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## **The power of sharing power: Presidential character, power mutuality, and country reputation**

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### **Abstract**

Using the context of the United States' (U.S.) President Donald Trump's promotion of an America First agenda, this study conducted an online survey ( $n = 511$ ) in Australia to explore the dynamics among Australians' perceptions of presidential character, power mutuality, and U.S. country reputation. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were conducted to explore and validate the construct of power mutuality. The findings indicate that power mutuality consists of two dimensions: perceived power balance and perceived power dominance. Results from Structural Equation Modeling revealed that power mutuality fully mediates the association between foreign publics' perceptions of presidential character and the governmental aspect of country reputation. It partially mediates the association between presidential character and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation. The implications of these findings on relationship management in public diplomacy are discussed.

*Keywords:* country reputation, mutuality, perceived power balance, perceived power dominance, power mutuality, public diplomacy

## **Highlights**

- Power mutuality is defined as the extent to which a country seeks and pursues shared power with another country.
- It consists of two dimensions: perceived power balance and perceived power dominance.
- It fully mediates the effects of perceptions of presidential character on the governmental aspect of country reputation.
- It partially mediates the effects of perceptions of presidential character on the non-governmental aspect of country reputation.

# 1. Introduction

Public diplomacy is empirically understood as relationship management between a country (or an entity representing a country, such as an embassy or a diplomat) and its key foreign publics (Lee & Jun, 2013). Ideally, public diplomacy should be practiced to promote a balance between a country's own interests and the interests of the key publics in its counterpart countries (Fitzpatrick, 2017). The purpose of public diplomacy should be oriented toward engaging with global publics who are affected by a country's foreign policies (Gregory, 2011) and empowering them to affect decision-making (Zhang, 2013). Public relations has made substantial contributions to contemporary public diplomacy practices due to its focus on relationships (Snow, 2009) as well as its transferable skills and knowledge to public diplomacy practices (Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2013; Yun, 2006).

The application of public relations to public diplomacy has however been challenged by several scholars, who consider it an "engagement delusion," which results from the lack of genuine dialogue between countries and their foreign publics, as well as the primary focus on persuasion (Comor & Bean, 2012, p. 203). Furthermore, it has been suggested that in their public diplomacy practices, numerous countries have adopted public relations tools for advocacy as opposed to listening (Dodd & Collins, 2017). In this paper we argue that power asymmetries that exist among countries as well as between countries and foreign publics are one of the contributing causes of the engagement delusion. In support of this view, Comor and Bean (2012) commented: "engagement cannot sidestep the presence of power asymmetries in international and intercultural relations – asymmetries that shape and structure interactions between the American state and foreign publics" (p. 209). Put simply, power asymmetry plays a significant role in shaping foreign publics' perceptions of a country. Although most foreign publics do not have direct interactions or experiences with a country (Golan, 2013) and are generally reluctant to interact with foreign governments (Storie, 2015), they make observations and interpretations of power differentials between and among countries. Such perceptions can be shaped by observing a country's head of state interact with representatives from other countries (e.g., vicarious interactions; Lee & Seltzer, 2018).

The global resurgence of nationalism in recent years is an example of publics' reactions to an asymmetrical distribution of power, leaving publics in some countries feeling disadvantaged and dominated by other countries. Nationalism is proclaimed to defend the interests of a country itself against those outside of the country (Wimmer, 2019). Bieber (2018) discusses the global rise of nationalism and highlights that nationalism is often used as an easy (and dangerous) resource to shape public opinion and reinforce state power; it can be viewed as an assertion of a country's own power and interests.

Although public diplomacy advocates the pursuit of *mutuality* in terms of understanding, expectations, influence, and outcomes (Fitzpatrick, 2017), there exist power differentials among countries and countries tend to prioritize their own interests. Perceptions of such power differentials could result from conflicts and political tension between two countries, causing citizens in both countries to develop negative sentiments and behavioral intentions toward the other (e.g., Kang, 2013).

Against this backdrop, this study explores such perceptions of power differentials in public diplomacy, which have not been addressed in previous public diplomacy research. To do so, it introduces a new construct: power mutuality. Based on existing research on the notion of

mutuality in different disciplines (e.g., Arnould & Rose, 2016; Belk, 2010; Huang, 2001), power mutuality is conceptually defined as the perceived degree of a country's pursuit of power balance and power dominance in its relationship with another country. To measure and empirically test this new construct, a survey was conducted in Australia to examine how Australian citizens perceive another country (i.e., the U.S.) to be seeking and pursuing shared power with Australia. The character of the head of state (i.e., U.S. President Donald Trump) and country reputation (i.e., U.S. country reputation) are tested as power mutuality's antecedent and consequence respectively. The purpose of this study is two-fold: (a) to conceptualize and propose a measurement scale of power mutuality; (b) to test a conceptual model of power mutuality based on the associations between presidential character, power mutuality, and country reputation.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1. Conceptualizing power mutuality***

