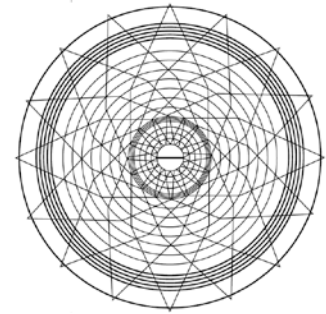


## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



# CENTRALISATION OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY MANAGEMENT IN CHINA: THE CARREFOUR INCIDENT<sup>1</sup>

**Timofeyeva O.**

Lecturer, National Research University Higher School of  
Economics (Moscow)  
[o.a.timofeyeva@gmail.com](mailto:o.a.timofeyeva@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

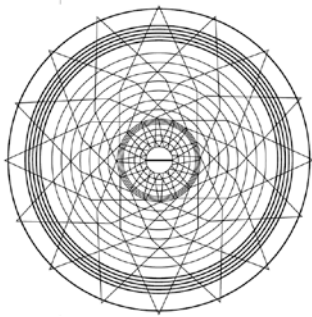
The article deals with the use of public diplomacy tools for promoting the interests of the state. The main purpose of this paper is to show the public diplomacy potential possibilities to achieve policy goals in an authoritarian one-party state with a focus on the online environment. As an example, we selected the Carrefour Incident, a conflict that occurred in China during the preparations for the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. The conflict broke out between the Chinese citizens, who were offended by the reaction of the Government of France towards the actions of pro-Tibetan activists during the Olympic torch relay in Paris, and the Carrefour Group in China.

The introduction provides a brief history of the development of the concept of public diplomacy in the context of Nicholas Cull's theory as well as explores several media communications models and theories that are helpful in better understanding the details of the case. Subsequently, the article presents a detailed chronology and the stages of the conflict and describes the main actors' goals and actions. The conflict was initially supported by the government via social networking sites and soft propaganda techniques, and when this goal was achieved, it was effectively pacified through Internet audience management tools. The case demonstrates approaches to implicit information management and shares some techniques to identify the critical phases of the conflict using basic media statistics. The Chinese experience is important for understanding the effectiveness of the media control policy and conflict management for state actors and non-governmental organisations. The conclusion provides a number of theoretical and practical points about the nature of this conflict and consolidating role of the Internet in it. In particular, some parts of the conclusion concern the effectiveness of Chinese "soft power" and the necessity of a term base transformation.

**Keywords:** public diplomacy, new public diplomacy, soft power, smart power, China, Carrefour, media environment, Internet regulation

---

<sup>1</sup> The original article was published by support of the Russian Foundation for Humanities grant no. 15-37-11128 and published in Vestnik MGIMO-University in 2017



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

### Introduction

As part of modern international relations, the phenomenon of public diplomacy is not a new one. The urgent need for governments to develop methods for influencing the public opinion of foreign audiences was first identified by Edward Murrow in 1963 (Murrow 1963). Two years later, Edmund Gullion, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, introduced the term “public diplomacy”, defining the concept as “the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies” (Cull 2006).

Initially, the term “public diplomacy” was considered to be synonymous with propaganda, or psychological warfare, which led to conflicting associations and the triggering of negative connotations to the new term. This is, for example, what Evan Potter’s definition implies: “Public diplomacy is the effort by the government of one nation to influence the public or elite opinion of another nation for the purpose of turning the policy of the target nation to advantage” (Potter 2002). This caused doubts in the instruments’ rationality and the longevity of its effect in the public diplomacy sphere.

Currently, researchers share these concepts and consider public diplomacy in a more positive manner, whereas the term “propaganda” still maintains a negative outlook. This is primarily due to the directionality of the communicative act: propaganda remains a unidirectional act, while public diplomacy is focused on feedback.

In this regard, China’s efforts to improve the country’s brand are worth mentioning. For example, in 1998, the Chinese People’s Republic changed the name of the Chinese Communist Party Propaganda Department to the “Publicity Department” for international usage only, because of the negative connotations entailed by the word “propaganda” (Shambaugh 2007).

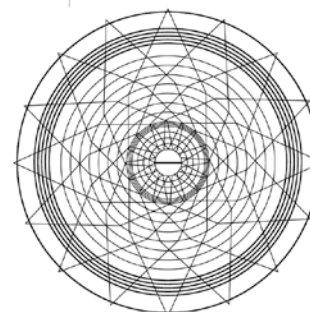
The public diplomacy toolkit in the last third of the 20th century is not particularly diverse. There are several basic methods including international broadcasting in the language of the target state, programs of student exchange, and international collaboration of scientists, athletes and artists and so on.

In 1990, the American political scientist Joseph Nye put forward the idea of the so-called “soft power” (Nye 1990). Furthermore, he suggested the now classic division of public diplomacy tools into “soft power” and “hard power”. In the first case, the influence on the behaviour and attitudes of other people is achieved by broadcasting culture, traditions and political values. In the second case, the same goal is achieved by using threats and coercion. Later on, J. Nye developed a new concept subsequently referred to as “smart power”, and constituting a combination of both these approaches (Nye 2006).

The development of Internet technologies resulted in the emergence of a new public diplomacy and shifted the focus from public diplomacy methods per se to the communication channels used for this purpose. One of the researchers of this theory is Nicholas Cull, who proposed to change the approach to public diplomacy goal setting and to focus on dialogue and long-term friendly relations between two

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
 Management in China: The Carrefour  
 Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



mutually foreign audiences. According to Cull’s concept of “old” and “new” public diplomacy, there are a number of different key features. They are displayed in **Figure 1**.

