

**Digital Diplomatic Crisis Communication:  
Diplomatic Signalling and Crisis Narratives in an Age of Real – Time  
Governance**

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by

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“I’m so random. I can’t believe I just did that”

- Ja’mie King

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

*“Communication is to diplomacy as blood is to the human body. Whenever it ceases, the body of international politics, the process of diplomacy, is dead, and the result is violent conflict or atrophy” (Tran, 1987: 8).*

**Abstract:** The practice of digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) and online crisis narratives (OCN) offers unexplored potential for analysing the creation and exercise of diplomatic communicative strategies during times of political crisis. Set within the global information space, the processes of DDS and OCN today carry the potential, to act as communicative tools for foreign policy power projection, and virtual powers of enlargement as the ‘battle for crisis narratives’ is now played out online. By developing a unique conceptual lens in which to view and analyse these communicative processes online, this research argues that digital signalling and online crisis narratives have become essential components of a Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) communicative toolbox, and worthy instruments in which they can seek to exert and extend their diplomatic influence both at home and abroad. Using DDS and OCN as conceptual lenses in which to view diplomatic crisis communication practices, we see that the power inherent in digital mediums becomes a communicative advantage during a crisis and a strategic instrument for the achievement of foreign policy goals. A new crop of studies which addresses the emergence of communicative power under the label ‘foreign policy in global information space’ adds substantial weight to these claims, supplying, new ways of extrapolating the power projections of digital diplomatic actors online. Through the exploration of two distinct case studies, the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, and 2013/4 Euromaidan crisis, this research therefore taps into the unexplored potential of the process of DDS, its power to create OCN’s, and ultimately expand a state's power and influence during times of crisis.

## 1.0 Introduction

*On July 15, 2014, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel (@AmbShapiro) retweeted the words of then Secretary of State (@JohnKerry). These words denounced the militant group Hamas, whilst expressing sympathy towards the Israeli state during their time of crises. The tweet read: “I condemn Hamas for shooting rockets at a time Israel and Egypt are working in good faith to get a ceasefire”. The Tweet was shared to over 19,000 followers and became a symbol of the United States position during the 2014 conflict.*

*On December 9, 2013, the Swedish Ambassador to Ukraine (@vBeckerath) tweeted his views relating to the countries protests for democratic reform. The Tweet read: “impossible not be impressed by the people on the cold streets of Kiev showing their support for a European future for Ukraine. #Євромайдан”. The Tweet was shared to over 3,000 followers, and signalled, if only indirectly, where Sweden's loyalty on this issue may lie.*

*On July 8, 2014, at the zenith of the 2014 Israel-Palestine conflict, the EEAS (@EuInIsrael) sent a symbolic message to their online network. It read; “the EU offers Israel special privileged partnership next best to EU membership, akin to Norway/Switzerland”. Although indirect, the signal was clear; that the EU stands firm in its support for the Israeli state during their time of conflict.*

Crises, and how they are communicated, have become characteristic features of our society. No continent or country in the world is free from hazards and risks, disasters and calamities, and with the existence of a complex array of communicative capabilities, nor are they offered the luxury to avoid commentary on these ever-pervasive events. The tweets illustrated above represent a snapshot of this rapidly changing landscape, and illustrate the altered practice of diplomatic communication, between serving diplomats and their digital

followers. They embody through their message and medium, the rustling beginnings of a new era for diplomatic communication, and diplomatic *crisis* communication in particular. Now for a long period of time, social scientists have felt a bit uncomfortable about the study of crises. Crises were seen as antithetical to the strenuous efforts of mainstream social science, to the study of safe and sound objects, to quantifiable trends, patterns, and regularities. The traditional preoccupation with questions of social and political order, and the longing for a reflection of natural science's rigor all nurtured a preference for predictability, regularity, and periodicity. Crises were viewed in functional terms, as facilitators of long-awaited change, and crisis management was therefore interpreted as a mechanism towards the restoration of normalcy. The world of crisis research, in turn, became dominated by natural agents, foreign enemies, and sudden disasters (Rosenthal, 1998), and developed as studies of the manifestation of 'unness' and unpredictability (Hewitt, 1983).

In today's world of receding borders, spectacular technological advancements, and increased pace, our historical conception of crisis has become too narrow. Crises can no longer be seen as external features of everyday life, as threatening events, awaiting us 'somewhere out there'. They have become part of our world, and part of the way we live. Today's crises are viewed not as discrete events, but are processes unfolding as manifold forces interact in unforeseen and disturbing ways. Modern crises are therefore increasingly characterised by complexity, interdependence, and politicisation. Tomorrow's crises, in turn, will look different from today's and yesterday's crises.<sup>1</sup> As social scientists we therefore share an urge to understand the nature of the modern crisis. As diplomatic practitioners tasked with managing crises on behalf of the state or the international community, we must seek to uncover how to effectively manage and communicate state policies, once in them. This research takes on this task, shedding light on the changing nature of crises in the 21st century and how a MFA can successfully navigate its communication practices to ensure their foreign policy goals and objectives are met, while

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<sup>1</sup> One needs only to look at the unfolding crisis of 2017, to see the changing nature of crises in the 21st century. They are distinct in their communicative capabilities, their interdependence, and the blurring of territorial jurisdictions, when compared to even a decade ago. Take for example, President Trump taunting tweets almost reading like an invitation to war to North Korea, with foreign policy analysts explicitly commenting on the substantive nature of the President's tweets in escalating tensions in the Far East (Foreign Policy 2017).

continuously working towards effective crisis management on behalf its actors, state and the international community at large.

To begin this understanding of the 21st century crisis, we first take a look at the primary changes that have emerged within them. *First*, and perhaps chief amongst them, is that the 21st century crisis has been sculpted and framed by the global information age. By this we mean that ‘information’ itself has become a principal ‘commodity’ by which one measures levels, not only of education, skills and knowledge, but also levels of well-being, prosperity, wealth, and development on a personal, local, and national scale. Indeed, the ability to acquire and efficiently employ knowledge and information is a critical consideration for success in an information-based society with ‘knowledge workers’ and ‘information workers’ becoming an ever-increasing fraction of the work force in all countries – and the diplomatic craft has proved no different (Amir Dhia 2015). *Second* is that the global information space has shown to have had a direct impact on the creation and formation of crises, with conflicts now bypassing traditional state borders, and the interdependence of global society producing powerful forces of social fragmentation, opening critical vulnerabilities, and the breeding of extremist organisations (Chong, 2010). The increasing interdependence of the global society, leads to the *third* core change: the evolution of foreign policy; its creation, projection and reception. This change is of particularly relevance to a crisis period, where the creation and projection of foreign policy is at (or should be at) the forefront of all MFAs engaged or commenting on the crisis at play. Despite its impact for diplomatic institutions at large, MFAs are yet to fully understand this change, and how it is altering their foreign policy engagement during a crisis. Indeed, foreign policy creation is now tending more towards that which cuts across governments departments and focuses on networks and issues rather than just geography, with departments in MFAs needing to blend their internal departments and work together, in order to tackle common issues and themes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose our research, globalisation is characterised by a proliferation in the number of, and kinds, of agents that are pertinent to the making of foreign policy (Neumann 2013). If transcendence of boundaries is an effect of globalisation, then the states system must increasingly be seen as only one part of the global political system. It follows that the state’s personnel must sooner or later take cognisance of the other kinds of politics that exist within the system. If negotiation and, more widely, mediation, is a key to foreign policy, then the work of the state’s diplomats increasingly involves mediating between a wider slate of agents than states. We have seen that diplomats used to mediate across state boundaries, but today are now increasingly mediating across a plethora of different social and political boundaries.

Examining foreign policy evolution within the global information space, also exposes to us the changing nature of agency within the diplomatic corps. With increasing time pressure to craft and project foreign policy (particularly during a crisis), diplomatic agents are today being granted more power and authority within the foreign policy process (Manor 2016). Agency and power, are therefore perhaps by default, becoming increasingly delineated within a Ministerial bureaucratic structure. Such a joined-up approach is arguably creating a flatter, more flexible and entrepreneurial structure within the diplomatic hierarchy, one which draws on the best ideas and information sources available, rather than a strict adherence to ranking and structure. Indeed, during a crisis, diplomatic staff abroad, are now expected to engage in real-time communicative activities, and in some instances, act without direct authority on subjects they would have previously had to wait hours (if not days) on, before Headquarter (HQ) would have sanctioned their offline statements. As a consequence, the diplomat on the ground has had to quickly become a master of communication. And, if they do not? They face the consequences of being left out of the online political dialogue completely, missing the opportunity to sculpt the narrative in their favour.

The delineation of authority from HQ to Embassy level, also places an increasing burden (or onus) on the Embassy to engage in effective crisis management. While this has always been an utmost priority for an Embassy, to draw on some clichéd rhetoric - with greater power comes greater responsibility. As it is widely recognised, the quality of crisis management has the possibility to make the difference between life and death, chaos and order, breakdown and resilience. Therefore, when Embassies and their agents respond well to a crisis, the damage is limited. And when emerging vulnerabilities and threats are adequately assessed and addressed, potentially devastating contingencies simply do not happen. Thus, recognising the power and context of the information age, and the communicative procedures which now consume and form its environment, the evolution of diplomatic authority and the increasing pressures Embassies on the ground face regarding their crisis communication practices, should now be regarded as a vital component of any diplomatic crisis management strategy and must be assessed with due regard during every stage of the crisis, if damage is to remain limited.

The evolution of foreign policy in the global information space, then, links to the *fourth* key change: evolved communicative capabilities. This evolution is particularly notable in

terms of the capabilities' speed, tone, and structure, as well as the ways these new methods directly challenge how diplomats and MFAs use communication tools to promote and project their foreign policy goals during a crisis. At the most basic level, we have seen that today, digital communicative capabilities play an enhanced role in the execution of a state's foreign policy efforts, coming to be regarded as vital tools of engagement for those actors tasked with diplomatic crisis communication activities. Indeed, the range of communicative capabilities available to diplomats to engage in these activities has also evolved exponentially in the digital age. With that said, two mediums in particular - Facebook and Twitter – have emerged as substantially more triumphant than the others, in terms of their use and integration within current diplomatic crisis communication strategies, and with that, provide firm justification for this research to centre upon them for its own data collection and analysis.

Drawing from this change, we also see the evolution of the inner workings of diplomatic communicative practices themselves, particularly regarding the processes of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation. Both processes have been altered and sculpted by the digital age, and carry with them unexplored potential to assess the power of diplomatic communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the case of the signalling process, we have seen the once formal, well crafted, and to some degree secretive practice, partially lose its relevance for those who practice and study it. Substituted instead with a communication process which sees signals sent through public forums, created by agents of all standing and directed towards an audience group which is high in number, reactive and delineated. Set against the backdrop of the global information space, the practice further holds the potential to act as an increasing tool for MFAs to form, project and have received their crisis state narratives, narratives which can prove essential communicative assets for a state and its agents during a period of intense conflict.

Framed by these changes, this research takes on the task of exploring the new world and makeup of diplomatic crisis communication. Narrowed further, it analyses the emerging and novel communicative capabilities of digital diplomatic signalling and online narrative creation within the diplomatic crisis discourse during the technological age. It conceptualises for the first time, the practice of diplomatic signalling in the digital age, and explores its increasing role of importance in evolving and strengthening diplomatic communicative capabilities during times of political crisis. It views digital diplomatic

signalling as a communicative process, bound within a number of digital mediums, with its power lying in its ability to craft, sculpt and project foreign policy and diplomatic narratives through a variety of unique online mechanisms, a vital power to hold, in a world filled with informational overload and communicative chaos. Both communicative capabilities are therefore shown to function as compensatory symbolic power tools, for both the diplomat on the ground, and the MFA at large.

With that said, this research is not simply about uncovering the processes of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation in the digital age, but about the potential outcome and effect of this very process. The primary effect of both these capabilities (signalling process and narrative creation) is ‘virtual state enlargement’; that is the art of states to enlarge their importance to the international community through a variety of methods and means (Vukadinovic 1971; Commonwealth Secretariat 1985; 1997; Cooper and Shaw 2009). It is seen as an emerging concept developed to provide intellectual purchase on the complexities of diplomatic communication today, particularly in regard to how influence works in a new media environment, and for the purpose of this study within a political crisis scenario.

By unpacking these communicative processes and by providing a blueprint to practitioners on how to use both processes to gain the most measurable output during a crisis (output meaning the creation of virtual state enlargement), the aim of this research is, therefore, to illustrate to MFAs the emerging and increasing power of these novel communicative process and the benefits they can provide to the institution, if included within a crisis communication strategy. Linked to this aim, is to highlight how digital communicative practices are becoming increasingly transformative for crisis communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with that, decidedly necessary for diplomats to engage in, if they wish to carry out, implement, and achieve effective communication strategies and crisis management.

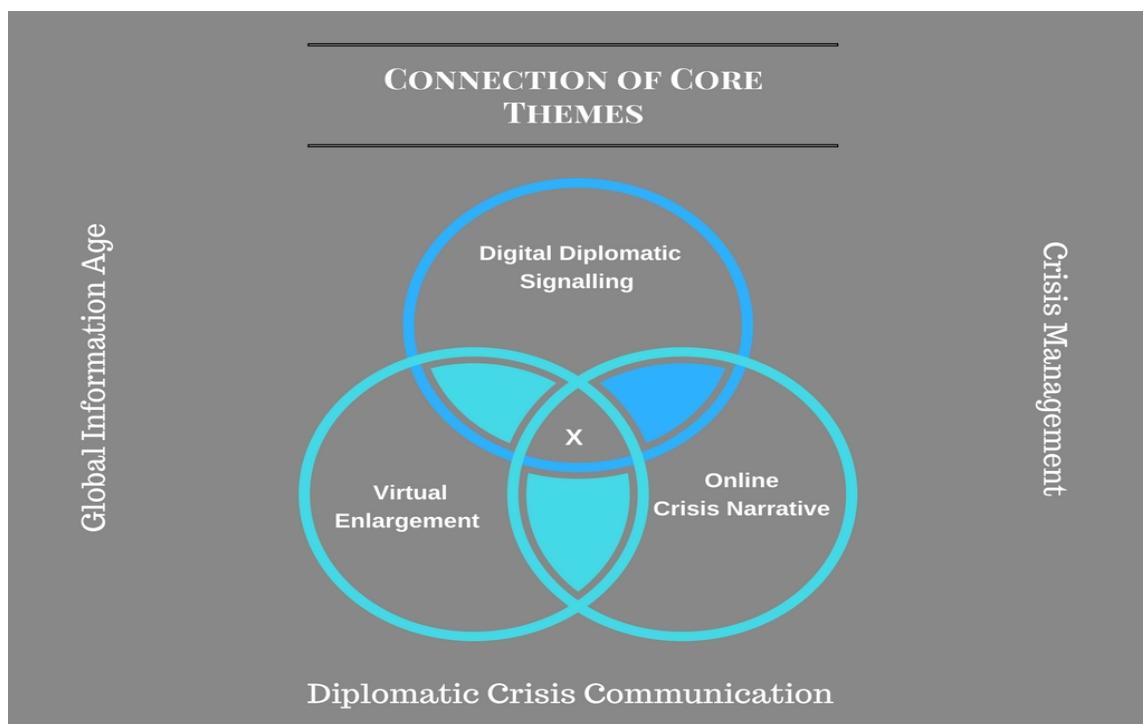
Now, it should be said, that while this research does seek to provide a core focus on the unique and increasing process of DDS and OCN; assessing how they emerge, what mechanisms they consist of, and of course, what *possible* influence these capabilities may possess through the power of its projection and audience reception online, it should be made explicitly clear, that the core goal of this research is not to assist with speculative musing on why sending states are acting in a certain way, but rather assess what their actual behaviour looks like. As although the possible influence and impact of DDS and OCN is

assessed through the reception of the online messages sent during the crisis – this research asserts that to make substantial claims regarding how messages *directly* affected the crisis (without taking into account an insurmountable host of indirect variables, which would be close to methodologically impossible) would be anything short of tenuous.

## 1.1 Core Themes of Research

While the anchors of this research are the dual processes of digital diplomatic signalling and online narrative creation, there are four central themes at play within it: 1) global information space; 2) digital diplomatic signalling; 3) online crises narratives; and 4) virtual enlargement through digital communicative means. Whilst distinct in their own manner, all themes are essential for the discovery and analysis of the practice of diplomatic signalling, and narrative creation in the digital age.

Figure 1.1 Connection of Core Themes<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> This map serves to highlight how the core themes are set or grounded within each other. For example, a crisis (and diplomatic crisis communication practices within them) in the 21st century is grounded within the global information age, as the former could not exist or could not have evolved, without the latter. DDS and OCN are shown to have direct links to each other, and when combined, hold the power to contribute to a process of virtual enlargement on behalf of the state. Through the use of both capabilities, MFAs can work to create more effective crisis communication strategies and in turn, manage the crisis to a greater degree.

