

focus of such studies, and how my research contributes to public diplomacy research in this area by employing Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model.

#### **4.2. Frame-Building and Public Diplomacy**

The concept of 'frame-building' is used by public diplomacy scholars as one way of examining the content of public diplomacy communications. This section highlights how public diplomacy frame-building studies extend their examination of the communication content by majorly looking at the factors that help public diplomats successfully promote their frames to foreign media. And, therefore, it highlights how my study contributes to academic research in this area by looking at the factors connected to the articulation of specific frames that appear in public diplomacy texts, such as press content shared with the media, and not public diplomacy frames that appear in foreign media content. It is beyond this research's scope to examine whether and how Bahraini public diplomacy frames are adopted by foreign media and publics. This section also paves the way to discuss the potential of extending Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model to public diplomacy frame-building research.

To deliver insights on the role of public diplomacy activities in the construction of social realities, Zhang (2006) conceptualises public diplomacy as symbolic interactionism, where nations actively engage in constructing and negotiating meanings of symbols and performing actions based on these meanings. His study examines this conceptualisation in the context of the international relief efforts for the Asian tsunami disaster. He uses frame analysis to examine news media's coverage and interpretation of the



international relief efforts for the tsunami. It offers insights on the process and dynamics of public diplomacy by analysing how image has become a concern to nations, and how symbols are communicated and meanings are constructed. It highlights that different nations had different image concerns in tsunami relief, which could be linked to these nations' motivations to engage in the relief efforts through specific actions. For instance, it is suggested that the US had explicit image building and maintenance motivations, where humanitarian aid could give the world, especially Muslims who opposed the invasion of Iraq at the time, a chance to see American values of generosity in action (p. 28). China, on the other hand, wanted to improve its image as a friendly regional power (p. 29). Although the study examines public diplomacy actions, it examines news media texts instead of texts written by the involved nations' professional communicators.

Entman (2008) offers one of the earliest attempts to create a model to study frame-building in public diplomacy when he introduced the concept of 'mediated public diplomacy'. As highlighted earlier, based on his US research context, mediated US public diplomacy is defined as "the organised attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of the US policy in foreign media" (p. 89). Before the introduction of this concept, he developed the 'cascading network activation model' (Entman, 2003) to explain the spread and dominance of different framings of US foreign policy in the American media. Entman (2008) extends the model to the international communication process to help understand the

success and failure of efforts by the US government to promote favourable frames on its policies in foreign news media.

The cascading network activation model investigates the dissemination of frames from the US president and administration through the networks of elites outside the administration who also serve as media sources; to the networks of news organisations and within and across them; to the networks of journalists; on to the textual networks of connected and repeated keywords, themes and visual images and symbols published in media texts; and finally to the networks of associations activated in citizens' minds. The president and members of his administration have the greatest power to initiate these associations, but each succeeding level also has some potential impact, and important feedback loops exist (Entman, 2008, pp. 90-91).

The extension of this model to international media includes the addition of external forces that interact with the political communication system in the foreign nation:

These external influences include those arising from private communications (diplomatic feelers, informal and formal negotiating stands, threats, and the like) between US leaders and the foreign country's elites; coverage of the US policy by the global media (including the US media) which influences foreign elites and journalists...; and US longer term public diplomacy as well as narrower mediated diplomatic efforts to shape the foreign political communication system's output" (Entman, 2008, p. 97).

The goal of extending the model to international media is to understand the conditions under which foreign support for American foreign policies can be stimulated by US public diplomacy initiatives that employ mediated

communication (p. 88). He argues that the success of mediated public diplomacy depends mainly on political cultural compatibility between the US and the targeted nation, and the motivations, power, and strategy of foreign elites to promote positive news of the US in their own media (p. 92). Therefore, he offers a framework to examine the factors that may help a government successfully promote its frames to foreign media.

Entman's (2008) work is utilised by other scholars such as Sheafer and Gabay (2009). They focus on the competition over international agenda building and frame-building as one central strategic activity in public diplomacy by examining the cases of Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the general elections in the Palestinian authority. Their research examines the success and failure of public diplomacy efforts to promote each actor's agenda and frames in the US news media. It is stated that "the attempt by national actors to influence the media in foreign countries is the initial step in a public diplomacy process and involves dominating agenda building and frame-building" (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 448). This suggests the centrality of both media relations and frame-building in public diplomacy. They highlight that an actor's success in promoting their frames to the media could be related to factors of political power; cultural and political resonance with the journalists and the general publics of the target nation; and communication and political skills (p. 449). Their particular context of examination suggests that one actor's success in promoting their agenda and framing to foreign media is related to cultural and political congruency between itself and the target nation (p. 463).

They also highlight that the success of one actor in promoting their frame to the media does not necessarily mean the acceptance of all the frame dimensions (problem definition; causal interpretation; treatment recommendation; and moral evaluation; Entman, 1993). This suggests that promoting a complete frame to the media is complicated (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 463). They also state that “more empirical studies in the field of public diplomacy, specifically on agenda and frame-building, are required in order to shed light on the mechanisms that affect the success of promoting countries’ issues and images” (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 464). My research addresses this by looking at the factors related to the articulation of specific public diplomacy frames before they reach media content.

Jungblut (2017) is another scholar who builds on Entman’s (2008) concept of mediated public diplomacy. He examines how the German and Hungarian governments communicated their positions on the recent migrant crisis in Europe to foreign publics. He analyses the content of English language press releases and their reflection in the news coverage of CNN and Al-Jazeera. Thus, his work examines both governments’ attempts to influence the media’s agenda and framing, and indicators of their success in doing so. He hints at the five levels of analysis offered by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) in his examination of frame-building in mediated public diplomacy. Nevertheless, these five levels are discussed in their original media context as important forces that public diplomats need to appreciate in order to understand how media news comes into being, and thus increase chances of

successful framing through the media (Jungblut, 2017, p. 387). It is also highlighted that professional communicators, like public diplomats and public relations practitioners, know about media routine practices and thus adjust their messages to journalistic standards and demands (ibid). He argues that professional communicators' familiarity with journalistic routines can help them put together information subsidies (e.g. news; press releases) that will successfully access the media agenda of the most important topics. Nevertheless, it is emphasised that journalists will not passively transmit the press releases as they are. Rather, they are edited and integrated into a news story alongside additional context. "At least in international opinion-leading media outlets, journalists still critically evaluate the incoming source material despite the increasing shortage of time and resources that media organisations have to face" (Jungblut, 2017, p. 395). Therefore, his work is another example of public diplomacy frame-building research which focuses on the factors that help public diplomats successfully promote their frames to foreign media, which also delivers insights on public diplomacy activities that contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality.

Sheafer, Shenhav, Takens and van Atteveldt (2014) also offer empirical examination of a country's success in its mediated public diplomacy efforts. They focus on the roles of value proximity and political proximity in successful frame-building by a nation in foreign media. Value proximity involves political values' proximity and affinity, while political proximity represents shared political and policy interests (p. 150). They examine the role of these factors in the case of the Israeli mediated public diplomacy efforts during the war in Gaza

in the winter of 2008-2009. They first analyse daily internal messages from the Israeli Prime Minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to trace the production of Israeli strategic messages during the war on a daily basis<sup>4</sup>. They then content analyse international media coverage during the war. They argue that the closer the relative proximity between Israel and a foreign country, the greater the acceptance of Israel's frames.

Yarchi, Wolfsfeld, Sheaffer and Shenhav (2013) extend discussions on mediated public diplomacy by examining the level of success that countries and non-state actors have in promoting their preferred frames about terror to the international news media. They use quantitative and qualitative content analysis of official publications and websites to understand what the preferred frames by state and non-state actors on a specific terrorist attack were. This is combined with quantitative analysis of large sample of news stories about terrorist attacks published in several national newspapers. They suggest that the nature of the trigger events that generate news coverage of terrorism have the most significant effect on the way foreign media covers conflicts. Other factors examined in the study are policy and political values proximity between the country attacked and the targeted country whose news media are also targeted for influence, in addition to the experience of the target country in dealing with terror. They argue that understanding how political actors

---

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that their examination of internal messages is significant to public diplomacy research, specifically because it is an unusual opportunity to access sensitive restricted data which can deliver insights on a country's frame-building during a war.

successfully promote their preferred frames to foreign media can help states manage their public diplomacy in their struggle against terrorism.

Therefore, the above discussion highlights the attention to frame-building in public diplomacy research. Although this line of research is relatively limited, it offers insights on the factors that may help public diplomats successfully promote their frames to foreign media. This is significant for theory and practice as it helps understand the conditions under which foreign support for a nation's foreign policy or decisions made in international context can be stimulated by this nation's mediated public diplomacy (Entman, 2008, p. 88). Nevertheless, available research on frame-building in public diplomacy does not examine the background processes and factors connected to the articulation of specific versions of reality in public diplomacy texts. It is mentioned that professional communicators, such as public diplomats, familiarise themselves with journalistic norms of producing news content to produce information subsidies (e.g. news items; press releases) that meet journalistic standards to gain media access and successful framing (Gamson, 1988, p. 168; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 449). This may contribute to the understanding of some factors related to the articulation of public diplomacy frames at the professional routines level. However, it does not highlight how other levels of influence may also contribute to the frame construction. Therefore, my research examines the factors and background processes connected to the articulation of frames in public diplomacy texts using Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model. As mentioned earlier, they

developed the 'hierarchical model of influence' which examines the construction of journalistic messages at five levels: individual, professional routine, organisational, external, and ideological. The next section further discusses this model, and how it is applied to frame-building in public diplomacy in this study.

#### **4.3. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) Hierarchical Model of Influence**

This section focuses on Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) 'hierarchical model of influence' which was developed to study factors of influence on journalists' construction of frames. The model is used in this thesis in a public diplomacy context, and I discuss below the structure of this model and how it is transferred to this context and can be used to study frame-building factors in public diplomacy.

Public diplomacy and journalism are different fields of work and research (Edwards & Pieczka, 2013, p. 7). The former, as indicated earlier, aims to influence foreign public opinion for the benefit of the sponsoring government (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Etang, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139), while the latter's general goal is to inform publics. Nevertheless, despite their different interests, both journalists and public diplomacy communicators have overlapping roles of constructing social realities (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007, p. 246; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p. 10; White & Hobsbawm, 2007, p. 291), and both use available information selectively in the process of communicating with targeted publics (Seib, 2009, p. 774; White & Hobsbawm, 2007, p. 287) influenced by factors in their personal, professional and organisational environment. Therefore, framing is at the core of both

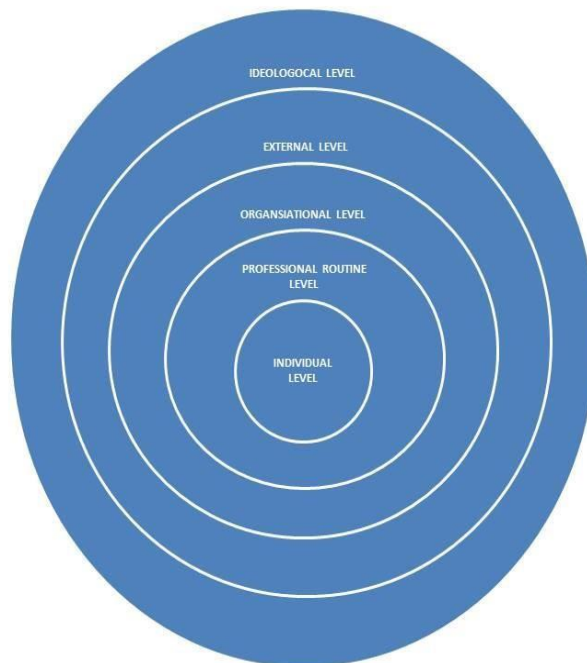


professional practices (Gilboa, 2008, p. 64; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 447), and this suggests the potential of Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model to deliver insights on different levels of influence in public diplomacy frame-building, if it is applied to this field. The specific factors influencing public diplomacy professionals may be different from those influencing journalists. However, the broad categories in which these influences fall (individual, professional, organisational, external, ideological) may be usefully transferred from one domain to the other to help us better understand public diplomacy frame-building. Further, the model offers a framework to explore the level of strategic intent in the articulation of messages (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 252). Hence, it offers a framework to explore the level of strategic intent in the articulation of public diplomacy frames and the crisis response strategies they represent.

With this approach, my research aims to contribute to academic discussions on frame-building in public diplomacy in an effort to deliver insights on background public diplomacy activities and message construction in times of a crisis and its aftermath. This is done by specifically looking at the factors that contribute to the construction of frames in public diplomacy texts (news items produced by IAA/BNA), and not factors that contribute to the adoption of public diplomacy frames in media texts. As Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model is a media/journalism theoretical framework, utilising it in my research responds to academic calls to use multidisciplinary approaches to study public diplomacy, which should help us understand how public diplomacy works (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 211; Gilboa, 2008, p. 75).

I discuss here how the hierarchal model is critically used in this project to understand the factors connected to the production of specific versions of reality by public diplomacy communicators. It is important to note that the model provides a beneficial framework to disentangle the complex relationships between different factors of influence at five different levels. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that these levels interact with each other and do not work in isolation. The model is displayed in Figure 2, where the 'onion structure' emphasises the interaction and interrelatedness among different layers of influence.

**Figure 2. Hierarchal Model of Influence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996)**



## **The individual level**

The first level of influence is the individual level, which looks at the personal characteristics of journalists and how they may contribute to frame-building. For example, it examines the effect of journalists' personal values, attitudes, and professional and educational backgrounds on the content that they produce (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 63). Moreover, the individual level investigates how journalists' conception of their professional role is connected to frame-building. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) suggest two role conceptions: neutral transmitters of events or active participants in developing a story. Within the first perception, journalists are more likely to adopt source frames as they are, and within the second they would promote their own frames instead. Note though that media organisations impose bureaucratic controls over the production of media content, and these controls limit the influence of individual journalists' professional orientations (p. 93). Similarly, professional communicators, especially at public organisations like governmental institutions, are "bounded by confidentiality and loyalty to political decisions, and bureaucratic culture and norms" (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014, p. 46), suggesting restricted ability to develop their own frames without consulting the government or gaining government's approval. In this project, therefore, the individual level of analysis looks at the personal characteristics of public diplomacy communicators, and how these may be connected to the frame-building process at the IAA/BNA. This includes the investigation whether and how their experience and professional background is related to the frame-building at the IAA/BNA during the examined crisis.

## **The professional routines level**

The second level of the hierarchal model of influence is the media routines level. This level examines patterns of response to common situations “including the routine and craft norms that are so much a part of a systematic information gathering ... they form cohesive set of rules and become integrated parts of what it means to be a media professional” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 106). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) discuss routines that work to satisfy the news’ sources, the organisation, or the audience. For instance, they discuss routines in relation to private newsmakers which seek financial benefits from news making that exceed the production cost. Another media routine is the tradition of aspiring to write impartially (ibid, p. 88), which requires the inclusion of oppositional voices in coverage, and is considered good journalism (Bartholome et al, 2015, p. 442). There is also the routine of journalistic storytelling, which often leads to the addition of an element of conflict by using dramatic depictions to a story to transform events into a news product and make an issue a vivid story (ibid). However, this study looks at the routines related to the profession of public diplomacy and public relations in governmental contexts. More specifically, it examines the role that public diplomacy professional routines play in message construction and production. These activities and messages are important as they have a powerful potential to contribute to the co-construction of specific versions of reality. For example, as this project studies public diplomacy in a governmental context, one professional routine that needs to be considered is the profession’s aim to influence the recipients’ perceptions for the benefit of the sponsoring

government (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Eatng, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). Further, work routines in governmental contexts imply the bureaucratic and top-down routines of decision-making processes (Lee, 2009; Sanders, 2011).

Specifically in terms of professional rituals of message construction, some professional communicators, like public diplomats and public relations practitioners, familiarise themselves with media routine practices and thus adjust their messages to journalistic standards and demands (Gamson, 1988, p. 168; Hallahan, 1999, p. 228; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387). They subsidise journalists with information in the form of news which can help journalists reduce the time and cost of news-gathering. Fulfilling journalistic needs aims to increase professional communicators' chances of successfully promoting advocate frames to the media to shape its agenda and frame-building (Jungblut, 2017, p. 387; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 449). It is noteworthy; however, that journalism is not mere transmission of press releases or advocate frames (Jungblut, 2017, p. 395). The suggested similarity between public diplomats and journalists' routines of producing news texts further supports the potential of extending Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) media model to public diplomacy.

Moreover, it is observed that some news stories published through state-owned media are perceived as objective, while others are pushing a government's agenda on certain critical issues (Zhang et al., 2017, pp. 239-240). This suggests that state-owned media "have a dual role as an official

news service that produces information judged by traditional, western criteria to be newsworthy, and as a platform for the distribution of information subsidies from the government” (ibid). Note that I discussed earlier that the BNA is a state-owned communication platform, highlighting it is a channel that the government uses to distribute information subsidies to foreign journalists and publics in the form of journalistic work.

Despite emphasis on professional communicators’ familiarity with journalistic standards and demands (Gamson, 1988, p. 168; Hallahan, 1999, p. 228; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387), Ihlen and Thorbjornsrud (2014, p. 46) highlight how public institutions, like governmental institutions “use bureaucratic language with complex arguments or references to laws and directives, and how this is a poor fit with the formats of the media”. Moreover, in a crisis situation, which is examined here, Avraham (2015, p. 228), argues that Arab communicators tend to minimise a crisis when it is presented in the media. Note though that this is discussed in destination marketing context, which is beyond the focus of this study. Nevertheless, it delivers insights on Arab communicators’ rituals of presenting crises through the media. Avraham (2015) also notes that this communication ritual is observed in this region significantly before the ‘Arab Spring’, suggesting the commonality of this routine in handling crises in the Arab region.

### **The organisational level**

The third level in Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) model is the organisational level, which focuses on organisational structures, policies, and

processes that lead to variation in content between media organisations, and explains “variations in content that cannot be attributed to differences in routines and individuals” (p. 139). In this research, the organisational level also looks at the organisational structures, policies, and processes yet in a public diplomacy organisation (IAA/BNA). In a journalistic context, the organisational level of influence usually overrules the influence of the first two levels. The organisational structure may limit the journalist’s decisions on the content of the communication, whether these decisions stem from individual-level characteristics or occupational rituals (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 140). Similar to journalism, organisational culture has a significant role in the practice of public relations (Edwards, 2014a, p. 321), and by implication on public diplomacy. Therefore, it is significant to understand how organisational level factors may influence the articulation of frames communicated by public diplomacy in a crisis situation.

Among the extremely limited discussions on Bahraini public relations and public diplomacy, AlSaqr (2008) offers insights on the position of public relations’ departments in several types of organisations in Bahrain, including government institutions. She highlights the marginalisation of public relations’ functions because different types of organisations (consultancies, non-profits, governmental, banks) only had the title of public relations for specific departments, while they were doing a mixture of technical tasks such as secretary, sales and marketing (p. 78). In governmental entities in specific, public relations suffered unclear social perspective and failure to perform as a management function (ibid). More recently, Jones (2017, p. 326) mentions that

the Bahraini government employed several Western public relations companies to rebuild an image of stability, which has been the core of Bahrain's public diplomacy efforts since the examined crisis unfolded. These companies include "Bell Pottinger, Qorvis, and M&C Saatchi", and they focused on promoting a more positive image of Bahrain by promoting investment in the Kingdom to blur the negative image resulting from accusations of human rights abuses (ibid). My research examines whether and how these factors have connections with IAA/BNA articulation of public diplomacy frames during the Bahraini 2011 crisis.

### **The external level**

The fourth level of influence is labelled in Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) work as extra-media and examines the factors that influence media content from outside the media organisation. In this thesis, however, this level is labelled 'external factors' as it looks at factors from outside the organisation practicing public diplomacy (IAA/BNA), and to avoid the confusion with media organisations. In the original media context, public relations and public diplomacy is part of the external layer of the hierarchical model. In my research, media is considered one among other external factors that may be connected to frame-building in IAA/BNA. Other external factors can be on-ground developments such as the escalation of the protests and drop in levels of security and safety.



## **The ideological level**

The fifth and final level of the hierarchal model is the ideological level. This level examines factors that contribute to the articulation of frames interpreted from the perspective of power centres in a society (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 223-224). The analysis of ideological level factors in this project aims to understand connections between the communication of specific frames through Bahraini public diplomacy and the effort to maintain the status quo of powerful actors (government, leadership). This is expected to have connections with the frame-building at IAA/BNA, especially because public diplomacy is understood in this research from a realist viewpoint- it is a power tool in the hands of the state, which, through promoting specific versions of reality serves the interests of nation-states, and public diplomats' aim is to boost the power of a state by promoting its values through rhetorically defending its interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). I discussed earlier that realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy are most reflective of how it is practiced in real-world (Fisher, 2010, p. 277; Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). In Arab countries in particular "most important is the socio-economic, political, social, legal and organisational context in which public relations [and here public diplomacy] operate in the Arab world. Public relations is highly tied to governmental institutions and is looked at as a tool of publicity, manipulation and protocol" (Kirat, 2005, p. 325). This suggests possible connections between frame-building and attempts to maintain power positions of the nation-state.

The five levels of the hierarchal model are employed in this thesis to organise our understanding of the factors and background processes connected to Bahraini public diplomacy frame-building during the examined crisis. As mentioned earlier, previous research on frame-building in public diplomacy evaluate the success or failure of public diplomacy frames in being adopted by the press, by exploring which factors contribute to journalists' adoption of frames promoted by public diplomacy communicators. In my study, however, my focus is on the factors that may contribute to the articulation of frames by public diplomacy practitioners themselves, and not the factors that may contribute to their adoption by journalists or other recipients. Whether and how these frames were adopted by foreign media falls outside the scope of my thesis, because the focus is on the framing process of public diplomacy messages and not on their coverage in the media.

The past three subsections (framing theory; frame-building & public diplomacy; the hierarchal model of influence) discussed the concept of framing and frame-building and how these may be usefully extended to discuss the formation of public diplomacy messages. Framing has potential in public relations and public diplomacy research. The purpose of this review is to present the significance of frame analysis as a framework to study versions of reality promoted in Bahraini public diplomacy messages. The frame analysis through the lens of the social constructivist paradigm should offer insights on the multiplicity of versions of reality communicated by different actors on a

specific issue (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 104). This project specifically focuses on the frames communicated by one actor: the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA).

The following section reviews the available studies on framing Bahrain in relation to the examined crisis.

#### **4.4. The Bahraini 2011 Crisis in Framing Research**

There are only a few studies that use the concept of framing in relation to the examined 2011 Bahraini crisis (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Al-Rawi, 2015; Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Pinto, 2014), and none of them focuses on the frames communicated by the Bahraini government. Therefore, my research extends academic discussions on the framing of the Bahraini crisis by systematically examining the frames communicated by the Bahraini government, specifically frames present in BNA's online content. This aims to contribute to research on the co-construction of the reality of the Bahraini crisis by offering insights on public diplomacy frames which is one among other factors that would contribute to the co-creation of social reality about the examined crisis. This section discusses these studies, highlighting which stakeholders they focus on and what they found, how the framing concept is used, and whether they offer frames which may be used in the analysis in this thesis.

Al-Rawi (2015) and Pinto (2014) suggest that one of the frames related to the examined crisis is the 'existential threat' frame. My research employs insights from these two studies to operationalize the use of this frame in the frame analysis. AlRawi (2015) did a content analysis of comments of Bahraini online activists on YouTube videos about the Bahraini crisis. He suggests the

examined crisis was framed as a foreign conspiracy by Iran against Bahrain and other GCC<sup>5</sup> countries to infiltrate into the region and spread Shiism. Sectarianism was widely referred to in the context of the Bahraini crisis. The historical conflict between the Sunni monarchies of the GCC countries and the Shiite leadership in Iran was used to discredit the cause of the mostly Shiite protestors, as, according to this frame, they were seen as betrayers for supporting an Iranian agenda in the Arab and GCC region (Al-Rawi, 2015, pp. 25- 26). To understand how this frame was manifested in the activists' comments between February-October 2011, Al-Rawi measures the dominant words and phrases in the comments, in addition to the most recurrent associations between them. I use his insights to operationalize the analysis of this frame in my project. Yet, instead of only using the individual words he counted, which would not deliver an in-depth understanding of the co-text in which they were used, I employ his explanations of what the most used associations imply to form the elements of this frame. The Methodology chapter details how insights from Al-Rawi's (2015) work are used in this project to operationalize the frame analysis.

Pinto (2014) explores how the Bahraini leadership "successfully" promoted a securitised frame in messages<sup>6</sup> targeted at other GCC countries between early 2011 until August 2013. She considers GCC's response of sending the Peninsula Shield Forces (PSF) to Bahrain as evidence of the success of this

---

<sup>5</sup> The Gulf Cooperation Council, founded in 1981. It comprises: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.

<sup>6</sup> The author does not specify the source of the messages, i.e. whether collected from media sources or any other source.

frame (p. 169). She mentions that a securitised frame is built in messages targeted at other GCC countries through the “construction of an existential threat as regards a referent object must contain certain elements that convince the audience to move the subject from the realm of normal politics into one of extraordinary measures” (Pinto, 2014, p. 166). According to her, the elements of a successful securitised frame by the Bahraini authorities were: representing Iran as a threat that wanted to invade GCC and spread Shiism through Bahrain; targeting other GCC countries and their Sunni monarchies who also have historical conflict with Iran; spreading the message through the king of Bahrain- a trusted source of a securitised message; and asking for foreign military intervention (p. 168). The Methodology chapter details how I used insights from this study in the frame analysis.

On the other hand, Bowe and Hoewe’s (2011) frame analysis only measures whether positive or negative framings were employed by three US newspapers (New York Times; Los Angeles Times; Washington Post) in their coverage of the Bahraini crisis between January-March 2011. They count which sides (protestors or government supporters) were represented in articles sampled from these newspapers and the number of words quoted or paraphrased from these sources. Based on these measurements they identify different levels of negative and positive framings of the studied topic. This analysis does not provide an approach to help to understand the situation in Bahrain during the studied timeframe and does not adopt the same understanding of framing used in the present thesis (frames as schemata proposing problem definitions, evaluations and treatment recommendations,

as explained earlier in this chapter). Frame analysis is understood in my research as more than a classification of 'positive' or 'negative' narratives on a certain topic (Tankard, 2001). Nevertheless, despite the different understanding of frame analysis in Bowe and Hoewe (2011), it delivers insights on whose voices dominated in foreign media in relation to the examined crisis. They suggest that the content of the analysed US newspapers was overwhelmingly against the Bahraini government- in the findings I will discuss how negative international coverage impacted on the messaging of the Bahraini authorities.

Another relevant study is the work of Maguire and Vickers (2013). They do not use frame analysis, but their work delivers very relevant and significant insights on the portrayal of the Bahraini crisis in the international arena. They use discourse analysis to explore British foreign policy officials' responses to the crisis in Bahrain compared to that in Libya. By analysing speeches, statements and press releases issued by British key government ministries between February-December 2011, the study concludes that the crisis in Bahrain was referred to as "*events* [that] had led to *deaths* of some *protestors*", unlike Libya where "*civilians* were being *brutally attacked* by a *dictatorial regime*" (Maguire & Vickers, 2013, p. 23 emphasis in original). According to them, the effect of British official references to the case of Bahrain as only 'events' was to downplay the seriousness of the situation and the importance of the protestors' actions (p. 14). Discourses employed by British foreign policy officials state that "dialogue" between the government and the protestors, and further "reform" was enough to solve any issues (p. 23). Furthermore, officials

referred to those involved in the events as “protestors” rather than “civilians” or “rebels”. This is to suggest that Bahraini protestors “are similar to those who protest in the UK, for example against government cuts, or increased fees, rather than for a change of government. Although this does not portray them as being legitimate, non-violent and organised, it does not give an impetus for mass sympathy and comes without the connotations of innocence or empathy framing” (p. 14). I considered the portrayal of the situation in Bahrain as ‘events’ as a frame that emerged from narratives used by IAA/BNA to promote such an interpretation of what was happening in Bahrain to foreign media. The textual elements identified through Maguire and Vickers’s (2013) discourse analysis suggesting this representation were employed as potential elements of this frame. These elements are detailed in the Methodology chapter.

This section reviewed relevant framing studies on the presentation of the Bahraini crisis. It offers insights on potential frames and frame elements that can be used in the frame analysis in this project. Yet, as discussed earlier, the 2011 Bahraini crisis coincided with protests in other Arab countries, which were widely referred to as the ‘Arab Spring’ (Avraham, 2015; Karolak, 2012, p. 173). While the literature offers limited number of studies on the framing of the Bahraini crisis, the literature on framing during the ‘Arab Spring’ is dominated by discussions on Egypt. Moreover, there are relatively limited studies that look at the ‘Arab Spring’ from a public diplomacy perspective, comparing to the focus on the role of social media during the Arab Spring. The next section discusses research on the Arab Spring with focus on framing and

public diplomacy. It highlights insights offered by this line of research and positions the current study among them.

#### **4.5. The 'Arab Spring' in Public Diplomacy and Framing Research**

This section discusses how the 'Arab Spring' phenomenon is approached in public diplomacy and framing literature. In terms of public diplomacy, it is observed that the major focus is on Western actors' public diplomacy activities in relation to the 'Arab Spring', while Arab countries engagement in public diplomacy remains a largely untapped area. Regarding framing, the focus is on the framing of the situation among several foreign media platforms, and not the framing of public diplomacy messages or the content of state-owned media. Yet, it delivers insights on the presentation of the 'Arab Spring' in media platforms from different geographical and ideological contexts.

First of all, I use insights from previous studies to define the 'Arab Spring' using Entman's (1993) four dimensions of a frame (problem definition, causal interpretation, treatment recommendations, and moral evaluation). The problem definition within the 'Arab Spring' frame presents the Arab demonstrations as revolutions by oppressed people against dictatorships (Maguire & Vickers, 2013), and an outbreak of democratic change in the Middle East and North Africa (Joffe, 2011, p. 507). The causal interpretation is the accumulated political and economic tensions and challenges that have not been resolved by Arab leaders but, instead, artificially repressed in the search for stability for their power position and authority (Joffe, 2011, p. 508). The recommended treatment is regime overthrows and urgent international military intervention to help protestors bring down what was perceived as oppressive



regimes (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). In terms of moral judgment, the frame provokes sympathy and support for the protesters, and thus legitimises regime overthrows and foreign military interventions to help oppressed citizens pursue democratic change (Harlow & Johnson, 2011, p. 1365). This description of the frame highlights the broader cultural framework in which the Bahraini crisis evolved. The Methodology chapter further discusses the role of the Arab Spring frame in my research.

Regarding public diplomacy and the Arab Spring, Yli-Kaitala (2014), for example, examines the events in Egypt in the context of US public diplomacy efforts to drive public opinion in the Middle East. Golan (2013), on the other hand, examines how two elite European newspapers (The International Herald Tribune and the European edition of the Wall Street Journal) used op-eds as public diplomacy tools during the Arab Spring to interpret and advocate divergent policy stances about the Egyptian upheavals for Western readers. Other scholars like Cofelice (2016), for instance, examine the role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean during the Arab Spring as an example of parliamentary actor engaging in public diplomacy. Samei (2015), studies public diplomacy of the European Union towards the Arab Spring by specifically focusing on the case of Egypt. These studies suggest interest in examining different types of actors' (e.g. state and non-state actors) engagement in public diplomacy in relation to the Arab Spring. Yet, there is limited research on public diplomacy by Arab countries themselves witnessing mass protests during 2011.

In terms of framing research and the 'Arab Spring', Guzman (2016), for example, examines the evolution of US news media frames of participants in the 2011 Egyptian upheavals (Mubarak and the government; anti-government protestors; Muslim brotherhood). She suggests that frames present in news stories texts appearing on CNN.com and Foxnews.com predominantly reflect US political ideology that favours people seeking democracy over authoritarian rule and remains wary of Islam. Du (2016) investigates how the Arab Spring events were framed by news media in mainland China compared with that in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The study reveals significant differences in coverage among the three markets and interprets this in terms of the ideological differences and differences in press freedom. Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are in close geographic and cultural proximity but are in stark ideological contrast. They have a not free, a partially free, and a free media system, respectively (p. 100). Although Du (2016) does not examine the framing of the Arab spring by Arab countries, her work delivers insights on the framing of the Arab Spring in contexts other than the dominantly examined Western (especially US) media, and insights on media coverage of events that are culturally and politically distant and unfamiliar to their general publics. These studies highlight interest in examining the framing of Arab Spring events in different countries. Nevertheless, the focus remains on foreign media's framing instead of the involved countries' framing. Therefore, this section highlights that the current literature on public diplomacy during the Arab Spring does not focus on Arab countries public diplomacy responses to the crisis. Further, it suggests that framing research mainly focuses on the presentations

of the Arab Spring by different foreign news media, and not by the Arab governments. And, in both cases, the focus remains on the Arab Spring events in Egypt. Therefore, my research focus on Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the 2011 crisis aims to extend studies on the 'Arab Spring' context in a number of ways. First, the focus on Bahrain offers insights on another Arab country largely overlooked in the literature with a dominant focus on Egypt. Second, the focus on the Bahraini practice of public diplomacy during 2011 offers an example of an Arab country's engagement in public diplomacy in the Arab Spring context instead of western state and non-state actors. And third, the focus on the content of the Bahraini government's public diplomacy delivers insights on a government rather than media framing during the Arab Spring.

As the examined context in this research is a crisis situation, the following section discusses crisis communication, which is another relevant area in this research. It discusses how crisis communication is understood from a social constructivist viewpoint; the role of public diplomacy in crisis communication, the significance of framing during crises, and the most common crisis response strategies as proposed by Benoit's (1997) image repair theory.

## **5. CRISIS COMMUNICATION**

### **5.1. Crisis Communication and Social Constructivism**

From a social constructivist perspective, "crises are social constructions produced by the organisational member's perception and sense-making

processes” (Heide, 2009, p. 43). This is different from the dominant functionalist approaches to study crises in public relations, where a crisis is understood as “a result of some external threats in the surrounding environment. Thus, a crisis is normally understood as an objective and a ‘real’ thing ‘out there’, which hits and affects an organisation at full strength. As a consequence, an organisation is supposed to react to the objective crisis and immediately act in order to revert to an imagined state of equilibrium.” (ibid, p. 44) These different perspectives on the understanding of a crisis affect the focus of academic research on crisis communication.

Crisis communication is the main field of research on how different types of organisations communicatively respond to different types of crises, and is a significant area of public relations’ practice and research. As a result to the risk in today’s society imposed by modernity, and media’s intensive focus on crises taking place in this risk society; crisis communication has received a lot of attention from public relations’ researchers and has become an emerging field in public relations (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002 in Heide, 2009, p. 44). Falkheimer & Heide (2006, p. 181), for instance, state that “Crisis communication is the core of public relations practice and theory. From a historical standpoint ‘damage control’, managing public opinion, mainly through mass media, set off the public relations industry” (see also Lyu, 2012, p. 782). With this popularity as a field of study in public relations, crisis communication research was dominated by case studies, and recommendations on best practices and guidelines on how practitioners

should respond to crises (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006, p. 180; Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 79; Heide, 2009, pp. 44-45). Yet, crisis communication research has moved beyond this with the development of theoretical models and examination from different theoretical positions. In the dominant positivistic approaches to crisis communication research, crises are “objective phenomena that have similar characteristics and, therefore, may be remedied with similarly ‘appropriate’ media strategies and decision-making rules” (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 80). A social constructivist approach, on the other hand, “argues that crises are above all communicative creation, and as such, their successful management and resolution is fundamentally communicative” (ibid). In the functionalist realm, studies focus on how organisations should respond to crises without offering insights on how to frame specific responses (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 80). Alternatively, a social constructivist approach to crisis communication means that “crisis communication is understood and analysed as a sense-making process ... where reality is negotiated and constructed in cultural contexts and situations, rather than distributed from a sender to a recipient” (Falkheimer & Heide, 2006, p. 180; see also Heide, 2009, p. 54). Therefore, a social constructivist approach to crisis communication suggests that this study does not aim to evaluate how the Bahraini government responded to the examined crisis through public diplomacy, or suggest how it should respond. Instead, a constructivist approach suggests the examination of crises as collective linguistic reconstructions by several stakeholders, and my research specifically focuses on the constructions offered by Bahraini public diplomacy (IAA/BNA) during

the 2011 crisis, taking into account that within this umbrella there are several stakeholders with conflicting views. The frame analysis aims to systematically deliver insights on versions of reality promoted through online content shared with foreign media, and the interviews aim to offer an understanding on the background processes of articulating specific versions of reality in government messages. This framework aims to deliver insights on public diplomacy processes that contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality communicated on behalf of the government during a crisis and its aftermath.

A crisis triggers questions on an organisations' social legitimacy, threatening the organisation's reputation and related assets (Coombs, 2011, p. 215). In terms of public diplomacy and governmental contexts, emotional news stories about public organisations (e.g. government) and how their functions negatively affect publics can threaten the reputation and legitimacy of such organisation (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014, p. 45). Crisis response is critical as crises create demand for information, and stakeholders, spearheaded by media, will seek information to understand the situation. From a positivist perspective, a 'quick' response by the organisation will help meet stakeholders' demand for information, minimising the room for speculation or other competing actors' un-favourable framing (Coombs, 2006, p. 172). A constructivist view of a crisis suggests that crises create "framing contests" between different actors (e.g. governments; protestors; the media) to define the situation at hand from their own perspective, and to promote such definitions to relevant members of the public (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; see also Galloway, 2016, p. 469). This is critical as failure or success in crisis

communication is often a matter of whose crisis frame dominates the situation (Coombs, 2011, p. 223; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 447; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 263). Hence, a crisis response may critically contribute to an organisation's image and reputation, and in terms of public diplomacy, it is vital in maintaining a nation's image and other soft power resources among foreign media and publics.

Crisis response research is divided into two main streams, the first focusing on 'form' and the other on 'content'. 'Form' studies what should be done, while 'content' focuses on what is said in the message (Coombs, 2006, p. 171). From a functionalist perspective, three main lessons are emphasised through crisis communication literature focusing on the form of response: "be quick, be consistent, and be open" (ibid, p. 172). Research on the 'content' looks at crisis response strategies employed to maintain the organisational reputation and rebuild its legitimacy (Coombs, 2011). Two widely used theories to study crisis response are Coomb's (2006) 'situational crisis communication theory', and Benoit's (1995) 'image repair theory' which is employed in this thesis. The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is a "prescriptive system for matching crisis responses to the crisis situation" (Coomb, 2006, p. 149). It offers a set of crisis response strategies and suggests what strategies are most effective in certain crisis situations. The three core premises of the SCCT are: 1) a list of crisis response strategies, 2) a framework for categorising crisis situations, and 3) a method for matching the crisis response strategy(ies) to the crisis situation (ibid, 152). Thus, the

theory offers a framework for evaluating crisis situations and matching them to the most desirable crisis response, which is beyond the focus of my research.

Instead of evaluating the effectiveness of the Bahraini government's public diplomacy messages during the 2011 crisis, my research aims to understand how these messages were framed and what factors contributed to their construction in the frame-building process during the crisis and its aftermath. A widely used theory in public relations' studies of crisis response is Benoit's (1995) 'image repair theory' (IRT) (Avery et al., 2010, p. 190; Maresh & Williams, 2010, p. 285), which offers a framework to analyse "persuasive discourse" (Benoit, 2006, p. 137). Drawing on a Western context of crisis situations, the theory offers a list of the most common crisis response strategies used by different types of actors (e.g. governments; corporations; public figures). I use this theory in my research to understand what crisis response strategies are reflected in the frames present in the Bahraini government's (IAA/BNA) analysed online content. The purpose of this approach and the theory are detailed below.

## **5.2. The Image Repair Theory**

The image repair theory (IRT) is applicable whenever an organisation, government, or a public figure's reputation is under threat (Coombs, 2011, p. 215). Benoit's early discussions of the theory (e.g. Benoit, 1995; 1997) labelled it as the image 'restoration' theory, but now he prefers to call it image 'repair' to avoid implying that one's image has been 'restored' to its prior state, while sometimes all one can hope for is 'repairs' (Benoit, 2000; 2014). The significance of applying Benoit's theory in my study lies in its speaker-centric



focus. This means that it focuses on how the communicators respond to a crisis situation (Coombs, 2011, p. 217). Moreover, image repair theory “is the best-suited crisis communication theory for the case analysis of political crises” (ibid, p. 223). It “focuses exclusively on messages designed to improve images tarnished by criticism and suspicion” (Benoit, 2015, p. 3). This was the case in the examined crisis where Bahraini authorities, surrounded by inflamed region widely portrayed across foreign media as Arab Spring, were accused of human rights’ violations in their treatment of public protests.

It is worth noting that crisis communication strategies can stand for the verbal and nonverbal actions an organisation or government takes in response to a crisis. When I discuss image repair strategy in my research, the term ‘strategy’ is used here as “an abstract or general concept that represents a goal or an effect sought by discourse” (Benoit, 1995, p. 80 in Avraham, 2015, p. 225), and not nonverbal actions. Another significant point on the understanding of the term ‘strategy’ in this thesis refers to the level of strategic intent by the organisation or individuals in the message construction process. Benoit (2014, p. 16) suggests that “communication generally is best understood as an intentional activity. Communicators attempt to devise utterances that they believe will best achieve the goals that are most salient to them when they communicate”. Nevertheless, it is important to note that “image repair strategies may have an element of improvisation precisely when public and media attention are most focused on the organisation and its communicative practices, and when the organisation’s image is most vulnerable” (Harlow et al., 2011, p. 11), which was the case in the examined

crisis. Thus, in the analysis of image repair strategies reflected in the frames present in BNA's online content, it is important to note that the observation of a specific 'crisis response strategy' does not necessarily suggest the Bahraini government had a strategic plan to reflect certain meanings and interpretations of reality in its public diplomacy messages. Further insights on this are discussed in the Interview Analysis chapter (4).

In this theory, a crisis situation is built on two main premises: (1) the accused (e.g. government, corporation, public figure) is considered responsible for an action, and (2) that act is considered offensive among a salient group of the public (Benoit, 1997, p. 178; Benoit & Brinson, 1999, p. 148). These two premises underlie the understanding of the examined events in this thesis as a crisis: the Bahraini authorities were accused across foreign media of human rights' violations during the 2011 protests (Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82), and foreign media and publics perceived this as offensive act against the protestors (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Note that the IRT emphasises that "the person (or organisation) who seeks to repair a damaged image does so because he or she *believes* (or has a perception) that an important audience holds an unfavourable attitude". (Benoit, 2104, p. 5 emphasises in original) This works in-line with social constructivist understanding of crises as "social constructions produced by the organisational member's perception and sense-making processes" (Heide, 2009, p. 43).

The IRT holds the principle that “perceptions are more important than reality”. This means if a significant segment of the public perceives an actor to be responsible for an act and that the act is offensive, then the actor’s reputation is at stake (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). This is significant for Bahraini public diplomacy because a nation’s ability to reflect its respect for human rights is significant to gain favourable image in the international media (Kunczik, 1997, p. 283). In the examined crisis, these were the most attacked aspects of the Bahraini authorities’ policies, especially as protestors died at a very early stage of the crisis after clashes with security forces, and military measures were employed to contain the situation. Hence, this could lead to an understanding of the situation as another Arab revolution against a dictatorship- a representation rejected by Bahraini authorities (Pinto, 2014). Note that the success of upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia, which were widely framed as ‘Arab Spring’, managed to draw international attention to the Bahraini protests (Karolak, 2012, p. 180).

The IRT offers five response strategies to repair an organisation’s image in a crisis: (1) denial; (2) evasion of responsibility; (3) reducing offensiveness of event; (4) corrective action; and (5) mortification. Some of these broad strategies have variations. These are presented in Table 1 as developed by Benoit (1997).

Table 1. Image Repair Strategies (Benoit, 1997, p. 179)

Image Restoration Strategies	
Strategy	Key Characteristic
<b>Denial</b>	
Simple denial	Did not perform act
Shift the blame	Act performed by another
<b>Evasion of responsibility</b>	
Provocation	Respond to act of another
Defeasibility	Lack of information or ability
Accident	Act was a misshape
Good intentions	Act meant well
<b>Reducing offensiveness of events</b>	
Bolstering	Stress good traits
Minimization	Act not serious
Differentiation	Act less offensive
Transcendence	More important considerations
Attack accuser	Reduce credibility of accuser
Compensation	Reimburse victim
<b>Corrective action</b>	Plan to solve or prevent problem
<b>Mortification</b>	apologize for act

The denial strategy has two variations. The first is simple denial and it can be done in three forms: denying the offensive act happened, denying committing the act, or denying the act was harmful. The second variation is shifting the blame where another actor is accused of the act in question. Denial is a defensive strategy that tries to change the audiences' beliefs about whether the accused is to blame (Benoit, 1997, pp. 179-180; Benoit & Brinson, 1999, p. 149-150, Brinson & Benoit, 1999, pp. 486-489; Benoit, 2014, pp. 22-29).