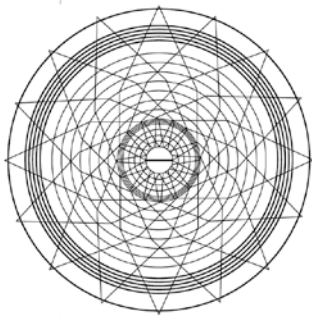
<b>Dominant Characteristics</b>	<b>Old Public Diplomacy</b>	<b>New Public Diplomacy</b>
Identity of international actor	State	State and non-state
Tech. environment	Short wave radio, Print newspapers, Land-line telephones	Satellite, Internet, Real-time news, Mobile telephones
Media environment	Clear line between domestic and international news sphere	Blurring of domestic and international news sphere
Source of approach	Outgrowth of political advocacy and propaganda theory	Outgrowth of corporate branding and network theory
Terminology	“International image” “Prestige”	“Soft power” “Nation Brand”
Structure of role	Top down, actor to foreign peoples	Horizontal, facilitated by actor
Nature of role	Targeted messaging	Relationship-building
Overall aim	The management of the international environment	The management of the international environment

**Fig. 1.** *The Old Public Diplomacy and the New (Cull 2009)*

In the modern world, public diplomacy is closely connected to the information rate and the activity of the media who set the agenda, i.e., a specific set of topics relevant in a given period of time for the discussion. The concept of “agenda setting” was first used by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in their work “The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media” (McCombs, Shaw 1972). However, some arguments about the role of media as a tool, which generates images of reality telling the audience what to look at and what to think about appeared much earlier, for example in the works of Walter Lippmann (Lippmann 1922) and Bernard Cohen (Cohen 2016).

Later, the classical agenda-setting theory of M. McCombs and D. Shaw was supplemented by Everett Rogers and James Dearing. They identified specific communication groups, affecting the topics’ rotation in the media, as the media, political elites and opinion leaders (Dearing, Rogers 1988). The term “opinion leaders” appeared in the works of Paul Lazarsfeld, the author of the two-step flow of the communication model (Katz, Lazarsfeld 1964).

The Carrefour Incident was chosen to illustrate the possibilities of public diplomacy to achieve specific policy objectives in an authoritarian one-party state and reveals the potential of public diplomacy with a focus on the online environment. The research of



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

the Incident's key features is based on the method of an analytical reconstruction of events (collation of the most complete information about the event and sorting by the order of the publication time), on the structural analysis (determination of the primary and secondary actors of the conflict) and on the intent analysis (determination of the goals and motive of the main actors during the decision-making process).

It should be noted that all media in China are under state control. The government uses them as a tool to form a favourable image for foreign audiences, without prejudice to the political interests of the state. Furthermore, there are a lot of allusions in this case to the mass communication theories mentioned above. For example, it demonstrates that the government can act as a communication group setting the agenda in the media. Furthermore, it showcases the effective delegation of this government's role to another communication group – opinion leaders.

### **China's Public Diplomacy and the Carrefour Incident's Background and Origins**

There are a number of factors affecting the development of public diplomacy in China. First of all, reference may be made to the economic growth and integration of the Chinese national economy into the world economy. China's economic achievements are the basis for implementing soft power techniques. Secondly, it is the change in China's own political system, involving the decentralisation of power, the expansion of public life and the increasing influence of NGOs.

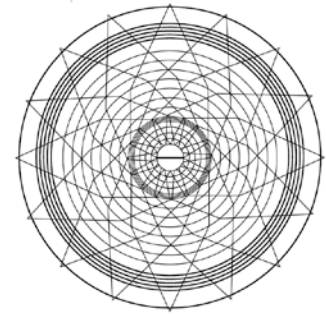
The reasons for the Chinese government's interest in public diplomacy and the causes for the international community's concern have much in common. But China's actions for improving public opinion and rehabilitating the country's reputation and brand give us reasons to assert that China is keenly aware of its problems. In effect, China recognises the fact that international public opinion is formed by foreign media, and the brand 'China', constructed by these media, is predominantly negative and weak.

As a result, China has several different strategies for reputation restoration, namely conferences, white papers and mass media publications. This article focuses on the Olympic Games in Beijing – a way to declare China's presence in the international arena and one of the traditional public diplomacy tools.

The Olympic Flame is one of the symbols of the events of the Olympic Games. Traditionally, the relay route was formed and coordinated in advance, passing through the territories of different countries. After the Olympic Games in Beijing, the international stages of the relay were cancelled. This was due to the fact that the Olympic Flame had increasingly served as an occasion to draw attention to issues unrelated to the Olympics (Kelso, Lewis 2008), as was vividly demonstrated by pro-Tibetan activists during the demonstrations in Paris in 2008. The unrest in Tibet received wide coverage in the international media and became the reason for international indignation. In most countries, dissatisfaction was at a low level, but in France the situation got out of police control. Pro-Tibetan activists disrupted the Olympic Flame relay and called on international media and world community to pay attention to their plight and ongoing human rights violations in China.

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



Obviously, the international media agenda was formed around the news about the Olympics. Surprisingly, the citizens of China also received the information about the Parisian stage of the relay. Thus, the reference points of the Carrefour Incident can be listed as follows:

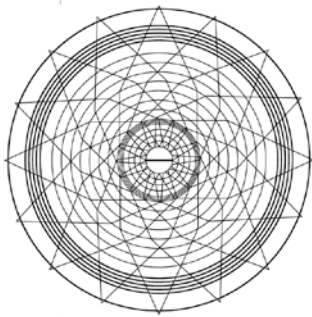
- 14.03.2008 – beginning of the anti-China mass protests and unrest in Tibet on the anniversary of Dalai Lama's exile.
- 24.03.2008 – start of the Olympic Flame relay in Greece.
- 25.03.2008 – Nicolas Sarkozy, the president of France, announces the possibility of boycotting the Beijing Olympics.
- 7.03.2008 – Olympic Flame extinguished by pro-Tibetan activists in Paris.