Despite the merits of practicing public diplomacy as relationship management (Fitzpatrick, 2007), there exist complex power relations and constraints which undermine and limit this practice (Berger, 2005). Ideally, in diplomatic relationships, countries should seek a balance of power with other countries to maintain the stability of an international system and to ensure that no countries will dominate other countries. On the other hand, countries also seek to attain maximal power so that their interests and rights are not encroached upon (Morgenthau, 1985). Literature on public diplomacy has conceptualized and differentiated three types of power, all of which are exercised to advance national interest (Wilson, 2008). These three types of power are hard, soft and smart power. Hard power refers to coercive power, such as military force and economic sanctions which have greater influence on forcing other countries into behaving in ways that a country desires (Wilson, 2008). On the contrary, Nye (2004) defined soft power as "getting others to want the outcomes that you want" by co-opting people rather than coercing them through the power of attraction (p. 5). Soft power is gained through facilitating mutual values, cultural exchanges and policy adjustments. Lastly, smart power is defined as a combination of soft power and hard power and should be exercised when the application of hard power cannot be avoided (Nye, 2008b). Some conceptual literature on international relations has proposed methods to measure different types of power such as by measuring the balance of tangible assets like military resources (Baldwin, 2016b). However, this type of measurement mostly focuses on hard power and has been criticized for failing to capture the abstract concept of power in operational terms (Baldwin, 2016a). Acknowledging this criticism, this study measures power neither as the resources held to influence nor the actual outcomes of the exercise of power. Instead, it examines power mutuality as a measure of perceived relational power observed through communication and actions such as a country's willingness to listen and concern for another country's interests and outcomes. Specifically, this study conceptualizes that power mutuality consists of two dimensions: perceived power balance and perceived power dominance. These two dimensions are explained below.

#### ***2.1.1. Perceived power balance***

In the diplomatic context, mutuality is considered important because countries are in interdependent relationships with other countries, requiring power to be shared and negotiated between them (Majumdar, 2014). In other disciplines, the notion of mutuality is similarly conceptualized in association with the sharing of power and its fundamental role in

establishing and maintaining relationships. In psychology studies that focus on interpersonal relationships, mutuality is considered to promote shared power to create shared meanings and prevent coercion and force (Mead & Filson, 2017). In management, the notion of mutuality proposes the inclusion of two parties in a relationship to generate mutual understanding, expectations, influence, and benefit (Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, & Kram, 2012). In marketing comparatively, mutuality is defined as an action of shared power without expectations of reciprocity (Arnould & Rose, 2016). To explain further, mutuality within marketing scholarship is understood as one's decision to distribute what he/she has to another party and encourages joint possession rather than a transfer of ownership (Belk, 2010). In sum, the concept of mutuality across various disciplines is centered around the idea of shared power for mutually beneficial relationships.

In public relations, however, the construct of control mutuality is used in place of mutuality. It is defined as the "perception by all parties in a relationship that they have a reasonable amount of power" (Bortree, 2011, p. 45) and "the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). In these definitions, the concept of control mutuality reflects and measures power asymmetry in a relationship between an organization and its publics and acknowledges an uneven distribution of power in the relationship (Huang, 2001). Its conceptualization assumes that there is a dominating party in decision-making, resulting in hegemony and subordinating other groups' interests. It involves one entity's working out its own interests prior to giving (or receiving) power and control to (or from) other entities. This arguably presents a more accurate view of most organization-public relationships or indeed country-public relationships relevant to this study. Based on the above literature review, we propose that the dimension of perceived power balance should reflect the notion of an entity's pursuit of balanced power distribution with another entity which promotes mutual relational efforts while also acknowledging that power asymmetry exists within the relationship. In this study, we define and operationalize the *perceived power balance* dimension of power mutuality as a foreign public's perception of the extent to which a country *seeks* to balance the power distribution between itself and its counterpart country by listening to, understanding, and working with another country to achieve mutual understanding, influence, and benefits. In other words, this dimension serves to measure foreign publics' perceptions of the extent to which an entity (e.g., a country) shares power with another country in pursuing a mutually beneficial relationship.

### 2.1.2. *Perceived power dominance*

The pursuit of mutuality in public diplomacy is complex because the costs of international cooperation could outweigh the gains (Elhardt, 2015) and the power increases of one country could cause power decreases or inferiority in other countries (Morgenthau, 1985). This is eminent in the emergence and spread of nationalist agendas. For example, U.S. President Donald Trump has promoted an *America First* agenda, proposing that the U.S. should optimize its gains from international trade (Nakamura & Parker, 2017). Exclusively advocating for a country's own interests could be interpreted as a country's declaration of its superiority over other countries (Druckman, 1994; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Evidence of how perceived power dominance can influence perceptions was found in an empirical study that purported "fear of American power" was a critical component of anti-Americanism sentiment (Fitzpatrick, Kendrick, & Fullerton, 2011, p. 168) among citizens in other countries. An empirical study in the U.S. found its citizens believed that the U.S. is surrounded by untrustworthy countries which seek to maximize their own advantage (Brewer, Gross, Aday, & Willnat, 2004). Power imbalances, reflected in nationalist policies and

decisions, could also engender consumer nationalism (Wang, 2005). In public relations, power differentials are seen as a stumbling block to achieving symmetry in relationships (Holtzhausen, 2000) and therefore could hinder efforts to achieve power mutuality. Based on the above literature review, we suggest that conceptualization of power mutuality should incorporate the concept of perceived power dominance as well. This serves to explicate to what extent an entity (e.g., a country) pursues efforts to maximize its self-interests over its counterpart(s)' interests. Therefore, we operationalize the *perceived power dominance* dimension of power mutuality as foreign publics' perceptions of the extent to which a country *seeks* to dominate and take advantage of another country to maximize its own gains.