At the broadest level, the global information space is the backdrop against which to explore the changing nature of crisis communication and foreign policy creation and projection within a 21<sup>st</sup> century framework. The exploration of this theme allows for the discovery of the basic rudiments of how, and in what capacity, a diplomat operates within a crisis today. Set against the backdrop of this theme, we then introduce the next two: the process of DDS and the creation and projection of OCN. The process of DDS allows us to explore how diplomatic agents are communicating during a crisis, whilst online narratives allows us to reflect on the outcomes of this process and open a discussion regarding its impact and influence. Both themes reside at the centre of this work, and anchor the research firmly in place. The final theme, that of virtual enlargement, is a lens used to explore the outcome for a state when they engage with these novel communicative processes and brings to the fore the question of impact and influence when discussing digital signalling and narrative creation during times of crises. As previously noted, while all of these themes have the capacity to stand alone for individual analysis, they also serve as important interlocutors for the overall premise of this work; when construed through digital symbolic messages and narratives, the powers inherent in digital mediums become a strategic advantage for foreign policy power projection and crisis management tactics for diplomatic agents during times of crisis.

Turning now to a brief explanation of each of the core themes:

### *1.1.1 Foreign Policy in the Global Information Space*

The global information space (GIS) is a direct consequence of information globalisation acting as a multidimensional information flow inducing a climate of scrutiny. This thesis sets itself apart from other works in the rapidly mushrooming nexus of globalisation and international relations (Luard 1990; Camilieri and Falk 1992; McGrew et al. 1992; Scholte 1993; Rosenau 1997a; Clark 1997; Clark 1999; Youngs 2000) by addressing the ideational challenge of globalisation to the nation-state in terms of a GIS. It argues for a reformulation of foreign policy strategy, under the working assumption that operative abstractions such as ‘the global’, are likely to place individuals and their constructed modes of organisation

under logical strain when they do not conform to centuries-old modes of territorial practice.<sup>4</sup>

Speaking on the question of foreign policy in the global information space, A. Chong (2010) argues that a ‘fundamental threat posed by globalisation is one of reconstructing space through the reconstruction of legitimacy’ (2007: 2). Expanding on this idea, he writes that ‘beyond the basic idea of the global as earth wide spatiality, globalisation in both academic and popular discourse is a cornucopia of issues entangled and symbiotic upon one another sharing a common theme of trans territorial actions and agents’ (ibid). He puts forth the claim that globalisation and the process itself has extended an awareness of boundary diminution, and that there now exists an overwhelming ‘weight of extraterritorial causality upon territory-bound policy makers, thereby rendering globalisation a disruptive reality’ (2007: 3). As some writers have put it, the globe and its intermediate political and ideological spaces above the level of nation-states come about when they are produced and reproduced by social modes (Spybey, 1996: 5-11).

Chong, however, is not the only voice in this sphere, but sits amongst a breath of literature with a nexus of globalisation and international relations (Luard 1990; Camilieri and Falk 1992; McGrew et al. 1992; Scholte 1993; Rosenau 1997a; Clark 1997; Clark 1999; Youngs 2000), all of whom seek to address the ideational challenge of globalisation to the nation-state in terms of a GIS. Here, foreign policy is regarded as a ‘separate and special area of government linked to the security and the fundamental values of the state,’ which ‘is intended to affect, and [ironically] is limited by, factors outside the national political system as well as within it’ (Wallace 1971: 9-10,17). Mainstream foreign policy theorists, in this regard, have also defended the importance of their focus on grounds that the nation-state’s sine qua non is to guard the common interests of those living within its boundaries (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin 1963a; Clarke and White 1989).

Finally, in this theme, individual agency, and how it has been altered by the GIS, is an important point to consider and reflect on. The building blocks behind the foreign policy

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<sup>4</sup> It can also be recognised that it is equally probable that these same human subjects of strain, are now being compelled to re-examine notions of community, with community, in this context, encompassing specifics of identity, interests and normative existence. By acting to distort the foreign, globalisation’s special effects are therefore ironically provoking new ways of thinking through complex coalitions of identity and interests, or through ever-deepening forms of communitarian bonds against a recast image of the foreign (Chong 2012).

agency studied in this research are that ‘people’ are human subjects, who possess will, imagination and biases, seldom function as uni-dimensional elements with universally fixed properties. Within the context of our research, this is an important point to note, as examining foreign policy evolution in the information age, provides us with an avenue in which to explore the changing nature of agency within the diplomatic corps. Here we see that both agency and power, are becoming increasingly delineated within a Ministerial bureaucratic structure, and this needs to be understood in its entirety, if diplomats are to successfully manage the changing environment they now operate within. Finally, these changes in the realm of foreign policy are particularly important if MFAs are to understand and effectively engage in how they communicate during a modern crisis; a time where communication is key and policy is imperative.

### *1.1.2 Digital Diplomatic Signalling*

Set against the changing background of foreign policy making in the digital age, this research explores the increasing role that the process of digital diplomatic signalling has come to play within a diplomat’s crisis communication strategy, or at very least, the extent to which it has come to be regarded as a component of a diplomat’s crisis communication toolbox.

This research explores, how, when used effectively<sup>5</sup> the digital signalling process can work as a worthy component of a state's foreign policy strategy, but when used ineffectively emerges as nothing more than a communication practice which simply adds to the vast amount of data online. Despite the potential and opportunities which this process brings, questions remain surrounding its use: what exactly does it consist of? How does it work? How does it transform and shape diplomatic communication during times of crisis? and,

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<sup>5</sup> For this purpose of this research, ‘effectively’ or being ‘effective’ refers to the use of these capabilities in a manner, which works to enlarge a state's importance online. That each mechanism is used with its best potential in order to enhance a state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create a consistent and appealing message to officials and non-officials alike. Within a crisis period, each mechanism can therefore be used in an effective or ineffective manner. Narratives too, can be used effectively, where states through the process of formation, projection and reception craft online crisis narratives of influences, which are appealing to official and non-official entities alike. Effective narratives then, provide both the opportunity and the means for a state to exert their foreign policy power both online and off, and ultimately contribute towards the achievement of virtual state enlargement on behalf of the MFA. This meaning of effectively or its derivatives, as described here, is the one carried throughout the body of this work.

ultimately, what role does it play within the new global information space as a tool of foreign policy power projection and crisis management?

Now, before we go any further, it is worth noting, that diplomatic signalling is not a novel practice to diplomacy, but *digital* diplomatic signalling is. Historically, we have seen the process of diplomatic signalling play a key and heightened role, in diplomatic affairs during times of crises. Diplomats, for example, have been shown to regularly incorporate this practice as a core component within their crisis communication strategies, sending signals through Collective Representations, Demarches, Minister State visits or in the most recent past, pre-recorded news broadcasts. Here, the tone of the signals was usually formal in both its structure and language, with diplomats of high standing (Ambassadors, Heads of Mission Ministers of Foreign Affairs) nearly always delivering it.

However, what the opening tweets of this Chapter illustrate (of which there are many derivatives - all to be further explored) is an evolved process of diplomatic signalling in the digital age; a new and distinct way to publicise and disperse a nation's foreign policy in 140 characters or less. At the core, what they demonstrate, is that diplomatic messages are now being carried out through digital means, crafted in linguistically short and informal tones, constructed by diplomatic agents of all standing, and sent directly to an audience never before matched in terms of its numerical size. Gone is the day where we see diplomatic signals confined solely to a Minister's state visit or a pre-recorded 9pm news broadcast – instead, now, having the power and possibility to be played out in real-time, with an audience and visibility never before seen. Therefore, while the historic practice of diplomatic signalling still takes its rightful place within a diplomat's crisis communication arsenal, the process by which it is now carried out in today's digital setting, has irrevocably changed and that needs to be understood by those who use it and study it.

This research proposes the hypothesis that when used effectively, digital diplomatic signalling aides in the creation of a crisis narrative during times of crisis and can be regarded as a valuable tool of foreign policy power projection and influence i.e. virtual enlargement. Themes we will now turn to discuss.

### 1.1.3 Online Crisis Narratives

The emerging concept of a *crisis narrative* is one that has been developed to provide intellectual purchase on the complexities of international politics today, particularly in regard to how influence works in a new media environment. Online crisis narratives (created through a process of digital diplomatic signalling) therefore sets off from a similar starting point which Nye faced in 1990, that of understanding fundamental change in the international system, posing the question: what are the best methods to influence international affairs? Indeed, the conceptual lens of online crisis narratives and digital diplomatic signalling, brings us back to some of the core questions within the conduct of International Relations (IR), which sees us questioning by what means and methods can an actor persuade and influence on the international stage, and under what conditions? Although the questions may have remained the same, the conditions under which they are answered have changed fundamentally since Nye's seminal 1990 article.

In his more recent work, however, Nye acknowledges this change and argues that international affairs have become a matter of 'whose story wins', and whose voice is heard within an increasing plethora of voices, often referring to the role of narratives in international relations (Nye Jr, 2013; cf. Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1999). Nye, however, does not explore the nature of narratives or attempt to explain how a narrative becomes persuasive to target audiences (see Miskimmon et al., 2013; Steele, 2012). But, by assessing digital signalling and its ability to create online crisis narratives, this research explores how these very processes can effectively contribute towards a state's attempt at virtual enlargement. With that said, part of this understanding is, of course, the initial recognition that social media is providing the diplomatic agent with unique and unexplored power capabilities. Capabilities which greatly assist diplomats, with one of the most important aspects of their foreign policy strategy during a time of crisis: the art of communication. However, to garner a true understanding of this practice, we must seek to look beyond its surface capabilities, and discover *how* exactly diplomats are using this novel practice during times of crisis, and *what* exactly they are achieving (or not achieving) by doing so, in terms of their foreign policy outputs.

Certainly narratives - created through a process of digital diplomatic signalling<sup>6</sup> - are important to the structure of the communication process, and many social scientists suggest that this is, in part, hardwired into humans (Salmon, 2010). Lawrence Freedman writes, '[n]arratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events' (2006: 22). That is, if others are convinced that that narrative 'fits' with ongoing historical developments then their responses become predictable. This cognitive dimension of narratives (understandings of cause/effect and means/ends) can then work in parallel with a normative dimension. That is, interests and values can be constituted. Narratives can therefore be used strategically to create or cohere identity groups and establish shared normative orientations (Ronfeld and Arquilla, 2001). For example, once individuals are convinced by a cause/effect narrative of climate change – that carbon emissions play a causal role and must therefore be limited – an identity group forms between those convinced by this, and they will distinguish themselves from 'deniers' in 'the other camp'. Narratives can therefore be seen as representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political elites attempt to give determined meaning to the past, present and future, in order to achieve political objectives. Examples include the justification of policy objectives or policy responses to economic or security crises, the formation of international alliances, or the rallying of domestic public opinion.

Hence, this researcher's conception of narratives reflects Hajer's definition of storylines in politics: 'the key function of storylines is that they suggest unity in the bewildering variety of separate discursive component parts of a [policy] problem ... The underlying

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<sup>6</sup> The conceptual link between the process of digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) is one of the most difficult points in this research to make explicit in its explanation; that is, the connection between the use of the DDS mechanisms, and how they create, and add, to the overall process of online crisis narratives. This will be expanded and explored in detail in Chapter Three, Four, and Five, but for this moment, it can be noted that the outcome for the online diplomatic actor who effectively engages in the process of digital diplomatic signalling is threefold; 1) it creates for the actors, *inter alia*, increased foreign policy projection, heightened online presence of the state's crisis position, and through retweets and reshares, the multiplication of their crises message within and amongst the online diplomatic network; 2) the creation of an online crisis narrative, achieved through the formation, projection and reception of all messages sent by the online account. Messages which were created through the digital signalling mechanisms. As we will soon see through conceptual expansion and data presented in both case studies, the outcome of crafting a 'sellable' and consistent crisis narrative is only achieved by a small number of online diplomatic actors; 3) through the use of both DDS and OCN, an MFA can work to achieve virtual enlargement on behalf of the state. Strategies for 'virtual enlargement' view the both of these communicative capabilities as intrigue to their success, and are regarded as feasible methods in which states can exert their influence and presence in the global information age. These conceptual links will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three, Section 3.2.1.

assumption is that people do not draw upon comprehensive discursive systems for their cognition, rather these are evoked through story lines' (1995: 56, italics added). That storylines are used to evoke certain cognition points to the strategic usefulness of narratives. They are strategic insofar as they suggest medium and long-term goals or desirable end-states and how to get there, based on representations of the situation, the key actors, and 'causal beliefs' about how social and political processes operate and thus how certain actions could be expected to play out (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 3). They also involve political struggles over 'whose story wins' (Nye, in Gardels and Medavoy, 2009: viii). Critically, then, narratives (strategic or otherwise) integrate interests and goals. They articulate states' ends and suggest how to get there. The self-understandings expressed through narratives, reflexively influence states' perception of their interests and how the world works and should work (Harnisch and Maull (eds.) 2001; Tewes, 2002).<sup>7</sup>

Finally, we note that a preliminary step towards elaborating information as power in a global information space, is the recognition that information and the processes used to form and project it is intrinsically political power resources in their own right. The nature of narratives as power resources therefore proves particularly pertinent during a crisis, and to our study at large. As expressed, narrative creation has become an emerging concept which provides intellectual purchase on the complexities of diplomatic communication today, especially as digital platforms allow for thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands, of crisis narratives to emerge and have the power to be heard within an online context. As a consequence, it may be justified to claim that anyone today, who holds a digital device,

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the informational power of getting others to do what one wants through attraction instead of coercion defies sovereignty bound ways of comprehending power. However, not all narratives are there to attract, but also to coerce. In fact, in the context of world politics it makes far more sense to model attraction as a relationship that is constructed through representational force — a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through language. According to Janice Bially Matten (2009), representational force is a form of power which operates through the structure of a speaker's narrative representation of 'reality'. Specifically, 'a narrative expresses representational force when it is organised in such a way that it threatens the audience with unthinkable harm unless it submits, in word and in deed, to the terms of the speaker's viewpoint. The unthinkable harm threatened, however, is not physical, for that would imply physical force rather than representational force. Instead the harm promised is to the victim's own ontological security – it is a threat that exploits the fragility of the sociolinguistic 'realities' that constitute the victim's Self' (2009: 3). Indeed, when the author of the narrative builds such a threat into the constructed narrative, they have the potential to trap the victim with a "non-choice" between compliance with the view she articulates or tacit participation in the destabilisation, and even 'death', of the victim's own subjectivity. Because it leaves the victim no viable 'out', representational force is a very effective tool for actors whose purpose is to ensure the 'reality' status of some specific viewpoint" (ibid.). Actors are likely to take advantage of it in world politics, where radical disagreement about the meaning of evidence is frequent and where the stakes of 'reality' construction can be high.

also holds the power to create their own narrative on the crisis at a play. The sheer existence of this number of narratives therefore creates an increased pressure on an MFA to have their voice heard amongst them. The narrative processes also allow states to order the online noise and establish their own story in amongst the competing online voices. In short, the battle for narratives has become a war in itself. Finally, as mentioned earlier, engagement in the narrative process goes much further than the outcome of one simply having their voice heard. It brings with it the potential of ‘virtual state enlargement’; that is, the art of states to enlarge their importance to the international community through non-material forces. This potential can only reach fruition, however, if both communicative capabilities - DDS and OSN - are used effectively and in a strategic manner, something we shall now explore.

#### *1.1.4 Virtual Enlargement*

This research argues that strategies for ‘virtual enlargement’ are feasible methods in which states can exert their influence and presence in the GIS. These strategies - in which DDS and OCN prove vital components - must be now considered alongside material resources as a determinant of whether emerging great powers are able to shape a new systemic alignment. Thus, it is through the use of these virtual strategies that emerging and great powers can attempt to project their values and interests in order to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate.

Chong notes that the vast majority of states in the international community, particularly the larger powers – the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany, India, and Japan – have already understood this concept of state enlargement far earlier and on a larger scale than most others. According to Chong, these powers have become ‘great’, in part due to their historic practices of physical enlargement in the form of physical conquest and intensive physical penetration across borders in non-traditional spheres of influence, which they actively supplemented with virtual enlargement through the export of ideologies, educational standards, popular culture and lifestyle patterns. However, the GIS has now created an environment in which smaller states have the potential to compete with larger ones in how they can exert and extend their communicative influence online. In his work, *‘Small state soft power strategies: virtual enlargement in the cases of the Vatican City State*

*and Singapore*', Chong goes further with this argument, positing that smaller states may use this changing environment as an art of survival, including attempts to enlarge their importance to the international community (Vukadinovic 1971; Commonwealth wealth Secretariat 1985; 1997; Cooper and Shaw 2009). Furthermore, smaller states' foreign policy apparatus, may now possess human resources, intellectual and propagandistic skills which are disproportionate to its physical size (ibid). Thus, building on this argument, we can see that virtual enlargement and the process which emerges to create it, draws on the inherent power of online resources and tools. In this case, the point of virtual enlargement through ideational instruments is to ensure that the services offered by communicative capabilities is to benefit indefinitely the exerciser's vitality as a recognised member of international society. It can act, not only as a powerful online equaliser, in terms of a state's foreign policy projection and reach, but can also provide smaller states with the potential to function as compensatory symbolic power. Potential, which this research argues, can become a crucial tool for an MFA during a time of crisis.