In this context, we need to address the issue of China's Internet control. According to the statistics, in 2009 China had 385 million Internet users (China Internet Users n.d.). In the same year, the Internet was the most popular source of information (83,2%) in China, namely 30% more popular than state TV (Chen 2012). At the same time, it would be a mistake to think that the Chinese government underestimates the value of the Internet as an important platform for the formation of public opinion. The government continues to control and censor the Internet, especially particular topics, thus limiting the access to certain foreign websites in accordance with the Golden Shield project (the main part of the Great Firewall of China that is a complex of censorship of potentially undesirable information from foreign countries).

From the Chinese authorities' point of view, the objectionable content includes politically incorrect themes and their interpretation. Such texts must be blocked by all search engines, including Google and Yahoo. Most of the foreign media's official websites are also blocked, using special filters at the provider side.

The Chinese are active users of social networks. Foreign services, such as Facebook or Twitter are also prohibited in the Chinese Internet platform, so people use local ones (Sina Weibo, 51.com, Zhanzuo.com). Besides, real time entertainment forums such as Mop.com are even more popular. Of course, the government regulation also affects local Internet resources.

In order to prevent illegal activities in social networks, the Chinese microblogging website Sina Weibo announced a user credit point system in 2012. Every registered user receives 80 points and loses them for each violation. According to the terms of service, there are several types of offenses, for example, "publicly attacking another person", "spreads rumours, disrupts social order, and destroys societal stability", "calls for disruption of social order through illegal gatherings, formation of organizations, protests, demonstrations, mass gatherings and assemblies". Most of the provisions are quite standard and affect personal and national security, but there is also a special ban on the publication of untrue information. It is necessary to define the "untrue information". From the Chinese authorities' point of view, all information that challenges the government line is untrue. Of course, all these measures were taken after the Carrefour Incident, but surely in 2008 the government also had its methods of influencing netizens and regulating their activity.



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

Thus, the process of rallying in the Chinese society that began two days after the scandal in Paris raises a lot of questions. First of all, it is remarkable that the formation of a collective decision and the protest movement began on the Internet and then moved offline. The main events and stages of the Carrefour Incident are as follows:

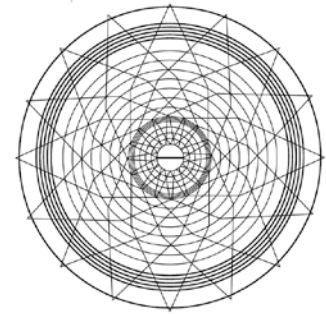
- 09.04.2008 – Chinese netizens launch a campaign to “boycott French products”.
- 10.04.2008 – Mop.com publishes the call of Chinese netizen Shui Ying titled “Boycott French goods, let us start with Carrefour” (Crisis Management... 2008).
- 13.04.2008 – the netizen Kitty Shelley pickets one of the Carrefour hypermarkets with the national flag and posters. This protest video, titled “Torch Great Reception” (Kitty Shelley... 2008), is distributed on the Internet.
- 14.04.2008 – beginning of mass appeals to boycott Carrefour hypermarkets throughout China. The Carrefour situation draws the attention of Chinese and international media. Carrefour’s Greater China spokesperson Dai Wei tells The Wall Street Journal that the company “does not want to be involved in politics or sports” (Crisis Management... 2008).
- 15.04.2008 – protests and indignation increase after the Dai Wei statements. The call for a boycott of Carrefour also spreads via the instant messaging software service Tencent QQ and the Bulletin Board System. Approximately 2.3 million netizens that supported protests add the tagline “I Love China” in their MSN profiles (Jacobs, Wang 2008). The Chinese tabloid Southern Metropolis Daily publishes an article “Netizens call for boycott, Carrefour claims innocence”. Jiang Yu, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, considers the boycott as an act of “Chinese people expressing their opinions and moods that the French government should rethink their actions. I believe that Chinese people should legally express their appeal”.
- 16.04.2008 – Carrefour Eastern China district Public Affairs General Manager Yu Jian is interviewed by print media (Crisis Management... 2008), appeals to the Ministry of Commerce and other government organisations in China. Suho, the French ambassador in China, is interviewed and stressed that the French government supports the Beijing Olympics, and further had an unchanged policy on China with no question about China’s sovereignty in Tibet.
- 17.04.2008 – the unknown hacktivists bring down the official website of Carrefour in China and leave the slogan “Boycott Carrefour” there.
- 18.04.2008 – Zhao Jinjun, the former ambassador to France, visits France in private and exchanges opinions about the China-France relationship. The beginning of mass demonstrations near Carrefour trade centres.
- 20.04.2008 – consumer numbers in Carrefour drop tremendously; some of the hypermarkets are closed, the official reason being “maintenance and renewal”.

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy*

*Management in China: The Carrefour Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



- 21.04.2008 – Christian Poncelet, the chairman of the French senate, arrives in Shanghai.
- 22.04.2008 – China Ministry of Commerce issues a first declaration on the Carrefour Incident. The official site of Carrefour is temporarily unavailable.
- 23.04.2008 – Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the former president of France, and two other envoys arrive in Beijing.
- 26.04.2008 – “Carrefour” query is temporarily blocked by several online search engines, such as Baidu, Google (China), and Yahoo (China).

### **Main Actors of the Carrefour Incident: Goals and Strategies of Behaviour**

When studying the Carrefour Incident, it should be noted that it is only a part of a larger scale conflict – protests in the world against the Olympic Games in Beijing. In its turn, those protests are some kind of micro model of claims against China in connection with the human rights violations and the suppression of ethnic minorities. It is possible to distinguish primary and secondary participants in the Carrefour Incident:

- The primary participants are the Chinese government, the Chinese citizens and the Carrefour hypermarkets;
- The secondary participants are the Government of the French Republic, the pro-Tibetan activists and the international media.