### 2.1.3. Propositions of power mutuality

To better reflect the nature of diplomatic practices, we defined power mutuality as how foreign publics perceive a country's pursuit of power balance and power dominance in its relationship with another country. It can be understood as the perceived degree of shared power that a country seeks and pursues in its relationship with another country. Drawn upon existing literature on mutuality in different disciplines, the construct of power mutuality is developed based on five propositions. First, countries are in interdependent relationships with one another, requiring power to be shared and/or negotiated (Majumdar, 2014). Second, power asymmetry exists in the relationship (Holtzhausen, 2000). Third, considering that most foreign publics do not have first-hand experiences interacting with countries and/or entities with which they are associated that could empower them in getting their voices heard— asymmetry is observed through countries' actions and communication (e.g., Lee & Seltzer, 2018; Sisson, 2017) that are reported in the media. Forth, *perceptions* of power mutuality could, in turn, improve foreign publics' relationship with the country (e.g., Genero, Baker Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992) and shape their impressions of that country (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992). Lastly, through the lens of foreign publics, power mutuality should not be interpreted as being equivalent to control mutuality in the form of an organization–public dyad (e.g., Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2015) because foreign publics are not necessarily given “a reasonable amount of power” (Bortree, 2011, p. 45) and do not have “a rightful power to influence” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19) a country in public diplomacy practices.

### 2.2. Presidential character as an antecedent of power mutuality

People are critical connectors between countries (Vibber & Kim, 2015). The relational approach to public diplomacy is built on the proposition that people-to-people interactions form the basis of a long-term relationship between a country and its foreign publics (e.g., Yun & Toth, 2009; Yun & Vibber, 2012). One of these connectors is a country's head(s) of state; their character and how they relate to foreign countries helps to “smooth differences and dispel distrust between nations and peoples” (Wang & Chang, 2004, p. 11). The importance of head(s) of states as connectors between countries often becomes more apparent when changes in political leadership occur, with studies suggesting these events significantly affect public diplomacy outcomes (Banks, 2011). Foreign publics have also been found to have an interest in changes in political leadership and in how these changes affect the interests of their home country (Payne, Hayden, Waisanen, & Osipova, 2013). In foreign policy making, presidential character has been found to affect whether head(s) of state would incorporate preferences of publics into their decisions (Knecht and Weatherford, 2006), which could arguably shape foreign publics' perceptions of power mutuality.



According to Owen and Dennis' (2001) work on the theory of political support, publics make judgments about a government based on five criteria: (a) effective linkages between citizens and the government, (b) government decision makers, (c) fair political decision making process, (d) effective outputs of problem resolution, and (e) fair outcomes of policy. Even though the theory of political support was originally used to understand citizens' political support for the government of their own country, these criteria can also apply to foreign publics' judgments about political leaders and governments in foreign countries. Publics' confidence in a foreign country's leadership and approval of their policies are intertwined with views about international relations and favorability toward other countries (Golan & Yang, 2013). Accordingly, in this paper we argue that foreign publics' perceptions of another country's presidential character can also influence power mutuality.

In addition, foreign publics' perceptions of a country's presidential character may also have an impact on that country's reputation. From a relational perspective, countries are advised to put a greater emphasis on their actions and be "a responsible steward" of their power (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011, p. 168). Yet, foreign policy making is often dominated by heads of state (Peterson, 1994) and their decision-making. Unsurprisingly, a recent empirical study found a significant spillover effect from a political leader's image on the image of the country he or she represents (Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018). Political leaders' integrity was found to be the most influential attribute, followed by competence, leadership qualities and charisma. When Barack Obama was elected U.S. President in 2008, the "Obama effect" occurred globally as there was a dramatic change in global public opinion towards the U.S. (Banks, 2011). Related specifically to the context of this study, research conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that the presidency of U.S. President Donald Trump has had a major impact on how foreign publics view the U.S. (Wike, Stokes, Poushter, & Fetterolf, 2017). The study revealed that Australian publics' confidence in the U.S. president to do the right thing regarding world affairs had fallen from 84 % during the Obama presidency to 29 % during the Trump presidency (Wike et al., 2017). As such the effect of presidential character on a country's reputation will also be explored in this study.

### ***2.3. Country reputation as a consequence of power mutuality***

In the extant literature, public diplomacy has been characterized by: (a) being more policy-driven than relationship-based, (b) having an emphasis on mass media communications, and (c) being tied to the management of a country's reputation (Wang, 2006). Reputation refers to the collection of cognitions and perceptions about an entity based on which publics can predict or explain the entity's future behaviors (Grunig & Hung-Baesecke, 2015). A country's reputation defines its standing in the international arena; it affects consumers' choices (i.e., country-of-origin effects; Kumara & Canhua, 2010), and determines what foreign publics think of (i.e., cognitive associations) and their attitudes (i.e., evaluative associations) when they think about a country (e.g., Grunig & Hung, 2002). Furthermore, Werron (2018) suggested that country reputation is formed by *mutual perceptions* as global publics are observers of others' governments and their respective populations.