Another defensive approach is to try to evade or reduce responsibility for the offensive act. In this case, an actor may not be able to completely deny responsibility but tries to reduce perceived responsibility for the wrongdoing by

altering audience's existing beliefs or adding new beliefs in the audience. This can be done through the general strategy of 'evasion of responsibility', which has four variations: (1) provocation strategy where the offensive act is justified as response for another actor's act; (2) defeasibility- claiming lack of control over or information about the situation; (3) alleging the offensive action was an accident; or (4) asserting good intentions. Successful use of strategies to evade responsibility can improve the image of the accused but may not restore it completely (ibid).

Reducing the offensiveness of an act has six variations: (1) bolstering through, for example, describing positive characteristics or acts to absorb negative feelings; (2) minimise the negative act to minimise negative feelings- it works by changing beliefs about the magnitude of the offensive act; (3) differentiation through distinguishing from other similar yet more offensive act; (4) transcendence by placing the act in a more favourable context; (5) attacking the accuser to reduce the damage caused for the actors accused of offensive doings; and (6) compensating the victims (ibid).

Another image repair strategy is corrective action, where the accused can promise to correct the problem by restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive action, and/or promising to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act. The final general strategy is mortification where the accused actor admits wrong-doing and asks for forgiveness (ibid).

The first two categories (denial and evasion of responsibility) tend to minimise accusations of responsibility for the act in question. The third and fourth categories (reducing offensiveness and corrective action) focus on

reducing offensiveness of the act in question. The fifth strategy (mortification) tends to ask for forgiveness to repair an image (Benoit, 1997, pp. 178-179).

The IRT can be used by practitioners in the normative sense by offering strategies on how to respond to crises. For academics, it can be used for critical evaluations of crisis responses (Benoit, 1997, p. 177). These evaluations are usually applied in two ways: measuring appropriateness of the strategy, and/or effectiveness of the used strategy (Burns & Burner, 2000, pp. 34-35). Yet, the IRT is criticised for oversimplifying the documentation and measurements in these assessments (ibid). In terms of appropriateness, the examiner assesses how well the 'organisation' used the available means of persuasion. For instance, it is argued that when "the cause of a crisis is external to the entity, and requires less accommodation of its publics, the entity will more likely use advocacy-type image repair strategies, such as attacking the accuser and denial. If an entity has strong personal control over the crisis and strong perceptions of crisis responsibility exist... the entity will use more accommodative image repair strategies such as bolstering, corrective action, and apology" (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, pp. 170-171). However, this overlooks the complexity resulting from interactions among multiple internal and external factors connected to the stance of the accused and the accuser. For example, the accused actor may use less accommodative strategies to avoid criminal charges and/or civil lawsuits (ibid; Benoit, 2014, p. 20). Yet, generally, measuring appropriateness helps the researcher to understand the context of the discourse (Burns & Burner, 2000, p. 35).

In terms of measuring the effectiveness of a strategy, “critics may try to document changes in the world, such as the extent to which public opinion changes. This approach is challenging, because of the questions of what to measure, how to measure it, and when to measure it” (ibid). Further, this approach cannot measure the specific relationship between image repair discourse and other phenomena, such as determining that image discourse is the cause of more positive media coverage on a certain issue. It is worth noting that I discuss the implications of using specific discourse strategies in BNA’s analysed content by drawing on insights from previous studies and the interviews regarding the context of the examined crisis. Nevertheless, it is beyond the focus of my research to systematically examine the effectiveness or appropriateness of the identified discourse strategies. I suggest that the impact of using specific response strategies in BNA’s content can be done in a more systematic manner by focusing on other phases of Scheufele’s (1999) framing model (e.g. frame setting).

Instead of focusing on responses’ effects, I identify the frames reflected in the analysed messages to understand the underlying intentions of Bahraini public diplomacy and their promotion of specific versions of reality in government messages during the examined crisis. Moreover, my research offers insights on the background processes connected to the articulation of frames that depict specific discourse strategies in BNA’s content. As indicated earlier, this is done through applying Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) hierarchal model to a public diplomacy context to examine frame-building factors at five different levels: individual, professional, organisational, external,

and ideological. A few previous studies focus on or at least mention the significance of culture in relation to crisis responses in different contexts. I discuss insights from these studies in the following section. Yet, none of the previous studies use Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model to understand different levels of influence on the construction of crises' response. Thus, my research contributes to IRT research by applying it beyond the dominant Western, specifically American context (Maioreescu, 2016), and delivers insights on the background processes connected to the use of specific frames in public diplomacy response to crises.

### **5.3. Crisis Response in Different National Contexts**

This section reviews studies using the IRT to examine a national or a government crisis context. The purpose is to deliver insights on the crisis response strategies employed in different types of crises in different cultural contexts, and whether culture or other factors contributed to the use of specific response strategies. Beyond the IRT, this section also delivers insights from previous research on public diplomacy responses to crises in different contexts.

The IRT was first introduced in a corporate context but is used now to study different types of actors like individuals or nations in different types of crises (Avraham, 2015, p. 225). The focus in my research is on the use of this model in response to a national crisis that had negative implications on the state government's image among foreign media and publics. This is important because there is limited research on strategies of building public diplomacy messages in crises and how nations repair their image comparing to the



dominant focus on corporate contexts (Lyu, 2012, p. 779; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 214; Schultz & Raupp, 2010, p. 113; SiewYoong Low et al., 2010, p. 191; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, p. 162). As indicated earlier, the examination of national images is significant because “nations have images, and relations between countries have always been shaped by images” (Zhang & Benoit, 2004, p. 161), and foreign media’s coverage on a nation can negatively affect its image among foreign publics (Avraham, 2015; 2016). A nation’s image is crucial for its status in the international relations arena (Wang, 2006 in Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 213), and public relations and public diplomacy are used to enhance this image (Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 213; Vaxevanidou, 2016, p. 111). As mentioned earlier, image can be understood as perception of a group, person, or nation held by others (Benoit & Brinson, 1999, p. 145).

The work of Zhang and Benoit (2004) is one of the earliest attempts that employed the IRT to address its limited use to study national crises. They study a Saudi campaign to deal with post 9/11 damaged reputation. American publics accused Saudi of supporting terrorism, and of failing to support a possible US attack on Iraq. The authors suggest that Saudi mostly used bolstering and denial strategies, arguing that this was partially successful at dealing with the first accusation and much less effective with the second one. They refer the success to the consistency between the discourse strategies and the Saudi actions, such as denying any connection with terrorism and revoking Bin Laden’s Saudi citizenship. Denial was also successful in this case due to the adoption of third-party endorsement.

Peijuan, Pei and Pang (2009) examine the strategies used and the images these strategies generated for China in the context of the crisis of continuous product recalls in 2007. While they find that the initial response by the Chinese authorities was denial to “defuse criticism”, they highlight that China could not continue using strategies that minimise its responsibility for the offensive acts. The authors suggest that piling evidence of its responsibility was connected to the shift toward a ‘corrective action’ strategy (p. 216). They emphasise that showing sincerity in solving the problem is significant for image repair (see also Benoit, 2004). Nevertheless, nations are less likely to employ a mortification strategy where guilt is admitted (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). Saving a nation’s image in this regard is significant for its empowerment and dignity; therefore it is more likely to implicitly admit guilt through corrective action to save face (Peijuan et al., p. 216)

Siew-Yoong Low, Varughese and Pang (2010) examine the influence of culture on image repair in Western (US) and Asian (Taiwan) governments which faced similar accusations of slow response to natural disasters in their countries. They highlight the role of uncertainty avoidance in the difference between the responses of both governments. One of the key differences between both governments’ responses to the crises was the use of mortification and corrective action. The authors argue that Taiwan has a significantly higher uncertainty avoidance index, meaning that its culture seeks rules, structure and formality. Uncertainty reduction requires explicit, logical and direct information on the part of the communicator. Thus, the Asian culture

is a likely contributor to the dominant use of mortification strategy at the height of the crisis in Taiwan.

The role of uncertainty avoidance is also observed by Maiorescu (2016) in her examination of the Deutsche Telekom spying scandal. Although this study looks at a corporate context of crisis, it highlights the role of culture in image repair. The author suggests that the German cultural environment is characterised by a high level of uncertainty avoidance. Meaning that in the German culture individuals do not tolerate ambiguity to the extent to which they do in the US. She argues that this propensity for uncertainty avoidance can explain why the company's crisis communication focused majorly on corrective action comparing to other response strategies.

Discussions on national or government crises or public diplomacy activities during crises are not limited to studies employing IRT. Note for example section 4.2 of this chapter. While it focuses on studies that examine frame-building in public diplomacy, all the studies look into a crisis situation, such as war or migrant crisis (Jungblut, 2017; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009; Sheaffer et al., 2014; Yarchi et al., 2013). They mainly deliver insights on the articulation of public diplomacy messages to attract media attention and successful framing. A number of other studies (Andreasen, 2008; Lindholm & Olsson, 2011; Mor, 2009; Olsson, 2013; Van Ham, 2003; Zaharna, 2004), deliver insights on public diplomacy responses to crises in different contexts. Although some of these studies have a normative approach focusing on how public diplomacy should be practiced in crises, they offer insights on factors connected to

specific public diplomacy responses to a crisis. These insights can help us understand whether the Bahraini government's responses to the examined crisis were connected to similar factors or not, and how.

Zaharna (2004) and Van Ham (2003), for instance, offer recommendations on how to practice public diplomacy in a crisis more effectively by examining the American crisis post 9/11 and the military action in Iraq. They argue that the American style of communication is more direct, where it aims for precise presentation of facts. In other cultures with indirect communication style (e.g. Arab culture), "when saving face is important, one's skill is not in how directly one can state criticism, but rather in how cleverly one can disguise it" (Zaharna, 2004, p. 136). Moreover, while Americans practiced one-way transition of information other cultures, such as Arab cultures, prefer relationship building as without a rational base to interpret information the information is meaningless (ibid, p. 141). This review on American public diplomacy delivers insights on how communicating with foreign publics may be related to using the same rituals of communicating locally without attention to any cultural differences and the consequences they may cause.

Mor (2009) investigates how Israel justified the use of power in the 2006 war with Lebanon. The study aims to understand how the use of power is presented through public diplomacy, especially as a nation's use of force triggers foreign publics' attention (p. 219). The author suggests that looking at different cultural contexts of practicing public diplomacy signifies questioning how the actors design their messages in a specific way to achieve their goals

(225). In this regard, the author suggests that a common message design strategy to deal with negative publicity or defend a nation's image is attacking the other (p. 228), which resonates with Benoit's (1997) 'attack the accuser' or 'shifting the blame' strategies. Mor (2009) suggests that if an actor's image is under threat due to its own behaviour, the actor would employ blame avoidance. A strategy of blame avoidance consists of arguments designed to: (1) avoid or reduce perceived responsibility for actions or outcomes; and/or (2) reduce perceived negativity of actions or outcomes (p. 230). On the other hand, when the image of an actor is threatened because of credit attributed to the opponent, it is likely that this actor will tend to deny this credit (credit denial). This can be done through strategies that "(1) deny or reduce the perceived responsibility of the opponent for positive actions and/or outcome; and/or (2) reduce perceived positivity of actions and/or outcomes for which the opponent is credited" (p. 231). This suggests that in public diplomacy response to crises, states may use rhetorical strategies of known patterns to protect or enhance their images among foreign publics in a way that may contribute to the articulation of specific versions of reality on a certain issue.

Andreasen (2008), Lindholm and Olsson (2011), and Olsson (2013) deliver insights on the Danish and Swedish practice of public diplomacy on behalf of separate cartoon incidents that triggered outrage among foreign publics, specifically in the Arab and Muslim worlds. While Andreasen (2008, p. 203) highlights the significance of fast response to crises to avoid misconceptions (see also Avraham, 2015, p. 231), it is mentioned that one way of responding in crisis public diplomacy is to "stick your head in the sand",

where it is assumed nothing is wrong and any response may just make it worse. This can also be the approach for those who are not courageous enough to face the situation in hand (p. 205). It is found that in certain contexts when the organisation used a “no comment” strategy, it generated significantly more trust in the organisation, and the organisation was viewed as having less responsibility for the offensive act (Lee, 2004 in Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009, p. 169). This is related to cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies, where Eastern societies would be more tolerant of a “silent, reserved gesture” (ibid). It is worth noting that Avraham (2015) suggests that “ignoring or limiting the crisis” is a popular response by Arab countries to problematic situations even before the Arab Spring events. Such response tends to suggest any damage reported by the media is minor and there is no serious crisis (p. 228).

Lindholm and Olsson (2011) draw attention to crises’ creation of new groups of stakeholders, and how crisis communicators tend to focus on stakeholders they are familiar with and whom they perceive powerful (p. 257). They suggest that the Danish government’s framing of the situation changed based on the change in their perception of which the important stakeholders are (p. 264). At the beginning of the crisis, when the cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammad as a terrorist outraged publics in Muslim and Arab worlds, the initial response by the Danish government framed the issue as a local matter that guarantees the right to freedom of expression. When the situation escalated and Danish products were boycotted and the flag was burnt in a number of Arab and Muslim countries, the Danish government changed its

response with recognition to the significance of foreign publics. The Swedish government, on the other hand, learnt from the Danish experience when a Swedish newspaper published offensive cartoons toward the Muslim world, and therefore immediately addressed this foreign public group in its response to the crisis, helping contain the situation without further escalation (Olsson, 2013). “The government’s core message was centred on the idea that while the free speech principle is constitutionally protected in Sweden, so too is the idea of religious tolerance” (p. 228). Thus, these studies suggest that a government’s response to a crisis may be connected to familiarity with routines of communication with specific segments of the public, perceptions of the most important public group, and previous experiences or lessons learnt from other actors’ crises.

These examples of studies on crisis public diplomacy deliver insights on the practice from different contexts. Yet, as indicated earlier, these studies are mostly prescriptive as they analyse different public diplomacy responses to crises to suggest how it could be done differently in a way that maximises the effectiveness of the response. This, however, should not undermine the insights these studies offer on how different actors responded to crises through public diplomacy, and the factors connected to specific responses. These studies suggest that a specific crisis public diplomacy response may be related to rituals of communicating locally without attention to any cultural differences and the consequences they may cause (Zaharna, 2004); use of known patterns of rhetorical strategies (Mor, 2009); previous experiences or lessons learnt from other actors’ crises (Olsson, 2013). These insights have potential

in understanding how the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) responded to the 2011 crisis. My research can investigate whether such factors were related to specific response strategies employed by the Bahraini government.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter was to review the most important theoretical frameworks and concepts that support answering this research's questions. It highlighted the focus on public diplomacy's informative rather than relational functions. It also reviewed the three stages of conceptualising public diplomacy, highlighting the perception of public diplomacy from a realist standpoint.

The chapter also illustrated the significance of studying public diplomacy and public relations closely. It argued that the social constructivist paradigm is a more fruitful approach to examine how public diplomacy activities may contribute to the co-construction of specific versions of reality through government messages.

After this, the concept of framing was reviewed as framework to systematically examine the construction of specific versions of reality in texts communicated through public diplomacy. This project particularly focuses on frames communicated by the Bahraini government through public diplomacy.

The chapter also reviews studies on frame-building in public diplomacy, framing of the 2011 Bahraini crisis, and public diplomacy and framing in relation to the 'Arab Spring' phenomenon. Research on frame-building in public diplomacy suggests the focus on factors that contribute to the success or failure of public diplomats at promoting their preferred frames to foreign



media. My research, however, looks into the factors related to the articulation of public diplomacy frames by public diplomats in public diplomacy rather than media content. Therefore, the chapter then discussed Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, and how the extension of this media theory has potential to study frame-building in public diplomacy. My research also contributes to academic research on the 'Arab Spring' phenomenon by looking at the frames communicated by the Bahraini government.

The chapter also discussed Benoit's (1995) image repair theory and linking the analysed frames to the crisis response strategies offered by the theory.

The next chapter discusses the philosophical standpoints underpinning this study, the research questions, and the methods used.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **1. PROJECT AIMS AND CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This project aims to study public diplomacy frames used in media relations during a time of crisis and its aftermath, and the factors connected to the frame construction process. It focuses on frames present in Bahraini affairs news published on the website of Bahrain News Agency (BNA) during different key moments of the 2011 crisis in Bahrain. Additionally, it studies the factors connected to the production of these frames by public diplomacy professionals working for the IAA/BNA. I specifically focus on media relations among the different aspects of public diplomacy because foreign media have important role in building national image and reputation among foreign publics and are therefore a key priority in public diplomacy (Zhang, 2005; Zhang & Meadows, 2012). Further, in crisis situations, public diplomacy is a reactive form of communication, where actors need to act to a short notice warning to limit any damage (Andreasen, 2008, p. 203). The short-term and reactive features of crisis response are mostly practiced through media relations, especially through one-way forms of communication (e.g. news), as they can communicate a nation's standpoint on a specific issue or correct misinformation (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008, p. 15).

The analysis of government messages offers insights on how a government promotes certain interpretations of an issue over others in their communications with foreign media and publics (Brewer, 2006; Pinto, 2014, p.

164). In this thesis, I analyse messages delivered through online content published in news format on the website of the BNA to understand the Bahraini government frames during the examined crisis. I analyse frames promoted through the BNA because it is the state-owned governmental news agency in Bahrain responsible for providing the official perspective of the country to foreign media (["About BNA"](#), 2017). As indicated in the Introduction chapter, the BNA is not an independent agency but works under the umbrella of the Bahraini Information Affairs Authority (IAA) – the main governmental body in charge of local and international communications (["organisational structure"](#), 2015)<sup>7</sup>. One of the Authority's main roles is to design the government's communication strategies and promote its messages, and BNA's website is one of its main communication channels (["Vision, Mission & Goals"](#), 2014). Even when other governmental bodies (i.e. ministries) engage in communications with foreign media through their own networks, they will still use the BNA as an official outlet for their messages. Thus, the IAA and BNA provide an important source of governmental messages communicated to foreign media, which puts them in a central position in Bahraini public

---

<sup>7</sup> The first governmental authority for information affairs in Bahrain was established in 1965. In 2010 a royal decree was issued changing the title from the 'Ministry of Culture and Information' to the 'Ministry of Culture'. And, at the time, the 'Information Affairs Authority' (IAA) was established, and put in charge of all information affairs in Bahrain (["About the Ministry"](#), 2014). The main difference between working as 'ministry' and 'authority' in Bahrain is that the authority has a board of directors, and is led by a chief executive officer and not a minister. Nevertheless, the 'authority' still has to work under the management of a specific ministry, and be represented by a minister in the Parliament. Other implications of working as an 'authority' are related to the employees' payment schemes and how the authority manages the budget. In 2014, the IAA was changed to the 'Ministry of Information Affairs'.

diplomacy. Moreover, they played a central role in offering the government perspective on the protests during the examined crisis.

I focus my analysis on online content published on BNA's website during three key moments of the Bahraini crisis: the first week of protests (14-19 February 2011); the deployment of the Gulf Peninsula Shield Forces (PSF)<sup>8</sup> in Bahrain (14-16 March 2011); and the publication of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report (23-25 November 2011). The next section of this chapter offers further details on the timeframe and context of each of the three examined key moments. The rest of the chapter presents the philosophical standpoints underpinning this project and the methods and sampling strategies used for data generation and analysis. Section 3 discusses the role of the social constructivist paradigm in my thesis and how it is associated with idealist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. From these philosophical positions, it then presents the research questions I aim to answer and discusses how the thesis adopts a qualitative methodology. The chapter then discusses the use of qualitative frame analysis with the sampled website content. It illustrates how the analysis combined existing "issue-specific" frames (de Vreese, 2005) from previous research with new issue-specific frames that emerged from the data. The frame analysis is combined with semi-structured interviews with selected IAA communicators to explore the frame production processes across the three key moments, and the factors

---

<sup>8</sup> The PSF is the military arm of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It is intended to deter and respond to military aggression against any of the GCC members: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait.

related to the frame-building. This research design aims to deliver insights on Bahraini public diplomacy processes which have a potential to contribute to the co-construction of specific versions of reality during a crisis and its aftermath.

## **2. PROJECT TIMEFRAME**

Regarding the timeframe of my research, I focus on the 2011 protests and their aftermath in Bahrain because they reflect a critical time in the nation's public diplomacy, and studying it can deliver insights on how public diplomacy is practiced in response to a crisis in such under-researched cultural context. As explained in earlier chapters, the Bahraini authorities were criticised for human rights' abuses and violence against the demonstrators during these protests. Different international media reports emphasised these accusations which consequently led to generating negative publicity about the country across foreign publics (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). The death of protestors since the first day of demonstrations after clashes with security forces drew international attention to the Bahraini protests (Govers, 2012), especially because similar incidents escalated to regime overthrows in Egypt and Tunisia around the same time (Karolak, 2012, p. 180). This negative publicity challenging the Bahraini government and authorities overlaps with Benoit's (1997) understanding of a crisis situation, which is based on two premises: first, an actor is accused of offensive acts, and second, a salient sector of the public perceives the accusations as offensive behaviour (p. 178; see also Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Benoit, 2004). Here, the Bahraini authorities were accused of the abuses, and the violation

of human rights is internationally viewed as an offensive act. Therefore, based on Benoit's understanding of a crisis situation, the Bahraini protests are discussed as a crisis situation for the Bahraini government.

### **2.1. First week of protests (14-19 February 2011)**

The first key moment focuses on the first week of the protests in Bahrain.

It covers the period from 14 February 2011 when the protests started, until 19 February when the situation relatively calmed down and the protests were allowed by the Bahraini authorities. Between 14 and 19 February, the protests were not legal from the perspective of the Bahraini law, because the protestors did not follow the official procedure of requesting the permission of the Ministry of Interior to demonstrate at a specific location and date (BICI, 2011, p. 68). In a gesture to calm the situation, the Crown Prince ordered the security forces on 19 February to authorise the protests (ibid, p. 83).

14 February 2011 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Action Charter (NAC) - a political document composed by a number of Bahraini legislators, ministers, academics, etc. based on a request by the head of state to set the roadmap for comprehensive national reforms in the country (Al-Hasan, 2015). It was endorsed by 98.4% of Bahraini voters in a national referendum that took place on 14 February 2001. Since the end of January 2011, different social media platforms (Facebook; Twitter; online forums) were used to call for demonstrations across different areas of Bahrain. The protestors' demands ranged between revising the Constitution, undertaking political reform and achieving greater socio-economic justice, and regime overthrow (BICI, 2011,

p. 163). The protests were designed to echo revolutions that took place earlier that year in Tunisia and Egypt (Al-Hasan, 2015; Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 92; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). The death of protestors after clashes with security forces at an early stage of the crisis radicalised the protests. This increased the level of violence, and, as mentioned above, increased negative publicity about Bahrain (Govers, 2012). Dalacoura (2012, p. 56) states:

In Bahrain, which faced longstanding political conflict between the Sunni monarchy and a Shi'a majority, protests erupted on 14 February resulting, a few days later, in the police storming Manama's Pearl Square, which was occupied by protesters, and killing seven of them, some asleep in tents. Demonstrations restarted on 21 February, but were met by even bigger pro-government events. Repression radicalized the movement, which called for a republic and a march on the royal palace on 11 March. King Hamad invited Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) forces, led by Saudi Arabia, into the country on 14 March to help suppress the uprising and declared a state of emergency.

Therefore, I focus on the first week of protests to analyse frames promoted through the BNA website as the crisis unfolded.

## **2.2. Deployment of the PSF in Bahrain (14-16 March 2011)**

The second examined moment focuses on the arrival of the PSF, a joint military force among GCC members, to Bahrain on 14 March 2011. The period between 20 February and 13 March 2011 marked a relatively calm phase of the Bahraini 2011 crisis (BICI, 2011, p. 126). During that time, the government's policy and approach toward the protests changed as demonstrations across different areas of Bahrain were allowed, and the security forces practiced more self-control (ibid). However, 13 March was a turning point as levels of security dropped considerably across Bahrain (ibid).

Vandalism of private and public properties, assault against individuals, and sectarian clashes were recorded.

Moreover, negotiations between the government and the opposition to start the national dialogue reached an end. Since 18 February 2011, the Bahraini Crown Prince (CP) was delegated by the King to call for a comprehensive national dialogue to solve the situation and meet people's demands. In the beginning, the opposition showed interest in this dialogue. Yet, according to BICI's (2011) investigations, with the escalation of demonstrations, the opposition kept changing its position on participation and adding preconditions to participate. By 13 March, the opposition changed its stance again by apparently eliminating the dialogue option in favour of electing a Constituent Assembly. From the opposition's view, their hesitance to enter the dialogue was due to mistrust of the government, which, in their opinion, did not fulfil all the promises of the NAC. On the other hand, the CP and his team concluded that the opposition was not willing to participate in a dialogue with the government. The CP believed that drafting a constitution through this assembly would alienate other members of the Bahraini society, which was unacceptable for both the CP and the King (BICI, 2011, p. 131; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). Thus, the negotiations ended.

As the dialogue option did not work at that point, and the nation's stability was threatened by escalated violence and clashes; Bahraini authorities considered the necessity of taking strict measures to solve the situation and restore order. On the night of 13 March, the King decided that Bahrain needed



military help from GCC members to protect Bahrain from what they believed was possible Iranian interference in Bahrain's internal affairs. The arrival of the troops was controversial. As the authorities considered it a strategic measure against potential foreign threat, the opposition viewed the arrival of the PSF as illegal use of GCC troops to confront popular demands. Further, they presented the invitation of foreign troops as a sign that the Bahraini authorities lost all legitimacy to an extent that it was unable to address the internal situation, which forced it to request GCC assistance ([alwefaq](#), 2011). Iranian media platforms went to present it as a 'massacre' against Bahraini civilians (Belfer, 2014).

I focus on this key moment to understand the frames communicated around an event that triggered further accusations of human rights' violations, and when the authorities turned to a military measure to contain the situation. I analyse BNA's news published on 14 March 2011 when the troops arrived at Bahrain until 16 March. On 17 March the focus shifted to another strict measure to restore order in Bahrain, which is a three-month 'State of National Safety'.

### **2.3. Publication of BICI report (23-25 November 2011)**

The third key moment is the publication of BICI report. BICI was established following a request by King Hamad of Bahrain in July 2011, yet it worked as an independent commission. To ensure its independence, the Royal Order appointed five renowned, non-Bahraini individuals who have expertise in the fields of international law and international human rights law to act as

Commissioners (["The BICI Commissioners"](#), 2011). The purpose of the Commission was to "investigate and report on the events in Bahrain in February/March 2011, and any subsequent consequences arising out of the aforementioned events, and to make such recommendations as it may deem appropriate" (BICI, 2011. p. 1). The significance of this report lies in its consideration by Western officials as a progress to the situation in Bahrain, a milestone in the Bahraini government's strategy for taking the initiative to request an investigation of what happened, and documentation of any human rights' violations in the country during that time (Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). "Such inquiry has not been attempted previously in Bahrain or elsewhere." (Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 91)

The Bahraini authorities aspired to achieve image recovery through this initiative, but it resulted in a more challenging situation in November 2011, when BICI report confirmed violations of human rights by some members of the state security forces. Another challenge at the time was the report's inability to find evidence on Iranian role in the unrest in Bahrain. To understand frames communicated around the publication of the report, I analyse news published on 23 November when the report was published, and the two following days. After that, BNA's online content shifted focus on the Royal Order of establishing the National Commission to review the recommendations of the BICI issued on 26 November 2011 ([biciactions](#), 2011).

As this section discussed the timeframe of focus in this research, the following section discusses the philosophical standpoints taken in the exploration of this context.

### **3. PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONS AND PARADIGMS**

My research works within the social constructivist paradigm which aims to understand the subjective world of human experience. It emphasises the researcher's direct involvement in the development of this understanding rather than just having an observer role (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). Social constructivism does not support social investigation through natural science methods, as it does not view human behaviour to be ruled by law-like regularities. Instead, social constructivists suggest that it is more appropriate to explore the social world through understanding the participants' own perspectives and interpretations of the world surrounding them (Ormston et. al, 2014, p. 24). This paradigm offers a framework to generate an understanding on the diversity of realities constructed on a specific matter, and this project specifically aims to explore versions of reality communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy during a crisis and its aftermath. The paradigm is also beneficial to deliver insights with the communicators on the messages used by IAA/BNA in key public diplomacy moments, what were the framing processes, and what factors were connected to it. The benefit of applying this paradigm lies in offering sophisticated, deep, and more informed understandings of the specific context under research (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 108). Further, it recognizes my involvement as the researcher in constructing and interpreting these views, instead of trying to claim objectivity.

As the social constructivist paradigm addresses how the researcher's personal stances and background may influence the research process and analysis, it is worth noting that my personal stance, as a Bahraini citizen, during the crisis was pro-government. Besides being a Sunni, my views during that time were influenced by the fact that I do not come from Bahraini origins. My parents moved to Bahrain from Jordan in the late 1970s, and my father worked with the Bahrain Defence force until early 2000. Thus, this background did not only influence my stance to be pro-government/regime, but also presented me among some of the protestors as a typical 'mercenary' who moved to Bahrain to support the status of an 'oppressive' regime and snatch 'original Bahrainis' opportunities in the job market. This background is related to my understanding of the crisis as an aggressive attempt by some Shiite fundamentalists, intolerant of other social/religious groups, to destabilise the country and takeover. Yet, I followed recommendations offered by the literature to delimit my understanding of the crisis from one angle and develop a critical distance from my personal stances. These are detailed throughout this chapter, especially in the section discussing the frame analysis procedure (6.3).

Philosophical standpoints depend on a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Ontology refers to the nature of reality concerning the social phenomena being investigated (Creswell, 1998; Mason, 2002, p. 14; Ormston et. al, 2014, p. 4). According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), ontology deals with "the nature of being" and explains assumptions about reality. This research has idealist ontology, where reality is argued to be the

product of an individual's internal consciousness, rather than a realist worldview where reality is claimed to exist in the world external to the individual (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Ormston et al, 2014, pp. 4-5). This suggests that, in this research, public diplomacy in general, the analysed frames, and the factors related to the frame production processes are understood through "collective reconstructions" (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 101) of different individuals' perceptions, instead of viewing these factors, the frames, and the studied phenomenon as external reality that has only one correct form regardless of how different individuals understand it.

Epistemology looks at the nature and forms of knowledge, how to acquire it, and how to communicate it to fellow human beings (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.1; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 6). Two competing and contrasting positions on epistemology are positivism and interpretivism. Positivism argues that knowledge exists independently of any individual's consciousness and that this knowledge can be studied in a systematic fashion without reference to any individual (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Positivism is often associated with quantitative research and aligns to natural science methods. Within this realm, the researcher has an observer role and seeks to establish causality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 6; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, pp. 2-3). Interpretivism, on the other hand, seeks to understand the world in which individuals live through developing subjective meanings of the participants' experience, with recognition of the variety and multiplicity of these meanings, and one way of doing so is through conversations (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Adopting a specific

epistemological position affects how knowledge about social behaviour will be generated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 6). Epistemology should help in generating knowledge and explanations about the ontological components of the social world (Mason, 2002, p. 16; Ormston et. al, 2014, p. 6). Thus, with idealist ontological position, I adopt an interpretivist approach which is often associated with social constructivism (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). This approach aims to help in understanding the subjective views of the communicators actively involved in public diplomacy activities regarding the factors connected to the frame construction in content published through the BNA during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath. Further, it has implications on how framing is understood and studied in this project, through considering the inseparability of the analysed frames from the political and cultural contexts in which they are studied (Snow D., 2004, p. 385).

#### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Departing from the above mentioned philosophical standpoints, framing in public diplomacy texts is viewed in my research as “selection and highlighting, and the use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). By bringing attention to some aspects of reality while concealing others, frames promote certain understandings of reality. Examining public diplomacy frames aims to understand what building-blocks Bahraini public diplomacy attempted to contribute to the (co)construction of social realities in foreign media about Bahrain during the crisis and its aftermath. Examining what

factors influenced IAA's "frame-building" (Scheufele, 1999; 2000) decisions attempts to understand the factors related to the production of these building-blocks of the social world within the Bahraini context. In order to do so, I focus on answering the following research questions:

**RQ1. What frames were present in news items on Bahraini affairs published on BNA's English website during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath?**

- 1.1. How were these frames used across the analysed texts and the examined key moments?
- 1.2. Were these frames unique or consistent through the examined key moments?
- 1.3. How do the analysed frames depict the use of specific crisis response strategies by Bahraini public diplomacy?

**RQ2. What factors were connected to the frame-building process in IAA during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath?**

- 2.1. How did IAA construct public diplomacy frames to address foreign media across the examined key moments?
- 2.2. How did Bahraini public diplomacy work during the crisis and its aftermath? To answer these research questions, the following sections provide more details on the qualitative methodology employed in this thesis, and the two research methods I used.

## **5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative research aims to reveal and interpret how meaning is constructed, and how people make sense of their lives and their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviewing is widely used in this regard to provide in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world through learning about the participants' own experiences, social and material contexts, and their perspectives and histories (Creswell, 2014, p. 9; Ormston et. al, 2014, p. 23). Generally, qualitative research is described as an interpretive approach where the researcher attempts to study a phenomenon through the participants' perspectives (Ormston et. al, 2014, p. 3). Yet, "as well as expressing their views in talk, people also write - to create records, to plan, play or entertain, to establish norms and rules, and to argue over controversial issues. So texts, as well as talk, are about people's thoughts, feelings, memories, plans and arguments, and are sometimes more telling than their authors realise." (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000. pp. 131-132) This highlights the benefit of using texts as data sources in qualitative research. The interpretivist approach associated with qualitative research underpins three main points in my methodology: the significance of the understandings and interpretations of different phenomena provided through the interview participants and the analysed texts; the role of the researcher in building these understandings and in interpreting them; and finally the inseparability of the surrounding social, cultural and historical factors from the way participants understand their social world and the way the texts are produced and understood.



I use a “mixed methods”<sup>9</sup> design by combining two qualitative methods, where one of them is a core method and the other is supplemental (Morse, 2003, pp. 191-195). The core method here is frame analysis of public diplomacy texts; specifically news items about Bahraini affairs published on BNA’s English website during the selected key moments. These items were intended as news sources for foreign journalists and the website constitutes a key platform through which Bahraini authorities disseminate content to international media.

The supplemental method is in-depth semi-structured interviews that aim to understand how specific versions of reality are represented in Bahraini public diplomacy messages. The interviews aim to generate knowledge on the messages IAA intended to promote to foreign media across different timeframes of the crisis, how the frame-building processes worked, and what factors were related to the production of public diplomacy frames during that time.

The following sections offer more details on how I employed these two methods, with attention to research ethics and quality issues. Validity and reliability are principles used to evaluate research quality. Validity can be understood as “the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers”, while reliability is “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers

---

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘mixed methods’ is usually used to refer to the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in one project. Yet, using Morse’s (2003) understanding of ‘mixed methods’, the term is still applicable in this project (Morse, 2003, p. 207).

or by the same observer on different occasions” (Hammersley, 1990 in Silverman, 2010, p. 275). Validity “should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state (Gronlund, 1981). Hence at best we strive to minimise invalidity and maximise validity” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 179). Regarding reliability, the term’s suitability for qualitative research is contested with terms such as ‘credibility’ and ‘consistency’, because reliability criteria for quantitative research do not apply to qualitative research (ibid, p. 201). More details on how reliability and validity were considered in each method used in the current study are offered in the following sections.

## **6. FRAME ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY TEXTS**

### **6.1. The method**

In this part of the research, I analyse public diplomacy texts published on BNA’s website in the form of news stories about Bahrain targeting foreign media. As I mentioned earlier, focusing on foreign media relations within public diplomacy acknowledges the significance of foreign media coverage in building national reputation and image cultivation across foreign publics (Zhang, 2005; Zhang & Meadows, 2012). It also represents the specific ‘informative’ aspect of public diplomacy focused on in this project. The selected format of texts can be labelled as “naturally occurring” materials, meaning that they were produced without my intervention (Creswell, 2014, p. 51; Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 277; Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 529; Silverman, 2011, p. 229). Texts are important in qualitative research as they may offer different information from what can be obtained from other methods

of data generation (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 297). In a political context, for example, texts can reveal how political actors promote certain realities over others to influence audience reactions and opinions (Entman, 1993, p. 55). Moreover, texts, especially in news format, are one of the most used public diplomacy tools in response to a crisis situation (Vaxevanidou, 2016, p. 112). When used with other methods, such as interviews, texts allow getting a bigger picture of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014, p. 190; Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 280). The analysis of the news written by public diplomacy communicators aims to understand the frames used to promote certain problem definitions, causal diagnoses, moral judgments, and solutions (Entman, 1993) during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath. I focus on analysing news items from BNA's website because, as I explain earlier, BNA and IAA were central actors in Bahraini public diplomacy and foreign media relations during the crisis and its aftermath. BNA was an extension to the main governmental communication authority in Bahrain: IAA. Moreover, BNA's website was a pipeline for Bahraini news sourced from different governmental organisations during the examined timeframe. Hence, it offered a platform for governmental news used to target foreign media and promote the government's messages. In the following section, I discuss how I selected specific news for frame analysis.

## **6.2. Sampling news items**

Four sampling criteria were taken into account in the collection process. First, as discussed earlier, the texts sampled were news items from BNA's website because BNA and IAA had central positions in communicating the

Bahraini government's stands to foreign media during the crisis and its aftermath. Second, the news items focused on Bahraini affairs, and therefore, where collected from the 'Local News' page of BNA's English website. Third, the news sampled was written in the English language to reflect the focus on foreign media outlets. And finally, the news was published within the timeframe of each examined key moment: the first week of protests (14-19 February 2011); the deployment of PSF in Bahrain (14-16 March 2011); and the publication of BICI report (23-25 November 2011).

I collected each news story that met the sampling criteria from the website's archive. A number of items were excluded from the analysis as they were: weather forecast, summaries of the local press headlines, or "short informative messages" (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 95) such as announcements on events and photo captions. A total of 158 news items were used in the frame analysis. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the number of items sampled in each examined moment and the number of the excluded items. From the first key moment I analysed 59 items, 40 from the second, and 59 from the third.

**Table 2. The number of sampled and excluded news items in each examined moment**

	Date	Total items published	Excluded items	Sampled items	Total
First moment: First week of protests	14/2	18	5	13	59
	15/2	13	1	12	
	16/2	16	3	13	
	17/2	11	2	9	
	18/2	6	2	4	
	19/2	8	0	8	
Second moment: Deployment of the PSF	14/3	11	0	11	40
	15/3	14	0	14	
	16/3	15	0	15	
Third moment: Publication of BICI report	23/11	40	9	31	59
	24/11	23	5	18	
	25/11	15	5	10	

### **6.3. The procedure of frame analysis**

The frame analysis of news items published on BNA's website aims to understand the frames promoted by IAA to foreign media in each of the three examined key moments in the crisis, whether IAA used consistent or unique frames at different points of the crisis and its aftermath, how specific frames were used in specific contexts, and whether these frames correspond to crisis response strategies suggested by the 'image repair theory' (Benoit, 1997).

The frame analysis focused on "issue-specific" frames adapted from previous research, in addition to new original frames that emerged from the data. I focused on issue-specific frames because they "allow for a profound level of specificity and details relevant to the issue under investigation" (de Vreese, 2005, pp. 54-55; see also de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001, pp. 108-109; Matthes, 2009, p. 350). Issue-specific frames offer means to understand how Bahraini public diplomacy messages promoted specific versions of reality

about the crisis that has a potential to contribute to the co-creation of social reality about it.

Yet, issue-specific frames are criticised for their limited ability to be used in the study of other contexts. In order to overcome this limitation, it is suggested to relate issue-specific frames to a more abstract “master” frame (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 67). Master frames are “generic” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 138), meaning they are not context specific and are “inclusive enough so that any number of other social movements can successfully adopt and deploy it in their campaigns” (Benford, 2013, p. 1; see also de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). As my thesis studies a context of demonstrations, I employ two pre-identified frames commonly used in the context of social protest as master frames, because they correspond with some of the issue-specific frames analysed in my research. These master frames are: “riots” and “protests” (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 157). These two master frames and other master frames developed in this research are discussed directly below.

The “riot” frame portrays a conflict between the demonstrators and society. It presents the demonstrators’ actions as illegal or aggressive behaviour, while the police or security forces symbolize social order and lawful behaviour to protect bystanders (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, pp. 157-158). The “protest” frame, on the other hand, portrays conflict between the demonstrators and a powerful institution in society. The frame focuses on protest activities instead of clashes with the police. Within this frame, protestors are treated as

legitimate political group. Therefore, the above frames are employed as master frames in my research (ibid).

As not all the issue-specific frames analysed in the current study focus on demonstrations, I developed another master frame to overcome the limitation of the specificity of these frames which tend to focus on the nation's image in general instead of the demonstrations or a crisis situation. I labelled this master frame 'national reform', and developed it from the 'non-demonstration' frames' consistent pattern of presenting Bahrain as a reformed nation. I also consulted literature on nation branding as it is the area that studies how governments consciously shape and design a place identity to promote it to foreign public groups (Jones, 2017). Previous research highlight that national reform is common approach in the entire GCC region to present their countries to foreign publics (Karolak, 2012, p. 3). For Bahrain in particular, their effort to present an image of a reformed nation to the international arena focused on cultivating an image of "western-friendly, stable, modern, and forward-looking country ripe for investment" (Jones, 2017, p. 326). Thus, 'national reform' is another master frame used in this research.

Another relevant framing to the examined context is 'revolution', which can be generally understood as "a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old regime and effect complete change in the fundamental institutions of society" (Neitzel, n/d). The 'revolution' frame is considered in my analysis with specific attention as explained directly below.

As mentioned earlier, the examined Bahraini crisis coincided with upheavals in other Arab countries which were widely referred to as the 'Arab Spring'- a term popularised by Western media in early 2011 when Tunisians successfully revolted against the regime and emboldened similar anti-government protests in most Arab countries (Manfreda, 2018). I consider 'revolution' as more abstract level of framing the Arab protests because, as indicated earlier, 'Arab Spring' defines these demonstrations as revolutions by oppressed people against dictatorships (Maguire & Vickers, 2013). Further, the term 'Arab Spring' was a reference to the revolutions in Eastern Europe<sup>10</sup> in 1989 which triggered the fall of communism and eventually the Soviet Union (Head, 2011; Manfreda, 2018), suggesting that Arab protests will also have a domino effect of overthrowing aging Arab dictatorships. Thus, 'revolution' is considered another master frame relevant to the examined context, while the 'Arab Spring' is considered as a more specific variation of this master frame. Nevertheless, Pinto (2014) mentions that the king of Bahrain refused the reference to the protests in his country as another 'Arab Spring'. Therefore, it was expected that frames communicated through BNA's online content will tend to contest the 'Arab Spring' framing. The implications of this on my analysis are two-fold. First, at the level of generic-frames, my analysis

---

<sup>10</sup>

While some point to the domino effect that spread across Eastern Europe as being similar to the way protests are moving across the Arab world, there are also some distinct differences. For example, there was no consensus on the political and economic model that existing systems should be replaced with. The European revolutions, on the other hand, had international consequences of pushing back of Socialism (Head, 2011; Manfreda, 2018).



examined how the 'revolution' frame was contested with other social protest master frames (riot, protest; Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Second, at the level of issue-specific frames, my analysis aimed to understand how the 'Arab Spring' was "counter-framed" in BNA's online content.

"Counter-framing" is communicating a frame that contradicts a frame that is introduced at a prior date to the opposing frame (Chong & Druckman, 2011, p. 3). A counter-frame has three main elements (ibid). First, the counter-frame comes at a later time than the initial frame. This means that the public received and processed the initial frame before exposure to the counter-frame. In the examined case, the 'Arab Spring' frame was introduced by Western media following the uprising in Tunisia in January 2011, hence, before the beginning of the examined Bahraini protests which started on 14 February 2011. Second, a counter-frame promotes a position on an issue that is contrary to the initial frame. As the king<sup>11</sup> of Bahrain refused the 'Arab Spring' frame, my analysis explores how the situation was framed differently through Bahraini public diplomacy. Third, it is assumed that the initial frame affected opinions on the issue, creating an incentive to counter-frame. As indicated earlier, the perception of the Arab protests as 'Arab Spring' provokes sympathy and support for the protesters (Harlow & Johnson, 2011, p. 1365), and legitimises regime overthrows and urgent international military intervention as a valid solution to help protestors bring down what was perceived as oppressive regimes (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). It is also argued

---

<sup>11</sup> The Introduction chapter drew attention to the connections between the king and governmental entities such as the IAA/BNA.

that the Bahraini protests were designed to echo revolutions in other Arab countries, emboldened by the success of uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia (Al-Hasan, 2015; Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 92; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the frame analysis in this thesis examines how the 'Arab Spring' was contested in BNA's online content during the three examined key moments, offering insights on versions of reality communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy.