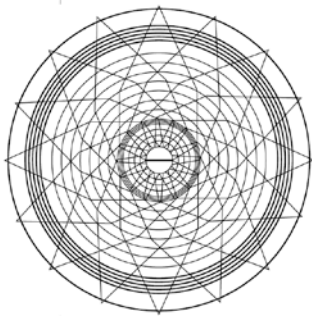
The targets and actions of the main actors of the conflict will be analysed in detail below.

The Carrefour Group is a French company, but most of the goods are produced in China, thus, the company became “local” and “more trustable” in the Chinese community. Carrefour’s participation in the incident began with the rumours about supporting the Dalai Lama. This information was unofficial but caused the rise of a negative attitude towards all Carrefour hypermarkets in China. In conjunction with the Parisian stage of the Olympic Torch relay, these rumours made Carrefour quite an obvious target.

This involvement made Carrefour’s position in the Chinese market risky: conflicts and boycotts could create temporary difficulties, but in the long term they can potentially derail all economic and reputational efforts. So, the company’s high interest in the speedy resolution of the crisis is obvious.

First messages about the boycott appeared on April the 9th, then the next day, an article titled “Boycott French goods, let us start with Carrefour” was published, identifying Carrefour as the main direct target for the Chinese audience. It took Carrefour a week to assess economic and reputational risks and develop a plan of action. On April the 14th, in his interview with The Wall Street Journal, Carrefour’s Greater China spokesperson carelessly declared the chain’s main goals at that time, namely, to avoid any involvement in politics or sports and to focus on legal business in China and customer needs.

Thus, Carrefour made an obvious mistake. On the eve of the Olympic Games in Beijing, a company representative literally said that the company was not interested in



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

the upcoming sports event and it wanted to stay on the sidelines. Naturally, this caused more public indignation and further escalated the conflict. Another (and possibly not so obvious) mistake was using predominantly rational arguments that lacked any emotional component. This did not allow the company to speak the same language with the protesters and communicate itself more effectively.

In fact, the most interesting question is why Carrefour became involved in this conflict at all. One of the reasons was the association, in the Chinese public eye, between the Parisian stage of the relay and the French chain of supermarkets. But we can assert that such association was artificially provoked or prompted by the political elites through the establishment of the necessary agenda in mass media, and with the help of opinion leaders, for example, Kitty Shelley or other prominent actors. Another reason was the rumours being spread about the Carrefour shareholders' support of the Tibetan cause. It is hardly possible to find an "index patient", the source of rumours now, but the hypothetical role of government agencies in starting them also seems plausible.

Thus, Carrefour did not reach their main goals and on April the 16th, instead it changed its rhetorical strategies for appealing to the Chinese people. "We and all our employees feel regretful about what happened in Paris and support the Beijing Olympics 100 percent," said Jean Luc Lhuillier, Carrefour China's vice president, at a press conference (Carrefour China 2008). He also refuted any connection to the Dalai Lama and pro-Tibetan activists. Another voice of the senses became Jose Luis Duran, the chairman of the Carrefour Group, who hoped "that the preparations for the Olympics will be implemented with a harmonious atmosphere" (Lu 2008). Now we can see the appeal to the feelings and emotions that sounded sincere, and were meant to separate the Tibet problem and Carrefour brand in the public opinion. Carrefour mainly used mass media to solve the conflict, choosing the right communication channel for the task, but even with that, the message failed since it was delivered much too late. A lot of the hypermarkets were temporarily closed on April the 20th awaiting the official reaction from the Chinese government.

Now it is possible to list the basic mistakes made by Carrefour:

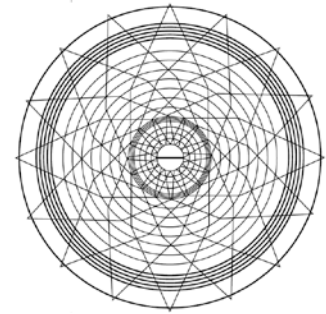
- Underestimating the gravity of the situation and, as a result, maintaining an extremely low rate of response to the rapidly developing events;
- Uncoordinated information policy within the company at the initial stage (lack of one official responsible for building a dialogue, the wrong choice of channels for appeals);
- Lack of understanding of the opponents' goals, discourse and rhetorical strategy;
- Lack of an individual strategy.

It is therefore very difficult to talk about Carrefour's success in achieving their goals. Most likely, the conflict could have much worse consequences (loss of market share and reputation) without the government mediation.



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



The Olympic Games are an event of national importance, a moment of recognition and approval of the country in the international arena. As a rule, such competitions are prepared in an especially thorough manner: it is not just a “moment of recognition”, it is also a spectacular celebration and an important element of public diplomacy.

Organising and carrying out the Olympics, on the one hand, gives a country a chance to form a positive image in the media and the minds of people all over the world, on the other hand, the current reputation of the country forms the attitude to the Olympic Games, including the attitude in the media. Thus, the focus on any negative aspects of the host country reduces the chances of success in forming a positive image in the end.

The direct involvement in the Carrefour Incident meant, for the official China, a risk of a stable association with the unrest in Tibet and human rights violations, not the Olympic Games. This can be identified as the main motive for the accumulation of efforts to end the conflict on the part of the Chinese government.

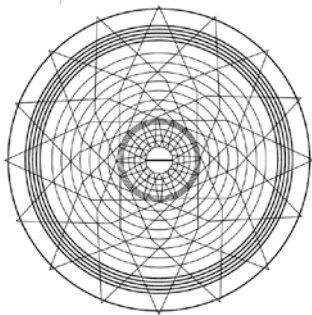
China’s official position is very complex. State media refuted the reasons for criticism of the Olympic Games at the initial stage of the Carrefour Incident. Thus, the protests allegedly reflected the “people’s will”, in formation of which the State had no part, although some echoes of the official position were easy to find. On the other hand, the protests have formed a negative agenda in the media casting a shadow on the coming Olympic Games and the country’s brand. A week after the beginning of the protest moods in society, China’s Foreign Ministry issued an official statement and recommended France to review its position and attitude.