Country reputation is an indicator of public diplomacy outcomes constructed through the long-term impressions of a country and has been proposed to incorporate three dimensions: leadership (in terms of governance), investment, and culture (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017). Jain and Winner (2013) also identified additional dimensions of country reputation, including people, products/services, governance, immigration and investment, culture, and

tourism. Accordingly, country reputation has been suggested to be a crucial predictor of attitudes and behavioral intentions toward a country, such as purchase and travel intentions (Yang, Shin, Lee, & Wrigley, 2008). Due to the positive associations between press releases and media coverage that often help to shape these attitudes and behavioral intentions, public relations is critical to managing country reputation (Jain & Winner, 2013).

Defined as the cognitive representations or collective beliefs about a country held by foreign publics, country reputation has been used as an indicator of public diplomacy outcomes and a measurable objective of public diplomacy programs (Kiambi & Shafer, 2017). In addition to travel and consumer purchases, it brings about other positive outcomes for a country such as stimulating export volumes (Dimitrova, Korschun, & Yotov, 2017).

This study explores country reputation as a consequence of power mutuality. Based on findings from the above literature review, two dimensions of country reputation are proposed: a government-related dimension (i.e., governance and international relations) and a non-government-related dimension (i.e., people, products, investment, and culture). According to Randolph, Fullerton, and Kendrick (2010), foreign publics generally portray a more positive attitude toward the non-governmental aspect of the U.S., such as its people. Song and Sung (2013) also found differences between the governmental and non-governmental aspects of country reputation in their research on country brand personality, in which items related to decisions made by the government (e.g., international policy) loaded on one single factor distinguished from other items.

### 3. Hypotheses proposed

Based on the above literature review, this study explores power mutuality as a mediating variable between presidential character and country reputation. Fig. 1 shows a concept model of this study. The following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1** Perceptions of presidential character are positively associated with power mutuality.

**H2** Perceptions of presidential character have direct effects on (a) the governmental aspect and (b) the non-governmental aspect of country reputation.

**H3** Power mutuality is positively associated with (a) the governmental aspect and (b) the non-governmental aspect of country reputation (Fig. 1).

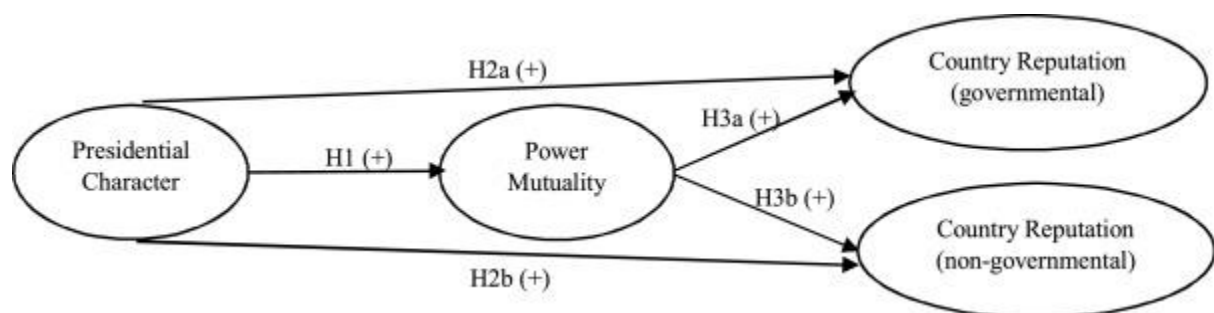


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

## 4. Methods

### *4.1. Development of measures*

An online questionnaire was developed to explore the construct of power mutuality and test the hypotheses. First, 16 survey items for measuring power mutuality were constructed based on its conceptual definition and the extant literature relating to the different facets of power mutuality including mutual understanding (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Sisson, 2017) and mutually beneficial outcomes (Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999). Eleven items were used to measure perceived power balance (e.g., “The USA government is attentive to what Australia says”) and five items were used for perceived power dominance (e.g., “The USA government seeks to take advantage of Australia”) (See Table 1). Second, seven survey items were proposed for measuring perceptions of presidential character (e.g., “I think President Donald Trump is arrogant” and “I think President Donald Trump is a strong leader”) which were adopted from the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Survey (Wike et al., 2017). Lastly, 21 survey items for measuring country reputation were adopted from Fullerton and Kendrick’s (2017) and Jain and Winner’s (2013) studies on country reputation (e.g., “The USA is competently and honestly governed.” and “The USA offers enjoyable entertainment activities”). Respondents were asked to evaluate survey items on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Factor loadings, mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean for each survey item ( $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, SE = standard error)