The analysed frames are also discussed in relation to the most common crisis response strategies proposed by the image repair theory (IRT), and these are: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of events, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1997; 2004). I discussed these in detail in the Literature Review chapter, drawing attention that the term 'strategy' does not necessarily involve strategic intent by the organisation or individuals putting the message together. The purpose of linking the analysed frames to strategies suggested by the IRT is to offer insights on framing in BNA's contesting of the 'Arab Spring' frame, and thus response strategies used by Bahraini public diplomacy at a time of crisis and its aftermath.

The analysis of frames comprised detailed exploration of their presence and use in narratives and discourses employed by IAA/BNA in news targeted at foreign media. To do so in a systematic manner, I followed analysis steps suggested by Van Gorp's (2007; 2010) constructionist approach to frame analysis. The first step in the analysis procedure is inductive reconstruction of the set of elements that manifest a frame in a text. Each frame can be presented in a text through a "frame package" which is "a cluster of logical

organised devices that function as an identity kit for a frame” (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 64). A frame package<sup>12</sup> consists of manifest framing devices, and manifest or latent reasoning devices (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 398; Gamson, 1981; Gamson, 1992; Gamson, 2001; Gamson & Lasch, 1981; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The framing devices can be word choices, exemplars, descriptions, metaphors, and arguments. The reasoning devices are: “explicit and implicit statements that deal with justifications, causes, and consequences in a temporal order, and which complete the frame package” (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 64; see also Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 398; Gamson, 1981; Gamson, 1992; Gamson, 2001; Gamson & Lasch, 1981; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The reasoning devices are connected to the framing functions launched by Entman (1993): problem definition, causal interpretation, treatment recommendation, and moral evaluation (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 64). Identifying elements of a news text and linking them to a central framing idea requires some interpretation by the person who is doing the analysis (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 90). This is important as human-judgment is essential to induce the meaning of a text, question what is in the content and what is not, and discover new insights as part of the coding process (Tankard, 2001, p. 154). With this, it seems unavoidable to have some level of subjectivity in the analysis. To minimize the subjective bias and enhance the validity and reliability of the frame analysis, the inductive reconstruction of frame packages involved a

---

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Gamson and Modigliani (1989) coined the term “media package” in their study of frames in media context. Van Gorp (2007, p. 74), however, replaces it with the label “frame package” to delimit the understanding of framing as a process only conducted by journalists or in media context.

systematic analysis of the framing and reasoning devices related to a specific frame. Frame packages should enable independent analysts to determine the presence of the frame in a subsequent deductive phase of the frame analysis, and decrease the level of subjectivity in the frame analysis (Van Gorp, 2010, p. 92).

The frame packages gradually take shape during the collection, coding, and analysis of the sampled texts (ibid, p. 93). To reconstruct frame packages, it is important to be familiar with the culturally available frames on the examined topic (Gamson, 1992, p. 215). To grasp an understanding of the diverse available frames on the examined crisis, I followed Van Gorp's (2010, p. 94; see also Tankard, 2001, p. 150) advice on reading materials from different sources on the examined issue. My reading included the news sampled for analysis; coverage of several news outlets on the Bahraini crisis (e.g. BBC; CNN; Al-Jazeera; Al-Arabiya); discourse published by the opposition political societies in Bahrain; previous academic studies on the framing of the Bahraini crisis (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Al-Rawi, 2015; Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Pinto, 2014); and coverage and academic research on protests in other Arab countries at the time (the Arab Spring) (e.g. Hamdy & Gomaa (2012): Egypt; Maguire & Vickers (2013): Libya). I also watched several YouTube videos on the Bahraini crisis that varied between interviews with Bahraini officials and citizens who support the government, and opposition representatives and protestors (e.g. ["Mushaima Talks to Al-Alam TV", 2011](#); ["Bahrain Demands Further Reforms", 2011](#); ["Thousands Protest to Overthrow Bahraini Government", 2011](#)). This step helped me understand the multiplicity

of how different actors may talk about the Bahraini crisis in a way that invites the recipient to understand the situation in a specific manner. Moreover, I am a Bahraini citizen who was in Bahrain during the crisis, suggesting my insider cultural background on how the protests were discussed by different social groups in Bahrain, and in the media either national or international. Despite my insider background, I followed Van Gorp's (2010, p. 94) advice on reading material from different relevant sources to assure my understanding of the available frames is not limited by my own personal experience and opinions.

After this exposure to the diverse arguments on the examined crisis, I used relevant previous academic studies to collect an inventory of elements that could contribute to the understanding of the examined situation in a specific manner. Due to my insider cultural background, I noticed similarity between the frames systematically analysed in previous studies and how the government and its supporters talked about the crisis at the time. Moreover, as I read the entire set of data during the phase of exploring the culturally available frames, I noticed that frame elements offered in some of the relevant studies overlap with some arguments in my data ('events' (Maguire and Vickers, 2013; 'existential threat' (Pinto, 2014; Al-Rawi (2015)). Yet, my analysis was not limited to frames from previous studies.

Other frames analysed in this research were new original frames that emerged from the analysed data ('reform'; 'supported leadership'; 'sovereignty'; 'unprecedented achievement'). The identification of elements and the construction of frame packages for these frames depended on the engagement with the analysed news sample. The engagement involved

reading and re-reading the data several times; and coding elements through three main phases: open; axial; and selective coding which do not necessarily work in this specific order (cf. Stauss & Corbin, 1998). In the open coding, I listed each element that could indicate the understanding of what is at stake in a specific manner. In the axial coding phase there was a higher level of abstraction as different elements were listed under each specific central idea that they may imply. The selective coding phase comprised even higher level of abstraction, where some elements from the axial coding may have been deleted.

The final step in the reconstruction of frame packages is labelling each package (frame) in a way that reflects the core idea abstracted (Van Gorp, 2007; 2010). As the elements of each frame were identified and connected to the relevant frame packages, I started filling the “frame matrix” (Gamson & Lasch, 1983), which contains the frame packages that comprise each frame. Each package in the matrix developed in this project contains two main sections: a list of elements serving as framing devices; and a reasoning devices section broken down into Entman’s (1993) four framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, treatment recommendation, and moral evaluation. The matrix is displayed in the Frame Analysis chapter (4) in Table 3.

As indicated above, I used relevant previous studies to collect an inventory of elements for some of the frame packages. One of these frame packages builds on ideas from Maguire and Vickers (2013) whom I used their work to develop the ‘events’ frame. I consider their finding on the portrayal of

the situation in Bahrain as 'events' as a possible frame that could emerge from narratives used by IAA/BNA to promote such an interpretation of what was happening in Bahrain to foreign media. The textual elements identified through Maguire and Vickers's (2013) discourse analysis suggesting this representation were employed as potential elements of this frame. The frame is present if the texts:

- Refer to participants as protestors.
- Suggest the normality of protesting in Bahrain: it is similar to protests in the UK, part of peoples' political rights.
- Suggest that protests' demands can be met through reform and dialogue.
- Suggest that protests are under control and do not necessitate urgent actions or international intervention.
- Suggest that the events led to deaths among the protestors: they were not killed by policemen, deaths were almost accidental, unplanned.

The frame analysis in my thesis also revealed an additional element of this frame which is:

- Suggestions of intentional misrepresentation of Bahrain in foreign media which signifies the necessity to convey the 'truth'.

Another frame that I was able to employ building on previous studies is the 'existential threat' frame adopted, with minor adjustments, from Pinto (2014) and Al-Rawi (2015). Both authors suggest the framing of the protests in Bahrain as "an Iran-backed conspiracy against the Gulf in an attempt to spread Shiism and infiltrate into the region" (Al-Rawi, 2015, p. 25). They both

offer the same reasoning devices in their separate studies, but different framing elements. To identify the “existential threat” frame, I used these elements form (Pinto, 2014) in the form of the following points:

- Bahraini authorities asking for foreign military intervention.
- References to the implications of Iranian threat on other GCC countries and their monarchies.
- References to Iran/Shiites as a threat.

On the other hand, Al-Rawi (2015) measures the dominant words and phrases in the comments of Bahraini online activists on YouTube videos about the Bahraini crisis. He also measures the most recurrent associations between them. As mentioned in the Literature Review, I use his insights on the implications of the most recurrent word associations found in his analysis to develop elements for the ‘existential threat’ frame. Therefore, besides the elements adopted from Pinto (2014), a text was taken to include the ‘existential threat’ frame if it contained:

- Reference to collaborations between Bahraini leadership, government, prime-minister and the Saudi ruling family against protestors, Shi’a.<sup>13</sup>
- Reference to majorities or minorities in the country in terms of Sunni or Shi’a.<sup>14</sup>
- Negative references to the regime, king, government, ruling families in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (Al-Khalifa, al-Saud), Shi’a.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This element was developed from Al-Rawi’s (2015) insights on associations between: “down with”, “Al-Khalifa”, “Saud”. <sup>14</sup>

This element was developed from direct references to Sunni and Shi’a.

<sup>14</sup> This element was developed from Al-Rawi’s (2015) insights on associations between: “Allah’s curse”, “Hamad”, “Khalifa”, Bahraini and Saudi governments. This depends on the affiliation of the element’s source, i.e. if the source is Shiite and refers negatively to the government, it indicates a sectarian conflict.



- Expressions of hatred between religious groups (i.e. Sunni and Shi'a).<sup>15</sup>
- Reference to wishes, prayers of victory to the Gulf Peninsula Shield Forces (PSF).<sup>16</sup>
- Reference to foreigners given Bahraini nationality as “mercenaries”.<sup>17</sup>

My analysis also revealed two additional elements of the ‘existential threat’ frame:

- References to riots, violence, vandalism, continuity of demonstrations and its consequences on the nation’s safety and stability.
- References to strict measures to restore order.

As indicated earlier, the remaining of the analysed frames in this research are new issue-specific frames that emerged from the analysed data. I also discussed above the procedure of developing the frame packages for these frames. These frames are: ‘reform’; ‘unprecedented achievement’; ‘supported leadership’; and ‘sovereignty’. The elements used in the deductive phase of analysing the ‘reform’ frame are:

- References to NAC’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a celebration.
- References to the leadership’s role in reform.
- References to the NAC and the reform project achievements.
- References to the protests and their consequences as “sporadic incidents”.

---

<sup>15</sup> This element was developed from Al-Rawi’s (2015) insights on associations between: “killing”, “dogs”, “death”, “Sunnis”, “Shiite”.

<sup>16</sup> This element was developed from Al-Rawi’s (2015) insights on associations between: “let Allah bring them victory”, “security forces”. PSF represent Sunni GCC monarchies.

<sup>17</sup> This element was developed from Al-Rawi’s (2015) insights on associations between: “regime”, “killing”, “curse”, “mercenaries”. Granting Bahraini nationality to foreigners was seen by Shi’a as a form of changing the “majorly Shiite” demography of the Bahraini society.

- References to the leadership's 'democratic' responses to the 'incidents'.
- References to further governmental initiatives to meet citizens' demands.

The reasoning and framing devices for this frame and all other frames are summarised in the frame matrix in Table 3 in chapter 4.

For the 'unprecedented achievement' frame, the elements are:

- References to the BICI and its report as unprecedented achievement and democratic solution.
- References to the acceptance of the report's results.
- References to the report's contributions to the future of Bahrain.
- Excluding government breaches asserted by the report.

The elements for the 'supported leadership' frame are:

- Supporting the leadership and its initiatives.
- Supporting Bahrain's stability and security.
- References to GCC unity, strong ties, historic relations, support.
- International support, ties, cooperation.
- References to loyal, patriotic citizens.

And, finally, the elements for the 'sovereignty' frame are:

- References to the authorities' determination and ability to protect the nation, citizens, residents.
- No impunity for criminal acts and their perpetrators.
- Order is restored successfully, return to normality.

To add more in-depth understanding of Bahraini public diplomacy's role in the construction of specific versions of reality in its messages during the crisis,

I also explore what factors were connected to the construction of the frames. I conducted interviews with selected IAA communicators to deliver insights on these factors and the processes of articulating public diplomacy messages. The following section details the role and procedure of these interviews in my thesis.

## **7. IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS**

### **7.1. The method**

Interviews with IAA communicators aim to understand the factors related to the frame-building process in order to generate insights on Bahraini public diplomacy processes that contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality as communicated through their messages. A qualitative interview has the purpose of producing knowledge through the interaction between the interviewer and the participant to understand the world from the participant's viewpoint (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4; Kvale, 1996). This works in line with the social constructivist approach overarching this research and discussed earlier in section 3 of this chapter. In-depth interviewing allows the researcher to explore "complex, contradictory, or counterintuitive matters, [and] portray on-going social processes" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 4). A semi-structured research interview is an interview with the purpose of generating deep descriptions of the "life world" of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 32). As my research paradigm highlights my involvement as a researcher in the knowledge production process, my role as the interviewer comprises actively following up on the participants' answers, seeking to clarify and extend the

interview statement (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 10; Bryman, 2004, p. 113). From a constructivist viewpoint, the interview data reflects one version of reality that is constructed by both the interviewer and the interviewee, instead of treating the data as a reflection of the interviewee's reality outside the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 51-52). Therefore, the interview is a process of data generation rather than data collection, and it is judged for its "richness, vividness and accuracy in describing complex situations or cultures" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 16; see also King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 22). Further, instead of treating its findings as generalizable rules, the quality of the generated data can be assessed through its transferability, where "the reader can assess the extent to which conclusions drawn in one setting can transfer to another" through the researcher's provision of adequate rich detail on the examined topic and the research process (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 160). Moreover, as working within the social constructivist paradigm highlights my interpretive rather than observer role in the data generation, a certain level of subjectivity in the process cannot be denied. Therefore, to establish validity and reliability in this method I provide detailed and transparent description of my research and analysis procedure, in addition to evidence from the data to support inferences and arguments made in the analysis (Silverman, 2006, p. 282). I also provide a copy of the interview guide in Appendix 1, and a full translated transcript of one interview in Appendix 3.

## **7.2. Sampling interview participants**

The BNA, the governmental news agency whose website content I analyse in the frame analysis, worked under the management of the IAA. The IAA did

not have a separate public diplomacy department, and practiced public diplomacy without using this label. Rather, IAA activities that were in line with the definition of public diplomacy adopted throughout this thesis were labelled 'external communication' or 'media relations'. Those involved in public diplomacy communications, hereafter called 'communicators', did not work within one department specifically responsible for communicating with foreign publics. Public diplomacy activities were practiced through the departments of External Communication, and Bahrain News Agency (BNA). Before starting my field-work, I searched the website of IAA (Ministry of Information Affairs at the time) for different communicators who had the potential to contribute to my project. I also contacted the head of the Public Relations Department who acted as research informant to identify potential participants. This helped me select the first interviewee, who was highly involved in different foreign media relations activities within IAA, especially during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath. Thereafter, I employed a snowballing approach.

In the "snowballing" approach (Strydom & Venter, 2005), every time I interviewed a communicator I asked him or her to recommend other colleagues who have experience in my topic and could potentially contribute to the research project. In order to be included in my sample the recommended interviewees needed to meet specific criteria. They had to be involved in IAA's foreign media relations activities during the examined crisis, and they had to have a role in making decisions on messages promoted to foreign media during the timeframe of my study. Before approaching each new interviewee, I needed to be introduced through the participant who recommended them. I

did not interview all the suggested communicators because some of them either refused to participate due to work restrictions (1 recommended interviewee) or did not meet the criteria of inclusion (2 potential interviewees recommended by others focused on local communications through social media instead of mainstream international media). To ensure that the interviewees' experiences are relevant to my research I also interviewed communicators who worked at different government positions outside the IAA (3 communicators) and were asked to join the IAA at different points during the crisis and its aftermath as consultants, for their communication skills and expertise. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, despite their relevant experience, the participants' insights could be limited by their ability to recall accurate memories about the examined phenomena, and their willingness to share sensitive information (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 71-76). I stopped interviewing more participants when the generated data reached a "saturation" point, where no new information or themes were observed in the data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006, p. 59). Saturation in specific themes started to build up in the third interview. From 7 recommended communicators I interviewed 4, bringing the total number of interviews to 5. Of these, one participant was highly engaged in foreign media relations during the crisis and its aftermath, two participants were responsible for monitoring different media platforms to help in designing IAA messages and responses through foreign media, and the other two were responsible for designing and approving different key messages and communication strategies related to the crisis and its consequences.

### **7.3. Interview procedure**

To interview the communicators, I prepared a series of main, follow-up, and probing questions in the general form of an interview guide (Appendix 1) (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 35-41; Kvale, 2007, pp. 60-66; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 134-144). The main questions are the questions that guide the conversation; probing questions attempt to clarify responses or extract examples; and follow-up questions aim to uncover the implications and hidden assumptions in the answers provided to the main questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, pp. 145-146 in Warren, 2002, p 86). I did not use the interview guide in the same form throughout each interview, as I only used it to remind me of the core questions and themes I needed to discuss with the participants, the follow-up questions I could use to extend the discussion of certain topics, and the main purpose of discussing specific issues. I also asked questions that were not in the guide but resulted from the discussion flow and were necessary to generate clear understanding of what the interviewees were suggesting. In order to generate data on the factors connected to framing during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath, I asked the communicators to share how the IAA/BNA communicated with foreign media, and what strategies, activities, and goals it had in this regard. I also asked them about the processes of texts' production; who was involved in it, how it was done, and who was it targeted at. Moreover, we discussed the different messages used by IAA in its communications with foreign media across the three key moments of focus. A sample of the interview guide is in Appendix 1.

The initial contacts with the participants were made through phone conversations after gaining access through the participants who recommended them. To work in-line with the University of Stirling's code of ethical research, and the ethical considerations in research interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 108), I asked the participant at each interview to sign a consent form that contained all terms and conditions we agreed on during the initial contacts ("Code of Good Research Practice", n/d, p. 11). Mainly, the forms document the participants' right of confidentiality, agreement to audio record the interview by the researcher, and their right to withdraw from the project at any time. The forms also contain agreements on the use of the interview data in academic publications originating from this project, in addition to the secure storage of interview records for five years. A template of the consent forms used in my project is in Appendix 2.

The interviews took place face-to-face in the interviewees' offices or in coffee shops depending on the participant's convenience. With the approval of the interviewees, I recorded each interview to transcribe it and use the transcriptions in data analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 204-205; Matheson, 2007, p. 548). Additionally, audio recordings helped me focus on the conversation and my topic rather than taking extensive notes. The participants spontaneously switched between Arabic (their and my first language) and English during the interviews. I transcribed the interviews as they are in terms of the language the interviewees spoke. As this research is presented in English, I only translated Arabic text to English when the quote was used in the interview analysis chapter as evidence of specific



interpretation. Appendix 3 offers an example of an interview transcript which I fully translated into English to help the reader follow the discussion flow.

The interviews took place between December 2015 and February 2016. A follow-up took place with one of the interviewees in January 2018 to clarify significant implications observed in the data, and assure they are interpreted by the researcher in accordance with what the participant meant. The interview data were analysed through three main phases detailed in the following subsection.

#### **7.4. Analysing interview data**

When analysing interviews from a social constructivist viewpoint the goal of the analysis is to produce knowledge concerned with how the interviewees actively create meaning (Silverman, 2011, p. 182). Such analysis should not be reduced to “what” the participants present as knowledge, as it also has to show the dynamic interrelatedness with “how” they present it (Gubrium & Holstein in Silverman, 2011, p. 186; Holstein & Gubrium, 2011a, p. 364, Holstein & Gubrium, 2011b, pp. 162-163). It is important to keep an eye on the contexts in which the participants share certain insights in order to assure what they mean is clear and accurate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008. p. 57). There is not one fixed method to analyse qualitative interview data, but there are common approaches to do so (Kvale, 2007, p. 103). One of these is a three-step approach suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), and includes: 1) open coding; 2) axial coding and 3) selective coding. I employed these three steps

to analyse what was represented by the participants and generated as “particular versions of reality” in this research (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 22).

As the interviews were transcribed, the first step was ‘open coding’ of the data. This comprises of closely examining the data to find concepts and group them under categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 62). Finding concepts, or the conceptualising process includes giving each discrete part of the data (sentence; paragraph; or observation) a name that represents what it stands for (ibid, p. 63). This is done by asking questions to understand what the data stands for, and making comparisons to categorise concepts and avoid a proliferation of categories. In the conceptualising process, the analyst needs to make sure they are not just summarising the data (ibid, p. 64). Rather, they need to take a step back and interpret what this data is about. Open coding is “designed to break open the data to consider all possible meanings” and generate ideas that will help in getting closer to the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 58-59). It is important to be open to data at the earliest stages of the analysis to prevent “early foreclosure or jumping to conclusions ... that might prove wrong later on as the analysis proceeds” (ibid, pp. 52-53). Thus, through reading and re-reading interview data, I coded each passage in every transcript by writing notes on how each passage helps in understanding the interviewees’ perceptions and experiences. Once these notes were developed I categorised them through grouping the concepts that seemed related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 65).

The second step was 'axial coding' and reorganising data by making connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was operationalized through reorganising, classifying and categorizing data to begin generating assertions about the studied topic (Roulston, 2014, p. 305). I further compared the categories generated in phase one, grouped the categories that share some common meaning, and interpreted the meaning of each group in light of my research questions and topic. New categories can be developed in this stage through further immersion in the data (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 154-156).

The third step of the analysis comprised 'selective coding' where I went through the data and the categories again to decide whether any categories can be discarded or any categories can be put together. This resulted in number of overarching themes reflecting key concepts in the analysis. I reduced the number of overarching themes as much as possible and supported each one with evidence from a substantial number of interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 156). Nevertheless, I considered that a theme can still be identified when it only occurred in one or two interviews if its identification is significant to the whole analysis. When the overarching themes were identified, I discussed them in relation to theoretical concepts or ideas related to my topic, with the use of data excerpts to support these interpretations (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 156; Roulston, 2014, p. 305). These insights are then discussed in relation to the frames identified through the frame analysis to develop in-depth understanding of Bahraini public diplomacy

processes which promoted certain realities in their messages during the crisis and its aftermath. I also used Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model to organise the discussion of the analysed factors of influence on five different levels: individual, professional, organisational external, and ideological. Chapter 5 presents the interview analysis.

Therefore, this chapter discussed the philosophical standpoints adopted in this study, the research questions, and the methods used. The next chapter presents the findings and discussion of the frame analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **FRAME ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the frame analysis of news items published on the Local news page of Bahrain News Agency's (BNA) English website during three key moments of the 2011 crisis in Bahrain: the first week of protests (14-19 February 2011), the arrival of the PSF to Bahrain (14-16 March 2011), and the publication of BICI report (23-25 November 2011). As explained previously, the BNA website is operated by the Bahraini government and functions as a key tool for communicating its perspective on current affairs to foreign media and publics. Through the lens of the social constructivist paradigm, my qualitative frame analysis of this content aims to identify the different frames present in the analysed news. It explores the textual elements that give the frames support and reinforcement to promote specific interpretations of issues over others. Moreover, it examines how the BNA communicated the analysed frames through these texts across the studied moments, and explores what common crisis response strategies as offered by Benoit's (1995) image repair theory (IRT) correspond to the analysed frames. Hence, the analysis generates an understanding of what public diplomacy frames were communicated to foreign media and, consequently, public during a national crisis and its aftermath, how were these articulated, and how the frames

evolved across time. The purpose of this is to deliver insights on how public diplomacy contributes and what role it plays in construction of the messages promoting specific versions of reality during a crisis and its aftermath.

My analysis of BNA's content published during the three examined moments argues that the majority of the analysed frames do not portray the examined context as a crisis (e.g. 'reform'; 'events', 'unprecedented achievement', 'supported leadership'), and even if they do they present the cause as foreign conspiracy and not internal issues as in 'Arab Spring countries' (e.g. 'existential threat', 'sovereignty'). The analysis revealed that the frames communicated to foreign media by the BNA change across the examined moments, representing several crisis response strategies offered by the IRT. The represented strategies vary between denial, minimisation, shifting the blame, bolstering, differentiation, and attacking the accuser. The combination of these frames and crisis response strategies in BNA's analysed content suggests the Bahraini government did not address the internal problematic issues causing a crisis, and, instead, tended to limit or externalise the crisis in the examined public diplomacy content. Despite communicating different frames and strategies across different moments of the crisis, all the analysed frames maintain consistent tendency to contest the 'Arab Spring' with the aim to prevent representing Bahrain within this frame in the foreign coverage in relation to Bahrain (the interview analysis discusses efforts by the BNA/IAA not to present the examined crisis as 'revolution'). Hence, instead of a 'revolution' master frame, the analysed frames tend to fall within 'national reform', 'protest', or 'riot' master frames as explained in the following sections.

The analysis suggests that Bahraini public diplomacy framing of the crisis corresponds to realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy, where it is a 'power tool' in the hands of the sponsoring government to maintain its power position in the international relations environment (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

The Methodology chapter detailed how I employed a constructivist approach (Van Gorp, 2007; 2010) in my analysis. All the issue-specific frames and the elements comprising them are summarised in Table 3. As indicated in previous chapters, this table represents the signature matrix for the Bahraini 2011 crisis. It contains six frame packages; each of them represents one of the analysed frames: 'reform', 'events', 'existential threat', 'unprecedented achievement', 'supported leadership', and 'sovereignty'. The first column represents the reasoning devices. According to Van Gorp (2007; 2010), the reasoning devices represent the four framing dimensions established by Entman (1993): problem definition, causal interpretation, treatment recommendation, and moral evaluation. The column labelled 'Elements' represents the framing devices, and these are the frame elements developed in the inductive phase of the analysis and used to explore the frames' presence in the deductive phase. The unit of analysis was the news item. The presence of a framing device in a unit illustrated the presence of a frame. Each unit was coded for up to two frames.

Table 3. Signature Matrix for the Bahraini 2011 Crisis

Frame Label		Reasoning Devices		Elements
1	Reform (new)  Strategy: Denial	Problem definition	Bahrain is a reformed nation where political, social and economic developments have been taking place for ten years through a comprehensive reform project initiated by the King in 2001. The leadership follows democratic rather than oppressive approaches. Within this context the protests and their consequences are only “sporadic incidents”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to NAC’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a celebration.</li> <li>References to the leadership’s role in reform.</li> <li>References to the NAC and the reform project achievements.</li> <li>References to the protests and their consequences as “sporadic incidents”.</li> <li>References to the leadership’s ‘democratic’ responses to the ‘incidents’.</li> <li>References to further governmental initiatives to meet citizens’ demands.</li> </ul>
		Causal interpretation	The frame does not problematize the situation. Thus, the “sporadic incidents” are caused by ‘regrettable’ individual actions rather than pre-organised public protests demanding reforms.	
		Treatment	Probe committee to investigate the “sporadic” events, and government projects to meet citizens’ demands.	
		Moral	The reforms achieved national accomplishments and enhanced citizens’ welfare. The protests, on the other hand, are just ‘regrettable’ individual incidents.	
2	Events (new)  Strategy: Minimisation	Problem definition	This frame acknowledges the demonstrations but downplays their significance. It presents them as protests that can happen in any democratic country, portraying them as unproblematic practice of freedom of expression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggestions that the events led to deaths among the protestors rather than that protestors were killed by policemen.</li> <li>References to protests in Bahrain as practice of political rights, and as similar to those in</li> </ul>
		Causal interpretation	While the frame does not problematize the situation, the cause of the protests is the democratic atmosphere in Bahrain that allows freedom of expression.	



		Treatment recommendation	“Further reforms” and “dialogue”, instead of urgent international intervention.	<p>democratic countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting reforms and dialogue as solutions.</li> <li>• Suggestions of intentional misrepresentation of Bahrain that signifies the necessity to convey the ‘truth’.</li> </ul>
		M or	Unproblematic expression of demands.	
3	Existential Threat adapted from Pinto (2014) and Al-Rawi (2015)  Strategy: Shifting the Blame	Problem definition	Iran backed plan against GCC members to invade the region and spread Shi’ism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• References to the Bahraini authorities’ “request” for GCC support.</li> <li>• References to implications of Iranian threat on other GCC countries and their monarchies.</li> <li>• References to Iran or Shiites as a threat.</li> <li>• References to riots, violence, vandalism, continuity of demonstrations and its consequences on the nation’s safety and stability.</li> <li>• References to the need for strict measures to restore order and protect Bahrain.</li> <li>• Reference to collaborations between Bahraini leadership, government, prime-minister and the Saudi ruling family against protestors, Shi’a.</li> <li>• Reference to majorities or minorities in the country in terms of Sunni or Shi’a.</li> </ul>
		Causal interpret	Iran triggered “riots” and “dangerous escalations” to infiltrate the GCC.	
		Treatment recommendation	“Strict measures” to restore order: “requesting” GCC military support; declaring a State of National Safety; and a security operation to clear demonstrations from strategic locations.	
		Moral evaluation	Any form of foreign interference in Bahrain’s internal affairs is “rejected” by all GCC members. The “interference” is a “hostile action” that “contravenes the principle of good neighbourly relations”.	

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative references to the regime, king, government, ruling families in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Shi'a.</li> <li>• Expressions of hatred between Sunni and Shi'a.</li> <li>• Reference to wishes, prayers of victory to the PSF.</li> <li>• Reference to foreigners given Bahraini nationality as "mercenaries".</li> </ul>
4	Unprecedented Achievement (new)  Strategy: Bolstering	Problem definition	Bahrain is a reformed country with a "wise" leader who took a "brave" and "pioneering step that won international recognition" to invite an "independent" commission to investigate the events of February and March 2011.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• References to the BICI and its report as unprecedented achievement and democratic solution.</li> <li>• References to the acceptance of the report's results.</li> <li>• References to the report's contributions to the future of Bahrain.</li> <li>• Excluding government breaches asserted by the report.</li> </ul>
		US Cause	Having such 'democratic' solution refers to the 'wise' leadership that took a national decision to invite an external investigation committee.	
		Treatment	The authorities' acceptance of BICI report and their vows to implement its recommendations are highlighted.	
		Moral evaluation	The BICI is a "historical achievement", an "instrument of self-evaluation", and a "contribution for the future of Bahrain" that will lead to the "beginning of a new era".	
5	Supported Leadership (new)  Strategy: Differentiation	Problem	Unlike regimes in 'Arab Spring countries', the Bahraini authorities' legitimacy is not at stake. It is supported by international leaders and Bahraini citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the leadership and its initiatives.</li> <li>• Supporting Bahrain's stability and security.</li> <li>• References to GCC unity, strong ties, historic relations, support.</li> <li>• International support, ties, cooperation.</li> <li>• References to loyal, patriotic citizens.</li> </ul>
		US Cause	The reformed system and the leadership's democratic initiatives and responses justify the leadership's legitimacy.	
		Treatment	Overthrowing the regime is not appropriate since it is a legitimate government. Rather, the political system should remain and its	

			initiatives (e.g. dialogue, BICI) are approved solutions.	
		Moral evalu	International leaders' support confirms the Bahraini leadership's legitimacy and proves it is a government with democratic values, whose rule benefits the stability and future of Bahrain.	
6	Sovereignty (new)  Strategy: Attacking the Accuser	P	Despite the unrest and the critical situation in Bahrain, the frame presents the authorities' in a power position.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• References to the authorities' determination and ability to protect the nation, citizens, residents.</li> <li>• No impunity for criminal acts and their perpetrators.</li> <li>• Order is restored successfully, return to normality.</li> </ul>
		Ca	The authorities' determination and readiness to protect the publics and national achievements from the unrest justifies its in-control position.	
		Tr	Pledging to stop 'illegal acts' and 'Iranian triggered riots'.	
		M	The authorities' firmness protected the nation and restored normality.	

Table 4 summarises the presence of frames in the analysed texts across the three examined moments. It illustrates how the 'reform' and 'events' frames were most prominent in BNA's online content in the first examined moment; the 'existential threat' frame in the second, and the 'unprecedented achievement' in the third. The following sections discuss the analysed frames, explaining how the frames evolved over the examined moments, how they combined with each other to present a certain construction of the issue at different times, and how these constructions depict specific crisis response strategies offered by the IRT. Although applying the analysed frames to other studies is limited by their situation-specific focus, I suggest they could be

useful as a starting point for comparison with government communications in other situations of national crises, particularly within the border context of the 'Arab Spring'. Moreover, drawing connections between the analysed frames and the strategies offered by the IRT can deliver insights on Bahraini public diplomacy framing strategies in contesting unfavourable coverage in foreign media, including the 'Arab Spring' frame.

**Table 4. The presence of frames in the analysed texts across the examined moments**

Moment	First moment 14-19 February 2011		Second moment 14-16 March 2011		Third moment 23- 25 November 2011	
	Total items	% of presence	Total items	% of presence	Total items	% of presence
Frames	59		40		59	
<b>Reform</b>	27	45.76%	-	-	3	5.08%
<b>Events</b>	22	37.28%	-	-	-	-
<b>Existential threat</b>	1	1.69%	27	67.5%	9	15.25%
<b>Unprecedented achievement</b>	-	-	-	-	25	42.37%
<b>Supported leadership</b>	15	25.42%	13	32.5%	19	32.2%
<b>Sovereignty</b>	3	5.08%	10	25%	4	6.77%

## **2. THE 'REFORM' FRAME**

This frame presents Bahrain as a reformed nation where improvement in different sectors (political, economic, social) had been taking place for the previous ten years through a comprehensive reform project initiated by King Hamad bin Isa AlKhalifa in 2001 (Table 3, row 1). The emphasis that items carrying this frame place on a decade of reforms tends to suggest that Bahrain had been engaged in reform for a long time before the protests. This tends to discredit the need for public demonstrations and thus avoids associations with the Arab Spring where citizens were revolting against 'dictatorships' that do

not peruse genuine reforms (Joffe, 2011, p. 508). Despite the fact that Bahrain has a non-elected hereditary monarchy system, the frame emphasises the democratic approaches of the leadership. The frame suggests the reform project scored several national achievements that improved Bahrain's profile as a reformed nation and the citizens' welfare. As outlined in earlier chapters, the National Action Charter<sup>18</sup> (NAC) sets the reform goals and strategies.

According to the 'reform' frame, the introduction of the NAC in 2001, and the achievements attained under the reform project addressed long-standing democratic deficits in Bahrain, and restored trust between the leadership and the citizens, specifically those from the Shiite sect (Karolak, 2012; 2017). Moreover, it depicts the King as the initiator of a "bold" reform project presenting him as a monarch with democratic rather than authoritative approaches. While the frame emphasises democratic achievements since the introduction of the NAC, it does not acknowledge the on-going conflict between the Sunni authority and groups of the Shiite sect in Bahrain, specifically regarding what some Shi'a perceived as insincere government efforts to deliver NAC's promises (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2). Moreover, the frame presents the protests only as "sporadic incidents" instead of pre-organised public demonstrations.

---

<sup>18</sup> A political document composed by a number of Bahraini legislators, ministers, academics, etc. following a request by King Hamad to set the roadmap for comprehensive national reforms in Bahrain. It was endorsed by 98.4% of Bahraini voters in a national referendum that took place on 14 February 2001. Politically, the major achievement of NAC and the reform project was restoring democratic approaches through reintroducing municipal and parliamentary elections in 2002, after the absence of the legislative authority for 27 years.

The analysis suggests this frame correspond to the 'national reform' master frame. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, I developed this master frame building on literature on nation branding. It focuses on nations' "conscious attempt" of presenting themselves to foreign publics (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2010, p. 1), where national reform is an approach employed by the entire GCC countries (Karolak, 2012, p. 3). In terms of Bahrain, it portrays the country as "western-friendly, stable, modern, and forward-looking country ripe for investment" (Jones, 2017, p. 326). This frame was dominant in the BNA's content on the first day of the protests (in 10/13 items published on 14 February). This could be seen as normal, since 14 February was the NAC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and it could be expected the IAA/BNA focused its communications of the day to highlight the occasion. Nevertheless, the country witnessed another major event on that day: public protests demanding rights and questioning reforms promised by the NAC itself had been planned for that day via social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Online forums) since the end of January 2011 (Al-Hasan, 2015; BICI, 2011, p. 65; Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 92; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). Thus, the authorities and its communication channels (e.g. BNA; IAA) were likely to have expected the protests. Therefore, the choice to focus on the perceived achievements of reforms on that day could potentially suggest a strategic choice of emphasis, shifting foreign media's attention away from the demonstrations and distancing Bahrain from Arab Spring protests in other countries. Yet, the interview analysis chapter suggests that frame-building at this stage of the crisis was not so much driven by pre-emptive strategy but rather related to the absence

of decision making, and IAA/BNA communicators' lack of experience in handling crises. This is discussed further in chapter 5 in addition to other frame-building factors at this stage of the crisis.

The analysis suggests this frame represents a 'denial' response strategy (Benoit, 1995), because it does not acknowledge mass public demonstrations demanding political, social, and economic reforms, which escalated to clashes with security forces, resulting in deaths among protestors. Note that according to the IRT, simple denial takes place by stating the offensive act did not occur. In the examined case, however, the denial of a crisis is implied by the reconstruction of the situation as a celebration of a national reform milestone. When 'regrettable' incidents were acknowledged on the day after, they were only addressed as 'sporadic incidents'. This acknowledgement suggests elements of Benoit's (1995) 'minimisation' strategy, but 'denial' still prevailed because the major focus of the frame remained on the celebratory aspect. As noted earlier, the use of the term 'strategy' in relation to the IRT does not necessarily involve strategic intent by the organisation or people who put the message together. This is discussed further in the interview analysis.

The elements articulating this frame in the texts analysed were references to: the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NAC as a celebration of reform achievements rather than a beginning of demonstrations questioning the reform project's promises; the role of the Bahraini leadership in reform; and the achievements attained under the umbrella of the NAC and the reform project. However, when two protestors died in the first two days of

demonstrations after clashes with security forces, the frame evolved through the presence of additional elements. These elements portray an image of a reformed nation with non-oppressive approaches through: references to the leadership's response to the escalating situation; references to the protests as only "sporadic incidents"; and references to further governmental reform initiatives to meet citizens' demands. Hence, the frame continued to present Bahrain as a reformed nation while it portrayed the protests as 'sporadic incidents'. I explain each of these elements directly below and illustrate with examples how they were manifested in the texts.

On the first day of protests, marking NAC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the 'reform' frame mainly appeared in news items that portrayed the anniversary as a celebration. For example, on the morning of that day BNA published a news item announcing:

1. Bahrain celebrates today the 10th anniversary of its historic National Action Charter and it is appropriate to assess the State of the Nation in terms of the achievement of its aims, objectives and directions.

The Charter is ... taking into account the aspirations of people... It set a new path for Bahrain's ... people and help them continuously achieve higher levels of progress and prosperity. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 14.02.2011)

The frame is not only manifested through the direct statement of the celebratory aspect ("Bahrain celebrates [...] the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary"). Noteworthy is also the use of the terms "appropriate to assess", which imply an attempt to direct attention to the reform project achievements instead of the protests. This is important as it implies the NAC is a success, thus contradicting protestors'



claims that it failed to deliver its promises. Despite the long history of tensions between the government and groups of Shi'a citizens; the protestors were emboldened<sup>19</sup> to demonstrate after uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (AL-Hasan, 2015; BICI, 2011, p. 56; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 28). The upheavals in these countries were widely presented by international media as revolutions by oppressed people against dictatorships (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). The 'reform' frame, by contrast, denies a crisis and emphasises celebrating a reform milestone thus seemingly avoids foreign media direct comparisons between Arab uprisings and the Bahraini protests. Further, while the Bahraini protestors demanded political, economic, and social reforms (BICI, 2011, Ulrichsen, 2013), the BNA presented the NAC as a project "taking into account the aspirations of people", and "help them continuously achieve higher levels of progress and prosperity". This reinforces implications that Bahrain should not be perceived like countries where people were protesting to have their aspirations taken into account and to achieve progress and prosperity; because the Bahraini government had already been catering for these since the reform process started a decade before.

The frame was also articulated and supported by a range of other elements in the texts. The following excerpt, for instance, illustrates how the emphasis on celebrations combined with references to the role of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Note that these demonstrations are not the first demonstrations ever; Bahrain witnessed several protests before. But what happened here is that these demonstrations were unprecedented in terms of the number of protestors and exposure to international audiences.

leadership in reform. It is from a news item covering congratulations passed to the leadership from the Chairman of the Representatives Council:

2. [He] sent a cable of congratulations to His Majesty King Hamad ... marking the 10th Anniversary of the National Action Charter.

[He] extended his sincere congratulations to HM King Hamad, describing the occasion as a landmark historical achievement reflecting HM's aspirations outlined in HM the King pioneering Reform Project. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 14.02.2011)

While the example highlights celebrations of a “historical achievement”, it presents this reform project as the King’s idea, and describes it as a “pioneering” one. The text also mentions wishes of “further progress and prosperity under [the King’s] wise leadership”, which reinforces the ‘reform’ frame by emphasising the role of the leadership in initiating democratic and national achievements. Hence, it implies that without the king’s “landmark” initiative, reform would not have been introduced in Bahrain. Thus, the frame denies a crisis situation by emphasising the role of the leadership in reform, and tends to distance Bahrain from the ‘Arab Spring’. Note that the ‘Arab Spring’ frame suggests that Arab publics were revolting against oppressive regimes which, instead of seeking genuine reforms, they focus on maintaining their power positions (Joffe, 2011, p. 508).

A further element of this frame involves references to achievements attained by the NAC and the reform project. The next example is from another item congratulating the leadership on NAC’s anniversary. It provides evidence of specific reform achievements in Bahrain:

3. Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments Minister ... hailed the kingdom’s achievements in terms of democratic development,

popular participation, boosting the role of civil society institutions, protecting freedoms and promoting human rights and the role of women. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 14.02.2011)

These particular achievements imply an image of a reformed nation where human rights are respected and freedoms are protected. Demonstrating democratic values and respect towards human rights are significant in building a nation's image and reputation among foreign media and publics (Kunczik, 1997, p. 238). Therefore, portraying Bahrain as a country with such values is important for its international reputation. The leadership's role is also highlighted at the end of the text, implying a reminder of its central role in achieving these accomplishments, especially when it is connected in the text to the "improve[ment] of citizens' welfare". This also tends to deny any problematic situation in Bahrain. Another main achievement that suggests the democratic accomplishments of the NAC and the reform project is the reintroduction of an elected assembly in 2002, after 27 years of suspending the previous short-lived (2 years) parliamentary experience in 1975. Nevertheless, the addition of an upper house of royal appointees lowered confidence in the sincerity of political reform and led to a range of political societies boycotting the 2002 elections (Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 2). This problematic aspect related to the reforms is not addressed in the frame. Hence, as the frame emphasises the achievements of the reform project, it does not address the problematic aspects erupting from the methods of implementing these reforms.

Until now, the examples illustrate how the frame was manifested through references to celebrations, the leadership's role, and reform achievements. Yet, additional elements of the frame emerged the day after when the situation worsened.

On 15 February, new elements started to appear within this frame. Despite the death of two demonstrators during the first two days of protests, BNA's content continued to focus on an image of a reformed country and deny a crisis situation involving accusations of violence and human rights' breaches by security forces representing the government and the regime. This appeared in the analysed news through references to: the leadership's response to the escalating situation, government work to achieve public demands, and presenting the public protests only as "sporadic incidents". The following example is from an item about the King's address to the nation on 15 February:

4. ...in celebration of the Prophet Mohammed's birthday... King Hamad [said] ... "In light of the sporadic incidents that have taken place yesterday and today, where, with regret, there were two deaths among our dear sons. We extend our sincere condolences to the families and ask God to grant them endurance and consolation." ... "We have asked ... Deputy Prime Minister to form a special committee to determine the reasons behind these regretful incidents."