From this point, the Chinese government’s actions focused on resolving the conflict and earliest possible cease of the demonstrations. For example, calls for boycotting Carrefour stores were removed from websites. Although the government’s response was quite reserved, it made it clear that the government no longer supported the protest activity of its citizens. At the initiative of China on April the 18th, a meeting and exchange of views on the Sino-French relations took place. And on April the 22nd the Ministry of Commerce of China issued a declaration on the Carrefour Incident containing the official position of the state and recommendations for the citizens to direct their enthusiasm and patriotism in a more peaceful direction (Crisis Management 2008).

The main goals of the Chinese government highly correlated with each other, they can even range in the order of importance (from less to more):

- Persuading its citizens to express their patriotism in a softer and more rational way;
- Termination of the negative coverage of the upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing in the international media;
- Control of the global public opinion regarding the status of Tibet.

To achieve these goals, a strategy was chosen to use the hierarchical superiority to convince people and shift the context of the established discourse from “international conflict” to the “upcoming Olympic Games”. Thus, the negative reality was replaced by



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

a positive one, while the patriotism level of the Chinese people remained unchanged. In addition to official statements, the Chinese government used its ability to regulate the Internet in their country: on April the 26th the search result pages related to the Carrefour Incident were blocked by search engines such as Baidu, Google (China), Yahoo (China), etc.

For example, Figure 2 shows a diagram of the intensity of the “anti-Carrefour” requests in the Google search engine from April the 1st, 2008 until May the 1st, 2008 in the geographic region “China”.



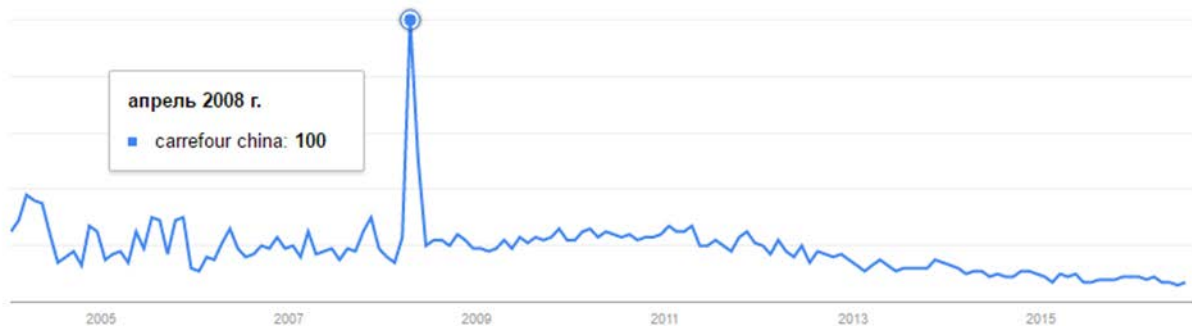
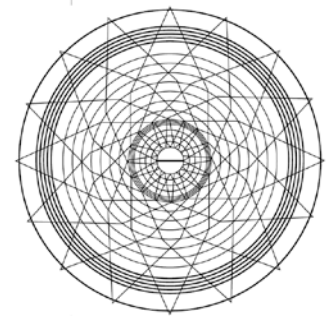
**Fig. 2.** “Anti-Carrefour” search query dynamics from Apr 01, 2008 until May 01, 2008 period in the China geographic region. Source: Google Trends, requested on Aug 01, 2016.

It is obvious that the mentioned search query was non-existent until specific circumstances. The query peaks on Apr the 18th, 2008 when the discontent of the Chinese people raised due to Carrefour’s inactivity and company representative’s statements. The total absence of the query is seen again after Apr the 26th, as the Chinese government started to block all the Carrefour Incident related search queries. Now let us compare this with another, more neutral query such as “Carrefour China” and this time let us consider the whole timeline available from Google Trends. The result is displayed in Figure 3.

The obvious peak observed in the chart is April 2008, the Carrefour Incident time. In addition, not only a rapidly increasing number of requests is observed, but also a rapid decline, very likely caused by the blocking of “Carrefour China” requests in the Google search engine. The continuation of the chart indicates that the actions were of a temporary nature, or the filter was adjusted later on, for example, the query “Carrefour China” was blocked only in conjunction with certain other words.

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

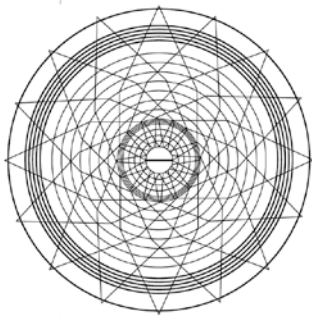


**Fig. 3.** “Carrefour China” search query dynamics in the geographic region of China for the entire available period. Source: Google Trends, requested at Aug 01, 2016.

Thus, it would be incorrect to say that the Chinese government’s participation in the conflict began on April 15, following the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Technically, the Chinese government became involved when they did not prevent Chinese citizens from obtaining “politically incorrect” information about pro-Tibetan activists and reaction of the international community. As mentioned earlier, the hypothesis that the Carrefour Incident was fully controlled from the beginning could be true. For example the creation of the required basis for protest moods in the form of an agreed agenda, the emergence of active opinion leaders who induced the action not only in the network, but also offline, terminating the conflict after achieving sufficient changes in public opinion, but before a threat of serious consequences in the form of a loss of crowd control becomes real.

The third major actor in the conflict is constituted by the Chinese citizens, who expressed their discontent with regard to the incident on the French stage of the Olympic Torch relay and defended the dignity of the country. Their position in the Carrefour Incident appears to be the most active: in fact, it is them who initiated the main conflict in the described case, by expressing support for their country (McDonald 2008) in the form of demonstrations and attacking France via Carrefour.