Variable	Survey Item	Loading	M	SD	SE
Presidential Character (positive)	I think President Donald Trump is a strong leader.	.79	2.54	1.35	.060
	I think President Donald Trump is charismatic.	.75	2.43	1.31	.058
	I think President Donald Trump is well-qualified to be president.	.91	2.2	1.31	.058
	I think President Donald Trump is caring about ordinary people.	.92	2.21	1.29	.057
$\alpha = .911$					
Presidential Character (negative)	I think President Donald Trump is arrogant. (reverse)	.86	2.02	1.19	.053
	I think President Donald Trump is intolerant. (reverse)	.92	2.01	1.17	.052
	I think President Donald Trump is dangerous. (reverse)	.89	2.11	1.26	.056
$\alpha = .920$					
Power Mutuality (perceived power balance)	The USA government is attentive to what Australia says.	.81	2.93	1.18	.052
	The USA government is concerned about the interests of Australia.	.81	2.95	1.16	.051
	The USA government listens to what Australia has to say.	.81	2.94	1.18	.052
	The USA government gives Australia enough say when making decisions.	.82	2.85	1.16	.051
	The USA government seeks to maintain an equal relationship with Australia.	.82	2.97	1.22	.054
	The USA government works with Australia to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.	.84	3.24	1.15	.051
	The USA government tries to share a balance of power with Australia.	.77	2.73	1.16	.051
	The USA government ensures it acts fairly with Australia.	.88	3.08	1.10	.049
	The USA government is fair and just to Australia.	.76	2.96	1.10	.045
	The USA government has tried it best to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes with Australia.	.81	3.18	1.1	.047
	The USA government has tried its best to understand Australia's positions.	.84	3.11	1.09	.048
$\alpha = .960$					
Power Mutuality (perceived power dominance)	The USA Government seeks to take advantage of Australia. (reverse)	.78	3.25	1.09	.048
	The USA Government dominates Australia. (reverse)	.76	3.44	1.21	.053

Variable	Survey Item	Loading	M	SD	SE
$\alpha = .873$	The USA Government only cares about its own interests rather than Australia's interests. (reverse)	.83	3.56	1.09	.048
	The USA Government overpowers Australia. (reverse)	.67	3.51	1.15	.051
Country Reputation (governmental) $\alpha = .936$	The USA is competently and honestly governed.	.80	2.70	1.21	.053
	The USA respects the rights of its citizens and treats them with fairness.	.80	2.86	1.17	.052
	The USA behaves responsibly in the areas of international peace and security.	.81	2.92	1.25	.055
	The USA behaves responsibly to protect the environment.	.84	2.9	1.2	.053
	The USA behaves responsibly to help reduce world poverty.	.85	2.99	1.13	.05
	The USA upholds international laws.	.80	3.28	1.14	.051
	The USA is a responsible member of the global community.	.82	3.32	1.19	.053
Country Reputation (non-governmental) $\alpha = .893$	People from the USA are welcoming.	.84	3.77	.906	.04
	People from the USA are friendly.	.90	3.81	.888	.039
	The USA has innovative products and services.	.78	3.86	.838	.037
	The USA has high-quality products and services.	.80	3.79	.872	.039
	The USA is a creative place with cutting-edge ideas and new ways of thinking.	.84	3.76	.854	.042
	The USA offers enjoyable entertainment activities.	.74	4.02	.835	.037
	The USA has a distinct culture.	.61	3.85	.944	.042
	The USA has a rich historical past.	.72	3.95	.934	.041
	The USA is socially and culturally diverse.	.66	3.98	.910	.040
	The USA is rich in natural beauty.	.69	4.14	.841	.037

#### **4.2. Participant recruitment and data collection**

Upon obtaining approval from the university's ethics committee, an international research company, Qualtrics, was commissioned to recruit a nationally representative sample of 500 participants from Australia in October 2017. Respondents received remuneration for their participation according to the agreement that Qualtrics made with them. In regards to the choice of research context, in 2017, the Pew Research Center's study of global publics from 37 countries reflected a decline of confidence in President Trump as well as in the U.S. (Wike et al., 2017). It was reported that global publics disapproved of his policies, which claimed to put "America first" over others. Reflecting on the extensive media coverage of the U.S. and U.S. President Donald Trump in Australia prior to and at the time of the data collection, this study selected the U.S. for the research context. Power mutuality was examined as the perceived power balance and power dominance exhibited by the U.S. toward Australia. Presidential character was examined with statements regarding U.S. President Donald Trump. Country reputation was examined as U.S. country reputation.

#### **4.3. Data cleaning**

A total of 523 completed questionnaires were received in October 2017. A standard deviation test was conducted across their evaluations for the Likert-scale survey items (Curran, 2016; Niessen, Meijer, & Tendeiro, 2016) to ensure that the respondents had paid attention when completing the survey. Responses that had a standard deviation of zero were deleted. As a result, a total of 511 responses were used for the analysis.

#### **4.4. Demographics**

The 511 respondents were aged between 18 and 83. Quota sampling was used to ensure that the sample was representative of the national population in Australia in terms of age and gender (e.g., Coleman & Multon, 2018). The age breakdown was as follows: 18–20 (6.6 %), 21–30 (18.2 %), 31–40 (18.4 %), 41–50 (14.4 %), 51–60 (17.8 %), 61–70 (16.9 %), and 71 and above (7.7 %). There were 245 males and 263 females. Three respondents preferred not to disclose gender. Of the 511 respondents: 374 (73.2 %) were Caucasian; 27 (5.3 %) were South Asian; 22 (4.3 %) were East Asian; 9 (1.8 %) were Indigenous, Native American, or Pacific Islander; 9 (1.8 %) were Arab or Middle-Eastern; 7 (1.4 %) were African; and 59 (11.5 %) identified to be of an unspecified ethnicity. Their highest education qualifications were as follows: 33 (6.5 %) completed less than high school, 149 (29.2 %) completed high school, 111 (21.7 %) did some university, 113 (22.1 %) completed a bachelor's degree, 44 (8.6 %) completed a master's degree, 9 (1.8 %) had a doctorate, and 52 (10.2 %) did not specify. Gender, age, ethnicity, and education qualifications were not found to have associations with the weighted composite scores of the four variables tested.