[The King reasserted] his Government's commitment to reform... [He] said: "Reform is a continuous process that will not stop..." ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.02.2011)

The original item covering the King's speech refers to "protests" and "marches" in Bahrain. Nevertheless, the above example illustrates how these are downgraded to "sporadic incidents" instead of pre-organised public protests. This is reinforced by presenting the address to take place in

celebration of the anniversary of Prophet Mohammad's birthday rather than a crisis. Further, the leadership's response to the deaths is portrayed as a democratic rather than an oppressive approach. This is reinforced by the King's expression of condolences to the families of those who "regret[fully]" died and his reference to them as "dear sons". This suggests a concerned and responsible leadership as it did not refer to those who died using negative references, nor portray their deaths in the context of their participation in anti-government activity. On the other hand, regimes in other problematic Arab nations responded differently to the death of protestors in their countries. In Libya, for instance, the overthrown late president Muammar Gaddafi referred to his opponents as "drug addicts", "gangs", "rats", "cockroaches", and "stray dogs" (Rojas, 2011). In Egypt, pro-government newspapers referred to the protestors as "unemployed thugs, foreign conspirators, and delinquent and violent youth who did not have the national good at heart" until President Mubarak stepped down (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012, p. 198). By contrast, King Hamad's response does not alienate the protestors, but offers a sympathetic, inclusive response through references like: "dear sons", "sincere condolences", and "God grant them endurance". Thus, this emphasis on a democratic and sympathetic response implies the frame's tendency to promote to foreign media that Bahrain is not like other 'Arab Spring' countries where the regimes were portrayed as oppressive authorities and dictatorships (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012; Maguire & Vickers, 2013). Moreover, democratic approaches are implied through not concealing or denying the deaths. Nevertheless, noteworthy is that all this emphasis on remedy procedures and

sympathy shifts attention from the fact that the deaths occurred after clashes with security forces. Hence, it tends to distance Bahrain from other Arab countries where the security forces were accused of violence and human rights' abuses (Du, 2016). Furthermore, the frame is articulated through references to the government's work to meet the citizens' demands. The excerpt, for instance, mentions that "Reform is a continuous process that will not stop".

Therefore, the articulation of the 'reform' frame portrays an image of a reformed nation with democratic values instead of highlighting the demonstrations. The manifestation started with references to: NAC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary; the role of the king in reform; and reform achievements. It then evolved to include references to: "sporadic incidents"; democratic and sympathetic responses; and continuous government work. The change of elements illustrates how the frame evolved within a day from completely ignoring the protests to presenting them only as 'sporadic incidents' and minimising their relevance. Nevertheless, the major focus continued to suggest a reformed nation where democratic responses are applied.

The analysis also suggests the frame tends to 'deny' (Benoit, 1997) and when occasionally referring to it 'minimise' a crisis which could justify the reference to the Bahraini situation as another 'Arab Spring'. The denial here specifically refers to denying a national crisis caused by mass public protests similar to that in, for example, Tunisia and Egypt. Thus, the analysis suggests that public diplomacy early response to a crisis can deny a problematic situation by promoting a version of reality that defeats the existence of any

causes of a crisis, such as highlighting reforms to refute lack of democracy and development that could legitimise a revolt.

Note that denial strategies aim to remove any connection between an organisation (e.g. government) and the crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). “If stakeholders, including the news media, accept the no crisis frame of denial, the organisation is spared any reputational harm.” (ibid) Nevertheless, in the examined case, foreign news media do not seem to accept the Bahraini government’s denial of a crisis. Conversely, and as stated earlier, the death of protestors at a very early stage of the crisis after clashes with security forces drew international attention to the protests in Bahrain (Govers, 2012), raising concerns on human rights’ violations and violent oppression of demonstrations (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). Moreover, the Interview Analysis chapter highlights how the IAA/BNA changed its daily routines of responding to the crisis to handle the escalating negative coverage across foreign media. This implies the Bahraini government’s failure to promote a ‘no crisis’ frame in the first few days of the protests, especially as it was inconsistent with the developments on ground.

Besides drawing international attention to the crisis in Bahrain, protestors’ deaths after clashes with security forces led to significant escalation after the first couple of days (BICI, 2011, p. 163). Along with this, the ‘reform’ frame became less dominant in BNA’s news material. It did not appear at all during the second key moment, and appeared slightly in the third through references to the government’s continuous reform efforts (see Table 4). With the decline of the ‘reform’ frame around 16 February, the ‘events’

frame became more dominant for the rest of the first examined moment. The key difference between these frames is that 'events' acknowledges the protests as pre-organised public demonstrations across Bahrain and not only 'sporadic incidents'. However, like the 'reform' frame, 'events' does not present the situation in Bahrain as a crisis. I discuss the 'events' frame directly below.

### **3. THE 'EVENTS' FRAME**

While the explicit acknowledgment of demonstrations within the 'events' frame suggests a transparent approach by the BNA, the analysis revealed that the significance of the protests and their demands was continuously downplayed, suggesting the frame represents a 'minimisation' (Benoit, 1995) crisis response strategy. A minimisation strategy suggests the offensive act is not serious (Benoit, 1997, p. 179), and this is depicted by the elements manifesting the 'events' frame in the analysed texts. Instead of implying a crisis, the frame downplays the seriousness of the situation in Bahrain by portraying the protests as tolerated practice of political rights guaranteed by the law and not as a revolution (Table 3, row 2). Further, it suggests that the situation can be solved through further reforms and dialogue instead of international intervention as suggested by the 'Arab Spring' frame.

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, my conceptualisation of the 'events' frame builds on ideas from Maguire and Vickers (2013). They used discourse analysis to understand how the Bahraini crisis was presented in official British communications in comparison to that in Libya. Their analysis reveals 'events' was the term used by British officials to refer to the Bahraini



crisis. Their explanation of how officials defined and used this term bears similarities with how the protests were defined in some of BNA's texts discussed in this section. Therefore, I also use this term to describe this frame that emerged in my data.

The analysis suggests that the 'events' frame falls within the "protests" master frame, mainly because the 'protest' frame treats the demonstrators as "legitimate political group, voicing opinions that merit consideration" (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 158). This, and the 'minimisation' strategy' is implied by the elements articulating the 'events' frame in BNA's analysed content. These elements are: suggestions that the events led to deaths among the protestors rather than that protestors were killed by security forces; references to protesting as practice of political rights; suggestions that protests in Bahrain are similar to those in democratic countries; and emphasis on dialogue as a solution. I derived these elements by identifying observations made by Maguire and Vickers (2013) in my data and systematising them as frame elements. I also identified an additional element, not mentioned by Maguire and Vickers, that involves representing claims that the protests were anything more than ordinary democratic demonstrations as intentional misrepresentations of Bahrain, which need to be countered with the 'truth'. I explain how each of these elements constructs the 'events' frame, strongly reflecting a 'minimisation' strategy below.

One element that 'defined the situation' is reference to "deaths" among protestors rather than protestors being killed by policemen. On 14 February a

protestor died after clashes with security forces and a brief statement was issued without explaining why and how it happened. On the second day, another Bahraini died during the protestor's funeral also after clashes with security forces at the location of the funeral. This time, the text explained how the death occurred suggesting it did not result from purposive violence by the police:

5. ... during the funeral of Ali Abdul-Hedi Mushaima today morning, some mourners got into clashes with members of four security patrol cars which were parked on the way.

Three of the police patrol cars were summoned to help evacuate the fourth one which had broken down. Fadhel Salman Matrouk died at the hospital of an injury he sustained in the clashes and investigations are still underway. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.02.2011)

This example demonstrates how the protestor “died” and was not killed. It suggests the police were not oppressive and tends to reduce their responsibility— they were at the incident's location out of duty to assist a colleague. Yet, the text makes no reference to the reasons of the clashes as it does not mention the Shiite mourners were outraged by the presence of the security forces that caused the death of their relative (BICI, 2011, p. 70), and which represent the Sunni ruling regime. Thus, it conceals the sectarian connotations of the incident, especially as Bahrain has a history of conflict between the Sunni establishment and some Shiite citizens (Karolak, 2012; 2014, Pinto; 2014). Moreover, this text tends to reduce the seriousness of the situation despite the fatalities. This downplay could potentially prevent international media or foreign publics from perceiving the situation similar to the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, where security forces used excessive

force to oppress demonstrations (Du, 2016, p. 112). Hence, it minimises the severity of the situation that resulted in fatalities, and the background sectarian aspect of the situation.

Another 'problem defining' element is portraying the protests as practice of freedom of expression and as similar to those in democratic nations, which suggests the legitimacy of the demonstrations as in the 'protest' master frame, and tends to limit the perception of the situation as another 'revolution'. The following example is from a news item covering a statement by the Minister of Foreign affairs where he said:

6. ... the reform programme of HM King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa remains on-going- a programme which guarantees the separation of powers, human rights principles, and the freedom of opinion and expression...

"The protests seen in Bahrain could happen in any free democratic country."

[He] underlined that the right to freedom of expression is guaranteed by the National Action Charter, the Constitution and the law ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 16.02.2011)

The association of the Bahraini protests with democratic countries implies distancing Bahrain from upheavals in other Arab nations. At the time, Tunisian and Egyptian protests developed to uprisings against what was seen as "dictatorships" (Maguire & Vickers, 2013). This suggests the importance of challenging foreign media associations of Bahrain with these upheavals. Therefore, the 'events' frame downplays the significance of the Bahraini demonstrations, presenting them as normal protests taking place in a reformed country. Yet, while the protests are not concealed, the protestors' inspiration

by upheavals in other Arab countries is not exposed. Instead, the associations with freedom and democratic approaches are reinforced in the text by the simultaneous presence of the 'reform' frame. This is articulated here by stressing the role of the leadership in reform. It emphasises the continuity of the "King's reform project", and implies more associations with democracy by depicting it as "a programme which guarantees the separation of powers, human rights principles, and the freedom of opinion and expression". Thus, this interplay between the 'events' and 'reform' frames implies BNA's discourse attempted to limit foreign media associations of Bahrain with unrest in other Arab countries in two ways. First, it communicated the 'events' frame portraying the protests as tolerated practice of freedom of expression. Second, it reinforced this 'problem definition' by stressing Bahrain is a country with democratic values through the 'reform' frame.

The definition of the situation as unproblematic was reinforced through suggestions that foreign media intentionally misrepresented the situation in Bahrain, which signifies putting across the 'true' picture. The following example is from a BNA news item discussing Bahrain TV's broadcasting of the protests at a very early stage of the crisis. The Radio and Television acting director-general said:

7. "The step aims to foil and debunk all those attempting to project a wrong picture of what's happening in Bahrain"... He pointed out that hiding the truth would only play in the hands of those who spread lies about Bahrain and enable them to achieve their private dubious designs. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.02.2011)

The protestors used the death of two demonstrators to present an image of violent security forces through social media (Jones, 2016). They presented Bahrain as of majorly Shi'a citizens fighting an oppressive Sunni ruling family. This portrayal extended to certain foreign media outlets. The Iranian Al-Alam<sup>20</sup> TV and the Hizbullah Al-Manar<sup>22</sup> TV channels emphasised this image to incite Shi'a citizens against Sunni monarchs in the GCC (Yateem, 2014, pp. 99-100). Within this context, the 'events' frame tended to define the situation in Bahrain as 'unproblematic' by rejecting these media's interpretations. Note that despite articulating the frame through an element that explicitly acknowledges the existence of 'claims' that the situation is more serious, the content of these allegations was completely excluded from the analysed texts. The interview analysis delivers insights on BNA/IAA's process of excluding negative narratives communicated by foreign media.

The 'events' frame tendency to downplay the situation is supported in the above text with another element of the frame which highlights "Bahrain's laws and the political leadership's directives [that] allow the peaceful expression of opinion". Thus, while the frame emphasises the normality of the situation it tends to depict a 'minimisation' strategy, distancing Bahrain from the Arab

---

<sup>20</sup> Arabic TV channel run by the Iranian government and used to influence Arab publics. "Al-Alam emphasises the Shiite protests against the Sunni monarchy in its news reports. In fact, the channel devotes a special section for Bahraini news in order to thoroughly cover the events taking place there." (AlRawi, 2017. P. 883)

<sup>22</sup> The official TV station of Hizbullah: the umbrella group uniting religious Shi'a groups in Lebanon, and one that is supported by military and financial Iranian aid. Al-Manar is one of the top stations in the Arab world (Baylouny, 2006, p. 8).

Spring through references to the 'truth', 'deaths' instead of intentional killing, and legitimate practice of political rights.

Instead of international intervention, the 'recommended treatment' in the 'events' frame is further reforms and dialogue. The following example is about the King's delegation of the Crown Prince (CP) to call for a dialogue to overcome the situation:

8. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa announced that "all powers to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of all gracious citizens from all sections" would be granted to... [the CP] to resolve the current situation through dialogue. (bna.bh, 18.02.2011)

Noteworthy here is the presentation of dialogue as a solution to the "current situation". The text does not use any expression suggesting a problematic condition. The night before this delegation, the CP appeared on Bahrain TV calling for calm, and stating "this nation is not only for one section - it is not for Sunnis or Shi'as. It is for Bahrain and for Bahrainis". This appearance was not planned as he interrupted a live evening show discussing the situation, and expressed concerns of social division and suggested a national dialogue to understand and meet all sections' demands. This action and statement suggest both the problematic and sectarian nature of the crisis. Nevertheless, BNA's content minimised the severity of the situation, portraying dialogue as just a measure to "fulfil the hopes and aspirations of ... citizens from all sections". Furthermore, while a sectarian conflict was a major issue at the time (BICI, 2011; Stoller, 2014, p. 116; Yateem, 2014, p. 98); the text does not refer to sects, Sunnis, or Shi'a. It only refers to those invited to participate in the "nationwide" dialogue as "all parties", "all sections", and "sons of our

beloved Bahrain”. This suggests the frame attempted to shift foreign media’s attention from the sectarian conflict threatening Bahraini society at the time, and which could present the situation as a crisis resulting from internal conflicts. Instead, it downplays the depth of the conflict by suggesting it is a disagreement that can be resolved simply with dialogue. The emphasis on such non-military solution tends to minimise any problematic aspect, especially because, at the time, foreign military intervention was presented as a possible solution to other Arab Spring countries like Libya (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Maguire & Vickers, 2013; Nuruzzaman, 2015; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129).

Thus, the above discussion illustrates how the ‘events’ frame was articulated in BNA’s news during the first moment, representing a ‘protest’ master frame (Hertog & McLeod, 2001) and ‘minimising’ (Benoit, 1997) the situation by using several elements: references to ‘deaths’ instead of killings; right of freedom of expression; claims the situation was misrepresented and there was a need to reveal the ‘truth’, and dialogue.

This frame highlights two points on the promotion of specific versions of reality through public diplomacy responses to a crisis. First, the change of the dominant frame (reforms to events) suggests the response can change in a short time. Second, it suggests how a government can address a controversial event (that protests happened), yet continue not to address it as a crisis and minimise it instead. Avraham (2015, p. 228) suggests that “limiting” or “minimising” a crisis in the media is a common strategy employed by Arab and Middle Eastern countries before the Arab Spring. He suggests that this was

particularly practiced by Egypt and Turkey to promote their nations as tourist destinations. Yet, Bahraini authorities had other factors influencing their framing. This is explained in the interview analysis chapter which discusses connections between ‘minimisation’ rituals and Bahraini public diplomacy activities during the examined crisis.

The ‘events’ and the ‘reform’ frames are compatible frames that dominated during the first week of the crisis. The combination of these frames in the coverage of particularly the first key moment contributed to a representation of a reformed nation where achieving reforms and political rights is not done by revolt but by democratic processes. Both frames distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring: the first does so by ‘denying’ and slightly ‘minimising’ a crisis and instead presents Bahrain as a reformed nation, and the second by fully ‘minimising’ the significance of the protests and portraying dialogue as the solution. Distancing Bahrain from the Arab Spring by communicating these frames to foreign media and publics suggests preventing proposals for international intervention like, for instance, foreign military involvement, which was seen as an appropriate solution in other Arab countries.

The implications of minimising the Bahraini crisis seem to vary among different foreign public groups. In terms of foreign authorities, for example, my previous discussions of Maguire and Vickers (2013) highlight how British officials referred to the Bahraini protests as ‘events’ in their official communications, while they referred to those in Libya as a “revolution”. There



is no evidence that the British officials' reference to the Bahraini protests as 'events' is a result of successful framing by Bahraini public diplomacy. However, adopting the same frame by such a foreign authority is important for Bahrain, especially when we consider the understanding of public diplomacy from a realist viewpoint. Realist public diplomacy emphasises the dual goal of nations' engagement in public diplomacy, where the end goal is to influence foreign authorities in favour of the sponsoring government, and not only to influence foreign publics (Yun & Toth, 2009, p. 494; Szondi, 2009. p. 292). In the case of Bahrain, a 'favourable' framing by senior British politicians was significant as the UK was one of the international powers which supported the decision to send the NATO air forces to Libya to help civilians from Gaddafi's oppressive responses to demonstrations in his country (Maguire & Vickers, 2013; Nuruzzaman, 2015). Thus, to maintain their power position as a ruling regime, it is critical for the Bahraini authorities that a significant international actor like the UK government also holds a 'minimised' perception of the situation. Nevertheless, it could be argued that this has to do with geopolitics more than mere perceptions of the situation. In the case of Libya, for example, sending the NATO air forces is controversial from a human rights perspective because their operations did result in the death of civilians, suggesting the move was to aid certain world powers and geopolitics to get rid of Gaddafi and not specifically to aid Libyan civilians (Nuruzzaman, 2015). In Bahrain, conversely, Britain was merely "concerned" at events, and the strongest reaction was to "urge" both the government and the opposition to take part in "dialogue" (Maguire & Vickers, 2013). It is argued that this "passive" reaction

by British officials to the Bahraini crisis is connected to the “friendship” between both countries, and the strong naval ties Bahrain has with both the UK and the US (ibid, p. 21), which holds the UK back from harshly criticising its ‘friend’s’ responses to the protests as it did to Libya.

In terms of foreign media, it seems that minimising the Bahraini crisis was not convincing. For instance, between January and March 2011, the coverage of the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post was overwhelmingly against the Bahraini government (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). While the ‘events’ frame minimises the situation to tolerated practice of political rights in a reformed country with democratic values, the coverage of these major newspapers presented the Bahraini government as an authority against democratic change (ibid). Moreover, one of the interviewees in my research indicated that not engaging in a crisis narrative from the beginning “backfired” because the government was “late” when it engaged in crisis narrative. According to the interviewee, this gave the protestors the opportunity to dominate in foreign media, especially as their narrative was more “convincing” due to its “consistency with the escalated situation on ground” (I4). Therefore, the implications of minimising the Bahraini crisis varied among different relevant foreign public groups.

Despite attempts to contain the situation through dialogue, the situation escalated again in the second examined moment as the country was threatened by social division and unrest due to escalating riots, and the failure of negotiations to start the national dialogue (BICI, 2011, pp. 126-131;

Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). During this time, the Bahraini authorities itself asked for military help from its GCC neighbours. With this, the 'existential threat' frame started to appear in BNA's news. The following section discusses how this frame presents the situation in Bahrain as a crisis, yet externalises its causes. The discussion also highlights how the frame continued distancing Bahrain from the Arab Spring despite employing military measures.

#### **4. THE 'EXISTENTIAL THREAT' FRAME**

An important turning point in the second examined moment is the communication of the 'existential threat' frame which presents the situation as a crisis, and where military solutions are emphasised after avoiding urgent international intervention in the first moment. It dominated (27/40 items published in the second phase) around the arrival of the PSF to Bahrain (14-16 March 2011). As indicated above, the situation escalated as negotiations to start a national dialogue failed, and vandalism of private and public properties, assault against individuals, and sectarian clashes were recorded. Despite acknowledging there is a crisis, the frame continues to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by presenting the cause of the crisis as 'foreign interference' that justifies the need for military measures, instead of internal conflict between the establishment and social/religious groups like in other Arab countries.

The analysis suggests the frame represents a strategy of 'shifting the blame', which is a variation of the 'denial' strategy (Benoit, 1995). 'Shifting the

blame' argues that another actor (e.g. person, corporate, country) is responsible for the offensive act (Benoit, 1997, p. 180). The 'existential threat' frame tends to deny the crisis was anything like 'revolutions' in other Arab Spring countries by blaming 'foreign interference' for the unrest. With this, the analysis suggests that the 'existential threat' frame represents a 'riot' master frame. 'Riot' portrays the demonstrators' actions as illegal or aggressive behaviour, while the police or security forces symbolize social order and lawful behaviour to protect bystanders (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 157).

This is illustrated in the discussion below.

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the 'existential threat' frame was adapted from Pinto (2014) and Al-Rawi (2015). It defines the situation in Bahrain as Iranian backed plan against GCC members to infiltrate into the region and spread Shi'ism (Table 3, row 3). My analysis extended this definition to include the 'causal interpretation' was "riots", "vandalism", and "dangerous escalation" triggered by Iran. Thus, the demonstrations are no longer considered a legitimate practice of political rights, but "threatening" acts "alien to Bahrain society" backed and incited by Iran. Furthermore, the demonstrators are depicted as vandals violating human rights, threatening publics, and harming the economy and national unity. Therefore, the frame could legitimise any future strict measures to contain the protests as defending the nation from external threat. These measures were deploying the PSF; declaring 'State of National Safety'; and security operation to clear demonstrations from strategic locations. Moreover, the frame emphasises Bahrain's and other GCC members' "rejection" of any form of foreign

interference in Bahrain's internal affairs, especially by Iran. It portrays this 'Iranian interference' as a "hostile action" that "contravenes the principle of good neighbourly relations" and "underscores respect of states' independence and sovereignty". By contrast, the arrival of the PSF is presented as "requested" support rather than interference. Further, Bahrain's membership in the PSF is emphasised to limit interpreting the military aid as foreign. While the troops were invited to Bahrain as a support in case of a potential foreign threat (BICI, 2011, p. 387), the frame does not refer to the Bahraini authorities' fear of protestors' takeover, just like in other Arab countries when protests escalated. Further, it tends to prevent assumptions that Bahrain and GCC members applied military measures in fear that Shiite uprising would tumble their monarchs (Al-Rawi 2015, p. 26).

Pinto's (2014) frame analysis of Bahraini authorities' messages targeted at other GCC countries revealed several elements of this frame. These include references to: the Bahraini authorities' request for GCC military support; the implications of Iranian threat on other GCC countries; and Iran or Shiites as a threat. Regarding Al-Rawi (2015), the Methodology chapter details how I developed elements from his quantitative frame analysis of the sectarian aspect of the 'foreign threat' in Bahraini activists' comments on YouTube videos about the crisis. These elements of the frame involve references to: collaborations between Bahraini leadership, government, prime-minister and the Saudi ruling family against protestors and Shi'a; majorities or minorities in the country in terms of Sunni or Shi'a; negative references to Shi'a, the regime, king, government, and ruling families in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia;

expressions of hatred between Sunni and Shi'a; wishes of victory to the PSF; and reference to foreigners given Bahraini nationality as "mercenaries". My analysis revealed none of the elements (framing devices) building on Al-Rawi's work appeared in the analysed news, probably because he examined an informal context where the elements would not be used in an official government context like the one studied here. Additionally, although the official Bahraini TV was accused of sectarian discrimination and defamation of some Bahraini Shi'a during the crisis (BICI, 2011, pp. 421-422); it seemed sectarianism was not given salience in BNA's discourse. Instead, my analysis revealed additional elements reaffirming the foreign threat aspect: references to riots, violence, vandalism, continuity of demonstrations and its consequences on the nation's safety and stability; and references to strict measures to restore order. I explain below how each of these elements articulated the frame in the analysed texts, with a tendency to depict a strategy of 'shifting the blame' and a 'riot' master frame.

The 'problem definition' within the 'existential threat' frame is articulated through references to Iran or Shiites as a threat, and the consequences of this Iranian interference on the entire GCC. Hence, while it addresses the unrest, it denies it is anything like 'revolutions' in other Arab Spring countries caused by accumulated political and economic tensions and challenges that have not been resolved by Arab leaders but, instead, artificially repressed in search for stability for their authority (Joffe, 2011, p. 508). The frame, conversely, blames Iranian interference and Iranian incited riots for the crisis. One example of this

is from a statement by the Secretary-General of the GCC, at the time, Abdulrahman Al-Atiya:

9. He ... reiterated that the GCC countries' strongly reject any foreign interference in Bahrain's internal affairs, asserting that no one will be allowed to undermine the kingdom's national unity.

"Jeopardizing Bahrain's security and stability and sowing dissension among its citizens is a dangerous encroachment of the security and stability of the GCC region,"...

Regarding Iran's threats ... Al-Atiya expressed the GCC states' rejection of any interference in Bahrain... ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.3.2011)

The example illustrates how foreign attempts to shake social unity in Bahrain are the problem. This is manifested through the GCC 'rejecting' any foreign interference in Bahrain. Yet, this frame is not manifested through references to sectarian conflicts in Bahrain in any of BNA's analysed texts. Some of the analysed news items acknowledge conflicts between social groups, but completely exclude any references to internal sectarian division in the country. Thus, the crisis is defined as foreign attempts to create unrest in Bahrain, yet nothing explicitly related to Shi'aSunni tensions as in the elements developed from Al-Rawi (2015). Instead, the excerpt openly presents Iran as threat. Further, it shows how the problem is defined by extending the consequences of the threat to the whole GCC. This is explicitly manifested by portraying the interference as "dangerous encroachment of the security and stability of the GCC". It is worth noting that reference to Iran could implicitly suggest the sectarian aspect of the situation. This is related to historical ideological tensions between Iran and Arab nations in the Gulf region. For Bahrain in particular, in 1971 for instance, when Bahrain gained independence from

Britain, and Iran was still a monarchy, Shah Pahlavi argued Bahrain was part of Iran (Pinto, 2014, p. 169). This represents a rivalry over ethnical hegemony in the region between Iran (Persian ethnicity) and Arabs. Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, relations between the Gulf monarchies and Iran deteriorated significantly due to the strong anti-monarchy ethos of the revolution (ibid). In more recent years, Bahrain is one among other Arab Sunni GCC monarchs (especially Saudi) that aim to maintain strategic power in the region and resist the Iranian Republic, with its Shiite ideology, attempts to play a more strategic role in the region (Mabon, 2012). Thus, despite explicit references to Iran as threat, the sectarian aspect is not explicitly manifest in the analysed texts, but can still be implicitly suggested by references to Iran. Therefore, the frame defines the problem through references to “Iran’s threats”, and the danger of this for stability in the entire GCC region, not just Bahrain. This threatening situation for inter-national stability, therefore, could justify to foreign media the need for military action.

Another element of the frame is references to riots and violent acts. Within the existential threat frame though, riots are not understood as internal unrest (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 156), but as the result of ‘foreign conspiracy’, which in this frame is the ‘causal interpretation’ of the crisis. The following excerpt is from a statement by the Minister of Interior where he talked about the escalating situation:

10. [He] pointed out the dangerous escalation and the acts of vandalism gripping Manama and various other parts across Bahrain. He deplored acts being orchestrated to sow chaos by blocking roads and disrupting people’s interests...



He described the sordid acts as alien to Bahrain society and genuine ethics and deep-rooted traditions. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.3.2011)

The example shows the Bahraini demonstrations are no longer presented as legitimate practice of political rights like in the 'events' frame ('protest' master frame; 'minimisation' strategy). Rather, they are portrayed as "riots", which consequently suggest their illegality, the aggressive behaviour of the demonstrators, and the security forces symbolisation of social order and lawful behaviour (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 156). Regarding the 'foreign interference' aspect of the 'existential threat' frame, it is stated that these acts are "alien to Bahrain society". This implicitly hints at the 'foreign interference' dimension, especially because the frame presents the protests as incited and financed by Iran to spread chaos and invade the GCC (AlRawi, 2015, p. 35; Pinto, 2014, p. 172). Although Iran is not explicitly mentioned in this particular excerpt, the previous example (excerpt 9) overtly suggests the Iranian role. Note that none of the analysed texts uses an official Bahraini source whenever Iran is explicitly mentioned as a threat. Rather, Bahraini officials seem to implicitly hint at foreign interference. In the above excerpt, for instance, the Bahraini Minister of Interior uses terms as "acts alien to Bahrain" to suggest the external connections with the illegal acts. Excerpt 9, conversely, illustrates how Iran is explicitly mentioned by the Secretary General of the GCC. Communicators interviewed in this project also did not speak openly about Iran as will be discussed in the next chapter. The frame analysis suggests that presenting the demonstrations as Iranian instigated "riots" threatening peoples' lives and breaching human rights justifies to international media the need for

strict measures to contain the situation. It also tends to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by refuting any framing of the situation as a 'revolution' and instead 'shifts the blame' to foreign interference.

The analysis revealed that strict measures were the proposed 'treatment' within the 'existential threat' frame. The following example illustrates this besides another element where the presentation of the PSF deployment as a Saudi invasion, especially by Shiite protestors and Iranian media (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Belfer, 2014; BICI, 2011), is refuted and Bahrain's 'request' for GCC support is emphasised instead:

11. The United Arab Emirates has today decided to dispatch troops to take part in preserving order and security in Bahrain. "The move is in response to a request from the Kingdom of Bahrain for assistance and in contribution to maintaining security and stability", UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs ... stated. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 14.3.2011)

The excerpt directly presents military intervention as a solution. Besides asserting the arrival of troops was a "response to a request", the statement is given by a GCC member other than Saudi Arabia. These both imply the measure was taken based on Bahrain's demand, and it is not limited to Saudi. Hence, it is not a Saudi invasion, but a strategic action by the entire GCC. As indicated above, the significance of emphasising 'request' refers to the fact the PSF deployment was presented in a number of foreign media outlets as an "invasion by Saudi troops" and a Saudi "massacre" against Bahrainis and "foreign interference" by Saudi against Bahrainis (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Belfer, 2014; BICI, 2011; [reuters.com](http://reuters.com), 2011). The "invasion" aspect triggered international concerns of human rights' violations and oppression- an image

Bahraini authorities were already struggling with due to questions around protestors' death at an early stage of the crisis. Moreover, despite warmly welcoming the PSF by some groups of Bahraini society (mainly Sunni); the frame does not refer to the fear of the troops among some Shiite communities. Although investigations asserted the PSF did not engage with the public in any form and was only present to protect Bahrain in case of potential foreign interference (BICI, 2011, p. 387), some groups of Shi'a citizens believed the deployment was to specifically oppress them, mostly due to Iranian media channels presenting the deployment as a "massacre" (Belfer, 2014; BICI, 2011). Therefore, BNA's news communicated the 'existential threat' frame to foreign media by highlighting Bahraini authorities' request for GCC military support to vindicate the necessity of inviting these troops to protect Bahrain in light of the 'potential foreign threat', and to defeat any claims this was a Saudi invasion to oppress Shiite citizens.

Therefore, the analysed texts manifested several elements that articulated the 'existential threat' frame, with a tendency to depict a 'riot' master frame and a strategy of 'shifting the blame' to foreign interference instead of internal conflicts. These elements are: presenting Iran as a threat; consequences of Iranian interference on the GCC; Iranian triggered "riots"; Bahrain "requesting" GCC support; and strict solutions.

Unlike the frames dominating the first moment ('reform', 'events'), the 'existential threat' frame acknowledges there is a crisis. Its core focus however lies in presenting Bahrain as being under Iranian threat, suggesting the crisis

was not caused by internal issues as in other 'Arab Spring countries'. Thus, the 'existential threat' frame, just like the frames presented earlier, also distanced Bahrain from the Arab Spring, but this time by blaming the crisis on 'foreign conspiracy' instead of internal issues connected to a history of conflict between the government and Shi'a citizens.

As mentioned earlier, the frame presents a turning point in BNA's discourse, where military solutions are emphasised after avoiding urgent international intervention in the first moment. This framing provides an example of a change in versions of reality communicated through public diplomacy messages from completely avoiding the implication of a crisis to a severe situation necessitating military and strict measures. According to Mor (2009), "attacking the other" is common public diplomacy response to defend a nation's image in crises and reduce its responsibility for wrongdoing. This common response resonates with Benoit's (1997) strategy of 'shifting the blame' represented here by the 'existential threat' frame.

Similar to the 'events' frame, the implications of communicating the 'existential threat' frame and 'shifting the blame' varied among different foreign public groups. In foreign media, for example, several Western foreign news media do not seem to adopt the 'existential threat' frame, and instead referred to the deployment of the PSF as a "Saudi invasion" (Bronner & Slackman, 2011; Noueihed & Richter, 2011). In pan Arab news media, conversely, the coverage of Al-Arabiya adopted the 'existential threat' frame (["the PSF enters Bahrain"](#), 2011). This could be connected to the ownership of this media

organisation by Saudi businessman Sheikh Walid Al-Ibrahim and his close relationship with the Saudi ruling family as a brother-in-law of the late Saudi King Fahd (el-Nawawy & Strong, 2013). On the other hand, it is argued that Al-Jazeera Arabic's coverage of Bahrain conformed to GCC foreign policy, while AlJazeera English's coverage was categorised as 'anti-GCC framing' (Abdul-Nabi, 2015, p. 275). This is because the majority of the Arabic articles legitimised and justified the deployment of the PSF, while the majority of the English coverage presented its role as "quelling the protestors" (ibid, p. 287).

In terms of foreign authorities, Pinto (2014, p.163) argues that the decision to send the PSF to Bahrain is already a sign of the Bahraini government's successful portrayal of the crisis as Iranian threat to the entire GCC monarchs. Regarding the frame's implications in the West, Western authorities stood "completely disinterested" in supporting the Bahraini protestors when the PSF arrived at Bahrain despite allegations of human rights breaches by these troops (Nuruzzaman, 2015, p. 8). Human rights' violations are of major concern to the West. Yet, it does not seem as the decisive element explaining Western reactions to the situation in Bahrain. Rather, regional competition for dominance, and Western geopolitical interests surpassed humanitarian concerns (ibid, p. 12). Russia and China, as well, remained silent and "preferred not to disturb the status quo in the Gulf sub-region while indirectly accepting Saudi intervention" (ibid, p.8). In China, in particular, the Chinese media framing of the upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen bares similarities with the articulation of the 'existential threat' frame and the strategy of 'shifting the blame' found in BNA's analysed content. The

protestors' actions were usually portrayed by Chinese media as illegal behaviour, robbery, violence, vandalism, and attack, while the actions of the governments were depicted as restoration of stability and peace, and the responses of the police were presented as necessary measures to maintain social order (Du, 2016). It is suggested that this framing is related to the Communist ideology, which steered newspapers in mainland China not to adopt the 'Arab Spring' frame (ibid), which triggers sympathy towards the demonstrators and presents them as outbreak of democracy (Harlow & Johnson, 2011, p. 1365; Joffe, 2011, p. 507). Rather than political dictatorship and oppression, the Chinese media attributed the social instability in the affected countries to social and economic problems (Du, 2016, p. 110).

Nevertheless, Bahrain's focus on 'Iranian threats' was challenged by the findings of the BICI report that was not able to confirm Iranian interference. The report, published in November 2011, states "Given that most of the claims by the GoB [Government of Bahrain] related to allegations of intelligence operations undertaken by Iranian operatives, sources of which by their nature are not publicly available, the Commission has not been able to investigate or independently verify the allegations of Iranian involvement in the events of February/March 2011." (BICI, 2011, p. 241) Moreover, the findings challenged the government's focus on reform and democratic approaches when it confirmed individual acts of human rights' violations against detainees by some members of the security forces during February-March 2011 (ibid, p. 417).

This creates a critical mismatch between the examined public diplomacy messages and actual events. The following section discusses the ‘unprecedented achievement’ frame, which prevailed in BNA’s news during the third examined moment. This phase focuses on the publication of BICI report, which was presented by Bahraini authorities as a solution to the Bahraini crisis. The following discussion also highlights how the Bahraini government responded when the report could not support its ‘Iranian conspiracy’ argument.

## **5. THE ‘UNPRECEDENTED ACHIEVEMENT’ FRAME**

The formation of the BICI commission on 29 June 2011 aimed to investigate the events of February and March 2011 and determine whether they involved violations of international human rights’ law and norms ([bici.org.bh](http://bici.org.bh), 2011). King Hamad’s order of establishing this commission was presented as another initiative under the umbrella of his reform project which emphasises the “policy of democracy” and the “commitment to principals of human rights” ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 2011). It was also perceived among Western officials as progress to the situation in Bahrain (Matthiesen, 2013, p. 81). Nevertheless, the publication of BICI report on 23 November 2011 further challenged the image of a reformed nation with democratic policies when it asserted violations of human rights by some members of security forces (ibid, pp. 82-83). The report suggests the most common methods of mistreatment used on detainees included: “blindfolding; handcuffing; enforced standing for prolonged periods;

beating; punching; hitting the detainee with rubber hoses ...; electrocution; sleep-deprivation; exposure to extreme temperatures; verbal abuse; threats of rape; and insulting the detainee's religious sect (Shia)." (BICI, 2011, p. 417) Further, as indicated above, the report could not confirm Iranian interference (ibid, p. 214).

In this key moment examined in the thesis (23-25 November 2011), the framing in BNA's content manifests a 'bolstering' response strategy (Benoit, 1997, p.180), namely a way to 'reduce offensiveness' by stressing positive aspects of the situation and offsetting any negative feelings connected with the crisis. This strategy is manifested in the 'unprecedented achievement' frame (Table 3, row 4), which dominated the BNA's content in this period (it was present in 24/59 items).

This frame blurs the 'negative' results of the report and focuses instead on presenting the BICI as a responsible initiative that resolved the crisis. Similar to the 'reform' and the 'events' frames, the 'unprecedented achievement' frame tends to directly portray Bahrain as a reformed country and does not imply any crisis situation in Bahrain. Therefore, it also corresponds to the 'national reform' master frame. Yet, the 'unprecedented achievement' frame specifically emphasises a reformed nation with democratic policies by presenting the King as a "wise" leader who took a "brave" and "pioneering step that won international recognition" to invite an "independent" commission to investigate the events of February and March 2011. The frame extends the reformed presentation to the government,



portraying it as a responsible one ready to implement all the report's recommendations, and accept the fact it was guilty in certain occasions. Although the frame acknowledges there had been violations on the part of the government, it does not mention what these were. It also distances the political system from these breaches by presenting them as individual behaviours rather than government policy. The recognition of guilt is very limited comparing to the frame's general emphasis on remedy actions, which suggests elements of the IRT's 'corrective action' strategy. Nevertheless, the 'bolstering' strategy prevailed through the frame's general emphasis on the 'positive' aspects of establishing BICI and publishing and accepting its report. The frame also constructs BICI as a "historical achievement", presenting it as an "instrument of self-evaluation", and "contribution for the future of Bahrain" that will lead to the "beginning of a new era".

The trend of presenting Bahrain as a reformed nation with democratic approaches, established by the frames in the earlier points of the crisis, continues in this third key moment, through the dominance of the 'unprecedented achievement' frame (and its occasional appearance alongside the existential threat frame - see table 3). As I mentioned earlier, the prevalence of the 'reform' and the 'events' frames in the first key moment tended to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by portraying Bahrain as a reformed nation, and depicting the protests as legitimate practice of political rights. Even when the situation escalated in the second moment, BNA's discourse seemed to employ 'Iranian interference' to justify the unrest,

suggesting that without this 'foreign conspiracy' Bahrain would not have gone through the crisis. Nevertheless, as BICI published its report confirming government breaches of human rights, and inability to prove Iranian interference, the 'unprecedented achievement' frame continued to present Bahrain as a reformed nation with democratic policies. Moreover, the frame occasionally appeared alongside the 'existential threat' frame, which continued to appear in BNA's analysed content despite BICI report's inability to prove Iranian role. The interplay between these two frames during the third moment seemed to reinforce Bahrain is a reformed country that was a victim of external conspiracy even though there was no convincing evidence for it based on BICI's investigations.

The elements articulating the 'unprecedented achievement' frame in the analysed texts are: references to BICI and its report as democratic achievements; references to the government acceptance of the report's results; references to the report's contributions to the future of Bahrain; and not mentioning any findings about government violations. The following paragraphs discuss how this frame was manifested in the analysed items.

The frame presents BICI and the report as unparalleled national achievement. The following excerpt is from a news item about an interview Commission Chair Professor Bassiouni had with Al-Arabiya TV after the publication of the report in November, where he talked about the establishment of BICI and its findings. The example also shows how government violations are obscured:

12. According to the legal expert, the formation of the commission is an unprecedented in the entire world as Bahrain called for it under a national decision, gave it all powers and allowed its members to enter all places... ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 24.11.2011)

The example directly emphasises the ‘unmatched’ ‘national decision’ of inviting external investigation committee. On the other hand, this text, and all the analysed texts, excludes any BICI findings about the authorities’ violations. Rather, the text provides extensive examples of BICI findings presenting the demonstrators negatively. For instance, it mentions Salmanyia Medical Complex’s (SMC) Shi’a staff mistreatment of patients during the crisis on a sectarian basis, but excludes references to deaths resulting from clashes with security forces during the security operation on 16 March (BICI, 2011, p. 235). Instead, it highlights “there were several instances of self-restraint and discipline success by the security agencies”. Moreover, the analysis revealed the demonstrators’ violations were given high salience in BNA’s news to the extent of devoting a news item for every single violation reported by BICI (e.g. [“BICI: Enough evidence shows South Asian workers were targeted”](#), 23.11.2011; [“BICI Report Uncovers many Medics' Crimes”](#), 23.11.2011). Thus, instead of communicating all the findings transparently, the frame focused on portraying BICI and its report as ‘unparalleled’ solution to a national crisis, and hence depicting a ‘bolstering’ strategy. This hints at presenting Bahrain as a nation with democratic policies, especially as it was the King’s’ decision to invite a foreign investigation committee made up of international human rights and legal experts. It tends to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by emphasising ‘unmatched democratic solution’ instead of oppression.

The frame was also articulated through references to the government's acceptance of the report. This also tends to suggest a 'bolstering' strategy by focusing on the positive aspect of accepting the findings, but not the 'negative' findings themselves. The following example covers the welcoming of the report by the Commander of the National Guards:

13. [He] welcomed the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) and the recommendations it included.

Shaikh Mohammed also affirmed to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa that he continues in implementing the monarch's directives related to the recommendations and working towards achieving what His Majesty aspires to accomplish with regard to development and prosperity. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 23.11.2011)

Although the National Guard, in particular, was not held guilty of any violations in the report (BICI, 2011, p. 263), it is still one of the main arms of the security forces in Bahrain. The report asserted the security forces' human rights violations through, for example, mistreatment of persons in custody (ibid, p. 285). However, the text does not make a single reference to any of the report's findings confirming the security forces' breaches. Even when the source vows to follow the King's aspirations of further development and prosperity, it is presented generally. There is no reference to specific reforms related to the development of the security forces' policies, although the report explicitly offers recommendations on "the use of force, arrest, treatment of persons in custody, detention and prosecution in connection with the freedom of expression, assembly and association." (BICI, 2011, p. 423) Thus, 'unprecedented achievement' is welcomed and accepted in this text. Yet, the

text and the frame, in general, exclude the specific recommendations to overcome the violations asserted in the report.

The 'moral evaluation' within the frame is the report's contribution to the Bahraini future. The following example covers a statement by a Member of the Shura Council<sup>21</sup>, where he talked about the report as a "positive sign" for Bahrain's future:

14. [BICI report], from indications available is a positive sign for Bahrain ... [it is] a chance to re-organise the internal affairs of government machinery, particularly the law enforcers and the security system.

"I see the report as an instrument of self-evaluation that needed feedback from an external source. The BICI has made an important contribution for the future of Bahrain," ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 24.11.2011)

Although the need for improvement is addressed, it is minimised to reorganisation of internal affairs. This tends to completely blur that some of these 'law enforcers' were involved in human rights' violations of international law. Instead, Bahrain is presented here as a country with human rights' values by highlighting the King's initiative of establishing a human rights body for the GCC region instead of addressing the violations. Hence, this text also stresses good traits and presents the situation as an unparalleled accomplishment that will help Bahrain achieve a brighter future.

---

<sup>21</sup> The Consultative Council which is the upper house of the National Assembly, the main legislative body of Bahrain. The Council comprises forty members appointed directly by the King of Bahrain. The forty seats of the Consultative Council combined with the forty elected seats of the Council of Representatives form the National Assembly of Bahrain.

Therefore, the dominance of this frame during the third moment presents another turning point in BNA's discourse by giving salience to external actors to imply the credibility of the authorities' solutions. This is significant when compared to the first two moments when the frames excluded any sort of foreign intervention solution. In the first moment, the 'reform' (denial) and the 'events' (minimisation) frames emphasised reform and non-oppressive approaches, refuting the need for international intervention suggested by the 'Arab Spring' frame (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). In the second moment, although troops from other countries were a 'recommended treatment'; the 'existential threat' frame (shifting the blame) emphasised two main points. First, it presented the military aid as national request rather than foreign decision. Second, it emphasised the membership of Bahrain in the troops to downplay the foreign aspect. In the third moment, however, the foreign facet was given salience through emphasising the authorities' unprecedented decision to invite independent international experts to investigate the situation, suggesting the credibility and independence of BICI, and hinting at the democratic aspect of the initiative.