There is not much to say about their pursuit for resolving the conflict, because it is extremely difficult to determine their motivation. Ideas of “national pride”, “national interests”, and “protection of the country’s dignity” are too vague when it comes to society as a whole. In other words, the Chinese protesters had different reasons to start the conflict: some were angry with the rumours about Carrefour supporting the Dalai Lama, some felt their pride was wounded, some were really worried about the upcoming Olympic Games. So, the main reason of the Chinese public reaction was anger and resentment over the remarks against China (McDonald 2008), but this motive is hardly intelligible or rational. In our opinion, that is what determined the duration of the conflict and led to the government intervention.



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

Therefore, there are additional reasons to contemplate the covert role of government in creating a possibility of a mass protest of such scale. First, information about the reaction of the international community to the Tibetan issue and the Olympic Torch relay problems was included in the agenda of the Chinese media and the local Internet segment (Jacobs, Wang 2008). Second, the protest moods have long remained without the government's attention, enabling them to take shape and get offline. Third, it is possible to distinguish individuals, heroes of this movement from the entire mass of Internet users and people who subsequently went into the streets, who can be referred to as opinion leaders, and upon whom government agencies can rely. Even though the anti-Carrefour actions were not accepted by all Chinese people, it was rarely highlighted by the mass media. However, a fair amount of Internet users chose to boycott the protests explaining their reasons as follows: "Maybe I cannot convince them, but I need to let them know at least that some people have different ideas" (Kitty Shelley 2008), "I find this boycott quite embarrassing. I may not be able to do much else, so I will go and purchase a bottle of water!" (Kitty Shelley 2008), "If we get rid of French, German and British cars, we would need to ride the South China tiger when we go out. After all, that one is made in China!" (Kitty Shelley 2008).

It is worth mentioning that with reference to the Chinese people as one of the actors, they were unable to communicate with the French government directly, as direct actions would lead to sanctions. For example, their actions were cut short by the government security forces once they tried to start a protest demonstration near the French embassy and a French school nearby (Jacobs, Wang 2008). Therefore, it was vital to find a safe, yet French-related subject which would become a target of an active grudge and protest. The target was found and it was Carrefour, a French retailer network, a non-government organisation which was used as a "communications channel" of sorts. This was actually an adjustment of the main target to a specific French-related subject within direct action. However, the Chinese society had no intention to exile Carrefour from the country, but only to draw attention and provoke an international reaction.

The strategy in this case was straightforward, as provocations and protests were targeted at a specific object which caused the French government's direct feedback. These actions included Internet coordination and cooperation, constant anti-Carrefour action calls, massive offline demonstrations and cyber attacks on the Carrefour website.

### **Conclusions**

Having taken all analysed information about the Carrefour Incident into consideration, we can state the following:

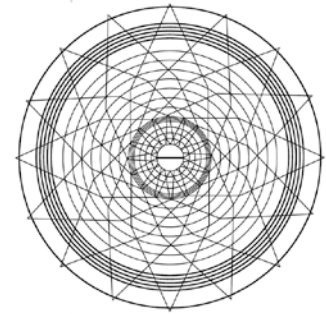
1) This case involves a combination of several different processes: the global anti-Olympic protests against the Tibetan background, the conflict around the Olympic Torch in France, and also the Carrefour boycott. The reason for this interconnection is

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy*

*Management in China: The Carrefour Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



globalisation, the rise of transnational corporations with specific economic interests, the ability to receive information and react rapidly and the formation of a global information network, “the global village”. The number of information channels has also grown dramatically. For example, the internal filtering of international critiques against China became more difficult to maintain. As a result, we can state the following:

- The number of international incidents will grow in time
- The instruments of the new public diplomacy should keep evolving, while conflicts should be resolved globally, not locally.
- The Internet becomes both an effective instrument and a space for solving international conflicts.

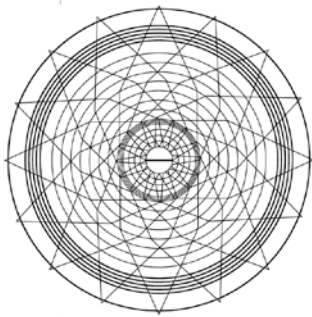
2) The analysis of the actors of the conflict is becoming more complicated due to the globalisation and the Internet capabilities. For example, the Carrefour Incident allows us to assume the following:

- According to the level of conflict involvement, all actors can be primary or secondary.
- According to the geofactor, all actors can be divided into three large groups: the French group, the Chinese group and the transnational corporation, which is de-jure French, but de-facto is active in China.
- According to the level of government engagement, the actors can be state organisations, social organisations and business organisations.
- According to the type of communication: one- and two-sided, direct and indirect, macro and micro etc. As a result, the arguments of all parties involved in the conflict need to be analysed to avoid the emergence of new crises within the existing one, as it happened in 2008 in China.
- According to the speed of communication: the Chinese society reacted rapidly, whereas the Carrefour company was too slow in its reactions.
- According to the type of communication channel: apart from traditional channels such as the Internet and media, the Carrefour company appeared to be a kind of communication channel between the Chinese citizens and the foreign community.

3) Another important difference is that of the actors’ discourses: the government’s and the business officials’ and rational discourse is in obvious conflict with the public’s emotional rhetoric. Some actors stick to one of the two types of discourse, while others change from one to another in the course of the conflict.

4) At the beginning of the conflict, the Chinese internal policy was criticised by the international community. In that regard, the final result of the case seems to be quite amazing and unexpected. It was exactly the Chinese government, blamed by the global community, which played a key role in the conflict’s resolution by shifting the context via official statements and Internet control tools.