Indeed, the emerging global media environment – and in particular the advent of Internet based means of mass communication – has been a key driver behind the increased focus on the 'intangibles of influence'. In times of conflict, these 'intangibles of influences' can also be described as the 'intangibles of war'. Here, new types of media have today bolstered the weaker side's chances of turning the virtual dimension of war in the decisive arena. And, just as the invention of gunpowder revolutionised military clashes on the physical battlefield, so the coming of new media types has ineradicably transformed the fight for perceptions in the cognitive domain. Together, these changes have now focused the minds of both scholars and practitioners on the virtual dimension of war and its management. Our research explores the novel communicative capabilities of these changing virtual dimensions, and how states can seek to achieve this influence during wartime through their use. This then brings us to the research questions we posed, questions aimed specifically at examining these new patterns, and emerging communicative trends in the diplomatic environment, and the impact and contribution of providing answers to such questions, can have to both academic and practitioner community overall.

## 1.2 Research Questions:

To explore these themes, this research sets forth a number of core questions for analysis;

(1) *What role does digital diplomatic signalling play in the creation of online crisis narratives and to what extent can it serve as a communicative tool for virtual enlargement during times of political crisis?*

This question cut straight to the core of one of diplomacy's age-old practices, and allows us to explore how, and where, it fits within contemporary diplomacy. It begins with the acknowledgement that social media is now the primary mode of communication for diplomats during a crisis, and recognises that existing knowledge on its use is fragmented, dealing only with limited facets of digital diplomatic interaction. By exploring and providing answers to this central question, this research seeks to rectify this current state of affairs, and gain a clearer insight into the workings of this transformative process for diplomatic crises communication in the modern age.

The question runs throughout the entire body of the work, with each chapter building on the last. It flows and connects through Chapter Two, where our discussion highlights the centrality of communication to the practice of diplomacy both historically and now in the global information age, the forces of globalisation which are now sculpting and altering diplomatic communication strategies, and provides for the reader, a historical tract leading to the current evolutionary standpoint regarding communication relationship and impact on diplomacy. Within this chapter, a discussion and analysis on the unique practice of digital diplomacy itself takes place, and how this practice has been shown to affect two communicative capabilities in particular: diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives.

Framed by Chapter Two's discussions on the themes of the global information space, and where diplomatic communicative capabilities now fit within them, Chapter Three (re)conceptualises the process of diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives during the digital age. The reconceptualisation of both these two practices is not only a core aim of this research, but is paramount to answering the overall research question posed. To do so, we first need to understand how both practices are formed and carried out during the digital age. Through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological

framework, this chapter also conceptualises how, when used consistently, and effectively, these processes can contribute, and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement.

The conceptualisation of these two communicative capabilities in the digital age, both in terms of their individual makeup and their potential for virtual state enlargement is then tested in Chapter Five and Six, through data generated by the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis and 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict. Through uniquely curated data, both chapters test how digital platforms were used by diplomatic agents during the crisis at play, and analyse this use in relation to the unique online process of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narrative creation. Using both communicative capabilities as analytical filters, the chapters assess overall diplomatic crisis communication performance by the sending state's diplomatic actors within the receiving state (specifically Embassies stationed in Tel Aviv and Kiev) during the crisis, and evaluate how both communicative processes, served (or did not serve) as instruments for virtual enlargement for online diplomatic actors during the time of conflict.

Based on this research's entire findings, Chapter Seven then acts a lynchpin to our work, proposing a number of feasible methods by which states can use to exert their influence and presence in the global information space, that is, contribute to a process of 'virtual state enlargement'. These strategies - in which DDS and OCN prove vital components of - must be now considered alongside material resources as a determinant of whether emerging great powers are able to shape a new systemic alignment. This chapter therefore provides a set of policy recommendations on how MFAs may best achieve effective crisis communication strategies and work towards creating workable communication practices for both their central HQ and embassies at large.

Breaking the core question into more digestible parts, we can ask:

*(2) how has the process of diplomatic signalling evolved during the digital age, and through what mechanisms are diplomatic signals now generated online?*

This question explores how technological advancements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have altered diplomatic communicative practices during times of crisis or otherwise. It looks at how

information technologies, in particular how social media platforms, are increasingly incorporated into the daily practice of diplomatic communication and how this change has transformed diplomatic activities in general, and more specifically, how this change has altered the historic practice of diplomatic signalling.

In order to succinctly address this question, Chapter Two provides a wealth of information with a focus on the changing nature of diplomatic communication in the 21st century as a whole. By exploring the historic communicative practices of diplomacy, it opens with the premise that diplomatic signalling is not a novel practice to diplomacy, but *digital* diplomatic signalling is. Through wide ranging examples from the Amarna period, the Iranian hostage crisis, to the Northern Irish Peace Process, Chapter Two, seeks to illustrate that the process of diplomatic signalling has historically always played a key and heightened role in diplomatic affairs during times of political crises. This historical exposure allows for the creation of a solid foundation in which to explore how the process is used in the modern day, and with what impact.

Thus, set against the backdrop of the global information space, Chapter Three advances a unique conceptual and methodological framework in which to (re) conceptualise the process of diplomatic signalling during the digital age, exploring the overall makeup of the process, and the individual mechanisms used to carry it out. This chapter puts forth the claim that digital diplomatic signalling can today serve as a stand-alone process in itself, one which creates for the MFA, *interalia*, increased foreign policy projection, a heightened presence of their crisis positions online, and through a series of retweets and reshares, the multiplication of the state's crisis message within and amongst the online diplomatic networks. These mechanisms are then tested within our two distinct case studies in Chapter Five and Six.

*(3) how can the overall process of digital diplomatic signalling contribute to the creation of online crisis narratives?*

This question, which is the relationship between the DDS process and the creation of OCN is one aspect of this research which is perhaps difficult to make explicit in its explanation. Through its reconceptualisation of both communicative process, Chapter 3 takes on this challenge and develops direct conceptual links between both processes. Here, it is

hypothesised that when used effectively, the overall process of DDS now carries with it the increasing potential to act as a tool through which diplomats can *form, project* and have *received*, their own *online crisis narratives*, narratives which are valuable communicative assets for an MFA and its agents during periods of intense conflict. Here, it is recognised that the process of DDS can be analysed as a singular process, but when used and viewed holistically, it has the power to sculpt, and create, alternative and ‘sellable’ narratives, which an MFA can use to help effectively manage the crisis in their favour.

*(4) during times of political crisis, how can the processes of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives contribute and work towards the creation of virtual state enlargement.*

The final question this research seeks to answer is weaved through discussions carried out through Chapters Three through Seven. Through its construction of a unique conceptual framework, in which both the DDS and OCN processes are conceptualised age in the digital age, Chapter Three specifically, hypothesised how both processes can contribute and work towards the creation of virtual state enlargement.

Building from the conceptual framework, Chapters Four and Chapter Five provide empirical data in which to test these conceptual claims, and through the lens of two distinct case studies ‘2014 Israel - Gaza’ and ‘2013/4 Euromaidan’ crisis, provide answers to how these novel communicative capabilities contribute to a process of virtual state enlargement, to varying degrees. Based on the findings of Chapters Five and Six, Chapter Seven, then proposes a number of feasible methods which states can use to exert their influence and presence in the global information space, that is contribute to a process of ‘virtual state enlargement’. These strategies - in which DDS and OCN prove vital components of - must be now considered alongside material resources as a determinant of whether emerging great powers are able to shape a new systemic alignment. Thus, it is through the use of these virtual strategies that emerging and great powers can now attempt to project their values and interests in order to extend their influence, manage expectations and change the discursive environment in which they operate.

In proposing these strategies, this research will show that while both communicative capabilities - DDS and OCN - can be viewed as worthy tools in their own right, both in terms of their role and impact within an MFAs crisis communication strategy, it is when both communicative capabilities were effectively combined, that they bring with them the possibility for MFAs something more: the possibility of virtual state enlargement. That is, they provided both the opportunity and the means for the state to exert their foreign policy power both online and off. Thus, we can say that the outcome of DDS is OCN, but the effect is virtual state enlargement.

### **1.3 Conceptual Framework**

This research creates a unique conceptual and methodological framework in which to understand the process and impact of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation in the digital age. The framework underpins and connects with every core theme of this research, guiding it in its efforts to define, understand, and explore, this new practice of DDS, and how it contributes to the creation of OCN during moments of turmoil. At its core, it (re)conceptualises the processes of diplomatic signalling and crises narratives as practiced during the digital age, and provides an analytical road map to answer pertinent sub questions such as: what it is? How does it work? Where does it fit within a MFA crisis communication strategy, and how can it act as a means of virtual enlargement for a state's foreign policy reach and presence during a crisis?

This framework itself is threefold; a) the presentation of a definitional framework for each constructed communicative concept; b) a discussion of the set of five core mechanisms unique to the signalling process, and how each mechanism is shown to be intrinsically linked to the construction of online crisis narratives; and c) the construction of a set of digital signalling typologies and the visualisation of this types on a digital signalling spectrum. The first fold, the *definitional framework* breaks down the communicative capabilities of DDS and OCN in all their forms, and discusses how each can be framed and discovered for the purpose of our research and otherwise. Here, we deconstruct, and reconstruct, what the communicative capabilities consist of - in all their forms, and provide, a mutually comprehensive starting-point, acting as an evaluative reference-point for a rigorous and analytically useful concept analysis.

The framework was created through inductive reasoning, where through detailed observation of digital diplomatic communications online, and in particular, digital communication by diplomatic agents during a time of crisis, the process of DDS and OCN creation was first discovered. After discovery, both processes were then deconstructed (and subsequently reconstructed) in a bid to create a framework, which was seen as concrete, appropriate and explanatory for these novel practices of diplomatic communication. It is therefore anticipated that this framework will not only act as a grounding tool for this research, but also for future research undertaken in the fields of diplomacy, communication, and crisis management.

The second fold of the framework is the presentation of *five key mechanisms* for the process of DDS and the introduction of the three-stage process required for OCN to occur. This allows for an in-depth exploration of the workings of both communicative process, and provides a set of unique analytical lens in which to test and measure the diplomatic crisis communication performance of online diplomatic agents overall. In short, this section explores how diplomatic signals are generated online, and how the process in its entirety, can contribute to creation of OCN, through the strategic use of a formation, projection and reception narrative structure. The point of analysing the DDS process through these five-unique mechanisms or the OCN through the three-level structure is that they provide a more precise grasp of how communication, persuasion and influence operate in international affairs. They also allow for more compelling explanations of power and influence within the global information space to emerge.

The third section of the framework becomes more discursive, exploring how these emerging communicative practices now carry with them the potential to act as a means of virtual state enlargement, particularly regarding the state's ability to project their foreign policy at a reach and extent never before seen, and the impact that this increased projection may have on an online crisis narrative discourse in particular. Thus, emerging from these core mechanisms we see the creation of a set of digital signalling *typologies*, typologies which outline how an online agent can best use these mechanisms in order to contribute to, or achieve, a process of virtual enlargement. These typologies form the foundation for the penultimate chapter, (Chapter Seven: A Note to Policy Makers) providing a blueprint on how MFAs can best use these unique communicative capabilities and incorporate them

into their crisis communication strategies for the most effective and strategic use of diplomatic communication tools and crisis management in the 21st century.

One problem to emerge from this conceptual approach, relates to some of the fundamentals of the kind of knowledge it is possible to possess about these communicative processes. For instance; Who legitimately contributes to both the signalling process and the narrative creation, and what status do the differing interests of those contributing to these communicative processes hold in relation to the supposed whole, particularly in terms of the crisis itself? How can signals and narratives be expressed across multiple social media channels and multiple narrators? and perhaps the ultimate question of concern, how can reception and eventual effects be determined, particularly in light of polysemy, multiple narrators and channels, and negotiated meanings? In short, what is the object of knowledge and for whom can this object be said to exist? (Antoniades et al., 2010; Dittmer, 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009; Wall, M. A. 2005; Bogost, 2006).

A means of resolving some of these theoretical issues is to therefore orient these communicative practices within the broader concept of discourse. While diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives are important factors in crafting and achieving certain foreign policy aims during a time of crisis, it is also important to investigate how they are *practiced*, particularly if this investigation has not been carried out in the digital age. We can then shift the focus from signalling and narratives as ‘things-in-themselves’ to their position within a context of production and consumption; in short, the relationship between DDS and OCN, and diplomatic crisis communication, and indeed diplomatic culture more generally. Thus, drawing on the premise that communicative representations of international affairs can influence the conduct of those affairs, we position these novel communicative practices within a mature body of theory on information globalisation, media and communication, and power relations.<sup>8</sup> At the broadest level, this conceptual

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<sup>8</sup> Here we draw on a critical geopolitics approach which deals with ‘*not only the material spatial practices through which the international political economy is constituted, but also to the ways in which it is represented and contested*’ (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995: 7). The implication is that there is contestation and negotiation between discourse and practice. Geopolitical discourse forms the building-blocks through which actors understand the world and make decisions, amid complex struggles over ideas, power relations, and credibility (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1998: 80). They explain and inspire in their attempts to influence. Therefore, these unique online communicative processes which are explored during our case studies are not facts in themselves but rather act as one possible representation of a set of complex relations, produced in order to support a set of political interests. We therefore seek to explore how these communicative practices

framework therefore aims to achieve a reconceptualisation of the practice of diplomatic signalling, and the construction of a replicable framework for which one can go about understanding and analysing this process in the digital age. Narrowed further, it creates an understanding of how this practice generates an outcome of narrative creation, and how this subsequently creates an effect of virtual state enlargement (or the possibility of this effect) for the diplomatic actors involved.

#### **1.4 Theory Development**

As previously argued, crises are no longer a matter of ‘if’ but ‘when’ in diplomatic life. MFAs and the agents who serve them, must therefore be ready to respond to a crisis with the greatest proficiency, for if they don’t, they can easily damage their Ministries image, identity, and reputation, at best, or at worst, contribute to international crisis and havoc at play. It is for this reason that the field of crisis communications has worked to develop theories and strategies to guide Ministries through periods of varying degrees of conflict. However, most of these existing theories are based on traditional models of communications, modes which emphasise a one-way flow of information from a single communicator to a mass audience. But, as discussed, social media has now destabilised these established frameworks, and in particular how they relate to most areas of crisis communication. There is a new world in which crises now operate, with new tools, new effects, and new practices. This world is yet to be understood. By conceptualising the disruptive effects and impact of social media on crisis communication, this research seeks to understand this new world, and the tools which work within them. This research presents findings that will contribute to both scholarship and professional practice.

In understanding this new landscape, this research offers a theory of how digital mediums are used to create digital signals and online narratives during times of conflict, and with what possible impact. To do this, it develops a framework, which looks at explaining how, when created, digital signals and online narratives work in unison to contribute to a process of virtual state enlargement, a process which sees a state's foreign policy reach and presence

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in times of political crisis, help the state dominate and sculpt the crisis narrative discourse in their favour, while also supporting their foreign objectives during the conflict.

expanded and enhanced both online and off. Furthermore, as the battle for narratives continues to be played out online, this research puts forth a theory regarding how these novel processes and communicative capabilities allow states to order the increasing online noise they now experience and how they can establish their own crisis narrative within it. As illustrated within the figure below, this theory is built through examining the effective use of five fundamental communicative online tools (which form the digital diplomatic signalling process), and how these tools are used to sculpt and build an OCN on behalf of the state. This theory also explains what exactly *effective* use of these processes consists of, thereby acting as a guiding point regarding how diplomats should engage with these new communication tools to effectively manage the crisis.

Although this theory is novel in its development, and works to fill the growing gap in diplomacy and crisis communication studies, it is grounded in part by previous communicative theory, in particular medium theory.<sup>9</sup> In this instance medium theory is borrowed by media studies, and enables the core themes of this research to be connected clearly; namely, the use of online communicative capabilities, and their potential for foreign policy projection and virtual state enlargement during times of crisis.

Medium theory proposes that any medium is more than a technological arm of efficacy; it is simultaneously a message by itself, and both a potential and actual shaper of representation, aesthetic, memory and other content carried upon it (McLuhan 1974, 51-66, 70-71). In a well-known parlance, ‘the medium is the message’, and it ‘is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs’ (1974, 16), medium theory argues that media are not simply neutral vessels for conveying information between environments; rather they are environments in and of themselves. For example, the invention of the electric light bulb did not merely introduce continuous lighting to urban areas; it also transformed the possibilities of public and private advertising. The invention of the television and computer not only altered human interfaces with business but also spawned new occupations, altered sense ratios between machine and humankind and speeded up experience and its corresponding decision-making. As the ‘nth capability’ and ‘extension of man’, the medium enlarges the reach of its creator and also supersedes its

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<sup>9</sup> Grounding this research in existing research and theory allowed for a more centred approach to theory development and study to emerge, particularly in a field so novel and unexplored as the digital world.

original design once it is embraced by the wider community. This is of particular relevance to this research, as in the policy realm, politico-diplomatic discourse as a policy qua medium can generate a corresponding form of virtual state engagement. Throughout our research, we see this theory played out with each signalling mechanisms working to create an overall narrative discourse, bringing to life an environment in which the creation, projection and reception of foreign policy online can expand a state's power online, allowing them to achieve their foreign policy goals, and provide more effective management on the crisis while doing so.