#### **4.5. Data analysis**

Before proceeding with hypotheses testing, items which were negatively worded were first reverse-coded. Then, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted on the survey items used for presidential character, power mutuality and country reputation respectively using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 25. Initially, 16 items were proposed for power mutuality. The EFA using Maximum Likelihood with Promax Rotation (Carpenter, 2018) indicated that it had two dimensions (i.e., perceived power dominance and perceived power balance) and that only one item should be removed. The Kaiser-Meyer-

Olkin (KMO) measure of adequacy was .95 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant. The seven items presidential character were found to load on two dimensions from the EFA (using Maximum Likelihood with Promax rotation) including three items reflecting a negative character and four reflecting a positive character. Results from the EFA showed a KMO measure of .874 and a significant Bartlett's test. Lastly, although 21 items were originally proposed for country reputation and were expected to load on six factors (i.e., people, products, investment, culture, governance, and international relations) (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017; Jain & Winner, 2013), the EFA (using Maximum Likelihood with Promax Rotation) showed that only 17 items should be retained, reflecting two factors: governmental and non-governmental. The KMO measure was .918 and the Bartlett's test was significant. The eigenvalues of all retained factors were all above 1. The EFA indicated that the retained items were adequate to explain the latent variables (Williams, Onsman, & Brown, 1996). After confirming the dimensionality of each construct, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for each construct. The 15 items retained for the two dimensions (perceived power balance and perceived power dominance) of power mutuality had factor loadings ranging from .67 to .88. Model fit for the measurement model was satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 151.229$ ,  $df = 72$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.1$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .987, RMSEA = .046, SRMR = .0223) based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) cut-off criteria for fit indices ( $\chi^2/df < 3$ , CFI  $> .95$ , RMSEA  $< .06$ , SRMR  $< .08$ ). The seven items for presidential character loading on two dimensions (positive and negative) had factor loadings ranging from .746 to .923. Model fit for the measurement model was satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 31.44$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.62$ ,  $p = .002$ , CFI = .993, RMSEA = .056, SRMR = .0267). The 17 items for country reputation loading on two dimensions (governmental and non-governmental) had factor loadings ranging from .535 to .826. The model fit for the measurement model was satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 282.578$ ,  $df = 99$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.854$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .968, RMSEA = .060, SRMR = .0581).

Subsequently, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to test the hypotheses and the fit of the data to the hypothesized model. For this study, SEM was used due to its statistical advantages, including its capabilities to test hypotheses about latent constructs that are represented by observed indicators (i.e., survey items) (Goodboy & Kline, 2017) and its recognition of imperfect measurement by including error terms which are not considered in regression analyses (Grover & Vriens, 2011). This was advantageous for this study, which explores relationships among three latent constructs – each of which are represented by observed indicators with error terms.

Table 1 indicates the survey items used, and the factor loadings from SEM, the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean for each item. The Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for each variable is also shown as an indicator of reliability.

SEM was performed on AMOS (version 25) to test the fit of the hypothesized model to the data. AMOS is a software package which uses a covariance-based approach to SEM (CB-SEM) useful for "scale development, exploratory and confirmatory analyses, relative salience of latent constructs and evaluation of causal relationships" (Hair, Gabriel, & Patel, 2014, p. 48). Compared to partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM), the use of CB-SEM is more appropriate for this study for several reasons (Aimran, Ahmad, Afthanorhan, & Awang, 2017; Hair, Gabriel, da, & Patel, 2014). First, given that the conceptual model has taken into consideration that earlier literature has identified the positive associations between a political leader's image and a country's image (e.g., Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018; Wang & Chang, 2004), the purpose of this study is theory testing and confirmation. Second, CB-SEM performs comparatively better in large sample sizes of 100 or more. Third, CB-SEM is more sensitive

in detecting low reliability indicators. Forth, CB-SEM models the error terms for each indicator, allowing elimination of indicators with large error terms or low loadings. Lastly, in addition to being able to test full and partial mediation effects, CB-SEM provides fit indices that assess whether the observed model is within an acceptable fit of the hypothesized model. In sum, CB-SEM is a more robust approach to testing the conceptual model in this study. The EFA and CFA indicated that power mutuality consists of two dimensions. Thus, in the SEM, power mutuality was analyzed as a second-order variable with two dimensions: perceived power balance and perceived power dominance. Because prior research has identified the differences between the governmental and non-governmental aspects of country reputation (Randolph, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2010; Song & Sung, 2013), country reputation was analyzed as two separate variables: governmental (consisting of people, products, and culture) and non-governmental (consisting of governance and international relations). Using weighted composites of each variable, the results indicated that the hypothesized model was a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 4.966$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.483$ ,  $p = .084$ ,  $CFI = .996$ ,  $RMSEA = .054$ ,  $SRMR = .0172$ ) based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) cut-off criteria for fit indices ( $\chi^2/df < 3$ ,  $CFI > .95$ ,  $RMSEA < .06$ ,  $SRMR < .08$ ).). We also tested the direct, indirect, and total effects in the model using bootstrapping procedures with 9000 bootstrapped samples at 95 % confidence intervals.