5) There are two strategies of significant importance that were used in the Carrefour Incident:



## [Scientific Articles]

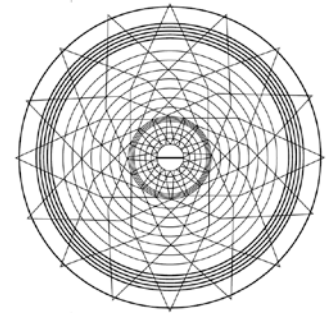
Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

- In fact, Chinese citizens resorted to some kind of provocation (anti-Carrefour demonstrations) to draw the world's attention to the Chinese point of view on the incident with the Olympic Torch in France.
  - The Chinese government used regulation and censorship of the Internet space in China, which is a repression instrument, in order to achieve a positive result.
- 6) Controlling and monitoring the Internet by the Chinese authorities is definitely not a part of the public diplomacy toolkit, because the main actors of public diplomacy are non-governmental and social organisations, but not exactly the government itself.
- 7) The Carrefour Incident shows the consolidating role of the Internet, as a unifying instrument of public discussion and problem solving. One of the key factors in this instance is the nature of social networks, which should be studied by considering examples from all over the world: the Twitter revolution in Iran, the Carrefour Incident in China, the coordination of efforts in social networking sites in the preparation to the Snow Revolution in Russia 2011–2012, etc. Theories of “cyber-pessimism” (Shirky 2008, Shirky 2010) and “cyber-optimism” (Morozov 2013) could comprise the theoretical background for such studies.
- 8) Technically, one could say that the Carrefour Incident was resolved by the constant changes made by the state in the cyberspace targeted at a vast audience, or in other words using the so-called “soft power”. But it would be wrong to think that what was used in this case by the Chinese government was smart power, because the global community still criticises the Tibetan policy. The Chinese government strictly censors traditional and online media, so the “soft power” is not effective enough to become a “smart power”.
- 9) Studying cases like the Carrefour Incident can be achieved using several methods:
- A content analysis allows quantifying the results of the qualitative research of different messages.
  - A discourse analysis allows studying both the linguistic components of media texts and the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of such texts on a certain subject in a certain context.
  - An analysis of the actors' rhetorical strategies allows to define special idioms, key words and motifs and to produce a counter strategy, if necessary.
  - An analysis of the media content in a given time period allows to identify the current agenda as well as information presentation methods that, according to some researchers, have an impact on the attribution of responsibility.
  - An analysis of the media statistics allows to identify the key points and stages of the conflict; it requires data from Google analytics, and also data from governmental and non-governmental media research companies.
  - Methods of crisis management.
10. There are some changes of the key definitions: due to the large influence of the cyberspace factor, classical “public diplomacy” evolves to a “new public diplomacy” or “cyber public diplomacy”. Moreover, the generally accepted division into “hard power” and “soft power” is no longer relevant and is transformed into “smart power”.

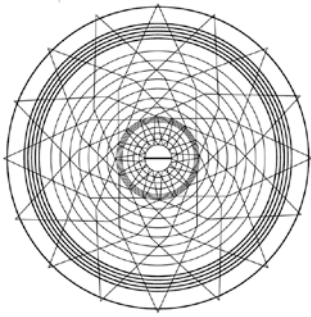
## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



### REFERENCES:

- Carrefour China Reiterates Support for Beijing Olympics. (2008, April 29). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.china.org.cn/olympics/news/2008-04/29/content\\_15031311.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/olympics/news/2008-04/29/content_15031311.htm)
- Chen, P. (2012). Cyber Public Diplomacy as China's Smart Power Strategy in an Information Age: Case Study of Anti-Carrefour Incident in 2008. *International Journal of China Studies*, 3(2), 189-217.
- China Internet Users. (n.d.). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/china>
- Ching, F. (2014). World should watch for Confucius. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/commentary/the-china-post/frank-ching/2014/10/01/418395/World-should.htm>
- Cohen, B. C. (2016). *Press and foreign policy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Crisis Management at Carrefour. (2008). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080428\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080428_1.htm)
- Cull, N. J. (2006). "Public Diplomacy" Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase. Audio record. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/060418\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_before\\_gullion\\_the\\_evolution\\_of\\_a\\_phrase](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/060418_public_diplomacy_before_gullion_the_evolution_of_a_phrase)
- Cull, N. J. (2009). *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. Los Angeles: Figueroa Press.
- Dearing, J. W., Rogers, E. M. (1988). Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has It Been, Where Is It Going? *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 11(1), 555-594.
- Izard, M. (Ed.). (2015). *The Olympic Underwear Relay*. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the\\_olympic\\_underwear\\_relay](http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the_olympic_underwear_relay)
- Jacobs, A., Wang, J. (2008). Internet fuels mass patriotic fervor in China. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/world/asia/20iht-china.4.12168456.html>
- Katz, E., Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1964). *Personal influence the part played by people: in the flow of mass communications*. Foreword by Elmo Roper. New York: Free Press.
- Kitty Shelley versus France. (2008). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080415\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080415_1.htm)
- Lewis, P., Kelso, P. (2008). Thousands protest as Olympic flame carried through London. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/07/olympicgames2008.china2>
- Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York: Macmillan.
- Lu, A. (Ed.). (2008). Carrefour chairman: Carrefour supports Beijing Olympics \_English\_Xinhua. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/23/content\\_8034795.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/23/content_8034795.htm)



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.

*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176.