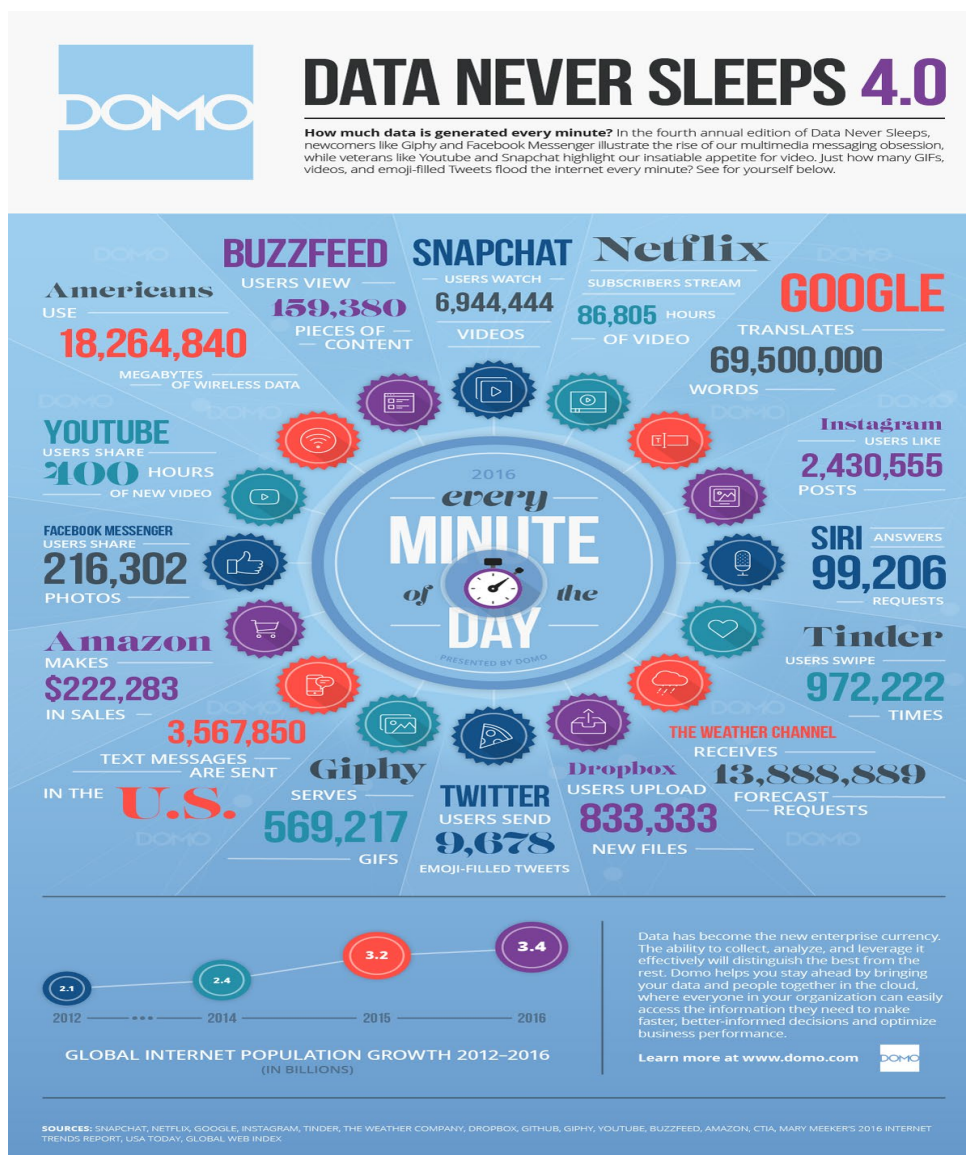
In developing this theory, it should be noted that this research does not seek to move or argue towards technological determinism and monocausal reductionism. As this is the type of thinking that attempts to reduce the sources of complex social forces or ideas to a single 'master' variable. Though such criticism is often a knee-jerk reaction to the impact of technology, it is nonetheless important to avoid the many interrelated pitfalls in such a simplistic model of change. Therefore, while the power of technologies to shape human affairs is certainly significant, it is at times distorting to portray new technologies (as technological determinists often do) as entering society *de nove* – as if deposited from outer space – with certain behaviours and ideas invariably tied to them irrespective of the social or historical context in which they are developed. Although this type of technological determinism and mono-causal reductionism is not deemed essential to the explanation of this theory, we see that with a number of modifications this novel theory may be articulated in a non-deterministic reductionist way; embedding it within a deeper tradition of scholarship which enables the reader to articulate a more holistic view of the role of communications technology today.

## **1.5 Methodology**

Contemporary society is marked by the pervasiveness and ubiquity of digital technologies of communication and, consequently, by a deluge of digital data that has saturated our everyday lives (Galinandro and Gandini 2017: 1). Indeed, the extent to which this deluge is captured by an infographic that has gone viral, disseminated by the social media company Domo (2016) and entitled 'Data Never Sleeps: How much Data is Generated Every Minute?'. This infographic is a pictorial representation of what happens on the

Internet of each day. For instance, we learn that each day, Google receives more than 2 million search queries each day, 571 new websites are created, YouTube users upload 28 hours of new videos, Instagram users share 3,500 new photos, brands and organisations on Facebook receive 34,722 likes, over 100,000 tweets are sent, and so on. Thinking then about the data circulating on the Internet, leads us to explore new ways and methods in which to track and visualise the very information now generated online. In the realm of digital communication analysis, we therefore seek to discover methods which can not only track the online activity of online users, but also its possible impact.

Figure 1.2 Data Never Sleeps (2016)



In the context of our proposed questions, this research employs mixed, mutually supportive methods, relying on both quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection and analysis. This approach results from the objective and subjective strands of diplomatic signalling and online narratives, and reveals in part the complexity of studying this space. In the case of our research, it may therefore be helpful to think about the study of signalling and narratives as dips into a fluid environment and that analytical choices depend on what aspect of the signalling and narrative processes we are seeking to explain along the spectrum of persuasion (Miskimmon et al., 2013: 14–16).

Within our research, distinct methods were chosen in order to accurately capture each aspect and use of the unique mechanisms and processes of DDS and OCN.<sup>10</sup> Here social media analytic tools, primarily Twitnomy, Visone, and Netvizz, were used to discover, collate and categorise these mechanisms during our two case studies chosen for analysis; the Israel-Gaza conflict of 2014 and the Ukraine (Euromaidan) conflict of 2013/4. Due to their consistent analytical makeup, these tools allowed for a concrete comparison between all actors analysed, a consistency not able to be achieved even by the most rigorous qualitative methods.

The subjective nature of these mechanisms and narrative stages, namely the *content* of the message, and the *formation* of the narrative, turns us to the use of qualitative methods for their discovery and analysis. Within the formation of narratives specifically, we used process tracing, textual analysis, and elite interviews which enabled us to understand the domestic political pressures evident when studying policy narratives, and how national or international narratives constrained how political actors conceive the realm of the possible. These qualitative methods were used alongside the aforementioned quantitative tools to analyse in further depth, the data and online posts collected through the quantitative tools. Furthermore, through the process of type construction, qualitative methods helped create empirically grounded typologies of digital diplomatic signalling performers, which assisted in informing lessons for a MFA future crisis communication practices. These typologies

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<sup>10</sup> Each mechanism and its methodological investigation will be expanded upon in detail in Chapter Three '*Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Crisis Narratives: A Conceptual Framework*' and Chapter Four '*Methodological Framework and Analysis*'.

then presented a methodological and visual outline explaining how a diplomatic online agent can best use these mechanisms, or which combinations of mechanisms helped contribute towards a process of virtual state enlargement during times of crisis. Overall, both quantitative and qualitative approaches worked towards providing the most comprehensive analysis on how diplomatic signals and online crisis narratives were generated online, and how this use varied and contributed to the process of virtual enlargement within our chosen case studies.

However, it is worth briefly clarifying the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study, and in part, its limitation. This research is structured around the proposition that how we ‘read’ and interpret diplomatic communication activities, shapes how we interpret it and how we then respond to it. This means that we do not imply a definitive or mono-causal relationship between meanings, interests, behaviours and outcomes, but contend that we cannot fully explain interests and behaviours, and thus the outcomes of interactions, without being aware of how actors understand the entities and social worlds with which they interact. Furthermore, we contend that meanings constitute only one, albeit critical and relatively under-explored, determinant of behaviour, and that the empirical story we present is necessarily more complex than my analytical framework responds to. Such a view, embracing the complementarity of certain academic approaches, is indeed the only one compatible with the ontology underpinning this thesis, namely that we can approach objects from multiple perspectives and that how we do so profoundly affects what we see. In short, this research highlights one piece of the complex puzzle that is diplomatic communication in the digital age, and therefore should be read as one, complementary approach, to a range of other approaches that might do better at filling in other gaps of this complex and multi-faceted problem.

## **1.6 Theoretical Contributions and Limitations**

The findings of this research have substantial implications for both theory and practice, changing the way we conceptualise diplomatic signalling and narrative creation in the digital age. Theoretically, it expands the way researchers view and understand signalling and narratives during a time of crises, concepts which has to date only been studied offline. Furthermore, through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodology

framework, researchers can dissect and explore further these new practices of DDS and OCN in a structured and replicable way, as executed through a number of distinct and varied social media platforms.

This framework also has the potential to open up a new dimension for studying the practice of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation as connected processes, and how both practices can be, and should be, integrated into the wider debates in international relations and foreign policy analysis. This study is therefore designed to make a contribution toward theory development in this field. Despite the growing impact and operations of diplomatic crisis communication on international affairs, its study remains an under-explored area of diplomacy, and in most mainstream IR approaches. This gap makes it worthy of more investigation. Indeed, there currently exists only a handful of academic studies which touch on the subject of signalling and crisis narratives and diplomatic crisis communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century tools. While some excellent works, such as Christer Jönssons *Diplomatic Signalling in the Television Age*, or John Ferris's *Intelligence and diplomatic signalling during crises: The British experiences of 1877–78, 1922 and 1938* exist within a healthy body of literature on diplomatic signalling within diplomatic studies and international studies at large, a substantial and increasing gap exists on how this subject matter fits within the digital age. This thesis is therefore an exploratory effort to examine an interesting intersection between digital communications (more specifically, social media platforms) studies, political crisis, diplomacy and crisis management studies. This is especially pertinent considering the international community's increasing interest in ICT use and conflict studies in general. By exploring novel uses for under-examined communication tools in diplomatic crisis communication efforts, this research will hopefully encourage further research on this subject and contribute to increasing the visibility of communication studies within diplomatic scholarship.

By advancing a conceptual framework for understanding how digital signalling and narrative creation takes place during times of crisis, this research explains why certain forms of digital signalling are more effective than others (effectiveness measured in terms of outputs) and how the outcomes of signalling (crisis narratives) may help virtually enlarge the power of the state. Finally, this research will cement the thesis that digital mediums are now essential ingredients in how diplomatic communication and diplomatic crisis communication in particular, is conducted, and that both communicative capabilities

should be seen as new and emerging ways in which MFAs and their agents can exercise and project their diplomatic power during a crisis.

Practically, this study allows researchers and practitioners to now easily detect the presence and use of diplomatic signalling in real-time, as, at present, the process and outcomes of diplomatic signalling have only been discovered and studied retrospectively. Detection in real-time may therefore serve as a useful tool for diplomats on the ground, allowing them to better recognise and interpret signals from all actors online during a times of conflict. Knowing how the ‘other side’ sends signals and how a diplomat may interpret these, is a vital aspect for the implementation and execution of a successful crisis communication strategy, and through this unique research, practitioners can seek to implement the strategies to do just that. This study will also highlight, and have seek to have acknowledged, the thesis that diplomatic communicative power, when exercised through digital mediums, can become a strategic advantage for an MFA to project and expand their foreign policy reach and presence in the global information age.

The limitations of this study come from seeking to quantify the impact or influence of the signalling and narrative process as a whole. Thus, it is important to note that this research does not, or perhaps cannot, determine whether or not social media platforms may prevent or mitigate a crisis purely through the exercise of communication process. This research is not therefore a discussion on how digital platforms may, or may not, have transformed a crisis *outcome* overall. No, this research acknowledges from the start that testing and evaluating the overall impact of digital communication on any international events is an extremely tough tightrope to walk, with digital analytical tools simply not having the power to isolate communication processes alone to test their direct impact on the events in question. Indeed, even in instances of successful isolation, making bold claims regarding the true effectiveness of communication is tenuous at best, due to the host of other factors surrounding a crisis situation.

Yet, even with such limitations mind, we can acknowledge that digital communication has grown to have enormous potential influence on state action during a crisis and that is why

we choose to study it.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while it would be easy to dismiss such activities as a particularly thin version of diplomacy – forms of marketing or epiphenomenal activities to the core processes of international politics – recent political events, such as the 2016 attempted political coup in Turkey, and President’s Trump increasing provocative tweets towards the North Korea suggest a more prominent and central role for ICTs in politics. Therefore, while measuring the absolute impact or influence of social media in times of crisis is not a perfect science (nor does it even come close), the sheer velocity of scale in which it is used, displays its undeniably importance and potential for impact. As such, this research looks at whether or not DDS and OCN, as impactful communication apparatuses, may be helpful to policymakers at the state and international level when deciding on, structuring, and executing their crisis communication efforts. It proposes a dialectical interplay to explore both the power and role of these novel communicative capabilities individually, and as overall mechanisms for virtual state enlargement. It brings a substantial contribution to both diplomatic studies, and those who seek to carry out these findings on the ground.

### **1.7 Case Study Justification**

In order to analyse the unexplored potential of the unique, and emerging digital communicative capabilities during times of political crisis, this research covers two distinct case studies: the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, and 2013/4 Euromaidan crisis.

Picking illustrative case studies for these propositions has proven difficult in part, because no two crises are completely alike in their political context, players, or power endowments. They also exhibit different degrees of ingenuity in marshalling communicative power for

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<sup>11</sup> A survey of OECD countries, foreign ministries, public diplomacy scholarship and popular press media suggest that digital diplomacy ‘is not only a cottage industry of academic study, but also a strategy that states take seriously often at considerable costs and attention’ (Bjola and Holmes 2015: 14). The United States for instance, as of September 2016, has over 150 full-time members working in 25 digital diplomacy nodes of Headquarters; with over 900 individuals using digital diplomacy at U.S. Missions abroad. Other countries diverse in terms of global power, have also followed suite, with the United Kingdom, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, and China all-embracing some form of e-diplomacy strategy, typically using the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, although other platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp are rapidly increasing in their popularity. According to press reports, around two-thirds of the 193 United Nations member states now have Twitter accounts (though usage of those accounts varies considerably, with the consequences of such inactivity being discuss later on within this research).

projection. Nevertheless, it is argued that, despite the structural imperfections of these two chosen crises, they serve as illustrations and exploratory vehicles for both the limitations and potential of digital diplomatic communicative power during times of crisis.

These two cases were selected for a number of distinct reasons. Overall, both crises demonstrated heightened public and diplomatic interest during 2013 and 2014. That is, in comparison to other crises which were discussed online during this period. Such heightened public interest, resulted in the generation of a vast amount of data which we collect and analyse, and ultimately use to situate our claims. The comparative context of both cases, and the stark geopolitical and strategic interests surrounding them, also allowed for further questioning of the extent the offline political context continues to play within the current realm of diplomatic crisis communication. Finally, at the unilateral level, each case deals with a political crisis situation. Both cases also originated within a similar time frame and were dealt with largely under the same diplomatic actors, which provided this research with a solid framework for comparative assessment. There also existed trustworthy and detailed primary and secondary sources for both cases. This is a particularly pertinent point given the difficulty of finding effective sources on crisis communication activities online. Indeed, this study originally started out with five cases in mind, but reduced its analysis to two, because of source availability.

Turning specifically to the Israel-Gaza crisis, we must first make clear that despite the Israeli-Palestine conflict being labelled, a ‘recurring’ or ‘unresolved’ crisis - that is, a crisis which is continuously played out time and time again by a set of continuous historical and unresolved issues by similar actors. The crisis of 2014 was chosen as it was seen as unique and relevant to our studies within the realm of crisis communication for a number of reasons. *First*, the outbreak of violence came after almost two years of relative calm, one of the longest periods of peace since the conflict began and emerged just months after the latest round of peace talks collapsed (Sousa, Hagopian, Stoller 2014). *Second*, the use of military technology used by both sides was substantially more advanced than in the earlier periods of violence. Here, Hamas publicly claimed responsibility for the use of drone technology, acknowledging the use of two distinct types: one to gather intelligence and another to fire munitions (ibid). As a direct consequence, Hamas were able to reach cities that were much further north in Israel than they ever before, leading the Israeli state to argue that some 5 million people were now living within striking distance of Hamas’

newest rockets (ibid). *Third*, and perhaps one of the most important aspects for this research, was that the 2014 period of violence between the Israeli state and the Gaza Strip was arguably one of the most publicly and openly discussed crisis periods within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict thus far (ibid). The catalyst for such an open and public discussion was undeniably the unique role of social media within the field of crisis communication, and the extent to which it was used, not just by the actors directly involved in the conflict, but also the international community at large as method to highlight, discuss and analyse the conflict. Such a popularity of discussion and the abundance of data it subsequently created (indeed offline, as well as on), makes it an extremely interesting case for analysis and discussion.