This frame, with its correspondence with the 'bolstering' strategy, suggests how public diplomacy framing in response to a crisis may reduce the perceived offensiveness of the wrongdoing by stressing good traits instead of giving salience to the negative aspects of the issue. In a Western context, where the IRT was developed, the use of 'mortification' is usually praised when an actor is accused of wrongdoing and held responsible for the offensive act (Benoit & Drew, 1997, p. 159). Nevertheless, studies in non-Western contexts suggest

that not all cultures appreciate direct admittance of guilt and instead tend to employ rhetoric of 'face-saving'. For instance, face-saving is an important communication device in the Chinese culture, where protecting one's face helps to preserve one's dignity and empower oneself, especially if the audience is an important one (Lu, 1994 in Peijuan, 2009, p. 216). It is suggested that face-saving can be done when a nation admits guilt embedded in 'corrective action' (Peijuan, 2009, p. 216). Yet, in the case of Bahrain, it seems that 'bolstering' was used to save face when BICI confirmed human rights' violations in certain occasions, and could not confirm Iranian interference. Generally, nations are less likely to employ a mortification strategy where guilt is admitted, because saving a nation's image in this regard is significant for its empowerment and dignity (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). In Arab culture, in general, "when saving face is important, one's skill is not in how directly one can state criticism, but rather how cleverly one can disguise it" (Zaharna, 2004, p. 136).

However, as mentioned earlier, the 'existential threat' frame continued to appear in BNA's analysed content even after revealing BICI's findings, suggesting that when Bahrain went through a crisis, it was caused by a foreign conspiracy and not internal issues.

Although BNA's framing around the publication of BICI's report focused on the 'positive' findings of the Commission, the full report was published on a special section on the BNA website both in Arabic and English languages. Hence, full access was allowed to any interested member of the public such as foreign journalists. As indicated by one of the interviewees in this research,

it was “the King’s order to publish the full report as it is. So the full detailed report was published on BNA’s website to work as a scientific resource for anyone interested in the case of Bahrain” (I1). The analysis suggests that the ‘bolstering’ discourse strategy in BNA’s content aimed to avoid giving further salience to the findings that challenged the government’s position, and this works in-line with public diplomacy’s typical goal of promoting the sponsoring government’s interests to foreign publics (L’Etang, 1996, p. 16; L’Eatng, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). Despite its challenging findings, the report was supported by a number of significant international actors. Several Western officials, for instance, perceived BICI as progress to the situation in Bahrain (Matthiesen, 2013, p. 81).

The support the Bahraini government enjoyed during different phases of the examined crisis is discussed further in the next section, which looks at the ‘supported leadership’ frame. This frame worked in-line with the ‘unprecedented achievement’ frame, and the first three frames.

## **6. THE ‘SUPPORTED LEADERSHIP’ FRAME**

In line with all the previous frames examined so far, the ‘supported leadership’ frame also functioned to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring. Its particular focus was on the support the Bahraini government enjoyed from international leaders and Bahraini citizens (table 3, row 5). The frame thus served a ‘differentiation’ (Benoit, 1995) response strategy, because, as I will argue in this section, this national and international support implicitly



differentiated the Bahraini government from governments in Arab Spring nations, which were condemned by their own citizens and the international community (Cofelice, 2016, p. 103; Joffe, 2011, p. 508; Yli-Kaitala, 2014, p. 129). The analysis suggests it also corresponds to the 'national reform' master frame.

Elements articulating this frame in BNA's texts are references to: international leaders and citizens supporting the leadership and its initiatives; supporting Bahrain's stability and security; GCC unity, strong ties, historic relations and support; international support, ties, cooperation; and loyal, patriotic citizens. I discuss each of this frame's elements directly below.

The following example illustrates how the frame gives salience to supporting the leadership and its initiatives, supporting Bahrain's security, and international ties:

15. The US today backed the Kingdom of Bahrain, stressing support for His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa's reform project. Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa received a phone call from US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who stressed her country's keen interest in Bahrain's security, urging all parties to rally together in support of HM the King's project. She also highlighted historic bilateral relations bonding both friendly countries. Shaikh Khalid thanked Ms. Clinton for the US stance, which, he said, reflected deep relations, wishing to work together to promote strong historic relations further. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 17.2.2011)

First, the text highlights support to the leadership and its initiatives stating the US "backed" Bahrain, and confirming support to the King's reform project. This suggests the legitimacy of the regime, especially as it comes from a

country with high democratic values when the death of protesters raised questions on the government's approaches. This tends to differentiate Bahrain from the Arab Spring by suggesting that credible international agents support the Bahraini leadership instead of urging it to step down as was the case in Egypt for example ([usnews.com](http://usnews.com), 2011). Second, it explicitly emphasises support to "Bahrain's security". This reinforces legitimacy, specifically because the text links security to the King's project. This implies that without supporting the leadership and its initiatives; Bahrain's security would be endangered. Third, the text refers to international relations. This implies 'strategic', 'friendly', and 'historic' alliances between Bahrain and different nations. Thus, the example illustrates three elements of the frame: international support for the regime and its initiatives, supporting Bahrain's security, and international ties. Despite the concerning escalations at the time, the emphasis on international ties suggests the legitimacy of the regime by continuing to have alliances with several significant international actors.

The frame is also articulated through specific references to GCC support and its ties with Bahrain. One example:

16. His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa today received at Al-Safriya Palace Omani Interior Minister Humood bin Faisal Al-Busaidi, who conveyed greetings from Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and wishes of further progress and prosperity for Bahrain and its people. He hailed the honourable stances of Sultan Qaboos in support of Bahrain's security and stability, and commitment to dispatch Peninsula Shield forces in line with the joint defence cooperation agreements. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 15.3.2011)

The excerpt directly demonstrates a GCC member's support to Bahrain and its security. References to military support manifest the 'existential threat'

frame, which is also present in the excerpt. The interplay between both frames during the second examined moment took the route of promoting that ‘foreign conspiracy’, rather than the leadership’s legitimacy, was at stake. This is significant as Bahrain employed military methods to restore order and stop demonstrations, suggesting undemocratic approaches and more links with ‘oppressive’ regimes. Thus, highlighting international support despite the strict measures reinforced the legitimacy of the leadership. The support during the second moment was not limited to GCC countries. Examples of other countries that supported Bahrain in BNA’s news content are Spain (["The Situation In Bahrain Is Different from Libya, Spanish Foreign Minister Said"](#), 15.3.2011), Jordan (["Jordanian FM Praises National Dialogue Initiative"](#), 16.3.2011), and the US (["BDF Commander-in-Chief Meets US 5th Fleet Commander"](#), 14.3.2011).

Reference to loyal citizens is another element of the frame. An example of this is from coverage on rallies supporting the leadership:

17. Over 100,000 citizens today took to Manama streets ... and renewed their allegiance and loyalty to His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and his wise leadership, voicing their love for the leader...

Participants expressed their full support for HM King Hamad, rejecting all that may pose a threat to the cherished land's security, stability and national unity. ([bna.bh](#), 18.2.2011)

The significance of highlighting citizens’ support is suggesting the difference between Bahrain and ‘Arab Spring countries’, to prevent associations with ‘revolutions’ against ‘dictatorships’. It tends to suggest a

differentiation strategy by suggesting Bahraini authorities did have supporters, unlike Tunisia and Egypt where majorly all citizens were against the regimes (Dalacoura, 2012). Thus, emphasising citizens' support for Bahraini leadership implies its legitimacy. Further, as the 'events' frame was dominant in BNA's content at the time of publishing the above public diplomacy text, the 'supported leadership' reinforced the normality of the situation, and that achieving reforms in Bahrain is not done through revolt. The frame also worked in-line with the 'unprecedented achievement' frame in the third examined moment. For instance, when BICI report was published, the White House "welcomed" the report, and "commended King Hamad's decision to establish the Commission and described it as a 'courageous decision'." ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 24.11.2011) Thus, despite human rights' violations, the interplay between both frames during the third moment suggests the legitimacy of the Bahraini regime through emphasising international support of the King's decisions.

Therefore, the analysis revealed the 'supported leadership' frame maintained its core idea of differentiating Bahrain from the Arab Spring across the three examined moments and worked together with the prevailing frames to limit foreign media and public associations of Bahrain with the Arab Spring. The support highlighted in this frame can be perceived as a third-party endorsement which, according to Zhang and Benoit (2004, p. 164), can increase the effectiveness of a response strategy in reducing an actor's responsibility for wrongdoing or the offensiveness of their acts. However, several examples discussed earlier argued that foreign media was not convinced with the Bahraini government's framing of the crisis, and instead

supported the protestors and raised concerns on human rights' violations by the government (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). By contrast, when it comes to foreign authorities, neither the West nor any Middle-Eastern countries supported the Bahraini protestors (Nuruzzaman, 2015, p. 7). Again, there is no evidence<sup>22</sup> that the support of foreign governments to the Bahraini authorities is a result of successful public diplomacy communication, but it could be more related to geopolitical interests and interdependencies.

Although the analysis revealed BNA's discourse focused on reforms, democratic policies, and legitimacy to contest Arab Spring framing; the 'sovereignty' frame shows how the BNA also employed arguments stressing authority and control to distance Bahrain from problematic countries. Like the 'existential threat' frame, 'sovereignty' also portrays a crisis situation. I discuss the 'sovereignty' frame directly below.

## **7. THE 'SOVEREIGNTY' FRAME**

This frame portrays Bahrain as a country with powerful authorities that would not compromise its sovereignty, nor tolerate "criminal acts". It appears in the second examined moment alongside the 'existential threat' frame, reinforcing the 'foreign conspiracy' definition. As the latter hints at Iranian plot to destabilise Bahrain and infiltrate into the region; the interplay with the

---

<sup>22</sup> This is specifically the case for Western countries, because Pinto (2014) argues that sending the PSF to Bahrain was a result of the king's successful framing of the crisis as Iranian plot to topple GCC monarchs.

'sovereignty' frame suggests the Bahraini authorities' determination to maintain its power position. The 'sovereignty' frame corresponds to the "riots" (Hertog & McLeod, 2001) master frame, and tends to depict Benoit's (1995) strategy of 'attacking the accuser', especially when it delegitimises the protestors' acts and pledges to stop them. This is significant as, during the second moment, Iranian and Shiite media and the protestors insinuated that the deployment of GCC troops suggests as the Bahraini authorities' loss of control and that the PSF was oppressing Shiite citizens in a severe violation of human rights (BICI, 2011, p. 134). Further, at an internal level, government supporters (mainly Sunni) doubted the authorities' ability to maintain control and protect them in case of Shi'a takeover (Al-Hasan, 2015; Carlstrom, 2012). Nevertheless, the frame does not refer to the Sunnis nor authorities' fear of potential takeover but emphasises a 'powerful' position. Thus, the 'sovereignty' frame limits foreign media associations with Arab countries where escalating chaos led to upheavals. Further, the frame's depiction of a strategy of 'attacking the accuser' is suggested by its emphasis on defeating "criminal acts", which implies the demonstrators, and not the authorities, are the violators of human rights through their illegal acts threatening individual and social safety.

The frame is manifested in BNA's news through references to: the authorities' determination and ability to protect the nation and publics; no impunity for criminal acts and their perpetrators; and successfully restoring order. I discuss these elements directly below.

The following example illustrates Bahraini authorities' powerful position where public security is not given up, and unlawful behaviour is not tolerated.

It is from a statement by the Bahraini Prime Minister:

18. [He] reassured all the citizens that the government will not let their security and safety be compromised, asserting that uncivilized and unpeaceful means of expression will never be allowed... ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 14.3.2011)

The excerpt illustrates how riots, referred to as “uncivilized and un-peaceful means of expression” are not tolerated. It also demonstrates how the ‘sovereignty’ frame reaffirms the ‘existential threat’ frame’s emphasis on the illegality of ‘riots’. Yet, the difference between the ‘existential threat’ and the ‘sovereignty’ frames regarding ‘unlawful behaviour’ is the former’s portrayal of the demonstrations as ‘Iranian triggered riots’, while the latter attacks the accuser and pledges to stop these riots. The analysis of the ‘existential threat’ frame illustrates how it tends to justify to foreign media and publics Bahrain’s employment of strict measures. Yet, rather than sounding apologetic; the interplay between both frames in BNA’s news during the second examined moment suggests a firm stance by the authorities’ decision to apply military methods. This tends to contest the ‘Arab Spring’ frame by presenting the demonstrators as a threat to national stability and social harmony, instead of triggering sympathy towards them as fighters for democratic change.

Emphasising return to normality is another element of the ‘sovereignty’ frame. The following excerpt is from a statement by the Bahrain Defence Force General Command following the security operation to clear strategic locations of demonstrators:

19. The operation was carried out according to plan with high standards of competence and professionalism while ensuring the safety of all... [He] congratulates all citizens on the start to regain of normalcy and stresses that it will take all necessary procedures and measures to assert security and public order and safeguard the country and the people. ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 16.3.2011)

The excerpt portrays the authorities in a powerful position by highlighting their 'successes' in restoring order. This is reinforced through 'congratulating' the citizens on this 'achievement', which suggests that normalcy is something good that citizens want and the government is helping them get it. This implies that the demonstrators' acts are a deviation from the norm, suggesting their illegality and the significance of the security forces' efforts to restore order. Thus, instead of presenting the protests as a desired movement to achieve democratic changes, the frame 'attacks the accuser' by presenting the protestors' acts as unlawful behaviour that should be defeated. Here, too, the text tends to distance Bahrain from problematic Arab countries. Instead of losing control over the escalating situation, the authorities' sovereignty is emphasised, showing foreign media that Bahrain is not following the scenario of upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia where the demonstrations' escalation managed to topple their regimes (Du, 2016; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012).

Therefore, the 'sovereignty' frame provides an example of public diplomacy crisis responses that 'attack the accuser'. Similar to the strategy of 'shifting the blame' which was represented by the 'existential threat' frame, the strategy of 'attacking the accuser' bares similarities with a common message design used in public diplomacy to deal with negative publicity against a nation, or to defend its image, and this is "attacking the other" (Mor, 2009, p. 228).



Similar to previous frames, BNA's communication of a frame that represents a strategy of 'attacking the accuser' had different implications among different publics. In terms of foreign media, for instance, it was not accepted or convincing, especially among outlets in democratic nations which support movements for democratic change (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Yet, in terms of foreign authorities, it was not objected. Even if it was condemned, it did not lead to foreign military intervention such as in Libya, or Western leadership urging the Bahraini monarch to step-down like in Egypt. As discussed in the 'supported leadership' frame, by the time of communicating the 'sovereignty' frame (and the 'existential threat' frame in the second examined moment) a number of significant international actors supported the position of the Bahraini authorities by, for example, stressing the importance of restoring order under the leadership of King Hamad.

Therefore, the analysis of the 'sovereignty' frame illustrates how despite portraying a crisis situation in BNA's messages to foreign media and publics, it reinforces the argument of an external cause of the crisis, instead of addressing any internal issues that could result in a crisis.

## **8. CONCLUSION: THE FRAMING OF THE BAHRAIN CRISIS OVER TIME**

My analysis demonstrates that the frames communicated in BNA's news to foreign media and publics tend to distance Bahrain from other Arab countries in times of Arab Spring uprisings. Earlier chapters indicated that the Bahraini crisis coincided with upheavals in countries like Egypt, Libya, and

Tunisia, which were widely framed as the 'Arab Spring' (Avraham, 2015). Although the King of Bahrain rejected the reference to the Bahraini situation as another 'Arab Spring' (Pinto, 2014), several media outlets covered the Bahraini protests in a manner that could present these protests as another 'Arab Spring'. For example, major American newspapers (New York Times; Los Angeles Times; Washington Post) were sympathetic towards the protests and presented them as rallies for democratic rights (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Iranian and Shiite media, on the other hand, referred to the Bahraini protests as revolution by oppressed Shi'a majority against Sunni minority (Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Belfer, 2014; BICI, 2011; Yateem, 2014). Some studies also talk about the Bahraini crisis as protests inspired by other Arab upheavals, which imply it is perceived as part of the 'Arab Spring' (e.g. Al-Rawi, 2015; Dalacora, 2012). Very few others, on the other hand, discuss it as Iranian plan to invade the GCC (e.g. Belfer, 2014; Yateem, 2014), which suggests that the 'foreign interference' argument is not widely accepted even within academic contexts. With this contested framing of the Bahraini crisis, my research examines what versions of reality the Bahraini government promoted in public diplomacy texts published on BNA's website, how were these realities framed, and how they evolved across time.

My analysis of BNA's content published during the three examined key moments argues that the majority of the analysed frames do not portray the examined context as a crisis, and if they do they present the cause as foreign conspiracy and not internal issues as in 'Arab Spring countries'. The analysis

revealed that the frames communicated to foreign media by the BNA worked together to represent the situation in Bahrain as different from that in other Arab countries where popular protests were taking place around the same time. I suggest that despite communicating different frames at different stages of the crisis and representing different crisis response strategies, they all attempted to contest accusations of human rights violations to avoid comparisons between the Bahraini events and those in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, for example. Instead, it promoted a favourable image of the Bahraini government as a reformed, credible, responsible, non-authoritative regime, which, according to some of these frames, was the victim of a foreign conspiracy. Thus, all the frames and the strategies they depict contest the 'Arab Spring' frame by excluding a crisis portrayal or blaming the crisis on foreign conspiracy.

The 'reform' frame dominated the news on 14 February, which marks both the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NAC and the beginning of demonstrations. Instead of acknowledging public protests, the frame represents a 'denial' image repair strategy as it presented Bahrain as a reformed country celebrating ten years of reform achievements, with minimal reference to the protests as 'sporadic incidents'. However, when the situation escalated, the analysis revealed a shift towards the 'events' frame which represents a 'minimisation' response strategy. Despite acknowledging the protests, the frame tends to downplay their significance by presenting them as normal practice of political rights like in any democratic country. These two frames prevailed in most of the official news items during the first examined moment.

Presenting Bahrain as a reformed nation, and the protests as unproblematic, the interplay between both frames tended to prevent foreign media associations with 'Arab Spring'. The 'supported leadership' frame also appeared in this period and reinforced the previous frames. As the 'Arab Spring' tends to present the Arab leaders as dictators who deserve to be overthrown by their oppressed people (Maguire & Vickers, 2013); the 'supported leadership' frame represents a 'differentiation' response strategy as it distances the Bahraini regime from such perceptions and suggests its legitimacy by emphasising citizen and international support.

The most prevailing frame during the second examined moment, which focused on the arrival of the PSF, was 'existential threat' which represents a crisis response strategy of 'shifting the blame'. It presents Bahrain under Iranian threat, and depicts the protests as 'riots' triggered by Iran to spread chaos and ease Iranian invasion. Despite the escalating situation at the time and the use of military measures, the frame continued to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by suggesting in their official messages on the BNA website aimed at foreign media that the cause of the Bahraini unrest is 'Iranian conspiracy' rather than internal conflicts. The 'foreign threat' aspect seemed to justify the strict measures of restoring order. The distance from the Arab Spring was reinforced by the communication of the 'supported leadership' frame too ('differentiation' strategy). By emphasising the Bahraini authorities' legitimacy, the frame suggests Bahrain is not like other problematic Arab countries where the regimes were overthrown for their oppressive policies. Thus, the frames worked together to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring.

Another frame communicated during the second moment is 'sovereignty', which represents image repair strategy of 'attacking the accuser'. Its interplay with the 'existential threat' frame tended to distance Bahrain from the Arab Spring by emphasising the authorities' control, and refuting protestors' takeover. The combination of the strategies of 'attacking the accuser' and 'shifting the blame' in BNA's analysed content represents a strategy of "attacking the other", which is a common public diplomacy response to defend a nation's image in a crisis (Mor, 2009, p. 228).

The third moment focused on the publication of BICI report which asserted human rights violations by some members of the security forces, and inability to prove Iranian interference. The 'unprecedented achievement' frame prevailed in the BNA news issued around this, depicting a 'bolstering' response strategy as it presents the BICI and its report as unparalleled solution to a crisis instead of highlighting the violations. While the full BICI report was published on a special section of the BNA's website<sup>23</sup>, and BNA's news acknowledged violations' assertions, excluding what the violations exactly were from BNA's news comes as an effort not to give the violations further salience and to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the government's acts. The exclusion of details of the violations of human rights by number of security forces members during the crisis also tended to distance Bahrain from Arab nations where regimes were overthrown for their violation of human rights

---

<sup>23</sup> The full report is now available on the BICI website in both Arabic and English Languages ([bici.org.bh](http://bici.org.bh)). The BNA website offers a special section on the BICI Recommendations Implementation Follow-up Body's report ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh)).

during protests in their countries. The 'supported leadership' (differentiation) reinforced the dominant frame here too. Within a context where some Arab leaders were ousted for what was perceived as oppressive approaches; the 'supported leadership' frame implied the Bahraini authorities' legitimacy by highlighting the international support for and approval of BICI, especially as it was initiated by King Hamad.

Therefore, the analysed frames and the response strategies they depict suggest that Bahraini public diplomacy tends not to address a crisis situation. Even when it does, it does not acknowledge all aspects of the problematic situation. Rather, it excludes reference to any aspect that may portray the situation as an internal issue. The communication of such messages shows how Bahraini public diplomacy's response to the crisis is similar to how nations respond to crises, especially by employing responses that do not admit responsibility for guilt (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). This habit of not addressing problematic situations to and through the media by Middle-Eastern countries is observed by Avraham (2015). He suggests that "ignoring or limiting the crisis" is a popular response by Arab countries to problematic situations even before the Arab Spring events (p. 228). While this is observed in the context of promoting Middle-Eastern countries as tourist destinations, the frame analysis in this thesis suggests it is an approach used by Bahraini public diplomacy to deal with accusations of human rights breaches. The analysis suggests that public diplomacy is practiced by the Bahraini government in a manner similar to realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy, where it is used as a 'power tool' in the hands of the sponsoring

government to maintain its power position in the international relations environment (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

Although it is beyond the focus of my research to examine the effects of the analysed frames and image repair strategies, this chapter also discussed the messages in relation to foreign media reporting and political reactions based on insights from previous studies and not systematic analysis of implications. It highlights different, and even contrasting 'implications' of Bahraini public diplomacy messages among these stakeholders. Foreign media's coverage was generally against the Bahraini government. Regarding foreign governments, other than Iran, which seems to devote its efforts to present the Bahraini protests as a revolution by oppressed Shiite majority against a 'Sunni dictatorship; Western, Russian, and even Chinese governments' responses to the Bahraini crisis was majorly passive.

While this research aims to deliver an understanding of public diplomacy activities of constructing specific versions of reality in its messages, the frame analysis offered insights on the frames communicated through Bahraini public diplomacy during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath. This is significant because the account of the presentation of this crisis varies widely among different relevant actors (Karolak, 2012, p. 186), and previous research on the Bahraini crisis does not systematically examine how the Bahraini authorities presented this crisis through its official BNA channel aimed at foreign media and publics. Further, the analysis offers an example of government framing in the Arab Spring context. This is significant as previous

studies on the Arab Spring phenomenon focus on the framing of Arab upheavals by different foreign news media platforms, with a specific focus on the upheavals in Egypt (e.g. Du, 2016; Guzman, 2016), keeping a gap in how Arab governments framed the crises in their countries. Moreover, the analysis offers insights on Arab government practice of public diplomacy in the Arab Spring context. Studies on public diplomacy during the Arab Spring focus on how Western state and non-state actors engage in public diplomacy activities in relation to the Arab Spring (e.g. Cofelice, 2016; Golan, 2013; Yli-Kaitala, 2014). The frame analysis also offers insights on the crisis response strategies represented in Bahraini public diplomacy frames. The strategies are derived from Benoit's (1995) image repair theory, which is developed and widely used in Western contexts. The frame analysis in this study extends the use of the theory by using it to examine the Bahraini crisis, and extend its application to study governmental crisis responses from a public diplomacy perspective.

The next chapter discusses the analysis of interviews with selected communicators from the Information Affairs Authority (IAA), who were involved in frame-building processes. The chapter aims to deliver insights on background processes and factors connected to frame-building at the IAA/BNA during the examined crisis.



## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **INTERVIEW ANALYSIS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter explored the frames communicated through the BNA's website during three key moments in the 2011 crisis. This chapter will shed light on the background processes at the time of communicating these frames by interviewing communication professionals who wrote that content. The chapter delivers an in-depth understanding of background public diplomacy processes and activities which contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality in its messages during crises. This is done by specifically looking at the factors and background processes connected to the production of public diplomacy frames during the Bahraini crisis and its aftermath.

This chapter presents the analysis of interview data generated with five communicators from the IAA, who were engaged in text writing and/or decision making on communication and message design during the examined crisis. As indicated earlier, IAA was the main governmental communication body in Bahrain during the crisis and the overarching management of BNA.

As explained in the Methodology chapter, in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews are a supplementary method in my thesis. They aim to generate insights on the processes and factors related to IAA/BNA's articulation of frames communicated through public diplomacy (hereafter

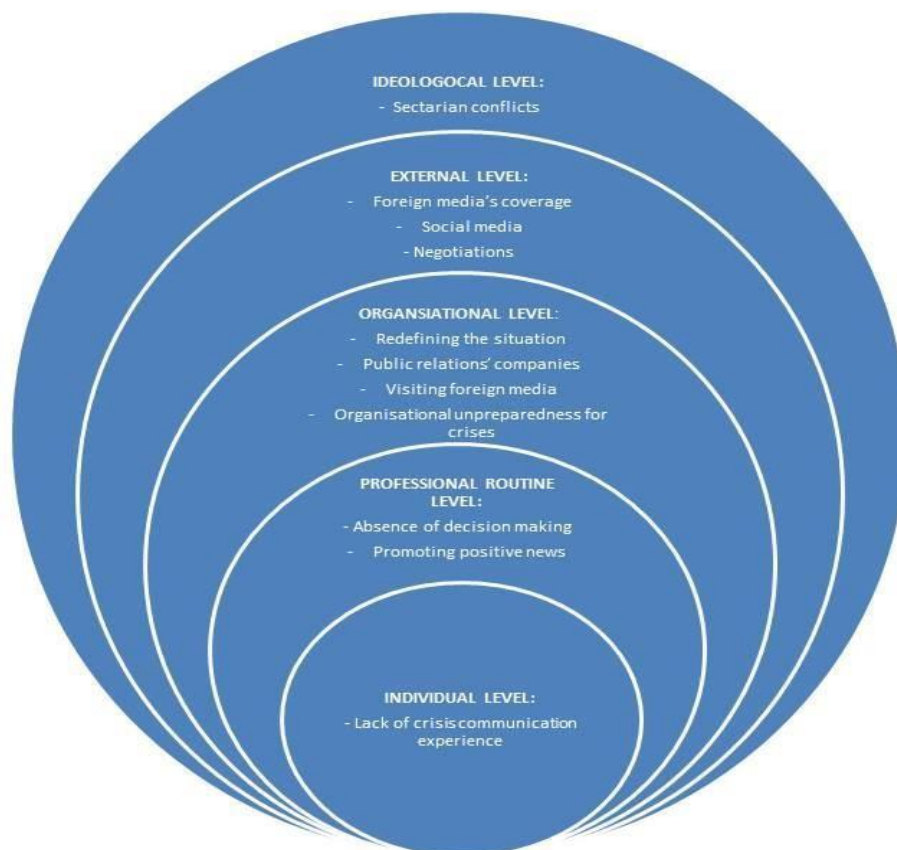
referred to as 'frame-building'). Previous chapters also indicated I employ Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model of influences on media content to organise findings on frame-building factors in public diplomacy. The model, originally developed in media research, studies influences on journalistic frame-building at the: individual, professional routines, organisational, external, and ideological levels. Public diplomacy and journalism are different occupations and fields of research (Edwards & Pieczka, 2013, p. 7). Journalism can be generally understood as the communication field that aims to inform publics (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), while public diplomacy practitioners' main goal is employing communication programmes to change or maintain foreign publics' opinions for the benefit of their governments (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Etang, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). Nevertheless, both fields use available information selectively to articulate the communication content (Seib, 2009, p. 774; White & Hobsbawm, 2007, p. 287). Hence, frame-building is a central practice in both areas, where journalists and public diplomacy practitioners put frames into public discourse for publics to process (Gilboa, 2008, p. 64; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009, p. 447). Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model offers a framework to understand different levels of influence on frame-building, and how these interact rather than work in isolation. It also helps explore how some frame-building factors are intentional while others occur as a result of other actions (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 252). The model is extended in this research to public diplomacy context to understand how different levels of influence may be connected to frame-building in public diplomacy texts. The specific factors

influencing public diplomacy professionals may be different from those influencing journalists. However, the broad categories in which these influences fall (individual, professional, organisational, external, ideological) may be usefully transferred from one domain to the other to help us better understand public diplomacy frame-building. This is significant as public diplomacy framing research is dominated by focus on factors connected to success or failure of public diplomacy frames in appearing in foreign media's content (Entman, 2008; Jungblut, 2017; Melki & Jabado, 2016; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Sheafer et al., 2014; Yarchi et al., 2013; Zhang, 2006). Using Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model shifts attention in public diplomacy framing research by looking at the factors related to professional communicators' construction of frames in public diplomacy texts and not how journalists construct public diplomacy frames in media content.

Using the hierarchal model, the interview analysis suggests 11 factors contributed to frame-building at the IAA/BNA during the crisis: 1) limited crisis communication experience (individual level); 2) absence of senior decision making (professional level), 3) promoting positive news (professional level); 4) redefining the situation by government representatives without addressing internal problematic issues in Bahrain (organisational level); 5) employing foreign public relations' companies (organisational level); 6) visiting foreign media organisations (organisational level); 7) IAA/BNA's unpreparedness for a crisis (organisational level); 8) foreign media's negative coverage (external level); 9) social media (external level); 10) negotiations between the authorities and political societies (external level); and 11) the sectarian conflicts

(ideological level). These are summarised in Figure 3 which presents these factors following Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) structure of the model to highlight the interaction among different levels of influence.

Figure 3. Levels of influence on Bahraini public diplomacy frame-building during the 2011 crisis



The interview analysis argues that IAA/BNA's frames tendency to differentiate Bahrain from the Arab Spring by communicating frames that do not present the situation as a crisis, or externalise the cause of the crisis started in a context of absent decision making, and lack of experience and preparedness for crises. While lack of organisational preparedness for a crisis remained, the frame-building then became connected to routines of promoting positive news to counter unfavourable coverage in foreign media, and maintain the Bahraini authorities' power position. The remaining of the chapter

discusses how different levels of influence contributed to public diplomacy frame-building during the Bahraini crisis, and the background processes of articulating frames that represent specific crisis response strategies from the Benoit's (1995) IRT.

## **2. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: LACK OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE**

The individual level analysis in this thesis looks at the communicators' characteristics and how it may contribute to public diplomacy frame-building. One frame-building factor that emerged from the data is IAA/BNA communicators' lack of crisis communication experience, which seems closely connected to frame-building in the first 3-4 days of the crisis. After 3-4 days, the analysis suggests the communicators were more involved in deciding what could be included in the communication content. This is illustrated by their ability to suggest communicative responses based on their observations of events in other Arab countries and foreign media's coverage. Nevertheless, these were not full-time IAA communicators responsible for content production in 'normal' situations. Instead, this was the responsibility of an emergency media team which was formed after 3-4 days of the crisis unfold. I discuss below interview fragments that indicate the lack of crisis experience at the individual level, highlighting how it interacted with factors at other levels of influence. After this, I discuss how these background contexts are related to frame-building, especially at the beginning of the crisis.

When asked about how they, as government communicators, responded to the crisis starting from 14 February, all the communicators mentioned they did not know how to react, highlighting their lack of experience in handling crises. This is exemplified in the following quote, which also indicates interactions with other levels of influence as will be explained below:

1. At the beginning of the 2011 crisis, we did not know how to deal with media regarding the events in Bahrain. Definitely, the situation was strange to us; no one expected it. We don't have any previous experience in handling it. There were troubles in more than one country and we were watching. We were shocked. So the shock resulted, in the first 3-4 days, in unclear media vision. What is our direction, where are we going with this, how to use language, what approaches should we use? We didn't know. So, an emergency media team was formed [after 3-4 days]. It contained senior people from the IAA and communicators from other government entities. The team's mission was to closely observe the situation: monitor, analyse, and then suggest how to deal with the situation... We started preparing news drafts ahead based on expectations and scenarios in the region. Then we tried to get approval on our messages and be ready. (I1)

The excerpt suggests IAA communicators did not have experience with handling crises. It does not suggest though that they did not perceive a problematic situation or did not understand the significance of handling the situation through media. Rather, despite demonstrating awareness of the importance of communication, the communicators could not employ this to produce or suggest possible communicative crisis responses. This seems related to the "shock", which highlights the interaction between the lack of experience and the unprecedented nature of the crisis to Bahrain- a factor working at the external level. Previous chapters indicated the Bahraini government could anticipate the protests because online platforms were used

since January to announce 14 February a day of mass public demonstrations (Al-Hasan, 2015; Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 92; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). Yet, “in the beginning no one knew how to handle a political crisis in this way” (I4). Note that Bahrain has a history of public protesting (Karolak, 2012), meaning it is not completely new to handle protests in Bahrain. Further, the government may have been through “some crisis experiences on organisational level in ministries. But an unprecedented comprehensive crisis on military, security, economic, and political levels was a new experience [to Bahrain]” (I1). Thus, the “rapidly deteriorating situation” with so much international and “media exposure” (I4) was new to Bahrain. This is reinforced by all the participants as they indicated the “new” situation that Bahrain “never” went through before.

The confusion resulting from the rapidly escalating crisis in Bahrain is not exceptional, as crisis communication literature draws attention to the difficulty of framing crises that unfold quickly (Coombs, 2011, p. 220), which was the case in the Bahraini crisis. Therefore, the above quote indicated the lack of crisis experience among the communicators, and highlights the interaction with the “new” crisis at the external level of influence.

Another indicator of the limited experience in handling crises is implied by discussion on lack of certain skills needed to communicate through national and foreign media during the crisis:

2. What happened in this crisis: the need for immediate response happened. There became a need for someone to come out, be ready, and answer. Someone to appear on screen, to appear live, to answer questions they do not know

on events that just happened. There became a need for someone to come out and have the information... we did not have this before. (I5)

To deal with this lack of experience, the IAA/BNA asked communicators from other governmental entities in Bahrain to join an emergency media team at the IAA. As indicated in excerpt 1, the team was formed after 3-4 days of the crisis unfold. The formation of this team suggests an interaction between the individual and professional routine levels of the hierarchal model. The individual level is represented in the presence of 'external' 'temporary' communicators. Regarding the professional routine level, the formation of an emergency team highlights a change in BNA's established processes of producing news to foreign media, and a shift in their approach in handling the crisis. Excerpt 1 indicates that forming the emergency team introduced the routine of preparing news drafts based on developments in other problematic Arab countries. The interrupted routine of content production by BNA worked as follows:

3. As [government] news agency, we have more than one news source. We either have ready press releases received from ministries, or an event covered by the agency's media team. We also have news published through Arab, Gulf, or foreign news agencies... We have agreements with some agencies so we publish their news, and they publish ours... After receiving news from different sources, we have a team comprised of editors and a chief editor. Tasks are allocated by the chief editor: you cover this story, you cover that. After this, the news returns to the chief editor and he/she publishes it on the wires service for international reach. Then we have the Internet team who takes the news from the wires system and publishes it on our website. (I1)



Note that the 'temporary' communicators do not specifically have previous experience in handling crises or qualifications in communication fields (e.g. public relations, public diplomacy, crisis communication/management, media/journalism). However, an observed pattern in their previous experience, qualifications, and workplace is related to having at least one academic degree from Western cultured nations (e.g. UK; US), spoke English more fluently comparing to other participants, and work in governmental organisations and positions with high international exposure. One participant indicated:

4. We needed to bring more people to help with the English language. We needed support with translating from Arabic to English and vice versa. We needed support in writing and revising our statements to make sure it is accurate. We needed support in translation and articulation of messages. We needed to make sure the messages are clear and accurate. (I1).

Note that BNA/IAA communicated with foreign media and publics in English language significantly before the crisis ([bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 2017). Their emphasis on communicating in English language could be related to the need to communicate internationally during the crisis, especially because the death of protestors at an early stage of the crisis, and the success of revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia drew international media attention to the Bahraini demonstrations (Karolak, 2012, p. 180). With this attention came negative publicity accusing authorities of human rights breaches and violence against the protestors (Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82), which increased association between the Bahraini protests and the 'Arab Spring'. Therefore,

the analysis illustrates that extra expertise was needed at the IAA/BNA to help with the crisis response. With this, the communication routine changed as the formation of the team introduced “monitoring”, “analysing”, and “suggesting” messages to the crisis response processes at the IAA/BNA (excerpt 1).

Comparing to the first few days of the crisis, the analysis argues that the lack of experience on the individual level had less connections with frame-building in the second and third examined moments of the crisis as the communicators started to accumulate experience on daily basis, and adjust their response to different incidents:

5. On the communicative level, no one was ready to handle a crisis like this. But we started to learn, every day we go through an experience and we learn from it. We also started to learn from others’ experiences. We started observing how other countries dealt with problematic events, and we started to correct our previous approaches (I1).

The interview analysis suggests that the lack of crisis experience, in interaction with the established communication routines as well as the lack of routines of how to deal with the unprecedented nature of the crisis to Bahrain are factors of the background contexts connected to public diplomacy frame-building in the first 3-4 days of the crisis. The frame analysis revealed the prominence of the ‘reform’ frame in BNA’s content in the first 3-4 days of the crisis, which represents a “denial” response strategy (Benoit, 1997) because it did not address the public protests and referred to them only as ‘sporadic incidents’. Referring to the protests as ‘sporadic incidents’ suggests elements of ‘minimisation’. Yet, the ‘denial’ prevailed because the general emphasis of

the frame remained on the celebratory aspect. At the time, the situation escalated in Bahrain, especially when two protestors died after clashes with security forces (BICI, 2011, p. 70). However, the frame excluded references to escalations and presented Bahrain as a reformed nation celebrating a democratic milestone. While the IRT suggests 'denial' is a common crisis response strategy to reduce actors' responsibility for an offensive act (Benoit, 1997; Benoit & Brinson, 1999; Brinson & Benoit, 1999), the interview analysis suggests that lack of experience in crisis communication, in interaction with the unprecedented nature of the crisis, is also connected to the denial of a crisis in public diplomacy messages.

Note that the 'denial' in the earliest response to the Bahraini crisis is not exclusively related to the communicators' lack of crisis experience and the 'new' crisis. The interview analysis argues that the 'denial' is also closely connected to, and dominated by the absence of higher authorities' stance on the protests, which is discussed further in the Professional Routines section (3) of this chapter.

The interview analysis also suggests that the involvement of communicators from other governmental entities, in combination with the change of the crisis response routines started to have relations with the frame-building at the IAA/BNA after 3-4 days of the crisis unfold: "We only started to have messages after 3-4 days about what to say and what we need to do" (I1). The frame analysis revealed that after 3-4 days of the protests' commencement, the most dominant frame in BNA's content changed from

'reform' to 'events'. The 'events' frame is different from the 'reform' frame in that it addresses the mass public protests in Bahrain. Yet, it presents them as normal practice of political rights and not a revolution as in other 'Arab Spring' countries. The frame analysis also suggested that the 'event's frame represents a "minimisation" response strategy (Benoit, 1997) because it downplays the significance of the protests and their demands. The interview analysis suggests that a change in the most prominent frames and crisis response strategies communicated through public diplomacy can be related to the change in the communicators responsible for crisis communication, and the change in response routines. Note that this is not the only contribution to frame-building at this stage of the crisis as will be discussed in other sections of this chapter.

Therefore, this section discussed how the individual level of the hierarchal model, in interaction with factors from other levels contributed to the IAA/BNA's frame-building of the Bahraini crisis, especially in the first examined moment. It argued connections between the communicators' lack of crisis communication experience and early framings of the crisis when BNA's frames tended to 'deny' a crisis. The literature suggests that denying a crisis is a common strategy to reduce oneself responsibility for an offensive act (Benoit, 1997). Furthermore, professional communicators may strategically remain silent on specific aspects of a crisis not to give the story "oxygen" (Dimitrov, 2015, p. 645), and prevent or limit the spread of news that may threaten the image or reputation of their sponsor among significant publics. However, the analysis argues that, besides strategic intents, denying a crisis can be also

related to public diplomacy practitioners' lack of experience in addressing unprecedented occurrence of a crisis. Moreover, the analysis suggested that engaging 'external' communicators with specific communication skills, and changing the response routines can be connected to the change of the most dominant frames and crisis response strategies communicated through public diplomacy.

As indicated earlier, the IAA/BNA frame-building during the first examined moment, when the frames and response strategies tended to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis, is not exclusively connected to the lack of experience on the individual level and the interactions discussed above. The next section discusses the contribution of the professional routines level to IAA/BNA's frame-building in different phases of the examined crisis.

### **3. PROFESSIONAL ROUTINES LEVEL: ABSENCE OF DECISION MAKING, AND PROMOTING POSITIVE NEWS**

In media context, the professional routines level of the hierarchal model concerns journalistic rituals of producing media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). For example, Western journalistic criteria of news production appreciate balanced coverage, which means offering different views of actors in a story (Starkey, 2007 in Dekavalla, 2016, p. 14). Other than balance, journalists produce news that should, for instance, resonate with cultural values, be dramatic, recent, and conflict-oriented (Ihlen, 2009, p. 73). In this thesis, however, the professional level focuses on the routines, norms, goals, and constraints of producing public diplomacy messages, keeping in mind that public diplomacy is defined and examined in a governmental context, where

the general goal of public diplomacy communicators is to change or maintain foreign public opinion for the benefit of the sponsoring government (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Etang, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). The aim of this section is to deliver insights on the contribution of this level to public diplomacy frame-building in response to the crisis, and how it interacted with other levels.

Two frame-building factors emerged from the data on the professional routines level: 1) disruption of top-down routines of building government messages represented in the absence of decision making by government seniors in the first 3-4 days of the crisis, and 2) the goal of communicating positive news about Bahrain to foreign media and publics. The analysis suggests connections between these factors and the construction of versions of reality that do not present the examined protests as a crisis or as an internal crisis. I discuss this in the following subsections.

### **3.1. Disruption of top-down work routines: absence of senior decision making**

Rituals of producing government messages work in bureaucratic and top-down routines of decision-making processes (Lee, 2009; Sanders, 2011). The majority of participants (3/5) indicated the disruption of this norm when they discussed the absence of higher authorities' stance on the protests when the crisis unfolded, and how it resulted in unclear messages about the protests to communicate with the media in the first 3-4 days of the crisis. This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

6. We only started to have messages after 3-4 days about what to say and what we need to do. As I told you, we did not have information [about the authorities' stance on the protests

before that]; there was an absence of decision making during a specific time. What is happening, what to say, we did not know. Journalists and media people would call and we did not know what to tell them. The situation was not clear, the information was not clear. (I1)

The excerpt indicates the communicators did not have approved messages on how or whether to address the protests or what they seem to perceive as a problematic situation. The disruption of established work routines is a common feature of crises in general (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006, p. 367; Coombs, 2006, p. 172; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997, p. 280). The disrupted routine discussed here specifically refers to the ritual of top-down message building at governmental organisations. The analysis suggests that the disruption of this ritual due to the absence of senior decision making on how or whether to address the protests is connected to IAA/BNA frame-building in the first 3-4 days of the crisis. As indicated earlier, the frame analysis revealed that the 'reform' frame prevailed in BNA's analysed content in the first 3-4 days, representing a 'denial' strategy. Thus, the analysis suggests that denying a crisis is not entirely connected to the communicators' lack of crisis experience and the unprecedented nature of the crisis to Bahrain, but also closely related to the lack of instructions and approval from decision-makers on how or whether to address a crisis.

The analysis also suggests that even if the communicators demonstrate experience and skills in handling the crisis, they still need the approval of higher authorities on addressing the crisis. Note how the communicator indicates in excerpt

1 that even when the emergency team members were more engaged in suggesting crisis responses and preparing news ahead of events, they still needed to “get approval on our messages” (I1). This implies that professional routines can overrule the contribution of the individual level to public diplomacy frame-building in a crisis. While this dominance can be common due to the bureaucratic rituals of decision making in government organisations (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014, p. 46; Lee, 2009; Sanders, 2011), the analysis suggests that denying a crisis in public diplomacy communications can be related to the disruption of top-down decision-making routines, and not necessarily to expertise or lack of a routine in containing a crisis.