## 5. Findings

Fig. 2 shows the standardized regression weights for the hypotheses tested in this study. This structural model indicates a significant relationship between presidential character and power mutuality ( $\beta = .568$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, H1 is supported. However, there is no significant relationship between presidential character and the governmental aspect of country reputation; as such, H2a is rejected. While H2b hypothesized a positive association between presidential character and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation, a significant negative association was actually found ( $\beta = -.202$ ,  $p < .001$ ). H3a and H3b are supported because there are positive associations between power mutuality and the governmental aspect of country reputation ( $\beta = .879$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation ( $\beta = .698$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This indicates that power mutuality has significant full mediation effects between presidential character and the governmental aspect of country reputation and partial mediation effects between presidential character and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation. Table 2 shows the standardized estimates for direct, indirect and total effects.



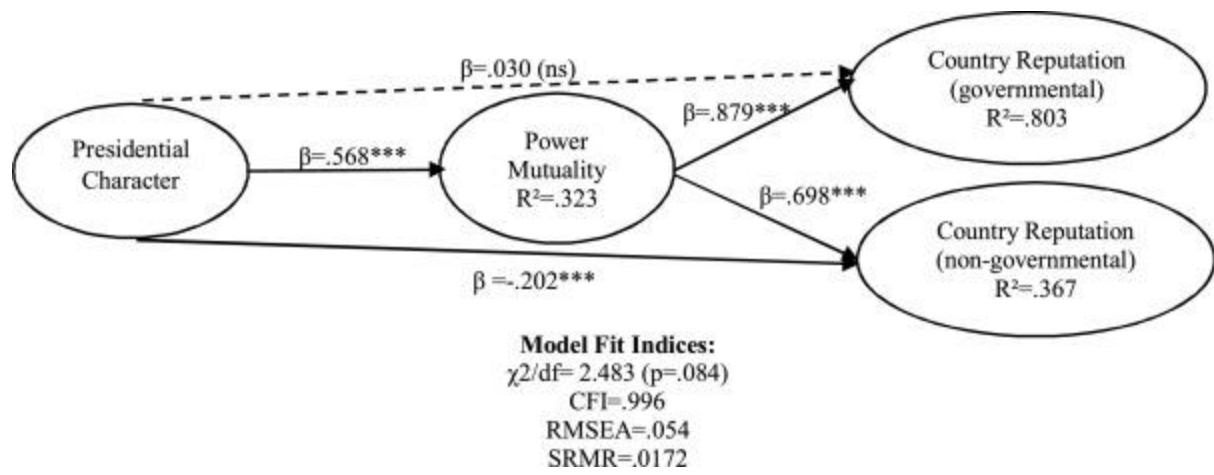


Fig. 2. Results from the model tested (ns= “no significance”; \*\*\*=p < .001).

Table 2. Direct, indirect, and total effects (ns= “no significance”; \*\*\*=p<.001)

	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Presidential Character ➡ Power Mutuality ➡ Country Reputation (governmental)	.030 (ns)	.500***	.530***
Presidential Character ➡ Power Mutuality ➡ Country Reputation (non-governmental)	-.202***	.397***	.195***

## 6. Discussion

The prominence of nationalist agendas (e.g., “America alone,” Nakamura & Parker, 2017) reflects that the relational approach, one that promotes mutual understanding and mutual interests, might not gain momentum. In reality, presently, countries’ use of a mix of coercion (through foreign policy) and attraction (through public diplomacy) as a form of *unsmart* power resulting in the distortion of mutual understanding and the exacerbation of mutual misunderstanding (Liu, 2018). Despite the numerous calls for improving mutual understanding to change foreign publics’ perceptions about a country’s hegemony (e.g., Heisbourg, 2000), efforts that seek to promote mutual understanding such as cultural diplomacy programs could be perceived as cultural hegemony (Ang, Isar, & Mar, 2015).

Power differentials between and among countries always exist, but the extent of power differentials can be changed or reinforced over time. In reality, it is impossible to achieve complete mutuality in power distribution between countries. This is why the construct of power mutuality is defined as the *perceived* extent to which a country seeks and pursues shared power with another country and is operationalized as comprising actions like listening and balancing interests and outcomes. It is different from control mutuality such that, in the diplomatic context, it is not about inviting foreign publics’ input into a country’s decisions from the perspective of an organization–public dyad. The construct reflects and measures individuals’ perceptions of a foreign country’s pursuit of shared power with another country (e.g., their home country).

Building on existing empirical studies which have identified relationships between a political leader’s image and the image of his or her country (Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018; Wang & Chang, 2004), this study has identified power mutuality as a mediating variable that can explain the association between how a political leader of a country is perceived and how his or her own country is perceived. The mediation effects of power mutuality on presidential character and country reputation indicate that in evaluating a country, foreign publics consider whether the country makes efforts to pursue mutual understanding, mutual influence and mutually beneficial outcomes with another country. A political leader’s character could affect their country’s reputation because his or her character influences their decision to seek shared power with or to dominate another country.