Finally, what makes this case interesting from a digital diplomacy perspective, is the offline political context in which the public discussion operated within, allowing us then to assess whether the power and potential of online media truly outweighed the presence and framing of offline national strategies, an argument which has gained traction with the rise of social media within crisis communication analysis. Indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one which is a notoriously divisive issue within the international arena at large, with nations crafting distinct policy approaches to the conflict (both historical and present) and with that demonstrating an even greater distinction in how they actually carry out their policies on the ground. Furthermore, the conflict is one which has arguably created less ‘official’ public discussion amongst ‘Western’ nations (and those nations which show the most frequent practice of digital crisis communication overall), subsequently furthering our case regarding whether or not the power of the new online mechanisms has been shown to surpass the offline political context and strategies in which it operates. In short, just because there exists new potential for crisis communication - in particular diplomatic signalling and narrative creation does this mean it has actually been harnessed by those who have the power to use it? This case therefore provides an interesting lens in which to explore this issue.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Regarding the crisis timeframe chosen for analysis, the dates range from 12 June to 26 August 2014. The justification for these is as follows; 12 June 2014 marked the abduction of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. Israeli leadership placed the responsibility for their abduction on Hamas, and on 30 June, the corpses of the teenagers were found. On 8 July 2014, Israel launched the formal military operation *Protective Edge* in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, and on 17 July 2014, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. The frequency of violence from both sides, came to an end after 50 days of conflict when a ceasefire was agreed upon on 26 August 2014, brokered by Egypt. Our research ends at this date.

To keep consistency within our case selection, the Euromaidan movement, and the crisis it precipitated in the Ukraine, beginning 21 November 2013, was chosen for reasons reflective of its comparative case study. *First*, the close time frame to the Israel-Gaza conflict, provided temporal connectivity between the cases, allowing us to then assess, how similar diplomatic actors acted in crisis situations online; some representing the same Ministry of Foreign Affairs analysed. This direct comparison allowed for an almost direct assessment of how and why certain diplomatic actors used digital tools during times of crisis when pursued under varying political contexts. *Second*, and perhaps the most important for this research, was just as seen in the Israeli-Gaza conflict, the 2013-2014 period of violence in Ukraine, was arguably one of the most publicly and openly discussed crisis periods within the 2013-2014 year; being prominently discussed on Facebook, Twitter and even newly formed applications such as Snapchat (Bohdanova 2014). This discussion was not restricted to non-state actors but was widely debated and deliberated by state actors online, demonstrating one of the first times we saw prolonged periods of crisis which brought about opportunities for states to not only project their foreign policy online but also create crisis narratives as result. Just as was seen in the previous case, the catalyst for such an open and public discussion was arguably the new role of social media within the field of crisis communication, and the extent to which it was used, not just by actors directly involved in the conflict, but also the international community at large as a method to highlight, discuss, and analyse the conflict. Such popularity of discussion and the abundance of data it subsequently created (indeed offline, as well as online), once more made it an interesting case for analysis and discussion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the justification of dates, this research stands by the interpretation of the crisis that the Euromaidan movement was both an instance of mass mobilisation and a wave of activist protest events. The Euromaidan protests lasted three months (November 21, 2013–February 22, 2014) and went through distinct phases and at least four waves of repressions (Onuch 2015). The first phase lasted from November 21 to November 30. The second phase began after the November 30 brutal beating of students and journalists by Berkut militia forces in Kyiv. The third phase began with the announcement of authoritarian anti-protest laws on January 16 by the Rada (parliament), making it illegal to protest, and lasted until January 19. This phase saw the diffusion of protests - including direct-action campaigns, road blockades, and government building takeovers - to the east and south of the country, as well as the expansion of violent protest repertoires and the use of mass state violence, resulting in four deaths (Onuch and Sasse 2014). The fourth phase and final wave of mass repression began on February 18, when the regime attempted to violently clear the Maiden, and ended only with the fleeing of President Viktor Yanukovich to Russia.

## 1.8 Chapter Outline

### *Chapter Two: Foreign Policy and Diplomatic (Crisis) Communication in the Global Information Space*

Sculpted by the forces of globalisation, this chapter highlights how diplomacy headed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century facing a manifold of challenges. Challenges, which *inter alia*, saw the confrontation of old ideals versus new practices. From acts of negotiation, to diplomatic representation, to channels for its communication, paradigms, which had for centuries, governed the workings of diplomacy, quickly began to shift. This chapter centres its focus on two core challenges and changes in particular: foreign policy and diplomatic (crisis) communication capabilities in the global information. The former is a necessary discussion for our research overall, as foreign policy is an arena in which all crisis decisions are made. This chapter discusses how foreign policy has proved particularly vulnerable to these winds of change, with MFAs experiencing seismic permutations concerning how their policies are created, the actors who create it, and the space surrounding the institutions national and international accountability. Under the changing dynamics of globalisation, this chapter illustrates how almost no aspect of the diplomatic craft proved or indeed is proving, immune to the forces of global change. By exploring the historic communicative practices of diplomacy, this chapter also highlights the premise that that diplomatic signalling is not a novel practice to diplomacy, but *digital* diplomatic signalling is. Through wide ranging examples from the Amarna period, the Iranian hostage crisis, to the Northern Irish Peace Process, it illustrates how the process of diplomatic signalling has historically played a key and heightened role, in diplomatic affairs during times of political crises. This historical exposure allows for the creation of a solid foundation in which to explore how the process is now used in the modern day, and with what impact.

### *Chapter Three: Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Crisis Narratives: A Conceptual Framework*

Firmly situated within the previous discussions on the themes of communicative capabilities in the global information space, this chapter (re)conceptualises the process of diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives during the digital age. It explores how,

when used consistently, and effectively, these processes can contribute and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement. This exploration is achieved by the construction a unique conceptual and methodological framework which is divided into three distinct parts; a) the construction of a definitional framework for the process of digital diplomatic signalling and online narratives, b) the presentation and discussion of five online mechanisms inherent to the online signalling process and are then firmly situated within the formation, projection and reception of online narrative construction, and c) a set of digital signalling typologies, which through the use of methodological and visualisation techniques can serve as comparative tool in which to test crisis communication performance, while also comparing and contrasting an actor's use of these online communicative capabilities.

#### *Chapter Four: Methodological Framework and Crisis Background*

The aim of this chapter is threefold; a) present an overarching methodological framework used to guide and frame our methodological process. In particular, a presentation and discussion on the nature of digital device, the concept of affordances and ‘thick data’; b) an exposé of the methodological tools used to accurately capture the unique mechanisms of DDS and OCN; c) justification for case study selection, and an insight into how each online diplomatic actor was selected for analysis. Each facet of this crisis, from its background, to its actors, to its defence for analysis selection is a vital component of the methodological exploration and is therefore extrapolated and discussed with precision. Limitations of each aspect of methodological toolkit are also discussed fluidly throughout.

#### *Chapter Five: Diplomatic Crisis Communication: Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Narrative Creation during the 2014 Israel-Gaza Crisis*

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#### *Chapter Six: Diplomatic Crisis Communication: Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Narrative Creation during the 2013/14 Euromaidan Crisis*

Chapters Five and Six are the two political crisis case studies chosen for empirical analysis. They mirror each other in terms of structure and methodological tools. Both are framed by

the unique conceptual and methodological framework built in Chapter Three. At the broadest level, both chapters explore how digital platforms were used by diplomatic agents during the crisis, and at their core, analyse this use in relation to the unique online process of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narrative creation. They explore how digital signals and online narratives were generated by diplomatic agents during the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis and 2013/4 Euromaidan and analyse the formation, projection and reception of online crisis narratives by a select number of diplomatic agents. Using both communicative capabilities as analytical filters, the chapters assess overall diplomatic crisis communication performance by the sending state's diplomatic actors within the receiving state (specifically Embassies stationed in Tel Aviv and Kiev) during the crisis, seeking to evaluate how both communicative processes, served (or did not serve) as an instrument for virtual enlargement for online diplomatic actors during the time of conflict. Informed by the data presented, this chapter also suggests how the digital signalling and narrative creation processes now act as effective tools for diplomatic communication, and with that, create a firm foundation on which to present a number of core policy recommendations to MFAs for diplomatic communication strategies during a time of crisis.

*Chapter Seven: A note to MFA policy makers: Crafting strategic communication policies during times of political crisis*

Using empirical case studies, and in particular those online diplomatic accounts which emerged as high performers within our chosen case studies, this chapter provides a number of core policy recommendations which MFAs can use to achieve effective crisis communication practices for both their central HQ and embassies alike. This chapter focuses in particular, on the formation of the crisis narrative, government to peer (G-2-P), government to government (G-2-G), and online diplomatic network (ODN) engagement, frequency of communication, presence versus content frequency/content, and forums for narrative projection. Based on the previous data gathering and analysed, we can see that it is through the use of these virtual strategies that states can now attempt to project their values and interests in order to extend their influence, manage expectations and change the discursive environment in which they operate. This chapter therefore contributes to the increasing policy literature on crisis communication and work towards professionalising digital diplomacy crisis communication among diplomats and their institutions.

## *Chapter Eight: Concluding Remarks and Discussion*

In the final chapter, the main results of the analysis will be summarised and the specific contributions of this research to diplomatic studies and crisis communication will be discussed. The relevant findings for each theme will be explored and presented individually, beginning with the evidence provided in relation to each of the core research questions posed, followed then by additional findings which emerged from the analysis of each theme. The purpose of this chapter is to therefore tie together, and integrate the various issues, and arenas of study covered in this body of this work, and to make comments upon the meaning of the work as a whole. These discussions will be then followed by an exploration of the implications of the research for diplomatic studies and policymakers, which draws on an assessment of the strengths and liabilities of the methodological approaches used in this study. Although the implications and contributions for the practitioner will have been expanded upon in detail within Chapter Seven, with the provision of a set of core policy recommendations to MFAs and their agents during a crisis, this chapter will finally identify further theoretical and policy implications of this research with respect to the overall arena of study, and provide direction and areas for future work.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

Posing the central question ‘*What role does digital diplomatic signalling play in the creation of online crisis narratives and to what extent can it serve as a communicative tool for virtual enlargement during times of political crisis?*’, this research sets out to unpack the changing nature of diplomatic crisis communicative capabilities during the digital age. It seeks to deconstruct the historic communication processes of diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives, and explore the evolution of each, as a direct result of the technological advancements and the global information space in which they now operate within. While examining the mechanisms and individual makeup of each process, this research moves beyond these communicative capabilities as singular tools for analysis, uncovering their unexplored potential as both tools for foreign policy power projection and expansion, and a means in which MFAs can contribute towards a process of virtual enlargement, on behalf

of their state. By reconceptualising both practices in the digital age, and then testing this conceptual framework within two distinct crises, this research taps into the unexplored process of DDS and OCN, and their potential to expand and project state power in the digital age.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Foreign Policy and Diplomatic (Crisis) Communication in the Global Information Space

### Chapter Highlights and Overview

- Introduces the concept of the global information space; the changing realm in which foreign policy now operates.
  - Highlights where foreign policy fits within this globalised environment, and the impact it brings in terms of how policy is created and challenged by MFAs and diplomats alike.
  - Underscores diplomacy's historic relationship with communication, and expands on the premise that diplomacy itself is an institutionalised form of communication.
  - Explores the recent digitalisation of diplomacy, and the primary actors who engage with it.
  - Discusses the emergence, practice, and impact of the 'digital' on diplomatic (crisis) communication in general and two crisis communicative capabilities in particular: (diplomatic) signalling and (crisis) narratives.
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### 2.0 Introduction

Sculpted by the forces of globalisation, diplomacy headed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century facing a surplus of challenges, that *inter alia*, saw the confrontation of old ideals versus new practices. Paradigms which had previously governed the workings of diplomacy for centuries, quickly began to shift. Foreign policy proved particularly vulnerable to these winds of change, with MFAs experiencing seismic permutations concerning how their policies were created, the actors which created it, and the space surrounding the institutions national and international accountability. Under the changing dynamics of globalisation, it seemed that no aspect of the diplomatic craft proved immune to the forces of global change.

However, not all the factors which brought about these shifts in diplomatic practice, weighed in with equal measure. Although many of them were diverse and interlocking in nature, to grant them equal credit could perhaps be regarded as unjust play. Standing firm as one of the key forces of change within the practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy, was the

digital revolution, and its near instant impact on every aspect of diplomatic affairs.

While gaining an understanding of this new environment is a pertinent task in seeking to understand all aspects of current diplomatic practice, it is particularly so during a crisis. This is because during a crisis, the role of the diplomat becomes heightened, acting as the vocal gatekeeper of their state's foreign policy, and serving as messengers who project and carry their master's message in a bid to achieve their institution's goals and objectives. Crises periods have always shown to increase the pressure on MFAs, to craft, and project their policies in a time-sensitive manner, and to have their decisions backed by information, which is cognisant, relevant, and appropriate to the crisis at play. While much of these historical pressures and heightened roles continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, the manner in which they are now presented and understood stands remarkably different to that of the past. The altered environment in which foreign policy now operates, creates ripple effects across all corners of diplomatic crisis management and strategy, forcing many MFAs to question and re-evaluate how they 'do' and carry out policy during a crisis.

Placed within the reigning paradigm of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalisation, the first aim of this chapter is to explore and discuss the changing space in which foreign policy is now created. This dialogue is imperative to our overall examination of diplomatic communication in the digital age. Before any discussion relating to how diplomatic agents project and communicate their foreign policy during a crisis, one must first acknowledge the environment in which said narrative is being formed. If MFAs and their agents are to succeed in defending and achieving their interests in the global information age, they must first and foremost understand the environment in which their policies and practices now operate. This discussion will create a firm foundation on which to make justified and informed predictions regarding why, during a crisis, diplomatic agents act the way they do, create policies in the manner they do, and project them in the way they do.

Building on the changing nature of foreign policy in the global information age, the second aim of this chapter is to explore the role and necessity of communication to diplomacy, both theoretically, historically, and in the present day. When viewed within the paradigm of diplomatic crisis communication strategies and management, observers and practitioners alike testify to what has become known as the 'relationship of essence', with diplomacy itself being defined as 'a regulated process of communication' (Constantinou, 1996:25) or

‘the communication system of the international society’ (James, 1980: 942). The word ‘diplomacy’ itself, derives from the Greek verb *diploun*, ‘to double’ and the Greek noun *diploma*, referring to an official document written on double leaves, joined together and folded. Diploma has therefore the double connotation of a secret message *and* an official paper conferring certain rights to the bearer, with both derivations emphasising the historical centrality of communication to diplomacy (Jönsson and Hall, 2005: 67).

Through highlighting the practice of ‘digital diplomacy’, this chapter aims to demonstrate that this historical centrality holds true even in the midst of these seismic technological advancements. And that although relationships between individual actors and institutions may have changed, and the ways and means by which diplomats communicate their power may have been altered, communication remains still, at the heart of diplomacy and its practice.

While the centrality of communication applies to all aspects of diplomatic practice, a crisis period is a time of particular relevance that this research seeks to explore. As whether a crisis has shown to be political, humanitarian, or global in nature, communication and the processes which carry it out, have proven key time and again. With that said, diplomatic crises communication is no longer what it was. From the power of the political hashtag, to the use of social media to announce Russia’s expulsion from the G8, the past ten years has brought about significant shifts in how crisis communication is played out, with the technological revolution in particular, taking the world of crisis communication by storm. From their extensive reach capabilities, to the instant power of connection, popular online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are demonstrating that the age of the digital — in particular the age of social media — is altering how we now practice and perceive the role (and power) of communication during times of political crisis (Cassidy and Manor, 2016). Social media platforms are used as vessels where MFA’s can connect with their citizens and provide up to date consular information to those who require it, while continuously acting as a central hub for all stakeholders during the crisis period in question. One only needs to glance at contemporary global crises to see this thesis come to light. Nowhere does this thesis shine brighter than in the crises this research chooses to explore: the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict and the 2013/4 Euromaidan movement. It is therefore hoped that by investigating these themes, this chapter will bring about a new understanding regarding the current environment in which MFA’s now operate, and the

communicative tools now at their disposal that aid them in their attempts to defend their interests and further their objectives.

This chapter is divided into three distinct, but interlocking parts. First, it explores the global information space; the changing realm in which foreign policy now operates. This begins with an exploration of globalisation's beginnings, and how it has evolved to become a challenger to the nation-state in terms of its boundaries and protection of community interests and borders. This exploration carries on to a discussion concerning where foreign policy now fits within this globalised environment, and the impact this new environment brings in terms of how policy is created and how it is being challenged by MFA's and diplomats alike.

The second part of this chapter centres its analysis on what we call the 'relationship of essence': diplomacy and communication. Here the argument put forward is that of Corneliu Bjola and Markus Kornprobst, who argue that diplomacy itself is a form of institutionalised communication, that cannot 'be understood without taking seriously the role of communication as an ontological anchor of diplomatic interaction' (2013: 4). Here an illustration of this evolving and historic relationship will be provided, that seeks to demonstrate the innate but consistently changing nature of the role of communications within the practice of diplomatic relations. A focus will be provided in relation to the necessity of diplomatic communication during periods of conflict and violence. This section will also highlight and examine the current evolutionary standpoint in terms of communication and diplomacy. The discussion centres on the emergence, practice and actors within the 'new world' of digital diplomacy, and explores how their role, and their duties have changed, or not changed as a direct result of the digitization of diplomacy. Specifically, we will examine how MFAs have dealt with these changes, and how new modes of power projection, are crafting and creating new ways to virtually enlarge the power of the state.