Note that the interview analysis does not suggest that the absence of decision making disrupted the entire process of message building at the beginning of the crisis. As evident in the previous chapter, the IAA/BNA published messages in the first 3-4 days of the protests, focusing on celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NAC. With the absence of senior stance on the unfolding crisis, it seems the BNA communicated the last approved messages they had, which is the celebration of NAC’s anniversary. The BNA’s online archive holds content showing that celebrating NAC’s anniversary was the focus of BNA’s online content even few days before 14 February 2011 (e.g. ["GCC Secretary General lauds royal reform project"](#) (13.2.2011); ["Manama Municipality to hold festival"](#) (12.2.2011); ["HM King Hamad directs to pay BD 1000 for every Bahraini family"](#) (11.2.2011). Therefore, it is not the entire process of message building that was interrupted, but only decision making on addressing the crisis.



The individual level analysis argued that after 3-4 days of the crisis unfold the frame-building was connected to the formation of an emergency media team, and change in the response routines. The following subsection highlights another professional level factor that contributed to frame-building after 3-4 days of the protests' commencement and other key moments of the examined crisis.

### **3.2. Public diplomacy goals: promoting positive news**

Another frame-building factor that emerged from the data is related to the goal of public diplomacy practitioners, which is affecting foreign public opinion for the benefit of their sponsoring government (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Etang, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). Media is an important tool for governments to communicate their messages, and professional communicators, such as public diplomacy practitioners engage with the media from behind the scenes to influence media content (Edwards, 2012, p. 2; Gamson, 1988, p. 168; Hallahan, 1999, p. 228; Ihlen, 2009, p. 73; Jungblut, 2017, p. 387). It is argued that journalists' dependence on sources' materials is increasing, which enhances public diplomacy chances to communicate its frames through the media (Edwards, 2012, p. 2). Two communicators discussed the significance of promoting government messages to foreign media outlets to assure it is present in media content and read by foreign publics. This approach started taking place after 3-4 days of the commencement of the protests, when communicators from other governmental institutions were asked to join emergency media teams at the IAA. One participant, for instance, discussed forming a new routine in their

crisis response processes, specifically promoting “positive news” in light of foreign media’s “negative” coverage:

7. The [foreign] media outlets were... never on the side of the government. So we understood that, but it was our responsibility to get our story out there. And therefore, we formed a war room. Basically, we sat around the table every morning, and we jotted down and wrote down the positive aspects of the events of that day or the day before, and how to combat any negative press that came out in the last 24 hours. So we need to immediately respond to the negative articles, and correct a lot of the mistakes that were out there. And we also need to take a proactive role in putting out the positive news, which was always taken for granted that everybody will know about it. No, people don’t know about it, and we need to make sure that the reader gets it. (I4)

The excerpt suggests the communicators formed a new crisis routine while aiming to promote the government side of the story to foreign media and its audience. Note here that the participant discusses this effort in relation to what they present as “negative”, and also (from government’s perspective) incorrect media coverage. This suggests an interaction with the external level which looks at influences from outside the organisation practicing public diplomacy (see Section 5 of this chapter). Yet, it is worth noting here how the IAA/BNA communications changed their response routine to contest what is already out there by foreign media through promoting “positive news”.

The analysis suggests that the ritual of “putting out the positive news” contributed to the articulation of frames that do not present the situation as a crisis (‘events’; ‘unprecedented achievement’; ‘supported leadership’), and their representation of discourse strategies that limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis (‘minimisation’; ‘bolstering’; ‘differentiation’). One example of a frame that tended to promote government messages with emphasis on

positive aspects is the 'unprecedented achievement' frame, which dominated in BNA's analysed content during the third examined moment and represented a 'bolstering' (Benoit, 1997) response strategy. The third key moment focused on the publication of BICI report, which asserted human rights' violations by some members of the Bahraini security forces, and inability to prove direct connection between Iran and the unrest in Bahrain. Despite revealing these findings by BICI, the frame analysis revealed that the 'unprecedented achievement' frame continued to focus on the positive aspects of the situation. 3/5 communicators highlighted that despite these 'negative' findings by BICI, the governments' main messages maintained its focus on the positive aspects of establishing BICI. One communicator, for instance, indicated that the "main messages" after the publication of BICI report were:

8. The main message was: the report was unprecedented, voluntary [as the Commission was established by a royal order and not imposed by a third party]... [The report] was fully accepted by the King. It is okay if the report says there was systematic [mistreatment of detainees by some members of the security forces] but it is not [the political] system [policy]. So it [the violation] is an exception, a deviation from the norm. The main message is that we are prepared to implement all the recommendations [of the report]. (I5)

This example illustrates how the 'bolstering' strategy depicted by the 'unprecedented achievement' frame in BNA's analysed content is related to the goal of "putting out positive news". This is indicated in the above excerpt by emphasising the focus on the positive aspects of the BICI despite confirming human rights' abuses.

The process of "putting out positive news" also seems to contribute to other frames in BNA's analysed content. For instance, the frame analysis

revealed that the 'supported leadership' frame, which represents a 'differentiation' (Benoit, 1997) response strategy, tended to limit associations between Bahrain and the 'Arab Spring' by emphasising local, regional and international support for the authorities and its initiatives. Even when a frame tended to portray the situation as a crisis, the interview analysis suggests connections between the frame-building and the ritual of "putting out positive news". The 'sovereignty' frame, for instance, presents the situation as a crisis. Yet, the frame is articulated in BNA's news through references that emphasise the security forces' success in restoring order and return to normality. Thus, the frames' overarching tendency to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis and differentiate Bahrain from the 'Arab Spring' seems connected to the ritual of promoting "positive aspects" about the situation.

The above discussion suggests that offering 'positive' versions of reality by a government to contest unfavourable framing by foreign media during a crisis is related to a strategic choice of promoting positive messages on the sponsoring government. In public diplomacy, it is common to use state-owned communication platforms to promote content that pushes a government's agenda on a certain critical issue (Zhang et al., 2017, pp. 239-240). The analysis in this research revealed the Bahraini government used BNA's website to promote its favoured messages by specifically promoting positive news during the crisis. "The attempt by national actors to influence the media in foreign countries is the initial step in a public diplomacy process and involves dominating agenda building and frame-building" (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p.

448). Note though that the challenge to the Bahraini government at the time was not to gain foreign media's attention to the situation in Bahrain (agenda building), as the success of the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt already drew international attention to the Bahraini protests (Karolak, 2012, p. 180). Rather, the challenge was to promote their favoured frames to foreign media outlets with the aim to present positive aspects of the government's actions and to tackle what they perceived to be incorrect information in media reporting.

I argued in the previous chapter that foreign governments, especially in the West, were not concerned about human rights' violations in Bahrain as much as in other Arab countries, such as Libya (Maguire & Vickers, 2013). Foreign media, on the other hand, had more negative reactions against the Bahraini authorities (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). It is argued that a nations' success in promoting its agenda and framing to foreign media is related to cultural and political congruency between itself and the target nation (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 463). Although it is beyond the focus of this thesis to evaluate the success of Bahraini public diplomacy frames in appearing in foreign media's content, it is worth noting that the cultural and political congruency could be connected to the unfavourable coverage in foreign media, especially in Western contexts with high appreciation to democratic values. For example, major American newspapers were more supportive of the protesters, while they presented the Bahraini government as oppressive authority against democratic freedoms (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). One interviewee indicated that it was difficult to promote the Bahraini government's messages to foreign media, especially because it came from a government that represents "an

Arab Gulf state, a kingdom that is not a democracy, so there is already bias against us” (15). Thus, the Bahraini public diplomacy promotion of positive news, especially those focusing on reforms and democratic values do not seem the most convincing messages to promote to foreign media, especially because the country’s political system as a monarchy in the Middle-East raises questions on the level of democratic policies of governance.

Therefore, this section discussed connections between public diplomacy’s professional routines and frame-building during the Bahraini crisis. First, it argued that the absence of seniors’ stance on the situation, in combination with the communicators’ lack of crisis experience and absence of crisis communication routines when facing the unprecedented nature of the crisis, has close connections with the earliest responses’ tendency to ‘deny’ a crisis. Then, the analysis argued that public diplomacy’s routines of promoting positive messages to combat negative coverage in foreign media contributed to the articulation of frames that represent response strategies that tend to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis (bolstering; differentiation; attacking the accuser).

These professional routines factors also interacted with factors at the organisational level, as discussed below.

#### **4. ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL: REDEFINING THE SITUATION, PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANIES, VISITS TO FOREIGN MEDIA, AND UNPREPAREDNESS**

The organisational level of influence looks at organisational structures, policies, and processes that lead to variation in content between media organisations, and “seeks to explain variations in content that cannot be attributed to differences in routines and individuals” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 139). In this study, it looks at processes and structures of the organisation practicing public diplomacy (IAA/BNA), showing some of the background contexts at the time of the government’s communication of frames that limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis, or externalise the causes of the crisis.

Two of the frame-building factors that emerged from the data at the organisational level are: redefining the crisis by government representatives through excluding negative aspects about the crisis from government narratives; and the IAA/BNA unpreparedness for crisis situations. The analysis also revealed organisational processes that may not have direct connection with the articulation of frames in BNA’s content, but highlight organisational efforts to promote specific versions of reality about the crisis to foreign media and publics. These processes are employing foreign public relations’ agencies and visiting certain foreign media outlets. The analysis argues these organisational level factors, in combination with factors from other levels of influence, were at the background context of communicating frames that limit the crisis or externalise its causes. I discuss this in the following subsections.

#### **4.1. Redefining the situation in government narratives**

This factor focuses on the process of excluding references to internal negative aspects of the crisis from IAA/BNA's content aimed at foreign media and publics. The interview analysis suggests connections between this factor and the analysed frames tendency to externalise the causes of the crisis and represent a discourse strategy of 'shifting the blame' (Benoit, 1997), especially in the second examined moment. For instance, two interviewees problematized IAA's approaches of responding to foreign media's coverage which emphasised the internal political tensions in Bahrain during the crisis (Al-Rawi, 2015; Tawfeeq, 2011; Yateem, 2014). Instead, the next excerpt highlights that the government approach was to redefine the situation in their communication with foreign media, without addressing the internal aspects causing the crisis:

9. We used to see the deficiency in some of the government side people. They insisted on presenting a counter narrative, another reality from the existing reality being covered in the [foreign] media... my approach: ... let us address the current narrative, and counter argue, and tackle this issue... so we stayed away from conspiracy stuff. We stayed away from foreign interference stuff [after November 2011]. These are domestic political issues. We will address them as domestic political issues within terms and resolutions in Bahrain. (15)

The quote highlights how some government representatives redefined the situation by providing "another reality from the existing reality being covered in the media". Sectarian tensions escalated rapidly during the Bahraini crisis, especially in the second examined moment (BICI, 2011, p. 167). Instead of addressing this, some government representatives tended to present the crisis as a result of "foreign interference" and "conspiracy" and not "domestic



political issues". These "counter argue[ments]" bare similarities with the frames observed in BNA's analysed content particularly in the second examined moment ('existential threat'; 'sovereignty'), suggesting connections between frame-building at this stage of the crisis and the approach of redefining the crisis as a result of foreign conspiracy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the frame analysis revealed that in the second examined moment the 'existential threat' frame prevailed in BNA's content, and it worked with the 'sovereignty' frame to present the unrest in Bahrain as a result of 'foreign conspiracy' triggered by 'Iran'. The frame analysis also argued that these frames represent 'shifting the blame' and 'attacking the accuser' discourse strategies respectively (Benoit, 1997). Note that 'shifting the blame' is a variation of the 'denial' strategy (Benoit, 1997). This suggests that denying an internal crisis in BNA's analysed content is not always connected to lack of crisis experience, the unprecedented crisis, or absence of decision making as in the earliest responses to the crisis discussed previously.

Conversely, the interview analysis suggests that at later stages of the crisis the denial of the internal causes of the crisis was a choice by government representatives who shifted the blame to "conspiracy" and "foreign interference". 'Shifting the blame' and 'attacking the other' are image repair strategies used to limit the perceived responsibility for the offensive act (Benoit, 1997, pp. 178-179). Social rewards and punishments are a function of how responsibility is attributed for the positive or negative consequences of

actions, and this applies to the practice of public diplomacy in a crisis context (Mor, 2009, p. 226). “Given that actors seek to avoid punishment and obtain rewards, they have an incentive to manipulate the attribution of responsibility and the perception of consequences of significant others. Thus, a ‘predicament of image protection’ occurs when the public image of the actor is under threat of being held responsible for negative consequences (and thus blamed).” (ibid, pp. 226-227) With the attempt to avoid punishment, “a key function of political discourse is to attempt to hide negatives” (Maguire & Vickers, 2013, p. 20), and the negative here is the internal sectarian conflict in Bahrain, which could present the Bahraini protests as another Arab Spring caused by internal issues, and thus legitimise the protests as upheavals against oppressive regimes. Therefore, the Bahraini government’s approach of redefining the situation by shifting the blame to “foreign interference” corresponds to common public diplomacy practices of reallocating responsibility for an offensive act to avoid negative consequences. Furthermore, and as indicated in the previous chapter, the combination of the strategies of ‘attacking the accuser’ and ‘shifting the blame’ in BNA’s analysed content represents a strategy of “attacking the other”, which is a common public diplomacy response to defend a nation’s image in a crisis, especially in an effort to reduce its responsibility for an offensive act among foreign publics (Mor, 2009, p. 228). Redefining the situation by “building/creating” a new issue is a strategy to “switch or distract the media focus or public attention by creating a different issue” (Haung et al., 2005, p. 230). This approach of creating a different issue is different from “reframing the facets within the same

issue but in a larger or favourable context” (ibid). For instance, I discussed in the Professional Routines section (3) that the routine of “putting out the positive news” contributed to the articulation of frames that limit the crisis. Note that a government can still promote its favoured positive message if it addressed unfavourable aspects or messages and put across their perspective on them. Nevertheless, the interview analysis suggests that with the promotion of “positive news” and “external threat”, BNA/IAA frame-building not only reframed the facets of issues, but also suggested alternative frames (i.e. “another reality from the existing reality being covered in the [foreign] media” (15)). This was specifically evident in the second examined moment by ‘shifting the blame’ to “foreign interference”. Note that IAA’s exclusion of negative messages that appear in foreign media’s content is not due to lack of attention to its content. Section 5 discusses how this organisational level factor interacted with the external role of foreign media’s coverage, especially where the communicators indicate attention to foreign media’s ‘unfavourable’ coverage.

The following subsection discusses the role of foreign public relations companies in promoting the Bahraini government’s favoured messages to foreign media and publics.

#### **4.2. Foreign public relations companies**

The analysis revealed that the IAA/BNA consulted foreign public relations agency on crisis communication. Yet, one participant argued that the role of the agency was limited to initiating contacts and establishing networks with significant foreign media outlets:

10. And no matter people say that, you know, yeah PR companies [did the work for us] or whatever. Believe me PR companies, they are good. They are good in the beginning, why? Because, Oh I know this guy in the Times newspaper, then you call him to see whether you can see him. They open doors for you. But in the end, who needs to go to the Times, or who needs to go to the Financial Times? Bahraini has to go. So we have to do the work. (I4)

While the above quote suggests the role of public relations agencies was limited to networking and gaining access to the media through their established relationships with journalists, previous research indicates that the Bahraini authorities employed several Western public relations companies to rebuild an image of stability, which has been the core of Bahrain's public diplomacy efforts since the examined crisis unfolded (Jones, 2017, p. 326). These companies include "Bell Pottinger, Qorvis, and M&C Saatchi", and they focused on promoting more positive image of Bahrain by promoting investment in the Kingdom to blur the negative image resulting from accusations of human rights abuses (ibid).

The companies' emphasis on 'promoting positive image' seems to interact with IAA/BNA's routine of "putting out the positive news". It also suggests connections with the analysed frames tendency to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis through focusing on positive messages and excluding references to negative aspects of the situation, such as human rights breaches, violations against the protestors, and internal sectarian tensions. As mentioned earlier, IAA's use of foreign public relations' companies during the crisis indicates organisational effort to promote a specific version of reality about Bahrain to foreign media and publics.

Employing such foreign agencies is not new in the GCC region. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, American public relations firms, law companies, and consultants were employed when the Saudi image in the US was seriously damaged by its connections with terrorism after the 9/11 attacks (Zhang & Benoit, 2004, p. 162). Some of the crisis response strategies employed by these foreign companies succeeded, and a key success factor was the consistency between the messages that represent these strategies and the actions of the Saudi authorities. For example, revoking bin Laden's Saudi citizenship was consistent with denying the country had any connection with terrorism (ibid, p. 166). In the case of Bahrain, one communicator indicated that the foreign company's "insistence on presenting a positive image cost us [the government] the confidence of foreign media due to the void between the messages and the escalation of events on ground" (12). Nevertheless, this 'mistrust' cannot be entirely blamed on the approach of foreign public relations' companies in communicating about Bahrain to foreign media and publics. As revealed in this analysis, it was also the government's approach to promote positive news, redefine the situation and exclude reference to internal problematic issues- approaches which also create void between the government's narrative and the escalations on ground.

Additional frame-building factor at the organisational level is official visits by delegations from the IAA to certain foreign media outlets to promote the Bahraini government's perspective on the crisis. This is discussed directly below.

### 4.3. Visits to foreign media organisations

The interview analysis revealed that the IAA organised official visits to foreign media outlets which had significant international recognition and, at the same time, was against the Bahraini government in its coverage of the crisis.

One communicator, for example, mentioned:

11. With a lot of American stations, we were weak. ABC, NBC. Those stations, no one knew them [at the IAA/BNA or networked with them before the crisis]. Wall Street Journal, New York Times, they had negative position [against the Bahraini government]. We visited them several times and managed to lessen the damage. I went with young representatives from the IAA to put a human face on the problem and make our perspective on the issue more convincing.  
(14)

This factor may not have direct connections with the articulation of frames in BNA's content. Yet, as mentioned earlier, it indicates IAA's efforts to promote specific versions of reality about Bahrain and the crisis to foreign media. Sending officials in speaking tours is one of public diplomacy's image repair activities (Zhang & Benoit, 2004, p. 162). This refers to the vital role of foreign news media in shaping the public opinion on other countries, especially because, unlike domestic issues, foreign news are beyond an individual's direct experience (Lim & Seo, 2009, p. 204). Personal communication with relevant stakeholders, like the media, is also a common practice by European professional communicators in the context of organisational crises to repair a threatened image (Verhoeven et al, 2014, p. 109).

As suggested by its label, the factor of visiting foreign media outlets interacted with foreign media's coverage at the external level of influence. For

example, the coverage of the Bahraini crisis in the New York Times, one of the media organisations visited by representatives from the IAA, was overwhelmingly against the Bahraini government (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Instead, it supported the protestors by primarily using them as news sources, and ended the news stories with quotes that trigger readers' sympathy towards the demonstrators (ibid). This could be connected to the political ideology in the US, which favours people seeking democracy over authoritarian rule (Guzman, 2016).

I discussed earlier that the Bahraini messages were not convincing to foreign media. This was attributed to, for example, the mismatch between the messages and the actual events (I2), and the emphasis on democratic values by a government that represents a monarchy rather than a democracy (I5). The interview analysis suggests that the IAA representatives' visits to foreign media outlets were to deal with the failure to promote its favoured public diplomacy messages on the crisis to such significant foreign news organisations. According to one interviewee, "it took over a year before we were able to gain some kind of respect, credibility and understanding... Getting to know the [foreign] media journalists, I think, played also a great role. Once they get to know you, and you accept and you take part of the responsibility for things that did go wrong, then you will earn their respect" (I4). Thus, this indicates that it was not until the government accepted responsibility for some of the events and gained trust of the media that it increased the government's

potential to influence media reporting and having their voices and views heard in the media.

#### **4.4. Organisational unpreparedness for crises**

Another factor observed at the organisational level of analysis is the IAA/BNA unpreparedness for a crisis. Cloudman and Hallahan (2006, p. 367) present organisations' preparedness for crises as "an important element of anticipating a crisis that involves mentally rehearsing scenarios and equipping the organisation with systems and procedures so that responses are appropriate, sufficient, and timely". A key indicator of an organisation's preparedness for a crisis is having a written plan which can pre-determine best practices, and save precious response time (ibid, p. 368). Another indicator of preparedness is when such plans are supported by "tactical preparation", such as the appointment of a crisis team to anticipate contingencies and then take charge during a crisis. I discussed in previous sections of this chapter that the communicators at the IAA/BNA were "shocked" as the Bahraini crisis unfolded despite their ability to anticipate a problematic situation due to the upheavals in other Arab countries, and the online announcements of Bahraini protests echoing these demonstrations. This suggests that unpreparedness for crisis also influenced frame-building at least at a very early stage of the protests. Further, excerpt (1) indicated that it was not until 3-4 days of the crisis unfold that an emergency team was put together to handle crisis response: "an emergency media team was formed [after 3-4 days]... The team's mission was to closely observe the situation: monitor, analyse, and then suggest how to deal with the situation" (I1). This was not presented by the interviewees as a



decision based on pre-planning for potential crisis situations, suggesting the IAA/BNA's unpreparedness for a crisis situation in this aspect.

A further indicator of an organisation's preparedness for a potential crisis is preparing communicators for responding through training (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006). Yet, the analysis revealed that this was not done at the IAA/BNA, suggesting the organisation's unpreparedness for potential crises.

One interviewee, for instance, stated:

12. We learnt a lot from this crisis. As communicators we learnt how to respond and interact, how to perceive different events, how to use language, tone, and articulate. We needed training of course. So we started various training programmes to handle media in crises: spokesperson, online media, translation, political analysis. All these training programmes did not exist before, but due to the crisis we had to adapt, and change even our training programmes. (I1)

Another tangible measurement for organisational crisis preparedness that was not considered by the IAA/BNA is the appointment, training, and empowerment of one or more spokespersons who can speak with authority and a single voice (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006). It is stated:

13. A government spokesperson was nonexistent. Look at the events from the early beginning, from February, who spoke? ... The Crown Prince appeared in February. Yet, it is not his role to be a spokesperson. He tried to contain the situation and calm it down when he came out and spoke, yet the purpose was not even to address the media. We did not have spokespersons between February and October. (I5)

Thus, besides the lack of crisis experience at the individual level, the IAA/BNA did not prepare its communicators for potential crisis situations through training. Nevertheless, the analysis reveals that the IAA/BNA took

some measurements after the crisis to address its lack of preparedness in handling the examined crisis. One example is the training programmes highlighted in excerpt 12.

Another tactic to deal with the lack of preparedness at the IAA was widening the communication networks with foreign media:

14. After the crisis we initiated work with many media organisations we didn't work with before. We activated agreements with the Spanish and Italian [media]. In India, we are now working with the biggest news agency, PTI. We expanded the agreement with the Russian [agency]. We initiated cooperation with China and South Korea. We have agreements with the French and now negotiating expansion. With the Spanish our goal is to cover Latin America because we did not have a voice reached there... in the Arab region we increased cooperation with the Egyptian news agency as the situation changed there and the image on the Bahraini situation did not reach Egyptian people clearly. The Bahraini [official] image did not reach many Arab publics. So we had to activate agreements with many Arab countries to publish news about Bahrain daily, and deliver the true image. (I1)

Changes in the IAA/BNA processes were also observed at a strategic level, as two strategies were built to deal with the consequences of the examined crisis:

15. A year after the crisis there were two strategies. One developed by Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammad [CEO of the IAA at the time] to improve Bahraini [official] media and deal with the challenges arising from the crisis. The other strategy was put by Samira Rajab [Minister of State for Information Affairs (April 2012-December 2014)]. It was about the [official] media and improving it. Both strategies involved the communication challenges we faced in 2011 and how to deal with it. (I1)

Thus, this subsection highlighted how the articulation of Bahraini public diplomacy frames that tend to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis, or externalize its causes took place in a context of unprepared organisation for

a potential crisis. However, the analysis suggests that the IAA/BNA learnt lessons from the crisis, and took measurements to fix the consequences of the 2011 crisis through the development of communication strategies, and, for example, training the communicators for crisis communication. This indicates that the examined crisis is a turning point in the Bahraini government practices of public diplomacy in response to crises. For example, to deal with the aftermath of the publication of BICI report, the Bahraini government took a strategic initiative of inviting celebrities in the capacity of their respective professions to Bahrain (e.g. musicians; singers; pop stars). Those praise their visits to the Kingdom using rhetoric that mirrors that of the state. This is significant as “celebrities can provide a mediating function between foreign publics ... [that] can serve to introduce ideologically weighted sentiments to audiences who would not necessarily describe themselves as political” (Jones, 2017, p. 326).

Therefore, this section discussed the contribution of organisational level factors to the frame-building at the IAA/BNA. It argued that the process of redefining the situation without addressing the internal problematic aspects of a crisis contributed to the articulation of frames that tend to ‘shift the blame’ in public diplomacy messages instead of addressing an internal crisis. It also argued that this factor, in interaction with the employment of foreign public relations’ companies, and the ritual of promoting positive news contribute the articulation of public diplomacy frames that limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the Bahraini government’s efforts to promote its favoured messages went beyond

publishing them on state-owned online platforms, and involved visiting foreign media outlets to promote these messages. It also highlighted that the articulation of public diplomacy messages during the 2011 crisis took place in an organisation unprepared for a crisis despite its ability to anticipate it.

As indicated in previous sections of this chapter, foreign media's coverage had close connections with IAA/BNA's framing of the Bahraini crisis. The next section discusses the external frame-building factors, including the role of foreign media, social media, and negotiations between the Bahraini authorities and political societies.

## **5. EXTERNAL LEVEL: FOREIGN MEDIA, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND NEGOTIATIONS**

In Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model, the external level of influence is labelled 'extra-media' and covers influences on content from outside the media organisation. In this thesis, however, it is labelled 'external level' because it looks at the factors from outside the organisation practicing public diplomacy (IAA/BNA). The interview analysis revealed three frame-building factors at this level: 1) foreign media's coverage, 2) social media, and 3) negotiations between the authorities and political societies. The analysis suggests the external level factors worked in combination with factors at other levels of the hierarchal model, contributing to the articulation of frames that tend to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis. I discuss this directly below.

### 5.1. Foreign media's coverage

Previous chapters indicated that the Bahraini authorities faced negative publicity across foreign media due to accusations of violence and human rights' breaches (Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). Major American newspapers (New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post), for example, framed the crisis strongly against the Bahraini government by presenting it as an authority against democratic change (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Other media (e.g. BBC; CNN; Al-Alam TV) also presented the Bahraini authorities as violating human rights, and oppressing Shiite citizens for not allowing them to protest and using violent responses against demonstrations (["Mushaima Talks to Al-Alam TV", 2011](#); ["Bahrain Demands Further Reforms", 2011](#); ["Thousands Protest to Overthrow Bahraini Government", 2011](#)). Nevertheless, the interview analysis revealed that the communicators did not only perceive foreign media's coverage as negative. Rather, all the interviewees discussed an issue of "media fallacy", where the communicators perceived that some foreign media outlets intentionally published false information about Bahrain and did not give the government the chance to deliver their message:

16. Our problem was with foreign media channels which had credibility among foreign publics and published false news about Bahrain and the events happening here. This phenomenon created pressure on the [official] Bahraini media. They did not give Bahrain the chance to defend itself.  
(I3)

Examples of the "false news" discussed by the participants revolve around spreading "false information on injuries and deaths among protestors", and

“the use of violence against the protestors” like “bombings and air attacks” (I1; I2; I5). Noteworthy is the fact that the IAA provided the BICI with a list of factual errors in foreign media’s coverage of the crisis between February and March 2011. The list included transcripts from the coverage of “Reuters news agency, Al-Quds Alarabi newspaper, the BBC, Elaph website, the Kuwaiti newspapers Al-Jarida, Al-Dar, AlRai, Al-Qabas, the Lebanese Al-Akhbar, the Egyptian Al-Shorouq, Radio Monte Carlo, CNN, Al-Jazeera.net, Al-Hurra television station and Dutch Radio” (BICI, 2011, p. 395). BICI investigations confirmed certain foreign news media and even some protestors spread false news about Bahrain. For instance, the Commission’s investigations revealed that at Salmanya Medical Complex (SMC), the main governmental hospital in Bahrain where injured protestors were taken, some medical staff members spread false news and rumours to the media about the situation and number of injuries (BICI, 2011, p. 213). Further, it confirmed one individual, at least, impersonated SMC medical staff and gave false information to unknown news agency to spread exaggerated false information on the injuries and deaths among protestors (ibid). Moreover, it asserted that Iranian media’s coverage of the Bahraini crisis tended to incite sectarian tensions in the Bahraini society through its exaggerated coverage (Yateem, 2014, pp. 99-100).

Within this negative media context presented by the communicators as ‘false coverage’, IAA’s main goal was to “correct false information published across media” (I2). The analysis suggests that these perceptions of false coverage started to have connections with the frame-building after 3-4 days of

the protests' commencement. One communicator, for instance, described how IAA and BNA started noticing 'false' coverage, and how they responded:

17. We started paying attention to foreign media [after 3-4 days]... especially as false news started to spread and increase at the level of information about the victims, the deaths, the detentions, everything, even the vocabulary used [like revolution]... As a news agency our role was to communicate with all agencies we had agreements with, and which operate in different languages: Russian, Chinese, Italian, Indian, German, and French. We started to activate our work with each agency we had agreement or cooperation with by directly communicating with them to assure the delivery of Bahrain's news and the true situation ... [because] after the fourth or fifth day [of the protests], there started to be more focus on Bahrain [in foreign media]. There were statements coming from countries, and stances from countries that did not know what exactly was happening in Bahrain. Therefore, the target was to... present the situation to foreign media outlets. (I1)

This excerpt suggests how, after 4-5 days of the protests' commencement, the communicators started to pay attention to foreign media's content, particularly 'false' coverage on Bahrain. Section 4.1 of this chapter (Redefining the situation in government narratives) argued that IAA/BNA's responses excluded any negative narrative by foreign media from their responses and, instead, presented "another reality from the existing reality being covered in the [foreign] media" (I5). Yet, this section argues that despite excluding foreign media's negative narratives, foreign media's coverage contributed to the articulation of frames that contest foreign media's 'false' coverage.

Foreign media's influence on frame-building in the IAA/BNA did not work in isolation. For instance, the above excerpt (17) indicates the interaction with

professional routines, where the communicators started “directly communicating” with foreign news agencies to assure the delivery of the official Bahraini messages and the “true situation”. I also highlighted in section 3.2 (promoting positive news) that a ‘new’ response routine was introduced to IAA/BNA’s daily processes, particularly “putting out the positive news” to “correct a lot of the mistakes out there”, “combat any negative coverage” and “get our [the government] story out there” (I4). On the organisational level too, the IAA organised official visits to significant foreign media outlets to “lessen the damage” and “make our [the government] perspective on the issue more convincing” to foreign media organisations which had “negative position” (I4) against the Bahraini government.

The interview analysis suggests that the interaction between these factors, spearheaded by unfavourable coverage in foreign media contributed to the articulation of frames that limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis to counter foreign media’s ‘negative’ coverage. Examples of these frames are ‘events’, ‘supported leadership’ and ‘unprecedented achievement’ which do not present the examined context as a crisis, and instead represent crisis response of ‘minimisation’, ‘differentiation’, and ‘bolstering’ respectively. Previous sections of this chapter argued that the tendency of these frames and crisis responses to limit the presentation of the situation as a crisis is mainly connected to routines of promoting positive news, and this section illustrated how this routine was put in place to combat unfavourable coverage and what the communicators perceived as “false news”. The articulation of public



diplomacy frames that do not present the situation as a crisis thus seems to be connected to activities of contesting unfavourable coverage in foreign media.

Note that external contexts, like media, work as powerful influences on government decision making during crises (Lee, 2009, p. 75). In crises, relevant actors enter framing contests to win media attention and favourable coverage (Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 449). Media coverage is considered successful when the event, topic, or political actor is framed in a way that supports the positions and commentary of one side in the conflict or that is detrimental to the other (Entman, 2003, p. 417; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 270). The analysis in this study suggests that foreign media's coverage was not 'successful' from the perspective of the interviewed communicators, and therefore, IAA/BNA's crisis responses targeted at foreign media and publics needed to contest this unfavourable coverage.

Note too that "limiting" or "ignoring" a crisis is observed in Arab and Middle-Eastern countries' communication with or through the media even before the Arab Spring (Avraham, 2015). This is observed in communications by Egypt and Turkey to promote their countries as tourist destinations post crises (ibid). In the case of Bahrain, 'limiting' the presentation of the situation as a crisis in BNA's analysed content seems connected to unfavourable coverage in foreign media to combat "false news". Nevertheless, and as stated earlier in different positions of this thesis, the Bahraini government (IAA/BNA) did not win the framing contest with foreign media, especially as the coverage,

particularly in Western news media was against the Bahraini government (i.e. Bowe & Hoewe, 2011).

The interview analysis also revealed that frame-building at the IAA/BNA was not only connected to unfavourable content in mainstream media. The following section discusses connections with social media too.

## **5.2. Social media**

The interview analysis revealed that public diplomacy frame-building at the IAA/BNA during the Bahraini crisis was also connected to what was at the time unprecedented role of social media. The following interview fragment, for instance, highlights how the influence of social media on public opinion was an element of surprise to government communicators during the examined crisis, how it interacted with the unprecedented nature of the crisis to Bahrain, and coverage in foreign media. The excerpt also highlights connections between these factors and not addressing the crisis in the government's messages when the crisis unfolded:

18. The first thing that everyone has to be aware of is that this was a very new phenomenon and crisis that Bahrain was never exposed to before in front of the world with so much media technology. And even though there were announcements of the events [the protests] that were going to happen on 14 February, I think as events deteriorated the government and the country was put in a situation never faced before. We saw what happened in Egypt only few weeks earlier, and we saw social media in Egypt playing a huge role in the change of the regime. But we never thought that not only social media but the normal mainstream media would affect how opinions would be formed on Bahrain. So basically, immediately I think the first mistake that the Bahraini government did that they didn't respond, they did nothing [about addressing a crisis]. That was a mistake.

They did nothing; they were like a deer caught in the headlights. Just froze in the middle of the road. (I4)

The role of social media is one of the most studied topics in relation to the Arab Spring phenomenon, for its vital role in the unfold and development of the events in several Arab countries at the time (Howard et al., 2011). The core influence of social media during the Arab Spring is enabling mass publics to circulate their messages timely, nationally and internationally, to elites and to publics alike, exposing oppressions by Arab regimes and triggering sympathy toward publics rallying for political and economic rights (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). According to the quote above, the IAA/BNA undermined the potential influence of social media on the situation in Bahrain despite noticing its critical role in overthrowing the regime in Egypt, and arranging for mass public protests in Bahrain to echo the demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia (Al-Hasan, 2015; Weatherby & Longworth, 2011, p. 92; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). Social media was also used by Bahraini publics during the Bahraini crisis to present their own perspective on the situation and reflect on how it relates to their own lives (Howard et al., 2011). This unprecedented role of social media in communicating public's experience and views with a potential to influence opinions about the situation in Bahrain seems to leave the government in "shock" (I1) as they "just froze in the middle of the road" (I4).

The interview analysis suggests this 'surprising' role of social media is another factor connected to frame-building at the beginning of the examined crisis, where the dominant frame in BNA's content was 'reform', and the response strategy was 'denial'. Other factors that contributed to the 'denial'

response strategy are the lack of crisis experience at the individual level, the unprecedented nature of the crisis at the external level, and the absence of decision making at the professional level. I discussed these factors in previous sections of this chapter.

The role of social media in the framing of the Bahraini crisis was not limited to the early stages. For instance, one communicator indicated that the government had to strengthen its presence on social media platforms to assure the delivery of their messages:

19. The social media revolution surfaced during the events in Arab countries [Arab Spring]. It was the fastest platform to deliver information and to build an image. [In Bahrain] the attacks [against the government and its policies] started from social media. The false news [against the government] started from social media. The threats [against Bahrain] started from social media. Harassing publics [by other publics with different views on the protests] started from social media. So we [IAA/BNA] had to be present [on social media] as an official and media organisation and perform as the only official source of government messages. (I1)

The interviews did not show how social media influenced the articulation of BNA's online content. Nevertheless, the excerpt highlights an interaction with the organisational level, where IAA/BNA started using social media platforms to promote the government's favoured messages. Note that the IAA/BNA did not use such platforms as a main source of government messages before the crisis, which is another indicator that the crisis represented a turning point, not just for Bahraini public diplomacy, but government communication in general. One communicator, for instance, mentioned that when the crisis unfolded:

20. We used our personal accounts on Facebook and Twitter to correct false news published by the protestors... at a later stage we had official accounts for the IAA/BNA on Twitter and Facebook to publish official messages and correct false news such as the number of deaths, locations of events, and using bombs against the demonstrators. (I2)

Therefore, the interview analysis suggests that at the early stage of the crisis, social media, in combination with factors from other levels of influence was at the background of communicating a frame that tended to 'deny' a crisis in Bahrain. The analysis also argues that at later stages of the crisis it contributed to the Bahraini government's efforts to promote its favoured messages by pushing the IAA/BNA to use social media platforms to promote its favoured versions of reality on the crisis.

Note that even before the proliferation in the use of social media, real-time media in a globalised world enabled corporations, countries, and individuals reach into the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005, p. 340). This increased the challenge raised by the emergence of non-state actors in the international relations' environment, which suggests public diplomacy is no longer mere government practice. Rather, the involvement of private individuals and groups in public diplomacy challenges governments' public diplomacy efforts because these actors' agenda may differ from the governments' (Dolea, 2015, p. 278; Van Dyke & Vercic, 2009, p. 916; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 264; Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 110). In the examined case, the protestors' ability to use social media to contest, contradict and challenge the government's framing of the situation contributed to the Bahraini government's public diplomacy efforts by

specifically starting to use such platforms as an official source of its messages. Using such platform by the government is not exceptional, as a number of studies highlight the use of social media as a public diplomacy tool in countries like the US (Zhang, 2013; Zhong & Lu, 2013), South Korea and Japan (Park & Lim, 2014).

Another external level factor is the negotiations between the Bahraini authorities and political societies. I discuss this below.

### **5.3. Negotiations between the government and political societies**

Previous chapters indicated that due to the escalation of the situation in Bahrain, King Hamad delegated the Crown Prince to call for a comprehensive dialogue among all components of the Bahraini society to listen to their demands and solve any issues (BICI, 2011, p. 131; [bna.bh](http://bna.bh), 2011; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3). The interview analysis revealed connections between these negotiations and frame-building in the first key moment. It also suggests that the failure of these negotiations has relations with the shift in the most prominent frames between the first and second examined moments.

This is exemplified in the following quote:

21. For the first 3-4 weeks there was a complete lid on any media [by the Bahraini government in terms of addressing a crisis]. And I think now I understand maybe because there were a lot of negotiations taking place... between the political societies involved in the protests in the roundabout, and the decision makers and authorities here in Bahrain. And they were trying to make a deal to find a solution and a way out. What we all know is: the political societies involved did not accept any kind of compromise and therefore the deal fell through. Then they [the government] realized they have a bigger problem now in their hand... and that is not

only they did not engage with the media from day one, but they were hoping that that would lead to a solution. The negotiations did not happen so now they have a bigger problem that they didn't engage from day one [in a crisis narrative], they engaged 4 weeks later. (14)

The previous chapter suggested that frames communicated in the first key moment ('reforms'; 'events'; 'supported leadership') do not problematize the situation in Bahrain. Even when the 'events' frame acknowledged the protests, it represented a 'minimisation' response strategy (Benoit, 1997) when it reduced the protests to tolerated expression of opinions and excluded the escalations resulting from the death of two protestors after clashes with security forces. The above quote suggests that using a 'minimisation' (Benoit, 1997) discourse strategy in the second half of the first examined moment is connected to government aspirations to solve the situation through negotiations without having to address a problem. Minimising a crisis in such case is common as crisis communicators will tend to symbolically solve the crisis by argumentatively altering perceptions in a manner favourable to their interests (Hearit & Courtright, 2003, p. 83).

However, the negotiations failed around 13 March 2011 (BICI, 2011, p. 131; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 3), and the above excerpt suggests it was only then when the Bahraini government engaged in a narrative that problematizes the situation. Hence, it changed its crisis response. The frame analysis revealed a change in BNA's most prominent frames between the first and second key moments. In the second examined moment, the 'existential threat' frame portrayed the protests as a suspicious movement triggered by a foreign

conspiracy to infiltrate into the Gulf region. The frame analysis also suggested this was a shift from a “minimisation” to “shifting the blame” response strategy (Benoit, 1997). This suggests that external factors, like failure of political solutions, can push a government to redefine the situation, including a radical shift from portraying normality through a ‘minimisation’ strategy to highly threatening crisis. Note though, as I discussed in section 4.1 when the Bahraini government addressed the crisis in the second examined moment it tended to portray the situation as a foreign conspiracy without reference to the internal problematic aspect of the crisis. This highlights the interaction between the external and the organisational levels in the framing of the crisis during the second examined moment, where the frame analysis suggested BNA’s dominant frame was ‘existential threat’ and the discourse strategy was ‘shifting the blame’. This is also connected to the ideological level of influence which is discussed in the next section.

Therefore, this section discussed connections between the external level of the hierarchal model and frame-building. It highlighted that external factors like unfavourable coverage in foreign and social media can contribute to the articulation of public diplomacy frames that limit the crisis and construct more positive image of the situation to counter negative and/or inaccurate coverage. It also highlighted interactions between such external factors and the professional and organisational levels, where a government initiates or changes its communication routines or organisational processes to assure the delivery of its favoured messages to foreign media and publics. This section



also argued that aspired solutions like dialogue, negotiations and their breakdown contributed to the articulation of frames that limit the crisis without giving salience to all the problematic aspects of the crisis. Additionally, it is argued that the failure of such aspired solutions triggers a government to shift its response strategy from one that limits the crisis to a highly problematic situation such as foreign threat.

The next section discusses how the ideological level worked closely with other levels of influence on frame-building processes.

## **6. IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL: SECTARIAN CONFLICTS**

The ideological level of analysis examines factors that contribute to the articulation of frames that support the interpretation of a certain issue from the perspective of power centres in a society (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 223-224). The analysis at this level also highlights how lower levels of influence work in favour of powerful actors not as individuals, but as a class transcending any one organisation, industry, or a place (ibid, p. 224). I indicated earlier that the goal of public diplomacy practitioners is to promote government messages and causes to foreign publics to change or maintain foreign public opinion for the benefit of a sponsoring government (L'Etang, 1996, p. 16; L'Etang, 2006, p. 378; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992, p. 139). This goal is the core of public diplomacy. However, the interview analysis revealed that promoting government frames did not only work at the professional level during the Bahraini crisis, especially as the understanding of public diplomacy in this

research draws attention to examine how various actors, through their practice, try to impose their own definitions and interpretations of specific issues, or even manipulate meaning in order to impose specific versions of reality in the competitive environment of international relations (Dolea, 2015, p. 275; L'Etang, 2006, p. 379). Here, the goal of public diplomats is not only prompting governments' messages, but boosting the power of their sponsoring government by promoting its values while rhetorically defining its interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

The interview analysis revealed that ideological sectarian tensions between the Bahraini and Iranian authorities were another background context of frame-building during the examined crisis. I discuss this directly below, illustrating how ideology interacted with factors at other levels of influence.

The analysis suggests that long-standing ideological conflicts between Bahrain and Iran triggered the Bahraini government to engage in framing contests with Iranian and Shiite media to assure the way the crisis is framed does not affect its power status as a legitimate authority. The communicators' attention to this ideological conflict in the process of handling the crisis through the media is indicated by references to "vicious media attack" (I3) with "political dimension" (I1) that aimed to misrepresent Bahrain to the world, and a political "agenda" against Bahrain which, according to one interviewee, hampered the government's efforts to deliver its message:

22. [Bahraini official] media was always criticized for not keeping up with the challenges facing the country [during the crisis]. I agree to some extent, and don't agree at the same time.

To what extent we [government communication] managed to deliver our message. Well, there were a lot of efforts, but we also need to know there was agenda against Bahrain. If they wanted the Bahraini [government's] voice to be heard, they would have allowed it. But, the goal was to mute the Bahraini [government] voice [in foreign media]. The political dimension was way more dominant than media issues. (I1) The participant pointed at "agenda" against Bahrain with "political dimension". In a follow-up discussion with the communicator to understand what they meant by this, they indicated "Iranian attempts to present the situation in Bahrain to foreign publics as a revolution to justify the protests and a change of the political system" (I1). This suggests that at the background processes of responding to the examined crisis, communicators at the IAA/BNA were aware of framing contests with Iranian and Shiite media.