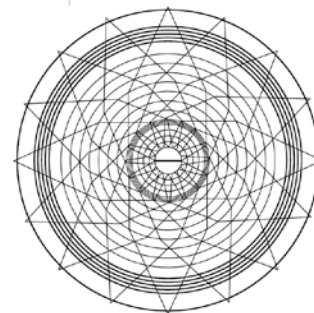
McDonald, J. (2008). Protests target Carrefour stores in China. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-01-3419792923\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-01-3419792923_x.htm)

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy the making of typographic man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



# ЦЕНТРАЛИЗОВАННОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ИНСТРУМЕНТАРИЕМ ПУБЛИЧНОЙ ДИПЛОМАТИИ В КИТАЕ: CARREFOUR-ИНЦИДЕНТ<sup>2</sup>

**Тимофеева О. А.**

Преподаватель, Национальный исследовательский  
университет «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва)  
[o.a.timofeyeva@gmail.com](mailto:o.a.timofeyeva@gmail.com)

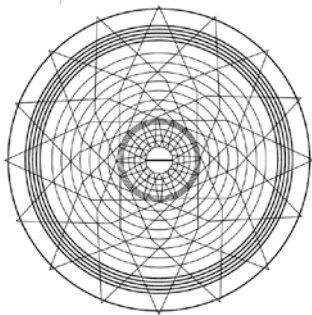
### Аннотация:

В статье рассматривается использование инструментов публичной дипломатии в целях продвижения интересов государства. Основная цель заключается в демонстрации потенциальных возможностей публичной дипломатии для достижения политических целей в авторитарном однопартийном государстве с акцентом на онлайн-среду. В качестве примера был выбран Carrefour-инцидент – конфликт, произошедший в Китае во время подготовки к олимпийским играм в Пекине в 2008 г. Конфликт разразился между китайскими гражданами, обиженными реакцией правительства Франции на действия протибетских активистов во время парижского этапа эстафеты Олимпийского огня, и компанией Carrefour Group в Китае.

Во введении представлена краткая история понятия «публичная дипломатия» с упором на концепцию Николаса Калла, а также рассмотрен ряд моделей и теорий медиакоммуникации, необходимых для лучшего понимания событий в рамках рассматриваемого кейса. Далее в статье даются подробная хронология и этапы конфликта, описываются цели и действия основных участников. Рассматриваемый конфликт был первоначально поддержан правительством с помощью механизмов социальных сетей и мягкой пропаганды, а затем, когда цель была достигнута, эффективно купирован с помощью средств управления интернет-аудиторией. Данный кейс демонстрирует также подходы по неявному управлению информационным пространством и раскрывает технологию выявления критических фаз развития конфликта с использованием базовых средств медиа-статистики. Опыт Китая в общем случае важен для понимания эффективности контроля медиапространства и управления ходом конфликта как для государственных акторов, так и для неправительственных организаций.

В заключении представлен ряд выводов теоретического и практического свойства о природе данного конфликта и консолидирующей роли интернета в

<sup>2</sup> Оригинал статьи подготовлен в рамках гранта РФНФ № 15-37-11128 и опубликован в Вестнике МГИМО в 2017 г.



## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*

нем. В частности, затрагивается проблема эффективности китайской мягкой силы и необходимость трансформации терминологической базы.

**Ключевые слова:** публичная дипломатия, новая публичная дипломатия, мягкая сила, умная сила, Китай, Carrefour, медиасреда, интернет-регулирование

### БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ:

Carrefour China Reiterates Support for Beijing Olympics. (2008, April 29). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.china.org.cn/olympics/news/2008-04/29/content\\_15031311.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/olympics/news/2008-04/29/content_15031311.htm)

Chen, P. (2012). Cyber Public Diplomacy as China's Smart Power Strategy in an Information Age: Case Study of Anti-Carrefour Incident in 2008. *International Journal of China Studies*, 3(2), 189-217.

China Internet Users. (n.d.). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/china>

Ching, F. (2014). World should watch for Confucius. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.chinapost.com.tw/commentary/the-china-post/frank-ching/2014/10/01/418395/World-should.htm>

Cohen, B. C. (2016). *Press and foreign policy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Crisis Management at Carrefour. (2008). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080428\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080428_1.htm)

Cull, N. J. (2006). "Public Diplomacy" Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase. Audio record. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/060418\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_before\\_gullion\\_the\\_evolution\\_of\\_a\\_phrase](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/060418_public_diplomacy_before_gullion_the_evolution_of_a_phrase)

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

Dearing, J. W., Rogers, E. M. (1988). Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has It Been, Where Is It Going? *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 11(1), 555-594.

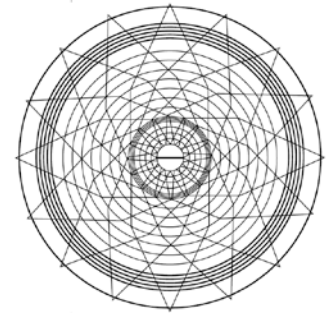
Izard, M. (Ed.). (2015). *The Olympic Underwear Relay*. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the\\_olympic\\_underwear\\_relay](http://hoaxes.org/archive/permalink/the_olympic_underwear_relay)

Jacobs, A., Wang, J. (2008). Internet fuels mass patriotic fervor in China. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/world/asia/20iht-china.4.12168456.html>

Katz, E., Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1964). *Personal influence the part played by people: in the flow of mass communications*. Foreword by Elmo Roper. New York: Free Press.

## [Scientific Articles]

Timofeyeva O.  
*Centralisation of Public Diplomacy  
Management in China: The Carrefour  
Incident in the Beijing Olympic Games*



Kitty Shelley versus France. (2008). Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080415\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20080415_1.htm)

Lewis, P., Kelso, P. (2008). Thousands protest as Olympic flame carried through London. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/07/olympicgames2008.china2>

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York: Macmillan.

Lu, A. (Ed.). (2008). Carrefour chairman: Carrefour supports Beijing Olympics \_English\_Xinhua. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/23/content\\_8034795.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/23/content_8034795.htm)

McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176.

McDonald, J. (2008). Protests target Carrefour stores in China. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-01-3419792923\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-05-01-3419792923_x.htm)

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy the making of typographic man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.