The final section of this chapter arrives at our chapter keeps its focus still on the 'digital' aspect of diplomatic communication, but narrows to look at diplomatic crises communication in particular. Specifically, we will see that despite the seismic shifts that diplomacy has experienced as a direct result of technological advancements, a key requirement of successful crisis management is the existence and execution of successful

communication practices. But this time carried out and reformulated to fit the digital age. These practices will be shown to include not simply the formation of communicative policies, but the communicative capabilities used to project them. In amongst these capabilities, we will discuss the use of (diplomatic) signalling and (crisis) narratives; discussion that is vital and needed as we begin to reconceptualise and analyse the use of both practices in the digital age.

While distinct in their own manner, the three core strands of this chapter, foreign policy in the global information space, the communication 'relationship of essence' (historically and at present), and diplomatic (crisis) communicative capabilities, are vital discussion threads in the larger project we seek to discuss. And that is the reconceptualisation of diplomatic crisis communicative practices in the global information age, and an evaluation of their potential to now act as communicative tools for foreign policy power projection, and virtual powers of enlargement during times of crisis.

## **2.1 Foreign Policy in the Global Information Space**

The introduction of new communication and information technologies has provoked an information revolution of comparable magnitude to those spurred by the advent of speech, writing and printing. Similar to the earlier upheavals, the contemporary information revolution has radically altered every level of social and political life, through its impact on lifestyles, professional behaviour, culture and mind-sets, access to knowledge, economic transactions and social and political organisation. At first, this upheaval came quite gradually, but began to gain increasing speed during the 1990s, but with the rapid growth of mass media technologies in the early 2000's, a new international landscape was generated, now commonly called the global information society or the global information space.

Now technological developments in the communications sphere have, historically, caused fundamental disruption not only to the social and political order but have also revolutionised the rules governing the conduct of foreign affairs. Like the agricultural and industrial revolutions before it, the mass media revolution involved (and is continually

involving) a systemic transformation, the passage of one technological age to another and the emergence of a new diplomatic environment (Pahlavi, 2004). As will be expanded upon in the upcoming sections, diplomacy is a form of communication and therefore any technical progress that affects communication on a global scale will also affect diplomacy as a consequence. By acknowledging this relationship of impact, it is therefore practical to emphasise how, and why, the information revolution is acting as such a powerfully enabling force which is continuously generating new challenges, and incentives within the diplomatic craft, particularly in the case of foreign policy activity.

A worthy lens in which to view these new challenges and incentives within the foreign policy realm, is the conceptual lens of the ‘global information space’. It is a concept introduced by Alan Chong, who in his work *Foreign Policy in Global Information Space: Actualizing Soft Power*, defines it as ‘a global public sphere, which resembles the features and faults of the national public sphere’ and one which is ‘constituted primarily of practices (rather than physical geography), and the exchange of symbolic designs (e.g. ideologies, reports, opinions)’ (2012: 127). Chong views the global information space as a product of 20<sup>th</sup> century technological developments, and argues it can be seen a contesting arena where opinion plays a critical role (Ibid). In this sense, the global information space is complementary to geopolitics by emphasising the constructive power of ideas in subjecting others without the use of tangible controls. This emphasis (and indeed the very concept itself) is vital to this research’s very thesis, a thesis which seeks to argue that discourse (projected through policies, signals, and narratives) can be contested and powerful within the informational realm, and that actors can subject others to their discourse through new and far reaching communicative capabilities.

Perhaps one of Chong’s more grander claims regarding the global information space, and one which must be considered when discussing the changing nature of foreign policy within a 21<sup>st</sup> century framework, is that as a concept and late-modern phenomenon, the global information space can be seen to threaten the relative autonomy of a state's agency in controlling their own boundaries (Chong 2002). While Chong is not the only voice in this sphere, he sits amongst a breadth of literature that focusses on the nexus between globalisation and international relations (Luard 1990; Camilieri and Falk 1992; McGrew et al. 1992; Scholte 1993; Rosenau 1997a; Clark 1997; Clark 1999; Youngs 2000), all of whom address the ideational challenge of globalisation to the nation-state in terms of the

global information space. Foreign policy, in this instance, can be regarded as a ‘separate and special area of government linked to the security and the fundamental values of the state’ which ‘is intended to affect, and [ironically] is limited by, factors outside the national political system as well as within it’ (Wallace 1971, 9-10,17). Mainstream foreign policy theorists have also defended the argument that the nation-state’s *sine qua non* is purely to guard the common interests of those living within its boundaries (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin 1963a; Frankel 1967; Clarke and White 1989). In this sense, borders can be treated as obsolescent if global governance means a domestically patterned world state, but not if a broad ‘global society’ of mixed state and non-state authorities still obtains power, as is presently the case (Shaw 1994).

While a discussion regarding the impact of globalisation on the nation – state may be viewed as abstract to some degree, its discussion is of direct relevance to this research, particularly regarding how communicative capabilities within this newly constituted space, and the discourses they create, may work to carry out state policies in the global information sphere. It is also a lens in which we can seek to understand and acknowledge the ideational threat now posed to the nation-state in terms of diminished borders in the face of global access to information (Chong 2000).<sup>14</sup> Thus this research attempts to set itself apart from other works in the rapidly mushrooming nexus of globalisation and international relations (Luard 1990; Camilieri and Falk 1992; McGrew et al. 1992; Scholte 1993; Rosenau 1997a; Clark 1997; Clark 1999; Youngs 2000) by addressing this ideational challenge of globalisation to the nation-state in terms of the global information space itself. At its core, it argues for a reformulation of foreign policy strategy, under the working assumption that operative abstractions such as the global are likely to place individuals and

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<sup>14</sup> In the face of international crisis, humanitarian intervention, environmental threats, and terrorism, territorial jurisdictions have also become increasingly less sacrosanct (Chong 2002). Contemporary post-Cold War and modern-day crises provide ample illustration. Between 1993 and 1995, genocide in Bosnia – Herzegovina provoked jurisdictional and emotional dissonance among NATO states and UN members alike. Similar atrocities in Rwanda (1994) and Sudan (2003-2006) were not prevented because ‘international will’ could not be mustered at strategic junctures. Today’s events, in Crimea for example, have once more raised the spectre of self-determination, demonstrating that the principle of self-determination either guarantees a state’s right to secede or gives it no such right at all. Similarly, the continuing governance crises in the Middle East crises, relating to Daesh, the Palestinian territories, Iraq and Lebanon, occasion sporadic UN intervention when, and only when, the major Western powers can muster favourable national and public support. Indeed, what these crises demonstrate, is the increasing instances of ideational challenges to sovereignty over territorial space, and that the ideational is endowed with power relations in spite of its abstraction, hence creating a tangible challenge to foreign policy. If diplomats are to successfully carry out their aims in the most strategic and relevant manner possible., they must now engage with their states foreign policy in a manner which is sympathetic to the global information age and attempt different processes regarding their policies creation, formulation and dissemination.

their constructed modes of organisation under logical strain when they do not conform to centuries-old modes of territorial practice (Chong, 2012). This is particularly true for diplomats whose very practice, is bound entirely by tradition and protocol.

Now when assessing a reformulation of foreign policy strategies within the global information space, it is important to recognise some of the challenges now facing MFAs. Amongst these primary challenges, is that MFAs are less and less able to isolate public opinion from outside influences. Writing on this very challenge, Pierre Pahlavi writes that these new technologies ‘contribute to the weaving of a dense web of virtual links between the communities of the world that superimpose themselves upon traditional territorially based allegiances and increasingly diminish the emotional authority of local governments’ (2004: 47) Today, ‘the rise of the new communication technologies such as the internet is creating virtual communities of interest where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other and understand each other’ (Potter, 2002). Consequently, in managing their international relations, MFAs and their governments are obliged to take into account new sources of uncertainty resulting from the increasing openness of their borders to 'subversive' values, ideas, practices and norms. In this sense, a wide array of transnational factors, many of which are of an ideological and cultural nature, put growing stress on national authority by creating new sources of loyalty. External pressures are not only becoming more complex but also more intangible than before (Holsti, 1989).

In light of these new challenges, governments and MFAs are therefore not taking lightly, (nor should they take lightly), the increasingly porous nature of national borders and the questioning of traditional allegiances. Traditional approaches may have been acceptable when the goal of the state was simply to prevent external physical threats, but in light of the changing international order, securing societal and cultural interests arguably matter as much as protecting traditional material interests (Brown and M.S. Studemeister, 2001). Thus, policy and diplomacy are now driven to reform in response to these heterogeneous and intangible challenges, reform which this research seeks to highlight, and provide possible avenues to achieve.

With that said, the global information space, is not simply about the challenges it brings to the state in terms of their foreign policy activity, but it is also about a number of exciting opportunities. Namely the opening up of all horizons to the art of diplomatic influence

(Pahlavi, 2004). Speaking on this very opportunity Pahlavi notes that ‘the diverse uses of cyberspace stimulate states to redefine and to restructure their foreign policy to take advantage of new opportunities’ (2004: 63). Indeed, a core aim of this research is to highlight some of the novel communication capabilities which are now available to MFAs. Communication capabilities which assist in the implementation of an MFAs broad diplomatic strategy, and are capable of addressing not only other governments but also increasingly large foreign populations throughout the world (Noble & Leonard). As Pahlavi writes;

*Where the clientele of states were once solely constituted of small political and economic elite, it can now be considerably scaled up to include virtually everybody around the globe having access to the global information and cultural marketplace. This is facilitated by the fact that massive amounts of information and culture flow inexpensively across national borders daily, permeating civil societies without being filtered by local authorities (2004: 64).*

Within the global information space, diplomacy's context of persuasion can therefore be seen to have expanded to include all actors connected to, and affected by, any of the information and communications media. Furthermore, what we are now witnessing is mass technologies which transcend borders and challenge government information monopolies, and the increase of powerful communicative tools which diplomats can use for the rapid collection, production, and dissemination of information on a world-wide scale. By reconceptualising and exploring a number of these new communicative capabilities – namely digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives – this research sheds light on how MFAs and their diplomats can begin to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded to them in the global information space and how they can seek to reformulate their policies accordingly.

Finally, it should be noted that despite of the seismic shifts happening within the realm of international policy, ‘foreign policy analysis has generally not kept pace with the changes brought about by globalisation, especially in respect of reopening all frontiers to multi-level political struggles, which invite unorthodox non-state and supra-state interventions

affecting foreign policy' (Chong, 2007: 37). Once again, the global power of information impact both the foreign and the domestic 'without visible physical control due to conditions of porosity accounted for by the global information space' (Ibid). This is insufficiently explained by conventional foreign policy analysis, which primarily scrutinises processes within state boundaries. This research posits that the current exploration regarding how foreign policy is sculpted and practiced under globalisation still falls short in its analysis. Therefore, the exploration of this theme remains central to this work; namely why, and how, diplomats form and project their foreign policy aims online in the global information age, and particularly how they do so during a crisis. This thesis renders a holistic account of how diplomats form and project their foreign policy aims online in the global information age, particularly how they do so during a crisis in which foreign policy projection is key to communicative and diplomatic success.

## **2.2 Diplomatic Communication**

### *2.2.1 Diplomacy: As A Form of Institutionalised Communication*

As seen within the preceding discussion on the global information space, communication is key to the workings of international state practice, and has evolved substantially in how it is perceived and used by actors around the globe. Chief amongst these changes sits how the global information space has altered the nature of diplomatic communication, how it is formed, sculpted and perhaps most paramount to this research, how it is engaged with during times of crisis. It is perhaps justified to claim that ever-increasing technological advancements have altered every aspect of diplomatic communicative practice and continue to do so. Before an assessment is undertaken on the impact of communication within the diplomatic craft as result of the technological age, it is first necessary to step back and to assess this 'relationship of essence', and how and why it matters for the effective practice diplomacy in the modern age.

Turning then to the burgeoning literature on communication's relationship to the art and practice of diplomacy, we see that there has emerged a number of broad understandings on how we view diplomatic communication as a term and a concept. At its core, the practice

of diplomacy has evolved as a process where representatives of states and international actors, including elected and appointed officials, are granted the powers to express and defend their state interests, put forward their grievances, and issue threats; all of which are carried out through an evolving process of communicative channels and techniques. Diplomatic communication can be seen as a malleable tool for clarifying positions, probing and gathering information, and convincing states and other actors to support one's own position (Gilboa 2008). More current definitions of diplomacy as 'a tool of international relations which involves nonviolent problem-solving through cross-cultural communication, negotiation, and compromise' also alludes to utmost importance of communication in diplomacy (Copeland 2009: 5).

At the broadest level, diplomatic communication can also be viewed as an exchange between states and international organisations (IOs), which takes place in highly formalised and even ritualised settings such as bilateral negotiations, summits and assemblies of international organisations or written communiqués. In this instance, diplomatic communication has also been described as (and accused of) being highly and even overly formalised, 'frozen', packed with euphemisms and 'wooden language' (Kurbalija & Slavik 2001; Villar 2005: 10-18), to the point that 'diplomats never produce anything new' (Neumann 2007). A further understanding of diplomatic communication is that it covers characteristics of communication in situations requiring tact and caution. One may speak of 'diplomatic language' referring to a polite and careful style, attentive to the expectations of the interlocutor and respectful of her integrity (Mikalayena 2011).

Our understanding of diplomatic communication, however, should not be limited to instances of open and ritualised, verbal communication – but should be expanded to include nonverbal, secretive and backchannel diplomatic communication efforts. Nonverbal messages or 'body language' constitute important aspects of diplomacy's communication. Diplomatic 'body language' encompasses everything from personal gestures to the manipulation of military forces. A handshake, for example, is commonly used as a metaphor for the quality of interstate relations, transferring the language of personal relations to the international arena. The venue and format of meetings, the shape of negotiating tables (symbolising prestige and power), and the level of delegations

(signalling interests and intentions of the parties) are other aspects used for interpreting subtle 'body language' (cf. Cohen, 1981: 39-40).

Now nonverbal communication certainly brings with it unique advantages to the diplomatic craft, and has at times been shown a more capable tool in capturing the attention and interest of various audiences when compared to verbal communication. Raymond Cohen goes so far as to say that if nonverbal communication 'did not exist, it would have been invented by public relations officers' (1987: 24). Although the 'semantic obsession' of diplomats' rests on the realisation that 'speech is an incisive form of action' (Eban, 1983: 393), we see also that every gesture or action crafted and sent by diplomatic agents sends a particular form of message. This realisation is particularly pertinent considering this line of research, and as it expands to include the art of communicating a message through signalling processes and narrative construction, two communicative capabilities we will discuss in upcoming detail in Section 2.3.2 and 2.3.3. The observations of one student of interpersonal persuasion are equally applicable to diplomatic communication, writing that 'activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating' (Simons, 1976: 50). Since nonverbal signals are inherently ambiguous and disclaimable, they also allow diplomats an advantage in retaining flexibility (Cohen, 1987: 35-40). Nonverbal communicative capabilities thus prove effective means for diplomatic communicative strategies and for maintaining diplomatic relations.

A broader understanding of diplomatic communication would involve a carefully calibrated language (allowing for cross-cultural communication with a minimum of unnecessary misunderstandings) and a protocol governing interstate 'body language' (Jönsson & Hall, 2002). Similarly, the management of verbal as well as nonverbal aspects of communication has allowed for the characterisation of variants of diplomacy throughout history. Yet an interesting interpretation of diplomatic communication and one built upon by this research is that put forward by Bjola and Kornprobst in their article *Understanding International Diplomacy: Theory, Practice and Ethics*. In answering the question, 'what turns diplomacy into a core analytical and practical method of international engagement?' Bjola and Kornprobst argue that diplomacy itself 'cannot be understood without taking seriously the role of communication as an ontological anchor of diplomatic interaction' (2013: 4). This paper adheres to their contention that diplomacy is, by its very essence, a

form of *institutionalised* communication ‘amongst international recognised entities through which these representatives, produce manage and distribute public goods’ (Ibid). According to Bjola and Kornprobst, diplomacy as ‘institutionalised communication’ is comprised of three key features, two of which will be further expanded here:

- (1) diplomacy is, on its most fundamental level, about *communication*.
- (2) processes of double recognition make an individual an actor in the diplomatic field.
- (3) diplomacy is about producing, managing and distributing public goods.