As indicated in earlier chapters, the ideological tension between Bahrain and Iran can be traced to the times of Shah Pahlavi's rule in Iran, when he argued Bahrain must be under Iranian sovereignty after its independence from Britain in 1971 (Pinto, 2014, p. 169). Even after the Iranian revolution in 1979, the relations between the Gulf monarchies and Iran deteriorated significantly due to the strong anti-monarchy ethos of the revolution (ibid). In more recent years, Bahrain is one among other Arab Sunni GCC monarchs (especially Saudi) that aim to maintain strategic power in the region and resist the Iranian Republic's, with its Shiite ideology, attempts to play more strategic role in the region (Belfer, 2014, p. 33; Mabon, 2012). "The split between Sunnis and Shi'as is directly linked to a power struggle over rightful leadership of umma, the Muslim community of believers" (Karolak, 2013, p. 3). This history of ideological conflict encouraged the understanding of the crisis by the Bahraini and other GCC authorities as Iranian incited riots to trigger a wave of unrest in

the region and topple Arab Sunni monarchies in the Gulf (Pinto, 2014, p. 172). This perception was reinforced among GCC authorities by the fact that in countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq demonstrations were held in support of the Shiites protesting in Bahrain (ibid). Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that Iran and the Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon used information platforms in their political and ideological warfare against Bahrain since the 1990s (Yateem, 2014, pp. 98-99). Even during the examined crisis Al-Alam TV, a channel run by the Iranian government, devoted a special section to thoroughly cover the events in Bahrain (Al-Rawi, 2017). It tended to “fabricate” an image of struggling Shi’a majority ruled by a Sunni ‘dictatorship’ (Yateem, 2014, pp. 99-100; see also Karolak, 2017, p. 83).

The analysis suggests that this ideological tension is connected to the articulation of frames that counter the ‘revolution’ frame, especially as Iranian media platforms presented the crisis as a “revolution” by oppressed Shi’a majority against a Sunni dictatorship (Karolak, 2017). The success of such Iranian framing of the Bahraini crisis could jeopardise the authorities’ position as a legitimate regime, especially because the ‘revolution’ portrayal increases associations between Bahrain and the ‘Arab Spring’. As mentioned earlier, the ‘Arab Spring’ frame legitimises the protests, and presents regime overthrows as valid solution to help oppressed citizens peruse democratic change (Cofelice, 2016; Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Joffe, 2011; Yli-Kaitala, 2014). Thus, it is important for the Bahraini authorities to resist Iranian framing of the protests as a ‘revolution’. This is reinforced by one of the communicators who

explicitly stated that their general communication goal was resisting the 'revolution' framing:

23. The general message was: it is not a revolution... this was the Bahraini position, our reality. This was good for [foreign] media channels [which want to understand what is happening in Bahrain]. If any politician, social or sports figure calls, this will help them know what the position in Bahrain is, what is happening in Bahrain. (I1)

Note that the excerpt highlights the rejection of a "revolution" frame. This is important because the situation escalated in Bahrain during the second examined moment, and the PSF was deployed in the country to protect it in case of potential foreign military interference (BICI, 2011, p.139). Iranian media and officials presented the deployment of the PSF as a "massacre" against Shiite Bahrainis (Belfer, 2014), a "Saudi invasion" (BICI, 2011), and "foreign interference" ([reuters.com](http://reuters.com), 2011), claiming that PSF units participated in clearing demonstrations at the GCC roundabout on 16 March 2011 in a severe breach of human rights. BICI investigations, however, confirmed the PSF did not engage with civilians in any form and did not commit any violations of human rights (BICI, 2011, p. 387). The PSF role was limited to securing strategic locations and being prepared to assist in the defence of Bahrain against any potential foreign armed intervention (ibid, p. 257). Therefore, it is suggested that Iranian attempts to define the unrest as a 'revolution' was taken into account in the process of articulating IAA/BNA public diplomacy messages during the crisis.

Note that the frame analysis revealed that none of the analysed frames portrays the demonstrations as a revolution. Conversely, the analysed issue-

specific frames which address the demonstrations ('events'; 'existential threat') represent either a 'protest' or 'riot' master frames. The first contests a revolution frame by presenting the demonstrations as a legitimate practice of political rights (Hertog & McLeod, 2001), while the second delegitimises the demonstrators' acts and emphasises the role of security forces in preserving order and protecting bystanders (ibid). Even in terms of the image repair strategies represented by the analysed frames, the previous chapter indicated that the discourse strategies represented in BNA's content were 'minimisation' and 'shifting the blame'. The frame analysis also argued that despite addressing a crisis through the 'existential threat' frame, the frame tends to 'shift the blame' of the crisis to Iran by externalising the cause of the crisis and excluding any reference to internal tensions that could present the situation as a conflict between the authorities and citizens. The interview analysis suggests that this tendency to contest a revolution framing is related to ideological tensions between Bahraini and Iranian authorities, especially with the latter's attempts to portray the Bahraini unrest as a 'revolution'.

Another indication of ideological contributions to the frame-building was observed in discussions on IAA/BNA's actions taken to reduce what they perceived as unfavourable coverage in foreign media. One communicator highlighted contacting foreign news agencies to stop referring to Bahrain in terms of its sectarian demographics. Stressing on majorly Shi'a population in foreign media' content could trigger sympathy toward the majorly Shi'a protestors and reinforce Iranian media presentation of the crisis as a

'revolution' by oppressed Shiite citizens against a minority Sunni 'dictatorship'.

The participant stated:

24. We usually struggled with Reuters, and the French and German news agencies. They always used a fixed background in their news about Bahrain. They kept saying it was ruled by Sunni family, or Sunni minority and Shi'a majority. This language is not used in the country's system, neither in its law. So, they are triggering sectarian fallacy and sectarian tensions. They are telling the Sunnis they are the majority, or telling the Shiite they are the majority. They must not write in this way. I don't see them saying in their news about Britain that Protestants are more than Catholics, or Catholics are more than Protestants as a fixed background. It was obvious that they intended to put this [sectarian message] as a fixed message [about Bahrain].

(I1)

This quote suggests how the Bahraini government rejected sectarian references to the country in foreign media's coverage. This is significant because the Bahraini protests did have a sectarian character, and they tend to be discussed in terms of sectarian divide (Stoller, 2014, p. 116; Yateem, 2014, p. 98). However, the analysis suggests that the Bahraini government resistance to sectarian references is connected to the fact they were emphasised in Iranian and some Western media narratives. This is important because such references tend to present the Shi'a as a majority revolting against a Sunni minority, and this could legitimise a regime change. Al-Rawi (2015) suggests that the 'existential threat' frame, which was present in BNA's analysed content, is articulated through references to sectarian conflicts. Nevertheless, the frame analysis in this research revealed that BNA's texts carrying this frame do not explicitly refer to sectarianism, sects, Sunnis, or Shiite. Rather, the sectarian aspect is only implicitly implied by reference to Iran as a threat, suggesting that

if the crisis has any sectarian dimensions, it is external and not an internal problem.

Note that there are no recent publicly available figures on the exact size of the Sunni and Shi'a communities of Bahrain. A census undertaken in 1941 prior to Bahrain's independence from Britain placed the percentage of Sunnis at 48% and Shi'a at 52% of the Muslim population (70%). Current unofficial estimates vary between 60-70% Shi'a and 30-40% Sunni, although these figures and demographic data in Bahrain generally, are a contentious issue (BICI, 2011, p. 13). The exclusion of the sectarian aspect from BNA's analysed news seems related to the Bahraini government frame contest with Iran and other Western media, which tend to give salience to this aspect in a manner that implies the legitimacy of a majorly Shi'a 'revolution' against a Sunni ruling minority.

Externalising the cause of the Bahraini crisis is not merely related to the ideological conflict. As indicated earlier, it is connected to the organisational level factor of redefining the situation and excluding the reference to any internal problematic aspects of the crisis, and the external factor of unfavourable coverage in foreign media.

Therefore, this section discussed how ideological conflicts contributed to the construction of public diplomacy frames during the crisis by triggering the government to engage in framing contests to protect its power position. Engaging in such framing contests is common in the practice of public diplomacy during crises, especially as failure or success in crisis



communication is often a matter of whose crisis frame dominates the situation (Coombs, 2011, p. 223). In the examined case, the Bahraini government contested Iranian and Shiite media framing of the crisis as a 'revolution' by 'shifting the blame' of the crisis to Iranian interference. Not resisting Iran's 'revolution' frame and emphasis on internal sectarian issues increases connections between Bahrain and the 'Arab Spring'. Avoiding the 'Arab Spring' frame was important for the Bahraini authorities as it legitimises public protests in Arab countries and overthrowing their regimes.

However, as discussed earlier, such framing by the Bahraini government was challenged when the BICI could not confirm Iranian role in the Bahraini unrest. Opponents of the 'Iranian interference' argument suggest the Bahraini government intentionally constructed the protests as an Iranian plot to demonise the protestors and be able to implement strict measures to contain the situation (Carlstorm, 2012). While it is beyond the focus of this research to determine whether 'foreign interference' had a role in the Bahraini crisis or not, using such argument in the Bahraini authorities' framing of the crisis offers an example of public diplomacy framing contests during crises, which work with the purpose of maintaining power positions of the sponsoring government. In such cases, public diplomacy practitioners not only try to impose their own definitions and interpretations of specific issues, but even manipulate meaning in order to impose specific versions of reality in the competitive environment of international relations (Dolea, 2015, p. 275; L'Etang, 2006, p. 379). Generally, the practice of persuasive communication (e.g. public diplomacy)

in Arab governmental institutions is looked at as a “tool of ... manipulation” (Kirat, 2005, p. 325).

The next section presents the concluding remarks of the interview analysis.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter presented the analysis of interviews with five communicators working within the IAA/BNA during the examined crisis to deliver insights on the background processes and factors connected to frame-building in Bahraini public diplomacy. The interview analysis revealed how frame-building started in a context of confusion, absence of decision making, and lack of crisis experience and preparedness. Yet, in a matter of days, strategic choices of promoting positive news to counter foreign media’s coverage were also at the background of frame-building at the IAA/BNA.

The analysis used Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) hierarchal model of influences on media content to organise frame-building factors in public diplomacy. The analysis suggested 11 factors at different levels of the hierarchal model are connected to frame-building: 1) limited crisis communication experience (individual level); 2) absence of senior decision making (professional level), 3) promoting positive news (professional level); 4) redefining the situation by government representatives without addressing internal problematic issues in Bahrain (organisational level); 5) employing foreign public relations’ companies (organisational level); 6) visiting foreign media organisations (organisational level); 7) IAA/BNA’s unpreparedness for

a crisis (organisational level); 8) foreign media's negative coverage (external level); 9) social media (external level); 10) negotiations between the authorities and political societies (external level); and 11) the sectarian conflicts (ideological level).

The analysis revealed that in the first couple of days of the crisis, frame-building was connected to lack of crisis experience and preparedness at the individual and organisational levels, shock resulting from the unprecedented nature of the crisis to Bahrain, and absence of senior decision making at the professional level. The combination of these factors in the very early days of the crisis suggests that framing choices were mostly unintentional, but occurred as a result of other actions. This confusion by the IAA/BNA at the beginning of the crisis is not uncommon to crisis situations, as it is generally difficult to frame crises that unfold quickly (Coombs, 2011, p. 220). The analysis revealed these factors contributed to IAA/BNA's frame-building at a time when the 'reform' frame was dominant in BNA's analysed content. This suggests that the 'denial' strategy (Benoit, 1997) represented by the reform frame can be connected to such confusion and not to a strategic and planned effort to promote positive framing of the Bahraini government while hardly mentioning and downplaying the crisis.

The analysis also revealed that after 3-4 days of the crisis unfold, frame-building turned to be connected to change of response routines and a choice to focus on promoting positive news to contest unfavourable coverage in foreign media. It also shows connections with aspirations to contain the crisis

through negotiations. These factors contributed to frame-building at a time when the 'events' frame was dominant in BNA's analysed content, representing a 'minimisation' strategy (Benoit, 1997). The tendency to limit a crisis is a common practice by professional communicators who may strategically remain silent on specific aspects of a crisis not to give the story "oxygen" (Dimitrov, 2015, p. 645), and prevent or limit the spread of news that may threaten the image or reputation of their sponsor among significant publics. However, the Bahraini government could not continue downplaying and ignoring the crisis, especially when the negotiations flailed and the unrest escalated in the second examined moment.

The interview analysis shows that during the second examined moment of the crisis, frame-building at the IAA/BNA was related to the failure of negotiations to start a national dialogue, government's representatives redefining of the situation as Iranian plot without addressing the internal causes of the crisis, and ideological tensions between Bahraini and Iranian authorities. During this phase of the crisis, the 'existential threat' frame prevailed in BNA's analysed content and was reinforced by the 'sovereignty' frame. The frames represent strategies of 'shifting the blame' and 'attacking the accuser' respectively. The combination of these two strategies represents a strategy of "attacking the other", which is a common public diplomacy response to defend a nation's image in a crisis, especially in terms of reducing its responsibility for wrongdoing (Mor, 2009, p. 228).

The analysis revealed that also in the third examined moment, frame-building was connected to the routine of promoting positive news to contest unfavourable coverage across foreign media. Note that in the third examined moment, the BICI report confirmed that a number of the security forces' members committed violations against human rights. Instead of highlighting this, the dominant frame in BNA's analysed content was the 'unprecedented achievement' frame, which represented a 'bolstering' strategy (Benoit, 1997). Generally, nations are less likely to employ crisis response strategies that admit guilt (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). Saving a nation's image in this regard is significant for its empowerment and dignity; therefore it is more likely to implicitly admit guilt through other strategies to save face (Peijuan et al., p. 216).

Further, the analysis revealed information which does not specifically relate to the articulation of messages in BNA's content, yet it offers insights on the Bahraini government's efforts to promote their preferred messages to foreign media and publics. These are: visiting foreign media organisations, employing foreign public relations' companies, and using social media. The analysis also suggests Bahraini public diplomacy lacked experience and preparedness to handle national crises with such international exposure, and how this crisis could be a turning point in the practice of Bahraini public diplomacy especially in terms of communicating with foreign media. This analysis aimed to contribute to academic debates on public diplomacy frame-building especially at a time of crisis and its aftermath. As discussed in the literature review,

majority of studies (Entman, 2008; Jungblut, 2017; Melki & Jabado, 2016; Sheaffer & Gabay, 2009; Sheaffer et al., 2014; Yarchi et al., 2013; Zhang, 2006) looking at public diplomacy framing during crises focus on the content of the message and the factors that may help public diplomats successfully promote their preferred frames to appear in foreign media's content. My research shifts focus by looking at the background processes and factors connected to the articulation of frames in public diplomacy texts (information subsidies) offered to the media and public in attempt to promote their preferred messages. Thus, instead of looking at whether, how, or why public diplomacy frames appear in foreign media content; this research looks at the frames in public diplomacy texts and the factors that influenced their construction. This aims to deliver insights on how public diplomacy activities in specific cultural contexts contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality in their messages during crisis.

The analysis also delivers insights on factors connected to the communication of frames that depict specific crisis response strategies offered by Benoit's (1997) image repair theory by looking at different levels of influence offered by Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchal model of influence. The frame analysis in the previous chapter argued that the analysed frames and the response strategies they represent do not portray the examined protests as a crisis, and even when they do they present it as a foreign conspiracy and not internal issue as in other 'Arab Spring countries'. The interview analysis argues that this started with confusion and lack of experience and preparedness at the IAA/BNA. However, it then became connected to

professional routines of promoting positive news to contest unfavourable and incorrect coverage across foreign media and maintain the power status of the Bahraini authorities in face of ideological tensions with Iran – a practice which reinforces realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy as a ‘power tool’ in the hands of the sponsoring government to boost its power by promoting its values through rhetorically defending its interests (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383).

The next chapter discusses the concluding remarks of this research.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In February 2011, a series of controversial protests started in Bahrain, generating negative publicity against the Bahraini authorities across foreign media due to accusations of human rights' breaches and violence against the protestors (Bowe & Hoewe, 2011; Brown, 2011; Matthiesen, 2013, p. 82). The account of the presentation of this crisis varies widely among different relevant actors (Karolak, 2012, p. 186). Previous research on the framing of the Bahraini crisis mainly looks at several foreign media outlets' framing of different stages of the crisis (e.g. Abdul-Nabi, 2015; Al-Rawi, 2015; Bowe & Hoewe, 2011). Yet, what remained unexplored is the Bahraini government's framing of the protests in its public diplomacy messages to foreign media and publics.

My research addressed this gap by examining public diplomacy frames communicated by the Bahraini government during the 2011 crisis in Bahrain, and exploring background processes related to the building and construction of these frames. This research employed qualitative frame analysis to identify and explore the frames present in online content targeted at foreign media and published on the English website of Bahrain News Agency (BNA) during three key moments of the crisis: the first week of protests (14-19 February 2011), the arrival of the PSF to Bahrain (14-16 March 2011), and the publication of



BICI report (23-25 November 2011). The research also employed qualitative semi-structured interviews with government communicators involved in message construction and/or decision making during the crisis to deliver insights on the background processes and factors connected to the frame-building.

The aim of this research was to deliver insights on how public diplomacy activities of responding to crises through media relations contribute to the construction of specific versions of reality in messages communicated on behalf of the government. It also contributes to research understanding the role of public diplomacy in representations of the Bahraini 2011 crisis through offering insights on frames communicated by one of the significant actors in this crisis: the Bahraini government. These frames are: 'reform'; 'events'; 'existential threat'; 'unprecedented achievement'; 'supported leadership'; and 'sovereignty'.

The analysis in this research revealed that Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the crisis, as manifested in the analysed content targeted at foreign media, majorly communicated frames that did not address a crisis, and when some of the frames did they presented the cause as foreign conspiracy and not internal issues as was the case in 'Arab Spring countries'. The interview analysis suggests that this tendency not to address the internal crisis started in a context of absent decision making, and lack of crisis experience and preparedness. It then became more related to choices of promoting positive news to contest unfavourable and incorrect framing across foreign

media, and to maintain the power position of the Bahraini authorities in face of ideological tensions with Iran.

These findings also offer an example of government framing in the Arab Spring context. This is significant as previous studies on the Arab Spring phenomenon focus on the framing of Arab upheavals by different foreign news media platforms, with a specific focus on the upheavals in Egypt (e.g. Du, 2016; Guzman, 2016), keeping a gap in how Arab governments framed the crises in their countries. Moreover, the current research offers insights on an Arab government practice of public diplomacy in the Arab Spring context. Research on public diplomacy during the Arab Spring focuses on how Western state and non-state actors engage in public diplomacy activities in relation to the Arab Spring (e.g. Cofelice, 2016; Golan, 2013; Yli-Kaitala, 2017).

This research revealed the frames communicated to foreign media by the BNA worked together to represent the situation in Bahrain as different from that in other Arab countries where popular protests were taking place around the same time. I suggest that despite communicating different frames at different stages of the crisis and representing different crisis response strategies, they all attempted to contest accusations of human rights' violations to prevent comparisons between the Bahraini events and those in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, for example. Instead, it promoted a favourable image of the Bahraini government as a reformed, credible, responsible, non-authoritative regime, which, according to some of these frames, was the victim of foreign conspiracy. Thus, all the frames and the strategies they depict contest the

'Arab Spring' framing by excluding a crisis portrayal, or blaming the crisis on foreign conspiracy. "Limiting", "minimising", or "ignoring" a crisis is a popular response by professional communicators in Arab and Middle-Eastern countries to problematic situations even before the Arab Spring (Avraham, 2015, p. 228). While this is observed in the context of promoting Middle-Eastern countries as tourist destinations, the frame analysis in this thesis suggests it is an approach used by Bahraini public diplomacy to deal with accusations of human rights' violations which could increase associations between the Bahraini protests and the Arab Spring.

Beyond the frames, the research contributes to public diplomacy research by exploring what crisis response strategies as offered by Benoit's (1995) image repair theory (IRT) are represented by the analysed frames, keeping in mind that the term 'strategy' in this context does not necessarily involve strategic intent by the organisation or individuals putting the message together. The identified strategies were: denial, minimisation, shifting the blame, bolstering, differentiation, and attacking the accuser. The combination of these strategies in BNA's analysed content also suggests that Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the examined protests denied a crisis caused by internal issues between segments of the Shiite community in Bahrain and the Sunni authorities. Employing Benoit's (1995) theory in the current study extends its use beyond Western contexts, where it was developed and widely applied (Towner, 2009). Using the IRT here shows how Bahraini public diplomacy messages to foreign media and publics during the examined crisis

represented some of the most common image repair strategies identified in a Western context.

Other than offering insights on a non-Western context, employing the IRT in my study contributes to the limited research using the theory in a public diplomacy context, especially as it is widely used to study corporate crises (Lyu, 2012, p. 779; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 214; Schultz & Raupp, 2010, p. 113; Siew-Yoong Low et al., 2010, p. 191; Zhang & Benoit, 2004, p. 162). My research finds that the image repair strategies represented by the analysed frames are similar to what previous studies suggest about nations' responses to crises, particularly employing responses that do not admit responsibility for wrongdoing (Benoit, 1997; Peijuan et al., 2009, p. 216). Rather, saving a nation's image in this regard is significant for its empowerment and dignity, and therefore, is less likely to admit guilt in its crisis responses even when there is evidence (Peijuan et al., 2009). Instead of admitting guilt, a common public diplomacy response to crises is 'blaming the other' to reduce its responsibility for offensive acts (Mor, 2009, 228). This was observed in Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the crisis, especially through the 'existential threat' and the 'sovereignty' frames which represent image repair strategies of 'shifting the blame' and 'attacking the accuser' respectively. Thus, as observed by previous studies on nations' responses to crises, Bahraini public diplomacy messages in response to the examined crisis did not employ any discourse strategies that admit guilt.

A further contribution of my research's framework and findings is that existing literature on public diplomacy framing focuses on the factors that influence the success or failure of public diplomacy frames in appearing in media content (Entman, 2008; Jungblut, 2017; Melki & Jabado, 2016; Sheafer et al., 2014; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009; Yarchi et al., 2013; Zhang, 2006). The current study shifts focus in public diplomacy frame-building research by examining the background processes and factors connected to the articulation of specific frames in public diplomacy texts written by professional communicators and not journalists. This is specifically done here by applying Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model of influence, a media research model, to organise our understanding of public diplomacy frame-building factors at five different levels: individual, professional, organisational, external, and ideological. Using this media theory to explore a public diplomacy context also responds to academic calls to study public diplomacy using frameworks from other relevant disciplines to help us understand how public diplomacy works (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 211; Gilboa, 2008, p. 75).

Employing the model in this thesis delivered insights on factors connected to public diplomacy frame-building at different levels, and how these factors interact rather than work in isolation. Such insights are not limited to the understanding of the articulation of frames, but also the (IRT) discourse strategies represented by these frames. The significance of combining Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model with the IRT here is also highlighted by delivering insights on the level of strategic intent in the background processes of designing public diplomacy frames, which also represent specific crisis

response strategies. The interview analysis revealed that the main factors connected to frame-building at the IAA/BNA during the examined crisis were: limited crisis communication experience (individual level); absence of senior decision making (professional level); promoting positive news (professional level); redefining the situation by government representatives without addressing internal problematic issues in Bahrain (organisational level); employing foreign public relations' companies (organisational level); visiting foreign media organisations (organisational level); IAA/BNA's unpreparedness for a crisis (organisational level); foreign media's negative coverage (external level); social media (external level); negotiations between the authorities and political societies (external level); and the sectarian conflicts (ideological level).

The interactions between several factors form different levels of influence at different stages of the crisis show similarity with common background contexts influencing crisis response. Examples of these are the difficulty of framing crises that unfold quickly (Coombs, 2011, p. 220), crises disruption of established work routines (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006, p. 367; Coombs, 2006, p. 172; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997, p. 280), the strong influence of media on government decisions during crises (Lee, 2009, p. 75), and how crises create framing contests between relevant actors to win media attention and favourable coverage (Entman, 2003, p. 417; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009, p. 449; Yarchi et al., 2013, p. 270).

Another finding is the Bahraini government lack of preparedness to handle national crises with such international exposure. The significance of this sits in the fact that the Bahraini authorities worked on rebranding the country as a

reformed nation since 2000 (Govers, 2012, p. 52; Karolak, 2012, p. 4; Karolak, 2014, p. 97; Ulrichsen, 2013, p. 1; Wright, 2008, p. 12). However, it did not seem to prepare for a potential crisis that would threaten its very efforts of presenting Bahrain in the international arena as a reformed country. Nevertheless, the research revealed how the examined crisis triggered the Bahraini government to take some steps to prepare for potential future crises and deal with the consequences of this crisis. Examples of these are training the BNA communicators, and developing strategies to deal with the challenges arising from the 2011 crisis. This suggests that the examined crisis could be a turning point in the practice of Bahraini public diplomacy, especially in terms of devoting further efforts to assure the promotion of messages that support the authorities' policies, and thus, its power status. Nations' rising interest in public diplomacy was most of the time a direct reaction to a downturn in foreign perceptions of their nations and the recognition of the significance of a nation's favourable image abroad to achieve its foreign policy goals (Melissen, 2005a, p. 9; Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 194). This is not to suggest that Bahrain did not engage in public diplomacy before the crisis, especially as it worked on improving the nation's image abroad since 2000. Yet, it is suggested that the 2011 crisis drew the Bahraini government's attention to the significance of devoting further efforts to promote their favoured messages when its image is threatened among significant foreign publics. The crisis was a turning point in public diplomacy, because the government adopted a lot more strategic approach to crisis communication, media relations and communication in general, cultivated media relations, started utilizing social media.

The findings of this research suggest that the Bahraini public diplomacy responses to the 2011 crisis correspond to realist conceptualisations of public diplomacy, which are argued to be the most reflective of how public diplomacy is practiced in the real world (Fisher, 2010, p. 277; Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). Within such conceptualisations, realist public diplomacy is perceived as a power tool in the hands of the sponsoring government to support and maintain its power position in the international relations environment (Zhang & Swartz, 2009, p. 383). The analysis in this thesis revealed how all the communicated frames, and the frame-building activities tended to communicate the government's favoured messages, which could subsequently maintain the power status of the authorities in face of accusations of human rights' violations. Therefore, based on the findings of this research, I suggest that this could be presented as a definition of public diplomacy from a critical perspective, especially as it highlights the centrality of maintaining power in the practice of public diplomacy. This thesis worked through the lens of the social constructivist paradigm, yet, I suggest that future research can look into public diplomacy from a critical philosophical stance to focus on addressing power issues in the practice of public diplomacy.

Although this thesis contributes to the limited research on Bahraini public diplomacy, especially in a crisis context, it does not capture a comprehensive account of the Bahraini government's framing during the examined crisis. The BNA English website is only one communication platform used, and owned, by the Bahraini government during the examined crisis. Bahrain Television (BTV) – the official television channel in Bahrain, for instance, is another state-



owned communication platform used during the 2011 crisis to deliver the Bahraini government's messages to domestic publics. According to BICI findings, BTV was accused of sectarian discrimination and defamation of some Bahraini Shi'a during the crisis (BICI, 2011, pp. 421-422). On the other hand, the analysis in my research revealed that frames present in BNA's analysed content are not articulated through any references that emphasise the sectarian aspect of the situation, or used any references to sects. If any, references to the sectarian dimension of the situation were only implicitly suggested by references to Iran, which has deep-rooted ideological tensions with the monarchs of the GCC countries, especially on sectarian grounds. Therefore, future research can look into government messages communicated through other platforms to generate more comprehensive understanding of the co-construction of specific versions of reality by the Bahraini government during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath.

Moreover, it should be noted that the discussion of the implications of the analysed frames and image repair strategies in the current study is not built on systematic analysis of the effects of these frames or discourse strategies because it is beyond the focus of this thesis. Rather, the discussion on implications mainly builds on insights from previous research about events and actors relevant to the examined crisis. I suggest that insights on the effects and implications of the frames and the response strategies can be developed in future research by looking into other phases of Scheufele's (1999) framing model, which offers a framework to do this systematically.

Although the frames analysed in this thesis are issue-specific, they can be used not only in future research looking at government messages on platforms other than the BNA website, but also in comparative studies examining public diplomacy framing by other Arab governments in the wider context of the Arab Spring. The frames can be also fruitful in future research taking a social constructivist approach to examine how the examined crisis is co-constructed by other actors relevant to the Bahraini crisis. Other than the frames, the crisis response strategies identified in this research can be used in future research to examine any patterns in Bahraini public diplomacy responses to other crises, and explore the level of strategic intent in employing certain 'strategies' and frames over others.

Besides the frames and discourse strategies analysed in this thesis, insights on background processes and factors connected to frame-building can contribute to future studies on Bahraini public diplomacy handling of other crises that unfold after the 2011 crisis, or other consequences of the 2011 crisis. Such studies can examine any difference or similarity in the Bahraini public diplomacy activities of constructing specific versions of reality in its messages. This is specifically significant as the current research revealed the lack of experience and preparedness to handle national crises under international scrutiny, and argued the 2011 crisis is a turning point in the practice of Bahraini public diplomacy. A recent study, for example, indicates that in the aftermath of revealing the findings of BICI report, the Bahraini government invited celebrities in the capacity of their respective professions to Bahrain (e.g. musicians; singers; pop stars), and those praise their visits to the

Kingdom using rhetoric that mirrors that of the state (Jones, 2017, p. 326). Moreover, in late 2011, the CEO of the IAA announced that Bahrain was launching a new satellite channel and posting media counsels overseas “to project the truth abroad and debunk fallacies and lies” (Brown, 2011). In December 2016, also, the National Communication Center was established, and one of its responsibilities is to handle government communications in crises ([alwatannews](#), 2017; [alwasatnews](#), 2016). Thus, future research on Bahraini public diplomacy can examine whether and how the Bahraini government employment of such initiatives, or any other image repair endeavours is connected to any learnt lessons or experience from the examined crisis.

Beyond the case of Bahrain, I suggest future research can employ Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) model in public diplomacy studies, and extend it to explore public diplomacy in other cultural contexts. I also suggest combining this with the other frameworks employed in this thesis: frame analysis and the IRT to help generate more comprehensive understanding of how public diplomacy works.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdul-Nabi, Z. (2015). Based on the peace journalism model: Analysis of Al-Jazeera's coverage of Bahrain's uprising and Syria's chemical attack. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(3), 271-302.
- About BNA. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.bna.bh/AboutBNA.aspx?cms=iQRpheuphYtJ6pyXUGiNqladb1RZ0e3I>
- About the ministry. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.mia.gov.bh/ar/Media-inBahrain/Pages/History-of-Media-in-Bahrain.aspx>
- Al-Hasan, H. T. (2015). Sectarianism meets the Arab spring: TGONU, a broad-based Sunni movement emerges in Bahrain. *Arabian Humanities. Revue Internationale d'archéologie Et De Sciences Sociales Sur La Péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, (4)
- Al-Rawi, A. (2017). News values on social media: News organizations' Facebook use. *Journalism*, 18(7), 871-889.
- Al-Rawi, A. K. (2015). Sectarianism and the Arab spring: Framing the popular protests in Bahrain. *Global Media and Communication*, 11(1), 25-42.
- AlSaqer, L. (2008). Experience of female public relations practitioners in bahrain. *Public Relations Review*, 34(1), 77-79.
- AlWasat, N. (2016). الوطني الاتصال مركز وتنظيم بإنشاء ملكي مرسوم. Retrieved from <http://www.alwasatnews.com/news/1186135.html>
- AlWatan, N. بهزاد: الإعلام والاتصال في بناء قدرات الاتصال والإعلام: بهزاد (2017). Retrieved from <http://alwatannews.net/article/719457/Bahrain/%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A->

[%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A8%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9](#)

Alwefaq.net. (2011). Retrieved from alwefaq.net

Andreasen, U. (2008). Reflections on public diplomacy after the Danish cartoon crises: From crisis management to normal public diplomacy work. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 3(2), 201-207.

Armstrong, M. C. (2008). Operationalizing public diplomacy. *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 83-91) Routledge.

Avery, E. J., Lariscy, R. W., Kim, S., & Hocke, T. (2010). A quantitative review of crisis communication research in public relations from 1991 to 2009. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 190-192.

Avraham, E. (2015). Destination image repair during crisis: Attracting tourism during the Arab spring uprisings. *Tourism Management*, 47, 224-232.

Avraham, E. (2016). Destination marketing and image repair during tourism crises: The case of Egypt. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 28, 41-48.

Bahrain demands further reforms. (2011). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQMqphicIR4>

Bardhan, N., & Weaver, K. (2011). Introduction: Public relations in global cultural contexts. In N. Bardhan, & K. Weaver (Eds.), *Public relations in global cultural contexts: Multiparadigmatic perspectives* (pp. 1--28). New York and London: Routledge.

- Bartholomé, G., Lecheler, S., & de Vreese, C. (2015). Manufacturing conflict? how journalists intervene in the conflict frame building process. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 20(4), 438-457.
- Bauer, M. W., & Gaskell, G. (2000). *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound: A practical handbook for social research* Sage.
- Baylouny, A. M. (2006). *Al-Manar and Alhurra: Competing Satellite Stations and Ideologies*,
- BDF commander-in-chief meets US 5th fleet commander. (2011). Retrieved from bna.bh
- Bedingfield, S., & Anshari, D. (2014). Thinking about Romney: Frame building in a battleground state in the 2012 presidential election. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(1), 78-97.
- Belfer, M. (2014). *Small state, dangerous region: A strategic assessment of Bahrain* Peter Lang AG.
- Benford, R. D. (2013). Master frame. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*,
- Benoit, W. L. (1995). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies, suny series in speech communication* Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Benoit, W. L. (1997). Image repair discourse and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 23(2), 177-186.
- Benoit, W. L. (2000). Another visit to the theory of image restoration strategies. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(1), 40-43.
- Benoit, W. L. (2004). Image restoration discourse and crisis communication. In M. Dan, & R. L. Heath (Eds.), *Responding to crisis: A rhetorical approach to crisis communication* (pp. 263-280) Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Benoit, W. L. (2006). Image repair in president bush's april 2004 news conference. *Public Relations Review*, 32(2), 137-143.

Benoit, W. L. (2014). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: Image repair theory and research* SUNY Press.

Benoit, W. L., & Brinson, S. L. (1999). Queen Elizabeth's image repair discourse: Insensitive royal or compassionate queen? *Public Relations Review*, 25(2), 145-156.

Benoit, W. L., & Drew, S. (1997). Appropriateness and effectiveness of image repair strategies. *Communication Reports*, 10(2), 153-163.

Benoit, W. L. (2015). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies :Image repair theory and research*.

Albany, New York; 4: SUNY Press. Retrieved from <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/stir/Doc?id=10954091>

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York:

The BICI commissioners. (2011). Retrieved from [http://www.bici.org.bh/index0d2a.html?page\\_id=20](http://www.bici.org.bh/index0d2a.html?page_id=20)

BICI report uncovers many medics' crimes. (2011). Retrieved from BICI Report Uncovers many Medics' Crimes

BICI . (2011). *Report of the Bahrain independent commission of inquiry*. The Commission.

bici.org.bh. (2011). The report of the Bahrain independent commission of inquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.bici.org.bh/>

BICI: Enough evidence shows south Asian workers were targeted. (2011). Retrieved from

BICI: Enough evidence shows South Asian workers were targeted

biciactions.bh. (2011). Retrieved from biciactions.bh

- bnabh. (2011). HM king Hamad orders setting up an independent national commission. Retrieved from [www.bnabh.portal/en/news/482045?date=2013-06-13](http://www.bnabh.portal/en/news/482045?date=2013-06-13)
- Boesman, J., d'Haenens, L., & Van Gorp, B. (2015). Triggering the news story: Reconstructing reporters' newsgathering practices in the light of newspaper type, newsroom centralization, reporters' autonomy, and specialization. *Journalism Studies*, 16(6), 904-922.
- Bowe, B. J., & Hoewe, J. (2011). Clash of coverage: Cultural framing in US newspaper reporting on the 2011 protests in Bahrain. *Middle East Media Educator*, 1(1), 27-36.
- Brewer, P. R. (2006). National interest frames and public opinion about world affairs. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 11(4), 89-102.
- Brinkman, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brinson, S. L., & Benoit, W. L. (1999). The tarnished star: Restoring Texaco's damaged public image. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 12(4), 483-510.
- Brown, R. E. (2011a). Epistemological modesty: Critical reflections on public relations thought. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(1), 89-105.
- Brown, R. (2004). Information technology and the transformation of diplomacy. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 18(2), 14-29.
- Brown, R. (2011). Do the origins of PD programmes shape their long term development?. Retrieved from <https://pdnetworks.wordpress.com/2011/10/23/do-the-origins-of-pdprogrammes-shape-their-long-term-development/>
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods* (2nd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burns, J. P., & Bruner, M. S. (2000). Revisiting the theory of image restoration strategies.



*Communication Quarterly*, 48(1), 27-39.

Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis*  
London:

Heinemann.

Cabosky, J. M. (2014). Framing an LGBT organization and a movement: A critical qualitative analysis of GLAAD'S media releases. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(1), 69-89.

Carlstrom, G. (2012). In the kingdom of tear gas. *Middle East Report*,

Carragee, K. M., & Roefs, W. (2004). The neglect of power in recent framing research. *Journal of Communication*, 54(2), 214-233.

Castelló, E., & Montagut, M. (2011). Journalists, reframing and party public relations consultants: Strategies in morning talk radio. *Journalism Studies*, 12(4), 506-521.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2011). Strategies of counter-framing.

Cloudman, R., & Hallahan, K. (2006). Crisis communications preparedness among US organizations: Activities and assessments by public relations practitioners. *Public Relations Review*, 32(4), 367-376.

Code of good research practice. (n/d). Retrieved from stir.ac.uk

Cofelice, A. (2016). Parliamentary diplomacy and the Arab spring: Evidence from the parliamentary assembly of the Mediterranean and the European parliament. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 27(4), 100-118.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. Milton park *Constitution of Bahrain* (2002). . Kingdom of Bahrain:

Coombs, W. T. (2006). Crisis management: A communicative. *Public Relations Theory II*, , 149.

Coombs, W. T. (2011). Political public relations and crisis communication: A public relations perspective. *Political public relations* (pp. 214-234) Routledge.

- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. *Basics of qualitative research :Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Los Angeles, CA; London: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cowan, G., & Arsenault, A. (2008). Moving from monologue to dialogue to collaboration: The three layers of public diplomacy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 10-30.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five tradition* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research* Sage Publications.
- Cull, N. J. (2008). Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and histories. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 31-54.
- Cull, N. J. (2010). Public diplomacy: Seven lessons for its future from its past. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 6(1), 11-17.
- Curtin, P. A. (2011). Public relations and philosophy: Parsing paradigms. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(1), 31-47.
- Cutlip, S. M., Center, A. H., & Broom, G. M. (1994). *Effective public relations* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- D'angelo, P. (2012). Studying framing in political communication with an integrative approach. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(3), 353-364.
- Dalacoura, K. (2012). The 2011 uprisings in the Arab middle east: Political change and geopolitical implications. *International Affairs*, 88(1), 63-79.
- D'angelo, P. (2002). News framing as a multiparadigmatic research program: A response to Entman. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 870-888.
- Daymon, C., & Holloway, I. (2011). *The nature and usefulness of qualitative research for public relations and marketing communications* (second ed.)

- De Vreese, C. H. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information Design Journal Document Design*, 13(1), 51-62.
- De Vreese, C. H. (2012). New avenues for framing research. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(3), 365-375.
- Dekavalla, M. (2016). Issue and game frames in the news: Frame-building factors in television coverage of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. *Journalism*, , 1-20.
- Dimitrov, R. (2015). Silence and invisibility in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 41(5), 636-651.
- Dolea, A. (2015). The need for critical thinking in country promotion: Public diplomacy, nation branding and public relations. In J. L'etang, D. McKie, N. Snow & J. Xifra (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical public relations* (pp. 274-288) Routledge London and New York, NY.
- Donnelly, J. (2002). *Realism and international relations* Cambridge University Press.
- Du, Y. R. (2016). Same events, different stories: Internet censorship in the Arab spring seen from china. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93(1), 99-117.
- Edwards, L. (2011). Critical perspectives in global public relations: Theorizing power. In N. Bardhan, & C. K. Weaver (Eds.), *Public relations in global cultural contexts: Multiparadigmatic perspectives* (pp. 29-49) Routledge.
- Edwards, L. (2012). Defining the 'object' of public relations research: A new starting point. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(1), 7-30.
- Edwards, L. (2014). Public relations theories: An overview. In R. Tench, & L. Yeomans (Eds.), *Exploring public relations* (Third ed., pp. 123-144). UK: Pearson Education Limited.
- Edwards, L. (2014a). Discourse, credentialism and occupational closure in the communications industries: The case of public relations in the UK. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(3), 319-334.

- Edwards, L., & Hodges, C. E. (2011). *Public relations, society & culture: Theoretical and empirical explorations* Taylor & Francis.
- Edwards, L., & Pieczka, M. (2013). Public relations and 'its' media: Exploring the role of trade media in the enactment of public relations' professional project. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2(1), 5-25.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Entman, R. M. (2003). Cascading activation: Contesting the white house's frame after 9/11. *Political Communication*, 20(4), 415-432.
- Entman, R. M. (2007). Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 163-173.
- Entman, R. M. (2008). Theorizing mediated public diplomacy: The US case. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(2), 87-102.
- Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2006). Multicultural crisis communication: Towards a social constructionist perspective. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 14(4), 180-189.
- Fisher, A. (2010). Looking at the man in the mirror: Understanding of power and influence in public diplomacy. *Trials of Engagement: The Future of US Public Diplomacy*, , 271-296.
- Fitzpatrick, K. R. (2007). Advancing the new public diplomacy: A public relations perspective. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2(3), 187-211.
- Froehlich, R., & Rüdiger, B. (2006). Framing political public relations: Measuring success of political communication strategies in Germany. *Public Relations Review*, 32(1), 18-25.

- Galloway, C. (2016). Crisis communication research in Australia. In A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger & C. Auer (Eds.), *The handbook of international crisis communication research* () John Wiley & Sons.
- Gamson, W. A. (1981). The political culture of Arab-Israeli conflict. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 5(2), 79-94.
- Gamson, W. A. (1988). The 1987 distinguished lecture: A constructionist approach to mass media and public opinion. *Symbolic Interaction*, 11(2), 161-174.
- Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics* Cambridge university press.
- Gamson, W. A. (2001). Promoting political engagement. *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, , 56-74.
- Gamson, W. A., & Lasch, K. (1983). "The political culture of social welfare policy". *Evaluating the Welfare State: Social and Political Perspectives*, , 397-415.
- Gamson, W. A., & Lasch, K. E. (1981). The political culture of social welfare policy.
- Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- GCC secretary general lauds royal reform project. (2013). Retrieved from bna.bh
- Gerth, M. A., & Siegert, G. (2012). Patterns of consistence and constriction: How news media frame the coverage of direct democratic campaigns. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(3), 279-299.
- Gilboa, E. (2001). Diplomacy in the media age: Three models of uses and effects. *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 12(2), 1-28.
- Gilboa, E. (2002). Global communication and foreign policy. *Journal of Communication*, 52(4), 731-748.
- Gilboa, E. (2008). Searching for a theory of public diplomacy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 55-77.

- Gilboa, E., & Megan, C. (2016). Crisis communication research in Israel: Growth and gaps. In A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger & C. Auer (Eds.), *The handbook of international crisis communication research* () John Wiley & Sons.
- Golan, G. J. (2013). The gates of op-ed diplomacy: Newspaper framing the 2011 Egyptian revolution. *International Communication Gazette*, 75(4), 359-373.
- Goldstone, J. A. (2011). Understanding the revolutions of 2011: Weakness and resilience in middle eastern autocracies. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 8.
- Govers, R. (2012). Brand Dubai and its competitors in the middle east: An image and reputation analysis. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8(1), 48-57.
- Gregory, B. (2008). Public diplomacy: Sunrise of an academic field. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 274-290.
- Grunig, J. E. (2001). Two-way symmetrical public relations: Past, present, and future. (pp. 30) Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Sriramesh, K., Huang, Y., & Lyra, A. (1995). Models of public relations in an international setting. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(3), 163-186.
- Grunig, J., & White, J. (1992). The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp. 31--64). U.S.A: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grunig, J. E. (1992). *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, N.J.; Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? an experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.
- Guzman, A. L. (2016). Evolution of news frames during the 2011 Egyptian revolution: Critical discourse analysis of fox News's and CNN's framing of protesters, Mubarak, and the muslim brotherhood. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93(1), 80-98.