Ultimately, how a political leader decides to approach power mutuality with a country on behalf of his or her country could affect the interests of foreign publics in that country. To garner positive foreign public’s perceptions, it is recommended that countries (and their political leaders) should be engaged in more “relational” communication and actions, emphasizing their pursuit of mutual understanding (e.g., engaging in direct interactions to learn about other countries), mutual interests (e.g., acting on shared values such as stances on climate change), mutual influence (e.g., addressing concerns from other countries on issues on which they have different views) and mutually beneficial outcomes (e.g., formalizing economic collaborations).

The findings of this study advance current understanding of public diplomacy as relationship management. This study points out and addresses the limitations of considering public diplomacy as a country–foreign public dyad (i.e., the relationship between an individual and a foreign country). It proposes investigating the multiplicity of relationships in a networked system (i.e., the relationship between a foreign country and an individual’s home country as an entity with which the individual is identified). It also considers that most publics’

interactions with foreign countries are vicarious in nature; they make observations of a country's interactions with other countries through its political leader (e.g., Dai & Walther, 2018). This study has highlighted that power complexities are both exhibited and observed. As such, perceptions of the power complexities within the international network of diplomatic relationships could be further explored in future studies. For example, whether powerful countries (which have more power to share) are perceived to have a responsibility to share but are less willing to do so than less-powerful countries (which have less power to share) and whether individuals would evaluate power mutuality between a foreign country and a country with which they have no identification in a similar manner.

Morgenthau (1985) has discussed the balance of power and equilibrium in international relations. However, the notion of mutuality should be more extensively interrogated in different contexts, including the context of the multiplicity of relationships within a networked system. It is critical to acknowledge the assumptions within power mutuality. It may sound altruistic, but it is still self-interested. It assumes a sense of collective ownership for managing collectively owned resources which require participation and mutual responsibility. The social scientific community should not generalize mutuality as a generalized exchange behavior but should interrogate it as emerging through ongoing interactions (Arnould & Rose, 2016). This study has also identified that presidential character could influence the perceptions of such mutuality.

As countries seek to manage and measure country reputation as a public diplomacy outcome (e.g., Kiambi & Shafer, 2017), power mutuality is of paramount significance in affecting country reputation. Countries should strive to increase power mutuality by engaging in actions and communication to achieve mutual understanding, mutual influence and mutually beneficial outcomes with other countries. Moreover, political leaders should exhibit a "relational" character that increases perceived power balance and decreases perceived power dominance. Foreign publics might not be directly engaged with countries in their actions and communication, but they make observations of interactions among political leaders of different countries. In 1979, Chinese President Deng Xiaoping's statement of "We came to the US with a message of friendship" and his efforts of relating to the American media and people improved China's image in the U.S. (Wang & Chang, 2004, p. 21). It was a demonstration of the pursuit of mutual understanding and mutual interests. On the other hand, nationalist messages, emphasizing the prioritization of one country's own interests, could negatively affect power mutuality. Ultimately, country reputation is measured as how foreign publics evaluate different aspects of a country but in fact, it is largely affected by how foreign publics evaluate the country to be pursuing mutual understanding and mutual influence with their home country.

## 7. Conclusion

Drawing upon the notion of mutuality in multiple disciplines, this present study conceptualized and operationalized power mutuality as the extent to which a country seeks and pursues shared power with another country. It explored Australians' perceived power mutuality of the U.S. toward their own country and investigated the dynamics among presidential character, power mutuality, and U.S. country reputation. The results show that power mutuality fully mediates the association between presidential character and the governmental aspect of country reputation and partially mediates the association between presidential character and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation. This study

argues that it is important for a country to pursue relational, engaging actions and communication that build mutual understanding and mutual interests with other countries.

## 8. Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, power mutuality was conceptualized and operationalized based on research on mutuality from interpersonal, marketing, public relations and international relations research. The measurement items for the construct were adopted and revised based on existing literature. Although two dimensions were successfully extracted from the EFA and CFA, it is possible that there are more dimensions within the multi-faceted construct which have not been captured. It is suggested that qualitative methods could be used to further develop the construct. Second, the concept of power is multi-faceted, but this study has not differentiated the different types of power. In the context of public diplomacy, concepts such as hard power, soft power and smart power have been distinguished from one another (Wilson, 2008). Future research should explore how foreign publics evaluate mutuality exercised in different types of power such as hard power (e.g., military and economic sanctions), soft power (e.g., cultural influence) and smart power (e.g., a combination of “the soft power of attraction and the hard power of coercion”; Nye, 2008a, p. 1353). Third, country reputation is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of functional, normative and emotional qualities (Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). The adopted scales for measuring country reputation (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017; Jain & Winner, 2013) in this study have not differentiated these different dimensions. Lastly, although it was first hypothesized that the association between presidential character and the non-governmental aspect of country reputation would be positive, the direct effect is negative but the indirect and total effects are positive. Further research should be conducted to explore the possible reasons behind this.

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