The first feature states that diplomacy is fundamentally about communication. More precisely, ‘it is about a peculiar form of communication that is highly institutionalised’ (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013). The argument here is that since diplomacy’s beginnings, there has evolved a plethora of rules and norms which have created a unique cultural language, consistently socialising diplomats into how they ought to behave. These cultural norms govern the rules and structure surrounding communication practices amongst diplomats.<sup>15</sup>

The second point is that diplomacy is centred around ‘producing, managing and distributing public goods’ that are important for the ‘well-being of a community and where the use by some members of the community does not reduce the availability of the public good to others’ (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013: 5). It is noted that traditionally, the art of diplomacy has been centred on engaging in communication for the purpose of achieving a particular type of public good: security of state. However, the twentieth century saw ‘diplomatic communication expands to address a growing number of other public goods, including economic welfare, development, environmental protection, health safety and

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<sup>15</sup> This definition of diplomacy is not far removed from Adam Watson’s influential claim that diplomacy, as both a practice and craft, revolves around the concept of ‘dialogue’. In his work *Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States*, Watson centred his writings around diplomacy as an institution of dialogue, and put the practice of communication as centre stage in his writings on the craft (Watson 1982). Even in his earlier works (1982), Watson argued that new technologies have continued to shift the *channels* of the diplomatic dialogue, making direct communications and meetings between heads of government and other makers of policy ever easier and more frequent, and the role of resident ambassadors less prominent.

migration control... and it has become increasingly evident that many of these public goods are interrelated and hence diplomats need to be proficient in how to juggle competing priorities of public goods' (Ibid). The impact of globalisation, the transformation of these public goods into now more 'global' public goods, and the recognition that issues which have traditionally been confined to the nation state boundary are now global, as has been discussed within our discussion of the global information age (e.g. environment, health, peace and justice), begins to raise a host of new challenges for how diplomats choose to communicate with these problems; referring both to the distinct issues themselves, what they represent, and the actors who are now required to engage them in the construction of potential solutions (Chong 2007).

The authors also note that the term 'communication' is certainly not narrowly perceived or defined when spoken in terms of specific diplomatic functions, or the overall craft itself. They write that 'the literature on diplomacy exhibits a somewhat celebratory streak when it suggests that diplomacy is about peaceful communication and dialogue' (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013) and that diplomacy as a working craft is often spoken about in singular terms surrounding peace; that is peaceful resolutions, peaceful projects and all achieved through peaceful communication. While linking diplomatic practice to peaceful activities is certainly not a flawed logic by any means, diplomacy is not always innocent. 'The declaration of war, for instance, is as much a diplomatic act — very much an institutionalised communicative act — as mediation and negotiation of peaceful resolutions of conflicts. So are attempts to build coalitions with other states to go to war' (Ibid: 4). The institutionalised nature of communication to diplomacy should neither be seen as representing a certain type of diplomatic language nor did creating connotations that diplomatic communication is either a purely peaceful or conflict infuse communicative process. Rather, it should be seen as simply representing the integral nature and composition of communication to the practice of diplomacy. This is a point of particular relevance to the discussion concerning diplomatic crisis communication and how we choose to frame our discussion surrounding it.

It should be noted that while a vast amount of English School scholars see diplomacy and its practice, in one form or another, as being a central feature of an international society, this does not mean that institutionalised communication is necessarily prior to other forms of functional interaction. Buzan and Little (2000) have demonstrated, for example, how

trade has historically been the first form of interaction among otherwise isolated polities. Bull (1977: 163-6) has also argued that the institution of diplomacy can be shown to perform set, but various functions. For example, the function of negotiation — which belongs in the conflict regulation category — or more simply, the function of diplomats and their agents serving as a symbol of the existence of international society, craft with it perceptions of membership and legitimacy. Nevertheless, the concept of diplomacy as institutionalised communication as explored and defined by Bjola and Kornprobst is one this thesis directly supports and sees as underpinning its outlook on diplomacy's essential and inextricable relationship to the communication processes today.

While existing research presents us with a worthy framework to analyse our own research, there exists a notable gap that this research seeks to exploit and explore: the nature of diplomacy as a form of institutionalised communication has yet to be tried or tested in the era of real – time governance. We are yet to see how this existing framework is weathered or sustained when diplomatic communication has been so greatly altered and tested by current technological advancements. While the premise of diplomacy as a form of institutionalised communication is one adhered to throughout this research, it is interesting to explore how it holds up or is altered in the modern day. The upcoming discussion, will therefore seek to highlight, explore, and bring to the fore the changes taking place within the diplomatic realm, as a direct result of the digital age.

### **2.3 Exploring Digital Diplomacy: Emergence, Actors, Definitions and Practice**

In *'Essence of Diplomacy'*, Jönsson & Hall write that 'there has never been a good diplomat who was a bad communicator' (2013: 67). It therefore comes as no surprise that the technologies of communication have always sculpted and affected how diplomacy is carried out. However as previously noted, the information revolution, has not unfolded in a vacuum. Instead, it has taken place alongside secular processes and seismic shifts in the international order such as globalisation. The convergence of small, mobile and powerful communications technologies around the Internet is one obvious source of change, but there are several other important aspects of these broad transformations. According to French international relations specialist Thomas Gomart (2015), one of these broad

transformations is the emergence of the practice of digital diplomacy, and the affect it has had on all actors on the international stage. Gomart also states that it is important to consider that digital diplomacy is the continuation, an avatar of public diplomacy carried out through new information and communication technologies.

Stepping back to consider the emergence of digital diplomacy, we see that the practice finds its roots in the digital revolution, also known as the third industrial revolution. It consists in the change from analogy, mechanical, and electronic technology to digital technology which began anywhere from the late 1950s to the late 1970s with the adoption and proliferation of digital computers and digital record keeping that continues to the present day. However, it is with the last two decades in particular, where diplomacy has witnessed what is probably the greatest seismic shift in every facet of its practice. This is because, although historically, diplomacy has been affected by every wave of technological advancement, be this the printing press, telegram or fax machine, contemporary advances have proven to challenge and alter diplomatic institutions and practice at a rate extent never before seen. Therefore, insofar as technologies have progressed, so too has diplomacy. In the early 21st century however, societal transformations had a much greater impact on the practice of diplomacy than in earlier periods when the authority of elites was (arguably) questioned less than it is today.

### *Definitional Framework*

The past decade has also witnessed increased academic or a scholarly interest in ‘digital diplomacy’ with scholars evaluating the digital practices of embassies, diplomats, MFAs and world leaders. To date, scholars and practitioners have offered different terms to conceptualise the growing influence of digital technologies on diplomacy. These have included net diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, diplomacy 2.0, networked diplomacy, real-time diplomacy and 21st century statecraft (See Hocking & Meissen’s 2015 report for their taxonomy). Interpretations of this practice vary from digital diplomacy signifying the altered diplomacy associated with the emergence of a networked globe. Taking it from the narrowest viewpoint, it is seen to comprise the decision-making coordination, communication and practice of foreign affairs as they are conducted with the aid of information and telecommunications in the wake of the changes brought about by the

computer and telecommunications industries. The plurality of terms and conceptualisations arguably relates to technology's impact on diplomacy, and stems from the fact that new platforms, tools and practices continue to immerge.

With that said, although scholars and diplomats have adopted the term 'digital diplomacy' when referring to the intersection between digital technologies and diplomacy, they have yet to offer a clear definition of this term. According to Ilan Manor (2017: 3) the search for such a definition is an important one, as "for practitioners, definitions help conceptualise how diplomacy should be practiced, what working routines need to be altered and which skills must be acquired. If diplomats conceptualise the world as networked they may increasingly strive to become nodes in transnational networks of advocacy. But if diplomats conceptualize the world as hierarchical they may place an emphasis on engaging with elites". Definitions are therefore important to scholars who rely on them to formulate hypotheses, select case studies and identify research avenues. We see this importance played out with the terms 'public diplomacy 2.0' and 'networked diplomacy' for example, both of which have both stimulated considerable academic research (Manor 2016).

Standing in line with Manors thesis that it is good and perhaps necessary to create a solid definition of a practice in order to concretely ground research within it, we now turn to some of the most prominent and apt definitional frameworks put forth by academics to date. According to Manor and Segev (2015), digital diplomacy refers mainly to the growing use of social media platforms by a country in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and proactively manage its image and reputation. Manor and Segev noted that digital diplomacy exists at two distinct levels: that of the foreign ministry and that of embassies located around the world. By operating on these two levels, nations can tailor foreign-policy and nation-branding messages to the unique characteristics of local audiences with regard to history, culture, values and traditions, thereby facilitating the acceptance of their foreign policy and the image they aim to promote.

Comparatively Lewis (2014) defines digital diplomacy as the use of digital tools of communication (social media) by diplomats to communicate with each other and with the general public. To Potter (2002), digital diplomacy mainly refers to the diplomatic practices through digital and networked technologies, including the Internet, mobile devices, and social media channels. Hanson (2012) defines it simply as the use of the

internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives. In his work *Baked in and Wired: eDiplomacy @ State* Hanson outlines eight policy goals for digital diplomacy:

- (1) Knowledge management: To harness departmental and whole of government knowledge, so that it is retained, shared and its use optimized in pursuit of national interests abroad.
- (2) Public diplomacy: To maintain contact with audiences as they migrate online and to harness new communications tools to listen to and target important audiences with key messages and to influence major online influencers.
- (3) Information management: To help aggregate the overwhelming flow of information and to use this to better inform policy-making and to help anticipate and respond to emerging social and political movements.
- (4) Consular communications and response: To create direct, personal communications channels with citizens travelling overseas, with manageable communications in crisis situations.
- (5) Disaster response: To harness the power of connective technologies in disaster response situations.
- (6) Internet freedom: Creation of technologies to keep the internet free and open. This has the related objectives of promoting freedom of speech and democracy as well as undermining authoritarian regimes.
- (7) External resources: Creating digital mechanisms to draw on and harness external expertise to advance national goals.
- (8) Policy planning: To allow for effective oversight, coordination and planning of international policy across government, in response to the internationalisation of the bureaucracy.

The United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) elaborates its definition of digital diplomacy on its website, stating that<sup>16</sup>:

*What is digital diplomacy? Digital diplomacy is solving foreign policy problems using the internet. It is conventional diplomacy through a different medium. Through the web we can listen, publish, engage and evaluate in new and interesting ways. Crucially, we can also widen our reach and communicate directly with civil society as well as governments and influential individuals ... Why are we doing it? Because we have to ... Those whose ideals and objectives we oppose are active and highly effective at using the web. If we don't take up the digital debate, we lose our argument by default. Many of our partners, particularly those outside government, have an established digital presence, engaged audiences and expertise in achieving goals online. If we don't work with them, we're missing a huge opportunity. Our shift from one-way web publishing into active digital diplomacy reflects the changing way we all use the web—as a multi-way social medium as well as a source of information. We lose credibility and cannot claim to be an open organization if we don't take part.<sup>17</sup>*

Grounding and reflecting on these distinct, but interlocking definitions, this work takes the definition of digital diplomacy as the use of the internet and new information communications technologies to carry out diplomatic objectives (Hanson, 2010), or to solve foreign policy problems (Foreign Commonwealth, 2012). It should also be noted that most definitions, including both forward by Hanson and the FCO, explicitly avoid linking digital diplomacy with the specific social media platforms, although it is closely related to it in popular opinion, or due to the emphasis placed on certain platforms such as Twitter and Facebook by practitioners (Bjola and Holmes, 2015). As will be discussed in the upcoming section, digital diplomacy can, and should, be understood and employed as a novel and practical extension of the soft power, public diplomacy concepts, and in the case of this research, extends to include the novel concept of virtual state enlargement.

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<sup>16</sup> See The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Digital Strategy for further details: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/39629/AB\\_12-11-14\\_Digital\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/39629/AB_12-11-14_Digital_strategy.pdf), Retrieved 17 July 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, given the centrality of communication to diplomacy, it is hardly surprising that the rise of these new technologies should be of interest to its practitioners, and brought with a reinvigorated interest regarding the nature of communication within the diplomatic sphere. Just like those around them, diplomats are in the process of adjusting their historical protocol and finding their own voice and practices in a new information sphere. This journey of understanding takes time, and requires substantial and detailed research. Digital diplomacy, in all its guises, be this e-diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, ‘twiplomacy’, or in some worrying instances ‘trumplomacy’, has created a complexity of technological advancements and altered the practice of diplomacy in the 21st sphere at a scale not before seen. It is therefore perhaps justified to argue that no quick-fix is available for which we can conjure such understandings to this new age. But to accurately explore, analyse and evaluate these changes in a way which is measured and coherent, one must take steps to understand it. We can therefore begin by shining a spotlight on a number of key developments, within the diplomatic craft as brought about by the digital age, and highlight the work of a number of scholars who have written on the subject.

### *Actors: the MFA and technological change*

Confronted with fast-moving changes in society, governments and MFAs, have had a hard time anticipating impending developments, let alone events, even though new technological capabilities appear to enhance the capacity for forecasting future trends (Wescott, 2008). Thus, the application of novel communications technologies to diplomacy which resulted in the emergence of digital diplomacy, is a practice that goes right to the heart of diplomacy’s core functions: negotiation, representation and communication, and has affected its core institutional players and how they function, namely the MFA, and the Embassies which represent them<sup>1819</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is a central structure of the diplomatic service which is dedicated to directing and administrating the task of foreign policy, and has come to assume a central reference point for both the study and practice of diplomacy. It is also the avenue by which a government exchanges their vital information with the government of another country or other international organizations. Historically, the primary purpose of creating a Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to recruit, brief, dispatch, finance, and maintain secure and daily communications with the states diplomatic agents abroad (Berridge 2005, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> The tasks that added to the survival and the expansion of the Ministry have been identified as, but not limited to: 1) *A nexus of communication*, that is providing a key link in a diplomatic communications system through which information gathered from the international environment is gathered, analysed, and disseminated (Hocking 1999); 2) *Policy Advice and Implementation*, which is frequently carried out by

With that said, 2017 marks a decade since the advent of digital diplomacy, a practice which in some instances, arguably began as an experiment by a select number of MFAs and diplomatic pioneers. That is their existed no tried and tested method in how to engage or infuse the practice of diplomacy with novel technological tools in order to achieve diplomatic methods. Despite the lack of any clear strategy in how to engage with this new world of technology, digital diplomacy has now become standard practice for diplomatic institutions the world over. Early examples of it include Sweden's virtual embassy to Second Life, launched in 2007, and the formation of a US digital outreach team in 2006 (Dutton and Thelwall ,2012). Over the past decade, as technologies have progressed, so too has their utilization by Foreign Ministries. Within the realm of public diplomacy for example, Norwegian Ambassadors are today using Skype to converse with university students while Palestine is embracing Facebook as a medium for engaging with Israeli citizens (Manor and Holmes, 2017). The Indian MFA is developing computer games for children of Indian Diasporas while the Georgian Diaspora Ministry offers online courses in the Georgian language. UN Ambassadors are employing WhatsApp to coordinate their votes on various resolutions while the Kenyan foreign ministry is increasingly using Twitter to deliver emergency consular aid (Manor 2015, January). More recently, MFAs have begun to employ software programmers so as to analyse big data sets or manipulate social media algorithms using Botsiv (Manor 2016), and are continually changing and evolving in light of the practice of digital diplomacy.

Now while recognising the developments of MFAs as a result of technological advancements, a number of the MFAs primary tasks arguably still stand, and carry substantive weight, in the Ministries day to day activities, namely; *Policy Coordination, Public Diplomacy, Administrative Functions, Staffing and Supporting Missions Abroad,*

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two primary departments: geographical and functional. The functional departments supervise the general issues, such as human rights, trade, drugs, and arms control, while the geographical departments deal with regions or individual states specifically (Berridge 2005, 2002); 3) *Policy Coordination*, which is distinct from policy advice and implementation, in that it is an informal discussion in all states with the other departments in government, such as a trade, finance, defence, transport, environment; 4) *Public Diplomacy*, which is a significant function of the MFA, and has the aim to influence opinion abroad, carried out by supplying approved information to both the diplomatic missions abroad and foreign and domestic developments (Hamilton, Langhorne 1995); 5) *Administrative Functions*, all of which relate to the management of the overseas diplomatic network, relationships with the resident corps diplomatique, and associated diplomatic protocol matters; and 6) *Staffing and Supporting Missions Abroad*, namely recruiting, briefing, dispatching, financing, and maintaining daily communications with the state diplomatic agents abroad.

and *Centralised Communication*. While all of these functions have remained at the core of the MFAs functioning, there has been considerable debate as to how far they are being altered as a direct result of the digital age, with observers and researchers of the MFA having reached and projected varying conclusions as to the role and significance of these diplomatic institutions in the rapidly shifting patterns of world politics (Hocking, 2010). This divergence of views about diplomacy in general, and the role of the MFAs in particular, is echoed in increasing literature and conversation on digital diplomacy.

Those who are more conservative in their conclusions on the fate of the MFA, have pushed forth the claim that the institutions of state diplomacy remain unchanged in their essence, almost proving themselves immune to the changing winds of 21<sup>st</sup> century world politics. The consequence of this projection is that the traditional state-centred diplomatic machinery of representation, intelligence-gathering, and communication, remains as it has traditionally been portrayed: a key institution of the international system and a major resource through which governments pursue their policy objectives (Berridge, 1980). More recent interpretations of globalisation however, cast a different light on these issues. Rather than being locked into a condition of terminal decline, the state has come to be seen as adapting to the pressures that globalisation imposes. The adaptation of the "globalized state" is seen as critical to the management of pressing global issues. This view declares that the pillars of globalisation and regionalisation are challenging governments and have dramatically diminished the significance of these traditional instruments of diplomacy. According to Hocking (2010: 1) "enough has now been written on these contested concepts to challenge the more exaggerated claims which envision the state as an ever-weakening actor enmeshed by the globalising forces of international capital and information technology". Consequently, the role of the MFA has become increasingly marginalised in the face of both internal and external pressures (Hocking, 2010). In terms of diplomatic studies, this suggests (a line of thought this research stands with) that the principles of state-based diplomacy are adapting to the demands of a multifactor environment in which the construction of flexible and issue-oriented networks is now critical. (Hocking, 2010).