- H. De Vreese, Jochen Peter, Holli A. Semetko, Claes. (2001). Framing politics at the launch of the euro: A cross-national comparative study of frames in the news. *Political Communication*, 18(2), 107-122.
- Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(3), 205-242.
- Hamdy, N., & Gomaa, E. H. (2012). Framing the Egyptian uprising in Arabic language newspapers and social media. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 195-211.
- Hänggli, R. (2012). Key factors in frame building: How strategic political actors shape news media coverage. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(3), 300-317.
- Harlow, S., & Johnson, T. J. (2011). The Arab spring| overthrowing the protest paradigm?  
how the new york times, global voices and twitter covered the Egyptian revolution. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 1359-1374.
- Harlow, W. F., Brantley, B. C., & Harlow, R. M. (2011). BP initial image repair strategies after the deepwater horizon spill. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 80-83.
- Hartig, F. (2017). Deterrence by public diplomacy: The negative dimension of international political communication. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(4), 342-354.
- Head, J. (2011). **The Arab world's 1989 revolution?**. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2011/02/201121165427186924.html>
- Hearit, K. M., & Courtright, J. L. (2003). A social constructionist approach to crisis management: Allegations of sudden acceleration in the Audi 5000. *Communication Studies*, 54(1), 79-95.
- Heath, R. L. (2006). Onward into more fog: Thoughts on public relations' research directions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 18(2), 93-114.

- Heide, M. (2009). On Berger: A social constructionist perspective on public relations and crisis communication. In Ø. Ihlen, B. van Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: Key figures and concepts* () Routledge.
- Hertog, J. K., & McLeod, D. M. (2001). A multiperspectival approach to framing analysis: A field guide. *Framing public life* (pp. 157-178) Routledge.
- Hiebert, R. E. (2005). Commentary: Challenges for Arab and American public relations and public diplomacy in a global age. *Public Relations Review*, 31(3), 317-322.
- HM king Hamad directs to pay BD 1000 for every Bahraini family. (2011). Retrieved from bna.bh
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2011a). The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, , 341-358.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2011b). Animating interview narratives. *Qualitative Research*, 3, 149-167.
- Holtzhausen, D. R., & Roberts, G. F. (2009). An investigation into the role of image repair theory in strategic conflict management. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(2), 165-186.
- Holtzhausen, D. (2011). The need for a postmodern turn in global public relations. *Public relations in global cultural contexts. multi-paradigmatic perspectives* (pp. 140-167) Routledge.
- Howard, P. N., Agarwal, S. D., & Hussain, M. M. (2011). When do states disconnect their digital networks? regime responses to the political uses of social media. *The Communication Review*, 14(3), 216-232.
- Huang, Y., Lin, Y., & Su, S. (2005). Crisis communicative strategies in Taiwan: Category, continuum, and cultural implication. *Public Relations Review*, 31(2), 229-238.



- Huijgh, E., & Byrne, C. (2012). Opening the windows on diplomacy: A comparison of the domestic dimension of public diplomacy in Canada and Australia. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 7(4), 395-420.
- IHLEN, Ø. V. (2009). On Bourdieu: Public relations in field struggles. *Public relations and social theory* (pp. 70-90) Routledge.
- Ihlen, Ø., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2014). Tears and framing contests: Public organizations countering critical and emotional stories. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 8(1), 45-60.
- Ihlen, Ø., & van Ruler, B. (2007). How public relations works: Theoretical roots and public relations perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3), 243-248.
- Ihlen, Ø., & van Ruler, B. (2009). Introduction: Applying social theory to public relations. In Ø. Ihlen, B. van Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), **Public relations and social theory** () Routledge.
- Ihlen, Ø., & Verhoeven, P. (2012). A public relations identity for the 2010s. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(2), 159-176.
- Joffé, G. (2011). The Arab spring in North Africa: Origins and prospects. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16(4), 507-532.
- Johansson, C. (2009). On Goffman: Researching relations with Erving Goffman as pathfinder.  
In Ø. Ihlen, B. van Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory* ()
- Jones, M. O. (2016). Saudi intervention, sectarianism, and de-democratization in Bahrain's uprising. *Protest, social movements and global democracy since 2011: New perspectives* (pp. 251-279) Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Jones, M. O. (2017). Nation branding and celebrity diplomacy in Bahrain. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 324-330.
- Jordanian FM praises national dialogue initiative. (2011). Retrieved from bna.bh

- Jungblut, M. (2017). Between sealed borders and welcome culture: Analysing mediated public diplomacy during the European migrant crisis. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(4), 384-398.
- Karolak, M. (2012). Escalation of social conflict during popular upheavals: Evidence from Bahrain. *CEU Political Science Journal*, 7(2), 173-195.
- Karolak, M. (2012). (2012). Tourism in Bahrain: A continuous search for economic development and for preservation of cultural heritage. Paper presented at the *Proceedings of the 2012 Gulf Studies Conference*. Retrieved March, , 26
- Karolak, M. (2013). Arab spring and the escalation of the sectarian divide in Bahrain: An assessment. *Conflict & Communication*, 12(1)
- Karolak, M. (2014). Tourism in Bahrain: Challenges and opportunities of economic diversification. *Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends*, 7(2), 97.
- Karolak, M. (2017). Social media and the Arab spring in Bahrain: From mobilization to confrontation. *The Arab spring, civil society, and innovative activism* (pp. 81-119) Springer.
- Kavaratzis, M., & Ashworth, G. (2010). Place branding: Where do we stand? *Towards Effective Place Brand Management*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (UK),
- Kelley, J. R. (2009). Between "Take-offs" and "Crash landings": Situational aspects of public diplomacy. In N. Snow, & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 72-85)
- Kinder, D. R. (2007). Curmudgeonly advice. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 155-162.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research* Sage.
- Kiousis, S., & Wu, X. (2008). International agenda-building and agenda-setting exploring the influence of public relations counsel on US news media and public

perceptions of foreign nations. *International Communication Gazette*, 70(1), 58-75.

Kirat, M. (2005). Public relations practice in the Arab world: A critical assessment. *Public Relations Review*, 31(3), 323-332.

Kruckeberg, D., & Vujnovic, M. (2004). (2004). The imperative for an Arab model of public relations as a foundation and framework for Arab diplomatic, corporate and nongovernmental organization relationships: Challenges and opportunities. Paper presented at the *International Conference on Public Relations in the Arab World: Current Realities and Future Prospects*, College of Communication, University of Sharjah, Sharjah,

Kruckeberg, D., & Vujnovic, M. (2005). Public relations, not propaganda, for US public diplomacy in a post-9/11 world: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Communication Management*, 9(4), 296-304.

Kunczik, M. (1997). *Images of nations and international public relations* Erlbaum Mahwah, NJ.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews (vol. 2)* Sage, London, UK.

Kvale, S. *Interviews :An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks; London: Sage.

L'Etang, J. (1996). Public relations as diplomacy. In J. L'Etang, & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in public relations* ()

L'Etang, J. (2006). Public relations as diplomacy. In J. L'Etang, & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations: Critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 373-388) Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

L'etang, J. (2006). Public relations as diplomacy. In J. L'etang, & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations: Critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 373-388) Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Mahwah, NJ.

- L'Etang, J. (2009). Radical PR: Catalyst for change or an aporia. *Ethical Space*, 6(2), 13-18.
- Lee, K. (2009). How the Hong Kong government lost the public trust in SARS: Insights for government communication in a health crisis. *Public Relations Review*, 35(1), 74-76.
- L'etang, J. (1996). Public relations as diplomacy. In J. 'L'Etang, & M. 'Pieccka (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in public relations* (pp. 14-34). UK: International Thomson Business Press.
- L'Etang, J. (2008). *Public relations: Concepts, practice and critique* Sage.
- L'Etang, J. (2009). Public relations and diplomacy in a globalized world: An issue of public communication. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 53(4), 607-626.
- Lim, J., & Seo, H. (2009). Frame flow between government and the news media and its effects on the public: Framing of North Korea. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 21(2), 204-223.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 97-128)
- Lindholm, K., & Olsson, E. (2011). Crisis communication as a multilevel game: The Muhammad cartoons from a crisis diplomacy perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(2), 254-271.
- Lyu, J. C. (2012). A comparative study of crisis communication strategies between mainland china and Taiwan: The melamine-tainted milk powder crisis in the Chinese context. *Public Relations Review*, 38(5), 779-791.
- Mabon, S. (2012). The battle for Bahrain: Iranian.Saudi rivalry. *Middle East Policy*, 19(2), 84-97.

- Maguire, S., & Vickers, R. (2013). (2013). Constructing Britain's response to the Arab uprisings: A comparison of Bahrain and Libya. Paper presented at the
- Maiorescu, R. D. (2016). Deutsche Telekom's spying scandal: An international application of the image repair discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 42(4), 673-678.
- Manama municipality to hold festival. (2011). Retrieved from bna.bh
- Manfreda, P. (2018). What is the Arab spring? Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/definition-of-the-arab-spring-2353029>
- Maresh, M., & Williams, D. E. (2012). Oil industry crisis communication. *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, 31, 285.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* Sage.
- Matheson, J. L. (2007). The voice transcription technique: Use of voice recognition software to transcribe digital interview data in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 12(4), 547560.
- Matthes, J. (2009). What's in a frame? A content analysis of media framing studies in the world's leading communication journals, 1990-2005. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86(2), 349-367.
- Matthes, J. (2012). Framing politics: An integrative approach. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56(3), 247-259.
- Matthiesen, T. (2013). EU foreign policy towards Bahrain in the aftermath of the uprising. *The Gulf States and the Arab Uprisings*, , 77-85.
- McKie, D. (2001). Updating public relations: "New science," research paradigms, and uneven developments. *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 75-91) Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Melissen, J. (2005). *The new public diplomacy: Soft power in international relations* Palgrave Macmillan.

- Melissen, J. (2005a). The new public diplomacy: between theory and practice In J. Melissen (Ed.), *The new public diplomacy. soft power in international relations* (pp. 3-27) PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- Melki, J., & Jabado, M. (2016). Mediated public diplomacy of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria: The synergistic use of terrorism, social media and branding. *Media and Communication, 4*(2), 92-103.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* John Wiley & Sons.
- Mor, B. D. (2009). Accounts and impression management in public diplomacy: Israeli justification of force during the 2006 Lebanon war. *Global Change, Peace & Security, 21*(2), 219-239.
- Morse, J. M. (2003). Principles of mixed methods and multimethod research design. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioural research* (pp. 189-208)
- Mushaima talks to al-alam TV. (2011). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq\\_7vK-DacY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gq_7vK-DacY)
- Nisbet, E. C., Nisbet, M. C., Scheufele, D. A., & Shanahan, J. E. (2004). Public diplomacy, television news, and Muslim opinion. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 9*(2), 11-37.
- Nitzel, L. (n/d). What is revolution? Retrieved from <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/exeas/asian-revolutions/pdf/what-is-revolution.pdf>
- Nuruzzaman, M. (2015). Rethinking foreign military interventions to promote human rights: Evidence from Libya, Bahrain and Syria. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne De Science Politique, 48*(3), 531-552.
- Nye Jr, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 616*(1), 94-109.
- Olsson, E. (2013). Public diplomacy as a crisis communication tool. *Journal of International Communication, 19*(2), 219-234.

- Organisational structure. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.mia.gov.bh/ar/TheMinistry/Pages/Organizational-Structure.aspx>
- Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M., & Snape, D. (2014). The foundations of qualitative research. In Ritchie J, Lewis J, Nicholls C, Ormston R (Ed.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students & researchers* (second edition ed., pp. 125). Great Britain: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Pamment, J. (2011). *The limits of the new public diplomacy: Strategic communication and evaluation at the US state department, foreign & commonwealth office, British council, Swedish foreign ministry and Swedish institute* Department of Journalism, Media and Communication (JMK), Stockholm University,.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication, 10*(1), 55-75.
- Park, S. J., & Lim, Y. S. (2014). Information networks and social media use in public diplomacy: A comparative analysis of South Korea and Japan. *Asian Journal of Communication, 24*(1), 79-98.
- Peijuan, C., Ting, L. P., & Pang, A. (2009). Managing a nation's image during crisis: A study of the Chinese government's image repair efforts in the "Made in China" controversy. *Public Relations Review, 35*(3), 213-218.
- Perakyla, A., Ruusuvuori, J., Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*
- Pieczka, M. (2006). Paradigms, systems theory, and public relations. In J. L'etang, & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations: Critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 333-357) Routledge.
- Pinto, V. (2014). Exploring the interplay between framing and securitization theory: The case of the Arab Spring protests in Bahrain. *Revista Brasileira De Política Internacional, 57*(1), 162-176.
- Pratkanis, A. (2009). Public diplomacy in international conflicts: A social influence analysis.

*Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York: Routledge, , 111-153.

The PSF enters Bahrain. (2011). Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DkIVwr6F4g>

reuters.com. (2011). Iran urges Bahrain to prevent "foreign interference". Retrieved from

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-bahrain-saudi/iran-urges-bahrain-to-preventforeign-interference-idUSTRE72D7NP20110314>

Rojas, J. F. (2011). Muammar Gadhafi in his own words. Retrieved from

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8838644/Muammar-Gaddafi-in-his-own-words.html>

Rosenthal, U., & Kouzmin, A. (1997). Crises and crisis management: Toward comprehensive government decision making. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 7(2), 277-304.

Roulston, K. (2014). *Analysing interviews*. (pp. 297-312) Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). ***Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*** (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.

Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. 2005.

Samei, M. F. A. (2015). The European Union's public diplomacy towards the Arab spring: The case of Egypt. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 10(2), 111-138.

Sanders, K. (2011). Political public relations and government communication. In J. Stromback, & S. Kioussis (Eds.), *Political public relations. principles and applications* (pp. 254-273) Routledge New York.

Saunders, M. N., & Lewis, P. (2012). *Doing research in business & management: An essential guide to planning your project* Pearson.

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103-122.



- Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Agenda-setting, priming, and framing revisited: Another look at cognitive effects of political communication. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(2-3), 297-316.
- Schultz, F., & Raupp, J. (2010). The social construction of crises in governmental and corporate communications: An inter-organizational and inter-systemic analysis. *Public Relations Review*, 36(2), 112-119.
- Scott-Smith, G. (2008). Exchange programs and public diplomacy. *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 70-76) Routledge.
- Seib, P. (2009). Public diplomacy and journalism: Parallels, ethical issues, and practical concerns. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 52(5), 772-786.
- Sheafer, T., & Gabay, I. (2009). Mediated public diplomacy: A strategic contest over international agenda building and frame building. *Political Communication*, 26(4), 447-467.
- Sheafer, T., Shenhav, S. R., Takens, J., & Van Atteveldt, W. (2014). Relative political and value proximity in mediated public diplomacy: The effect of state-level homophily on international frame building. *Political Communication*, 31(1), 149-167.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message. white plains NY* Longman.
- Siew-Yoong Low, Y., Varughese, J., & Pang, A. (2011). Communicating crisis: How culture influences image repair in western and Asian governments. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(3), 218-242.
- Signitzer, B. H., & Coombs, T. (1992). Public relations and public diplomacy: Conceptual convergences. *Public Relations Review*, 18(2), 137-147.
- Signitzer, B., & Wamser, C. (2006). Public diplomacy: A specific governmental public relations function. *Public relations theory II* (pp. 435-464) Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data: A guide to the principles of qualitative research* SAGE Publications Limited.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data :Methods for analysing talk, text, and interaction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- The situation in Bahrain is different from Libya, Spanish foreign minister said. (2011). Retrieved from bna.bh
- Snow, D. A. (2004). Framing processes, ideology, and discursive fields. In D. Snow, S. Soule & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 380-412) Blackwell Oxford.
- Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1992). *Master frames and cycles of protest* New Haven.
- Snow, N. (2009). Rethinking public diplomacy. In N. Snow, & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 3-11) Routledge New York & London.
- Snow, N., & Taylor, P. M. (2009). Preface and introduction. In N. Snow, & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. ix-xi)
- Stoller, A. K. (2014). *True Citizens of Bahrain: Discourse on Bahraini Identity since the Arab Spring*,
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research :Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strydom, H., & Venter, L. (2005). Sampling and sampling methods. *Research at Grassroots for the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, 3, 192-204.
- Szondi, G. (2008). *Public diplomacy and nation branding: Conceptual similarities and differences* Netherlands Institute of International Relations' Clingendael'.

- Szondi, G. (2009). Central and eastern European public diplomacy: A transitional perspective on national reputation management. In N. Snow, & P. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of public diplomacy* (pp. 292-313)
- Tankard Jr, J. W. (2001). The empirical approach to the study of media framing. *Framing public life* (pp. 111-121) Routledge.
- Tawfeeq, M. (2011). Iraqis protest against crackdown on Shiites in Bahrain. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/17/iraq.bahrain.sectarian.tension/index.html>
- Thousands protest to overthrow Bahraini government. (2011). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r\\_J3KCgb1v8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_J3KCgb1v8)
- Towner, E. B. (2009). Apologia, image repair, and reconciliation the application, limitations, and future directions of apologetic rhetoric. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 33(1), 431-468.
- Tsetsura, K. (2010). Social construction and public relations. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of public relations* (pp. 163) SAGE.
- Ulrichsen, K. C. (2013). Bahrain's uprising: Regional dimensions and international consequences. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(1)
- usnews.com. (2011). Obama administration urges Mubarak to step down. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2011/02/04/obama-administration-urgesmubarak-to-step-down>
- Van Dyke, M., & Vercic, D. (2009). Public relations, public diplomacy, and strategic communication: An international model of conceptual convergence. *Global public relations handbook: Theory, research and practice*. New York: Routledge
- ( )
- Van Gorp, B. (2007). The constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back in.

*Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 60-78.

Van Gorp, B. (2010). Strategies to take subjectivity out of framing analysis. *Doing news framing analysis* (pp. 100-125) Routledge.

Van Ham, P. (2003). War, lies, and videotape: Public diplomacy and the USA's war on terrorism. *Security Dialogue*, 34(4), 427-444.

Vanc, A. M., & Fitzpatrick, K. R. (2016). Scope and status of public diplomacy research by public relations scholars, 1990–2014. *Public Relations Review*, 42(3), 432-440.

Vaxevanidou, M. (2016). Public diplomacy as a tool to change the image of a country in crisis. *Journal of Media Critiques [JMC]*, 2(8)

Vela, Jordi de San Eugenio, & Xifra, J. (2015). International representation strategies for stateless nations: The case of Catalonia's cultural diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 11(1), 83-96.

Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., Zeffass, A., Moreno, A., & Verčič, D. (2014). Crisis? what crisis?: How european professionals handle crises and crisis communication. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1), 107-109.

Vision, mission, and goals. (2014). Retrieved from

<http://www.mia.gov.bh/ar/TheMinistry/Pages/Vision-Mission-and-Goals.aspx>

Vujnovic, M., & Kruckeberg, D. (2005). Imperative for an Arab model of public relations as a framework for diplomatic, corporate and nongovernmental organization relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 31(3), 338-343.

Warren, C. A. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, 839101

Weatherby, P., & Longworth, S. (2011). The Bahrain independent commission of inquiry: As one season ends, does another begin. *YB Islamic & Middle EL*, 16, 91.

- Weaver, C. (2011). Public relations, globalization and culture: Framing methodological debates and future directions. *Public Relations in Global Cultural Contexts: MultiParadigmatic Perspectives*, , 250-274.
- White, J., & Hobsbawm, J. (2007). Public relations and journalism: The unquiet relationship— a view from the united kingdom. *Journalism Practice*, 1(2), 283-292.
- Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheafer, T. (2013). Social media and the Arab spring: Politics comes first. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 115-137.
- Wright, S. (2008). *Fixing the kingdom: Political evolution and socio-economic challenges in Bahrain*
- Wu, D., & Yang, A. (2017). China's public diplomatic networks on the ebola issue in West Africa: Issues management in a network society. *Public Relations Review*, 43(2), 345-357.
- Xifra, J., & McKie, D. (2012). From realpolitik to noopolitik: The public relations of (stateless) nations in an information age. *Public Relations Review*, 38(5), 819-824.
- Yarchi, M., Wolfsfeld, G., Sheafer, T., & Shenhav, S. R. (2013). Promoting stories about terrorism to the international news media: A study of public diplomacy. *Media, War & Conflict*, 6(3), 263-278.
- Yateem, A. (2014). The predicament of Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 8(3)
- YLI-KAITALA, K. (2014). Revolution 2.0 in Egypt: Pushing for change, foreign influences on a popular revolt. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 13(1-2), 127-151.
- Yun, S., & Toth, E. L. (2009). Future sociological public diplomacy and the role of public relations: Evolution of public diplomacy. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 53(4), 493-503.

- Zaharna, R. S., & Uysal, N. (2016). Going for the jugular in public diplomacy: How adversarial publics using social media are challenging state legitimacy. *Public Relations Review*, 42(1), 109-119.
- Zaharna, R. (2004). Asymmetry of cultural styles and the unintended consequences of crisis public diplomacy. *Intercultural Communication and Diplomacy*, , 133-142.
- Zhang, C., & Meadows III, C. W. (2012). International coverage, foreign policy, and national image: Exploring the complexities of media coverage, public opinion, and presidential agenda. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 20.
- Zhang, J. (2005). World system and its agents: Analysis of the registrants of foreign agent registration act (FARA). *Public Relations Review*, 31(1), 47-54.
- Zhang, J. (2006). Public diplomacy as symbolic interactions: A case study of Asian tsunami relief campaigns. *Public Relations Review*, 32(1), 26-32.
- Zhang, J. (2013). A strategic issue management (SIM) approach to social media use in public diplomacy. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 57(9), 1312-1331.
- Zhang, J., & Benoit, W. L. (2004). Message strategies of Saudi Arabia's image restoration campaign after 9/11. *Public Relations Review*, 30(2), 161-167.
- Zhang, J., & Benoit, W. L. (2004). Message strategies of Saudi Arabia's image restoration campaign after 9/11. *Public Relations Review*, 30(2), 161-167.
- Zhang, J., & Swartz, B. C. (2009). Public diplomacy to promote global public goods (GPG): Conceptual expansion, ethical grounds, and rhetoric. *Public Relations Review*, 35(4), 382-387.
- Zhang, T., Kim, J. Y., Mohr, T. L., Myslik, B. A., Khalitova, L., Golan, G. J., & Kiouisis, S. (2017). Agenda-building role of state-owned media around the world: 2014 Hong Kong protest case. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(5), 238-254.
- Zhong, X., & Lu, J. (2013). Public diplomacy meets social media: A study of the US embassy's blogs and micro-blogs. *Public Relations Review*, 39(5), 542-548.

## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Objective:** To understand the messages communicated by the Authority of Information Affairs (IAA) through news targeted at foreign media during the 2011 crisis, and what factors influenced the articulation of these messages. The questions seek to explore strategies through which IAA worked with foreign media during the 2011 crisis and its aftermath, the content of the key messages the Authority communicated through the examined timeframe, and processes of producing news sent to foreign media.

### **Introduction topics:**

- How long have you been working in the Ministry?
- What do you do on day-to-day basis?
- What kind of communication responsibilities and tasks you were engaged in during 2011 events and their aftermath?

### **Topic 1: Foreign media relations' strategies**

- What media relations activities was IAA engaged in in February 2011?
- Were there any strategies specifically designed to communicate and coordinate with foreign media across the three key moments?
  - If any, what were the goals of these strategies?
  - How were they designed? (executive meetings, consultancy, research, other?)
  - Who was involved in the design processes?
  - Which departments were mainly responsible for carrying out this work? Why?
  - Were these strategies exclusively designed by IAA or did other parties also have a role?
  - If any, why did the Authority need to collaborate with other parties in designing its strategies to communicate with foreign media?
  - What kind of tactics did these strategies involve?
- What foreign media outlets did the authority target? Why these?
  - Did it manage to work with all the outlets it targeted?
  - How/why do you believe it managed/failed to do so?
- How did international media relations help/hinder IAA in delivering its messages during the 2011 crisis?
- What else did IAA do in following the 2011 events to communicate about Bahrain abroad and restore its image?

*(continued next page)*

## Topic 2: Foreign media relations' messages

- What were the authority's key messages about Bahrain in its communication with foreign media during the events of 2011 and their aftermath?
- What were the key messages at the beginning of the crisis (February- March 2011)?
  - Were these messages different from what the Authority communicated before the protests? How? Why?
  - Did the Authority change its messages while the events were unfolding? How? Why?
- What were the Authority's messages at the time of publishing the BICI report (November 2011)?
  - Are these different from what the authority communicated at the beginning of the crisis? How? Why?
  - How did IAA use BICI report in its communications with foreign media?
  - How did publishing BICI report affect how IAA communicated with foreign media? (messages, goals, approaches, targeted media, etc.)
  - Did the Authority change its messages after the period of publishing the report? How? Why?

*(continued next page)*



### Topic 3: Processes for the production of media relations texts

➤ What was the typical process of producing news across the three key moments?

If any, why did the Authority need to follow a different process every time?

Who was involved in producing these texts? (IAA employees, foreign/local consultancies, freelancers, other governmental communicators, etc)

If any, why were non-IAA communicators involved?

Were there any specific requirements on who produced these texts?

Were the texts' writers aware of the key messages? How did they know about it?

Did IAA need to train any of the text producers to do the job? If yes, tell me more about it.

➤ After writing the texts, did they need to be approved before being sent to foreign media? How? Why? By whom?

➤ How were the texts used? (foreign media only, website, shared through email, fax, etc.)

➤ In what different languages were the texts produced? Why?

➤ Did IAA face any challenges against the messages it wanted to present about Bahrain during 2011 crisis and its aftermath? If any, can you tell me more about it?

➤ Did the Authority monitor foreign media coverage? Why?

- Did the Authority need to change any of its practices in response to what was observed in foreign media coverage? How? Why?

### Wrapping up:

➤ Do you think any of the infinitives should have been handled differently? Why?

➤ What do you believe are the lessons learnt from the 2011 crisis and its aftermath in terms of communicating with foreign media?

➤ If any, is the ministry implementing any of these lessons in its media relations today?

## APPENDIX 2: TEMPLATE OF THE CONSENT FORM

### PROJECT: FRAMING BAHRAIN THROUGH PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

This project aims to understand how Bahrain was presented by the Information Affairs Authority (IAA) to foreign media in 2011, and what factors influenced the way Bahrain was presented during this period.

The interviews are conducted as part of a PhD research project at the University of Stirling, UK, with the purpose of gaining in-depth understanding of the studied topic.

I agree to participate in this project, whose conditions are as follows:

- The interview and the information it contains will be used solely for the above mentioned project, and in academic publications originating from it.
- At any time, I can withdraw from the project, and request that any data relating to my responses should be destroyed.
- To ensure accuracy, the interview will be recorded. Based on research codes at the University of Stirling, the audio records and the interview transcripts will be kept securely and password protected for five years by the interviewer.
- All interview data will be handled so as to protect my confidentiality. Therefore, no names or personal information to reveal identity will be revealed or mentioned.
- For any information about the project, I can contact Rana AlOmari at [r.a.alomari@stir.ac.uk](mailto:r.a.alomari@stir.ac.uk).

Respondent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE OF ONE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

- In my research, I'm working on the concept of public diplomacy. We don't use this label in Bahrain, but the practice of government communication targeted at publics of other nations is still observed in Bahrain. I'm specifically focusing on the aspect of media relations within public diplomacy.
- Okay.
- So, what I want to know is how BNA or IAA as the main governmental communication platform during the examined crisis communicated its messages about Bahrain during the timeframes of focus? How it framed Bahrain? This is one thing I'm looking at, and I intend to explore it through interviews with people who were involved in message writing and decision making during the crisis. The other thing is the news articles published by BNA during the crisis. I'm not focusing on confidential texts communicated at the time. I'm interested in what was actually published.
- Are you interested in certain timeframes within the crisis?
- Yes, the peak moments within the 2011 crisis: the beginning of the crisis, the events of February and March 2011, and the publication of BICI report.
- Okay. In terms of the published news, I'll arrange for you to meet someone to show you how to access the data you need. If you want they can provide you with a soft copy of everything. It may take them a day or two, maximum, if you want them to prepare soft copies.
- Excellent.
- So how did we deal with the events from a media perspective. At the beginning of the 2011 crisis, we didn't know how to deal with media regarding the events in Bahrain. Definitely, the situation was strange to us; no one expected it. We don't have any previous experience in handling it. There were troubles in more than one country and we were watching. We were shocked. So the shock resulted, in the first 3-4 days, in unclear media vision. What is our direction, where are we going with this, how to use language, what approaches should we use? We didn't know. So, an emergency media team was formed. It contained senior people from IAA and communicators from other government entities. The team's mission was to closely observe the situation: monitor, analyse, and then suggest how to deal with the situation... We started

preparing news drafts ahead based on expectations and scenarios in the region. Then we tried to get approval on our messages and be ready.

- Okay.
- After the fourth or fifth day, there started to be more focus on Bahrain. There were statements coming from countries, and stances from countries that didn't know what exactly was happening in Bahrain. Therefore, the target was to present the situation to foreign media outlets.
- Can you remember when exactly?
- I can't remember it was chaotic. We were late in many things in terms of the steps taken to respond to foreign media. But it was also never too late. We started to focus on foreign media... an emergency media team was formed to work within IAA. The team was considered an emergency media team to handle the communications during that time. The team was important especially as false news started to spread and increase at the level of information about the victims, the deaths, the detentions, everything, even the vocabulary used... As a news agency our role was to communicate with all agencies we had agreements with, and which operate in different languages: Russian, Chinese, Italian, Indian, German, and French. We started to activate our work with each agency we had agreement or cooperation with by directly communicating with them to assure the delivery of Bahrain's news and the true situation. After the crisis, we expanded the activation of these agreements. We increased our co-operation with these agencies to continue our media battle of correcting the false image about Bahrain and defend Bahrain in foreign media. BNA's role was to communicate daily with these agencies and send our news to them through the Wires system. We also used emails. We established a database for the most popular journalists and writers interested in the events in Arab countries and Bahraini affairs. So, we sent them a daily package containing news, images, and videos to show them the image on daily bases and to communicate the official stance. the videos were used to assure they get the true image on what is happening.

On a later stage, we also used journalists' visits. We invite journalists. When they come and see the situation with their naked eyes, they tend to believe more. When an image or a video is sent, they might think it is fabricated. Or they think we are trying to glorify the image of the government. So decision makers decided to invite journalists to Bahrain. And the visits actually started. I won't say that they changed their perspective 100%, but they started to be convinced on what it is really happening in Bahrain.

- So all these procedures were initiated as a result of the crisis?

- Yes, a result. On the communicative level, no one was ready to handle a crisis like this. But we started to learn, every day we go through an experience and we learn from it. We also started to learn from others' experiences. We started observing how other countries dealt with problematic events, and we started to correct our previous approaches. We did well in certain places, but we also failed in others due to the lack of information.

The visits by foreign journalists had more positive than negative effect. It was not our goal to change their perceptions. Our goal was to let them see with their own eyes. So we started to observe that some of them finally started to write objectively. We also found, through the journalists who used to visit Bahrain, that some of them used to enter the country as tourists but pursue their journalistic work as soon as they arrive. Some of them used to come with a prepared agenda to meet a certain person and leave. So we tried to make sure, we don't want to change their opinion, but at least we want our voice to be heard too. We want our statements to be also included in their coverage. Honestly, some journalists were professional as they responded well to this, either Arab or foreign journalists. Some journalists, no, they have a specific agenda- they leave the airport to meet a certain person, and they say they don't want our opinion.

- Were those the same journalists who entered Bahrain as tourists?
- Many of them entered as tourists, although Bahrain doesn't prevent the entry of journalists. The IAA was ready to welcome any journalist. Our only condition was, if you are covering a story in Bahrain take both opinions. This was the only condition. We will not interfere in your journalistic work, or what to write, but include different perspectives.
- Did you start working with any foreign media platforms, news agencies, media organisation which you never dealt with before as a result of the crisis?
- Many. After the crisis we initiated work with many media organisations we didn't work with before. We activated agreements with the Spanish and Italian. In India, we are now working with the biggest news agency, PTI. We expanded the agreement with the Russian. We initiated cooperation with China and South Korea. We have agreements with the French and now negotiating expansion. With the Spanish our goal is to cover Latin America because we did not have a voice reached there... in the Arab region we increased cooperation with the Egyptian news agency as the situation changed there and the image on the Bahraini situation did not reach Egyptian people clearly. The Bahraini image did not reach many Arab publics. So we had to activate agreements with many Arab countries to publish news about Bahrain daily, and deliver the true image.

- As we are still discussing the beginning of the crisis, you told me that there were many things you learnt after the crisis. Didn't you have a clear strategy before the crisis? At the BNA? At the IAA? Did you apply the concept of strategic planning?
- There were only general plans. But the events that occurred imposed many things that we did not consider earlier.
- Do you believe strategic planning was implemented at any stage?
- Maybe in certain sectors to handle some crisis experiences on organisational level in ministries. But unprecedented comprehensive crisis on military, security, economic, and political levels was a new experience.
- Okay. Would you like to continue the discussion on the strategy at other stages of the crisis or do you want to talk about messages now?
- No, strategies. After a year from the events, or immediately after the events, there were work plans. But as strategies, a year after the crisis there were two strategies. One developed by Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammad to improve Bahraini media and deal with the challenges arising from the crisis. The other strategy was put by Samira Rajab. It was about the media and improving it. Both strategies involved the communication challenges we faced in 2011 and how to deal with it.
- How were these post-crisis strategies developed? Research? External agencies? Or by seniors at IAA?
- The first one was put with the help of a company, but the consultants were from all the media sectors inside and out the IAA. The second was through internal consultants besides the executive faculty at the IAA...
- Would you like to discuss anything on the motives of employing external agencies and not IAA staff to develop strategies?
- It was the vision of the minister. The leadership of the ministry.
- So all this happened after 2011?
- Yes.
- Was this in general, or there was something specifically done at the time of publishing BICI report?
- As I told you, the strategy was to meet the challenges that they both met, each one at a time different from the other. But there wasn't a plan in action. Our media was always criticized for not keeping up with the challenges facing the

country. I agree to some extent, and don't agree at the same time. To what extent we managed to deliver our message. Well, there were a lot of efforts, but we also need to know there was agenda against Bahrain. If they wanted the Bahraini voice to be heard, they would have allowed it. But, the goal was to mute the Bahraini voice. The political dimension was way more dominant than media issues.

- Was there any documentation of this strategy? Even for purposes of internal communication?
- Yes, it was.
- Can I take a look at the document?
- I may find you a copy.
- Is it a confidential document?
- No, it was published online. I'll try to find you a copy if it is still available. I think it is too old now to be found online.
- Was there something specifically developed for the publication of BICI report? A special strategy? We are now discussing the third timeframe, unless you want to discuss something about the first two.
- Not really.

It was a historical event for Bahrain. The report. We didn't know the details that will be in the report. But we were prepared to communicate the truth as soon as possible. Everybody was waiting for BICI report. The whole world is watching, media channels; citizens; everyone. So, as a news agency, we made sure to be the first voice to transmit the results as soon as possible. So we were there. Of course, we prepared reports about the significance of this topic. We didn't know the content, so we didn't even have any analysis of the findings, or expectations on what will happen. But, we knew there will be a speech by Bassioni, and a speech by his majesty the king. This is the scenario we had. And there is a report that will be approved. So we were there at the ceremony. We were broadcasting live for those who couldn't watch TV, so they can watch through the internet. After that, since the king and Bassioni's speeches started, we started broadcasting as soon as possible through social media or Twitter. We wanted to assure that the published news is correct. It is true that there was more than one media platform covering the event, but we gave the best credibility especially as people were waiting for the truth and they wanted to hear it from the news agency.

After this, we started the analysis phase. Publishing the report on BNA's website for two years. The original report was available for two years; we then replaced it with the report of the follow-up committee.

- Did you prepare any messages on the publication of the report before it was actually published? About this project in particular?
- Sure, we prepared a media plan. After a while there was a comprehensive media plan on what to talk, this event, this project, this step taken by Bahrain. A step no one dared to take before- to invite a foreign committee to investigate the events in your country. The main goal was to focus on this effort. The other thing is, we did not expect the existing scenario as we did not know the content of the report. It could be something positive or negative in the report. We were ready to share everything, really. The King's order was to publish the full report as it is. So the full detailed report was published on BNA's website to work as a scientific resource for anyone interested in the case of Bahrain.
- We know when the report was published it created further challenges for Bahrain. What was next? Did you change anything about your communications? Was something new established?
- The goal of media communications was as the plan. On the level of news agencies, we share news with them as soon as possible. For social media specifically, we started to use it more. After accepting the report's findings, we entered the phase of implementing the recommendations of the report. So the challenge of the media plan was always emphasising the implementation of the recommendations. Emphasise the government's seriousness about the recommendations. This was the main message- Bahrain is serious about implementing the recommendations of BICI. We established special sections on the website, and we published news there, and updated it with images to show the government's seriousness about the implementation of the recommendations.
- Didn't this lead, as at the beginning of the crisis, to establishing new communication activities or news networks? I understood from what you said that social media was one thing.
- In the first year we established a main database. After this, any VIP, guest, or figure interested in Bahrain's affairs was added to this list. So the database grew like a snowball. At least our goal was to do something correctly- we established a database for contacts and we communicated with them on daily bases. This database is still growing today.
- Is it correct what I understood about focusing on social media after publishing the report?



- The social media revolution surfaced during the events in Arab countries. It was the fastest platform to deliver information and to build an image. The attacks started from social media. The false news started from social media. The threats started from social media. Harassing publics started from social media. So we had to be present as an official and media organisation and perform as the only official source of government messages.
- Were all these plans put at the IAA or BNA, or were there external contributors?
- We continuously, almost daily, work on reports about the country's accomplishments under the umbrella of BICI's findings. We also utilise infographics- we use it on social media. We also use PDF images. We try to keep up with what is published on BNA's website by publishing it on social media too.
- Did anything change after this phase? After publishing the report?
- In my personal opinion, the report experience was shocking to many countries. No one expected Bahrain to be this brave. To open doors and implement the project, no one expected it. The other surprise was Bahrain's, under the leadership of his majesty the king, acceptance of the entire recommendations. It was expected that, like any country Bahrain would reject the recommendations, or accuse the committee to distance the truth. Bahrain's goal was to know the truth about the vents. It believed in the committee and gave it all authority. The biggest challenge was to accept all recommendations without exceptions. And the last thing is the implementation of the recommendations.
- I want to go back to media messages at the beginning of the crisis. Were you focused on specific messages before 2011 and then changed it? Did you change your media tone?
- ...
- Okay.
- We only started to have messages after 3-4 days about what to say and what we need to do. As I told you, we did not have information; there was an absence of decision making during a specific time. What is happening, what to say, we did not know. Journalists and media people would call and we did not know what to tell them. The situation was not clear, the information was not clear.
- Do you remember these messages? Are there any documents?

- ...
- Okay, I understand.

Can I have a moment to revise my questions and make sure if I missed something?

- Okay and I will try to find if there is any document on the messages.
- So, was there any other department at the IAA responsible for communicating the messages with foreign media?
- Just the agency.
- Was the cooperation with foreign media platforms successful with all of them, or do you feel there are some that didn't respond and continued as it was?
- We did not aim to pressure foreign media as much as we aimed to deliver our voice. To be honest, there were countries which supported us, knew the situation, and published everything we wanted. In other countries we only hoped to get our voice to them without pressuring them. We believed that as long as they started to publish news about Bahrain then we must get our voice heard in their own language. Not as a response, but included in the story.

...

- I want to ask about the daily processes, how did the BNA work on producing materials targeting foreign media?
- There is a point I want to mention, which establishing a unit at the IAA for news exchange. Previously we only published through Wires- we broadcast, finish, and goodbye. Now no. we have a follow-up unit introduced to the organisational chart. It is not just a name, but a unit in the organisational chart. The mission of the news exchange unit is to follow-up with the news agencies to assure the activation of our agreements with them, not just signing an agreement and that's it. This assures follow-up for both sides- they publish, and we publish.

Okay, so you asked me about the daily processes at the BNA.

- Sorry, can you just tell me when was this unit introduced?
- 2013. As an idea of a project it started in 2013. But it only started to function lately.
- Okay, you can continue now where I interrupted you.

- Okay, so how the BNA works and the daily process. As news agency, we have more than one news source. We either have ready press releases received from ministries, or an event covered by the agency's media team. We also have news published through Arab, Gulf, or foreign news agencies... We have agreements with some agencies so we publish their news, and they publish ours... After receiving news from different sources, we have a team comprised of editors and a chief editor. Tasks are allocated by the chief editor: you cover this story, you cover that. After this, the news returns to the chief editor and he/she publishes it on the wires service for international reach. Then we have the Internet team who takes the news from the wires system and publishes it on our website. Now we also use social media with all its tools. We now also have people to follow-up when we have important news story that must be delivered in hand or phone. We now have a unit for networking with other news agencies, or through emails, SMS, or WhatsApp groups to send them the news, and kindly ask them to take care of this story.
  - Is this the unit introduced in 2013, or was it there before?
  - Yes. Before it used to happen spontaneously. But to organise our work better we introduced this unit to handle follow-up. All news agencies receive our news. Yet, if we have a news story which we want to emphasise, we need to communicate on a personal or administrative level: please can you take care of this story by emphasising or publishing it? You know, every agency receives hundreds of news every day, and therefore is not obliged to publish your news. But with good relationships and by highlighting their news and vice versa you create a good relationship, and build mutual respect to be able to publish any news you want in the future.
  - Did you need to train any of the people who handled the writing of the messages during the different stages of the crisis? Did you need to bring new people?
  - We needed to bring more people to help with the English language. We needed support with translating from Arabic to English and vice versa. We needed support in writing and revising our statements to make sure it is accurate. We needed support in translation and articulation of messages. We needed to make sure the messages are clear and accurate.
- ...
- I remember you telling me that at the beginning of the crisis your work was hampered by the need for approvals on the messages.
  - Yes, no one knew what is happening, what is the situation, what is the crisis, what will happen, what is the scenario. Until 3-4 days, things became a bit clearer, and we all became on the same track...

- I want to make sure I got this correctly. Were the written materials only targeted at foreign media, or was it used for other purposes too?
- We mainly publish our news items on the website. This is the first step so foreign media can see it. We also send these items to the local press, and email the same material to foreign media.
- So was this the main process?
- Yes. Sometimes we also need to wait on certain messages to get approval and assure the accuracy of the information. Sometimes there is a press conference, and we need to contact the person in charge to make sure this is what they mean.
- You mention that you monitor the news published across foreign media platforms, agencies, or other sources. Did the materials published foreign platforms have any connections with how you write your messages?
- Can you explain?
- Do you monitor foreign media and adjust your own messages accordingly?
- ...
- So does the material you observe influence your own messages?
- Normally. ...
- So, did you need to change anything?
- If we find that the image is still not clear in certain areas, we increase the news published in that sector. If there is an agency that always uses a wrong background, we try to deliver the correct image, and that this background you are using is false information. Repeatedly publishing false information, so we have to intervene. Our role of intervening is to draw their attention to the false information.
- Were there any major incidents you can tell me about?
- We usually struggled with Reuters, and the French and German news agencies. They always used a fixed background in their news about Bahrain. They kept saying it was ruled by Sunni family, or Sunni minority and Shi'a majority. This language is not used in the country's system, neither in its law. So, they are triggering sectarian fallacy and sectarian tensions. They are telling the Sunnis they are the majority, or telling the Shiite they are the majority. They must not write in this way. I don't see them saying in their news about Britain that Protestants are more than Catholics, or Catholics are more than

Protestants as a fixed background. It was obvious that they intended to put this [sectarian message] as a fixed message.

- Was there anything that could have been done differently at the time?
- With the first shock we were not ready. Then we tried to prepare ourselves within the resources we have. There were improvising. In certain places we did well, and in others we didn't. So after this we had to stop or correct where to point our compass.
- What are the lessons the IAA and BNA learned from this experience?
- In general, we need to have a well-studied plan, and to have well-prepared communicators to implement this plan. We have challenges now in terms of employment. In any government organisation in any country, you can find a problem in this area. We learnt a lot from this crisis. As communicators we learnt how to respond and interact, how to perceive different events, how to use language, tone, and articulate. We needed training of course. So we started various training programmes to handle media in crises: spokesperson, online media, translation, political analysis. All these training programmes did not exist before, but due to the crisis we had to adapt, and change even our training programmes.
- In terms of communicating with foreign media in specific, was there something where you said this we must change?
- It is easier now, when a level of trust is built. When there's any foreign media representative that wants to visit Bahrain, the procedure is easier. The follow-up is easier. There is more trust now in the official Bahraini media or in the BNA. Our news is always present. At the same time, we don't prevent them from using our news and adding opinions and comments. The most important thing is that the BNA message or the official message is present in their news.
- Is there anything you'd like to add on any of the topics we discussed today?
- No, I believe this is all I have. Can I contact you if I remember anything?
- Of course, please do. You have my phone number and email.
- You can get in touch too if you need to ask more questions.
- Thank you...