Now it should be noted that the digitalisation of diplomacy has affected actors well beyond those charged with officially representing the state, i.e. Foreign Ministers, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Embassies, Consulates etc. Although this research chooses to focus its analysis on official state actors, and the impact of the digital upon them, it does clearly

recognise that we are now living and acting in a post – Westphalian world, and that the digitalisation of diplomacy has affected nearly every actor who is playing, or is involved with the diplomatic game. Sitting high amongst these consequences in this post – Westphalian world is the diffusion of power we are seeing played out amongst a varying set of actors in the global arena.

This diffusion of power (both outwards and downwards) as a direct result of technological and the growth of international interest groups (more interested in their cause than in their nationality), has weakened the nation state as an autonomous entity and complicated diplomacy (Cooper 2003, Hobsbawm 2007, Friedman 1999 2005). It is perhaps justified then to argue that sovereignty is increasingly coming to mean having a seat at the international table, but not necessarily maintaining autonomy within one's own state borders. New actors who not officially ascribed to the state, are therefore now gaining increasing influence within the international order and the making and enacting of international policy. The digitalisation of nearly every facet of our lives, has therefore arguably contributed to the weakening of the traditional nation state as a primary focus for political loyalty, by enabling communities to coalesce and act across national boundaries. In the digital era however, we are increasingly witnessing (as per the examples highlighted above) that states and their Ministries are not above trying to manipulate the virtual world as much as the physical one to prop up their own rule—though in some cases states may see the Internet as a threat rather than an opportunity because of its inherently open nature (Westcott 2008).

However, no matter where one places their analysis regarding the current role and power of the nation state, it is beyond dispute that the digitalisation of diplomacy has become an inseparable part of the process of global political change, and affects what states do, how they do it, how they relate to each other, and what their relationship is to other operating actors on the international stage. As noted, this body of work recognises this changing political and diplomatic landscape, and acknowledges the new international order which is now composed of powerful state and non-state actors, all of whom hold the power to influence change.

## *Practice*

Now within this changing international order, we can see that digital diplomacy becomes nowhere more essential than its role within the projection of foreign policy. Indeed, when used properly (of which digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives play a key role), digital diplomacy can be seen as a persuasive and timely supplement to traditional diplomacy that can help a country advance its foreign policy goals, extend international reach, and influence people who will never set foot in any of the world's embassies (Lowy Interpreter, 2015).

The report produced by Jan Melissen and Brian Hocking entitled *Diplomacy in the Digital Age*, proves particularly helpful in the endeavour to shine a spotlight on a number of key developments, within the diplomatic craft as brought about by the digital age. With relevant case studies, the authors illustrate how that the practice and impact of digital diplomacy can be observed at three levels.

*First is that the tools of the digital age create new issues and routines, while simultaneously redefining existing ones in all spheres of human interaction. There are many examples of behavioural mutations in the diplomatic world. For instance, diplomatic missions' outreach to the societies of host countries is as old as diplomacy itself, even as 'offline' public diplomacy work has received a great deal of attention in the public outreach strategies of foreign ministries. The penetration of and interaction with foreign publics, however, has taken on entirely new dimensions in the digital age (Clingendael Report, 2015: 11).*

MFAs today are granted the tools to engage and interact with foreign and their own publics to an extent never before seen. To build diplomatic coalitions and networks online, which through increased numbers, shared values and resources, serve to strengthen their diplomatic aims and objectives. These tools have become important strategic assets and effective means of strategic communication for increased international and domestic public opinion. From Twitter Q & A's to YouTube live streams, Ministries can now use novel channels of digital communication to implement their policies with greater reach and

possible effect. Whilst these channels are still not fully understood in terms of their impact, they have nonetheless become established methods and tools in which MFA's and their agents carry out new or existing policy. From the Internet, to social media platforms, to internal IT systems, MFA's now use a range of information technologies that transform Ministry operations toward effectiveness, efficiency, service delivery and the promotion of democracy.

These developments are particularly pertinent during moments of conflict wherein **diplomatic coalition building** and **networking** remain key ingredients to successful crisis management (ibid). Digital tools allow MFA's to reach hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people during a crisis. MFA's can subsequently use this reach to connect with state and non-state who hold a stake in the crisis itself. Through Facebook Q & A sessions, Periscope briefings, and instant Twitter updates, today's MFA's can inform actors of their foreign policy positions, their aims, and the actions they intend to use to achieve them. Practiced more subtly, diplomats can now use online networking and coalition building to indirectly back certain crisis positions. For example, they may use the power of the retweet or reshare to highlight or expand the message of their contemporaries, without actually taking a direct position on the crisis itself. This method is a new and revised form of nonverbal diplomatic communication and creates new avenues in which crisis communication activities and strategies can now be carried out.

Despite these changes and their increasing necessity in the practice of contemporary diplomatic communication and diplomatic crisis communication in particular, a holistic understanding of their practice remains somewhat elusive. While MFA's and their corresponding agencies are indeed adopting these novel tools within crisis communication strategies, it is arguable that many MFA's have embraced these technologies without having a clear understanding of what their impact is or how this impact can be used to manage diplomatic practice and policy objectives more effectively. This is the very gap this research seeks to exploit. Through the exploration of two communicative capabilities in particular, this research begins to dissect and analyse the changing nature of these digital tools for the purpose of diplomatic activities.

Given that the history of the evolution in communications technologies rarely involves the supplanting of one form by another, **the report notes a second key development in that**

**hybridity is the norm in current media and diplomatic environments** (ibid 2015: 3). Existing forms of communication, adapting to the emergence of new technologies, generate rapidly evolving ‘hybrid’ media environments in which traditional media produce new ‘online’ ways of conceptualising, sharing and visualising ‘the news’ (ibid). The authors draw on empirical cases to demonstrate these claims in an online diplomatic environment, while also illustrating that in diplomacy, the balance between old and new forms of communication is different, and perhaps does not reflect similar revolutionary changes. For example, ‘when in the spring of 2015 Pope Francis publicly referred to the ‘first genocide of the 20th century’ in Armenia, Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu was quick to get world attention by voicing his protest through Twitter. This was of course the opening public discussion to this diplomatic quarrel and was paralleled by traditional diplomatic initiatives through less visible channels’ (Melissen and Hocking 2015: 3). Melissen and Hocking rightly purport, that new developments experienced in the diplomatic sphere, developments caused and brought about as a result of the digital age, have not led the complete removal over tried and tested ones. But in future diplomacy, ‘we expect to see the progressive adoption of a mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ modes of communication – within governmental networks, in transnational multi-stakeholder environments, and in both friendly and antagonistic relations between states’ (ibid: 4).

We have seen these developments happening nowhere more clearly than during a crisis, where diplomats are expected to incorporate new communicative tools in how they negotiate, communicate, and represent themselves to state and non-state actors alike. Insofar as speed and ability to react to crisis events in an effective and appropriate manner are important components of any successful crisis management, MFA’s have no other option than to adapt to this hybridity of tools.

Ignoring this hybridity has proven to have disastrous consequences for a wide range of actors. One needs only to look at the attempted coup in Turkey in the summer of 2016 to see this play out. In this case, the actors attempting to take over relied heavily on the old coup ‘playbook’, involving the control of traditional vehicles of power (i.e. traditional news outlets and the offline buildings of government). It was historically believed that once these arenas were successfully in the hands of the opposing powers, the coup would be complete. But the case of Turkey demonstrated that the rebel actor’s failure to take into account the prominent role of social media proved detrimental to their cause. In this instance, social

media platforms enabled not only the citizens of Turkey to mobilise swiftly and efficiently against the coup, but also allowed the President to take to the real-time application Facetime to request a ‘call to arms’ for national and international support against the coup. In a matter of hours after the coup was initiated, the streets of Istanbul were full, and the online space was crowded with online messages of support for the reigning government. The coup was subsequently derailed by the power of digital communication in a time of crisis. This coup attempt was one of the first to happen within the age of real – time governance. The aforementioned example proves the undeniable role, power and impact that 21st century technologies have during times of national crisis. More than this, the attempted coup shows that the rebel’s failure to regard the new hybrid nature of the online and offline worlds ultimately proved detrimental to the achievement of their aims.

The third and final development noted by the report, states that **the challenges posed by digital technologies will demand strategies dealing with the integration of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ environments** (Clingendael Report 2015: 12). This is particularly true for an MFA when seeking to sculpt and achieve effective crisis communication strategies. The speed and the scope to which foreign ministries have been confronted with this challenge has arguably been faster and probably more encompassing than anything they have experienced since their beginnings in the 17th century. Crisis communication strategies today, require a redefinition of roles and new diplomatic skills, and involve a challenge to vertical organisational structures and traditional work processes within foreign ministries, which we have previously discussed with our discussions on the global information age. According to Melissen and Hocking (2015: 13) ‘the good news is that new technologies facilitate such fundamental change requiring the integration of existing analogue and emerging digital spaces’. One area which falls within this, and in which we now turn, is the use of core communication capabilities within diplomatic crisis communication strategies.

### *2.3.1 Digital Diplomacy, Soft Power and Virtual Enlargement: An Inclusive Relationship?*

As previously noted, digital diplomacy can be understood and employed as a novel and practical extension of soft power. And in the case of this research in particular, it can be seen as an analytical lens in which to develop and explain the concept of virtual state

enlargement. Where virtual enlargement is defined by this research as an attempt by states to project their values and interests through virtual strategies in order to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate. In the case of this research in particular, virtual state enlargement or the quest for state virtual enlargement is assessed during a crisis period, where states may seek to expand their influence and/or manage domestic and international expectations through digital means, as part of their crisis management strategy. Therefore, when we speak of virtual state enlargement (a process which arguably stems from the practice of digital diplomacy itself, when viewing digital diplomacy as a means through which to achieve political objective through digital means), we must acknowledge its conceptual and practical relationship to soft power.

At the broadest level, we can see soft power as a concept which Joseph Nye defined as the ability to set the agenda in world politics through the tools of persuasion, i.e. enticing and attracting others through the force of one's beliefs, values and ideas, and not through military or economic coercion (Nye, 1990: 176). Despite Nye's concept's popularity, current power scholarship is still divided about the nature of power. Some scholars see capabilities (Singer, 1963) as the most important factor and others see it as a behaviour outcome (Nye 2002, 2004, 2011). Nye (2011:11) built his concept as a behaviour outcome, or as he calls it 'relational power concept' on the multiple faces of power. For Nye, soft power is really the combination of second and third faces of power together.

When viewing digital diplomacy through this lens, we can see that the informational power of getting others to want what you want, through attraction instead of coercion, defies sovereignty-bound ways of comprehending power. Therefore, not surprisingly, Joseph Nye (2004) introduced the subject by recalling the historic misunderstanding of soft power by policymakers, and intellectuals, who were long inured to associating power with iron and steel production or simply sheer numbers of punitive consequences measured by bombs and deaths. As noted, there has been alongside Nye, a flurry of literature on the analysis of soft power, with a number of scholars attempting to expand the notion of soft power as a rainbow application of nation-building, aid, reconstruction and image-burnishing, as an adjunct to the fight against terrorism or in support of a conventional military campaign (Lennon 2003; Leigh. 2004). Hallams (2010: 541), puts it aptly writing that the 'the art of soft power in the twenty-first century is fusing the traditional tools of diplomacy and

negotiation and the ability to harness the power and potential inherent in the new and emerging technologies that globalisation has wrought’.

In his edited volume *the new public diplomacy: soft power in international relations* (2005), Jan Melissen addresses soft power more systematically through the long tradition of public diplomacy, as that form of open diplomacy, that targets the public opinion in foreign societies with or without the consent of their governments. Included in the measure of public diplomacy is also the explicit cultivation of non-official groups within a target state's domestic sphere, such as civil society groups, influential individuals and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to Nye (2002) in terms of power resources, these new groups rarely possess much hard-coercive power, but the information revolution has greatly enhanced their soft power, power which is primarily associated with ideas, cultures, and policies. Nye goes on to state that ‘not only is there a great increase in the number of transnational and governmental contacts, but there has also been a change in type’ (2012: 67). This is of consequence to the international stage, as while earlier transnational flows were heavily controlled by large bureaucratic organisations, the lower costs of communication in the Internet era have opened the field to loosely structured network organizations with little headquarters staff, and even individuals (Ibid). Therefore, according to Nye ‘these nongovernmental organizations and networks are particularly effective in penetrating states without regard to borders. Because they often involve citizens who are well placed in the domestic politics of several countries, they are able to focus the attention of the media and governments on their preferred issues’ (2012: 67).<sup>20</sup>

These shifting actors of importance, of which we have previously discussed in relation to the impact of digitalisation of diplomacy on the international order, allow us to present the case that while geographical communities and sovereign states will continue to play a major role on the international stage (and their importance should not be diminished), we must also realise that these states will be less self-contained and more porous. They will have to share the stage with actors who now hold similar powers to increase their own soft power. Powers which are created and projected through the digital device. Providing one

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<sup>20</sup> The treaty banning land mines was the result of an interesting coalition of Internet-based organizations working with middle-power governments, such as Canada, and some individual politicians and celebrities, including the late Princess Diana. Environmental issues are another example (Nye 2012).

of the most poignant commentaries on the role of soft power within the changing nature of the international order, Nye states:

*Governments that want to see rapid development will find that they have to give up some of the barriers to information flow that historically protected officials from outside scrutiny. No longer will governments that want high levels of development be able to afford the comfort of keeping their financial and political situations inside a black box, as Burma and North Korea have done. That form of sovereignty proves too expensive. Even large countries with hard power, such as the US, find themselves sharing the stage with new actors and having more trouble controlling their borders. Cyberspace will not replace geographical space and will not abolish state sovereignty, but like the town markets in feudal times, it will coexist with them and greatly complicate what it means to be a sovereign state or a powerful country. Americans shaping foreign policy in the global information age will have to become more aware of the importance of the ways that the Internet creates new communications, empowers individuals and non-state actors, and increases the role of soft power (2012: 68)*

Now what Nye's remarks reveal, is not simply the role of soft power and technological tools within the current international order, but also the opportunities currently presented to states which allow them to engage in a process of virtual state enlargement as a result of these latter concepts and practices<sup>21</sup>. This engagement, be this through a process of virtual enlargement or otherwise, highlights a central aspect of the soft power discussion, that is the use of soft power instruments to achieve diplomatic or political objectives. Despite the necessity of studying these very instruments one of the complications of soft power literature is that they focus on the influence attempt and/or the outcome of soft power and not the capabilities. With that said, it is acknowledged that both the outcome of soft power initiatives be difficult to measure, as we cannot know for sure what lead to the changed

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<sup>21</sup> As referenced by J. Nye, we can argue that any actor, be they an individual actor, a civil organisation or an NGO, now have the opportunity to engage in a process of virtual enlargement through a projection of soft power through digital means. While recognising the power of these new actors, and their increasing numbers, this research turns its focus to how official diplomatic actors, specifically MFAs and the actors who represent them, use these digital tools to help virtually enlarge their state power.

preferences or to the renewed agenda in other countries. The other downside of the intended influence literature is that scholars cannot be sure what the intended result were and how do those differ from the actual results or outcomes. In other words, showing causation can be a serious issue in this literature. This ‘downside’ is indeed a core methodological challenge which this very investigation faces, that is the accurately capturing the intended result versus actual outcome.

By focusing on the measurable and objective parts of digital diplomatic practice (such as digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives), undertaken within a soft power framework, this research hopes to create a less confusing and more objective measurement of power extension during times of crisis. By focusing on these capabilities, we will be also better able to detect variations among countries in their soft power capabilities as well as in their actual foreign policy usages. Conceptualising capabilities (Singer, 1963, Tellis, 2010 et, al.) has historically proved to be an effective method in measuring in hard power, thus we will seek to do the same when it comes to the different faces of soft power.

Finally, it should be noted that one way to consider the process of virtual enlargement, and the soft power capabilities which assist in its production, is through the lens of medium theory, theory borrowed from media studies, and initially presented in Chapter One.<sup>22</sup> What medium theory proposes, is that the ‘*n*th capability’ of the medium (or in this case the soft power capability), enlarges the reach of its creator and with that might also supersede its original design once it is embraced by a wider community (McLuhan 1974), a reality we have seen played out with the role of social media in particular. In a well-known parlance, ‘the medium is the message’, and it ‘is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs’ (McLuhan 1974: 16), medium theory argues that the media are not simply neutral vessels for conveying information between environments; rather they are environments in and of themselves. For example, the invention of the electric light bulb did not merely introduce continuous lighting to urban areas; it also transformed the possibilities of public and private advertising. The invention of the television and computer not only altered human interfaces with business but also

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<sup>22</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, medium theory in this instance is drawn from the work of media philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who argues that any medium is more than a technological arm of efficacy; it is simultaneously a message by itself, and both a potential and actual shaper of representation, aesthetic, memory and other content carried upon it (McLuhan 1974: 51–66, 70–71).

spawned new occupations, altered sense ratios between machine and humankind and speeded up experience and its corresponding decision-making. This is of particular relevance to this research, as in the policy realm, politico-diplomatic discourse as a policy qua medium, can generate a corresponding form of virtual state engagement. Throughout our research, we see this theory played out with each signalling mechanisms working to create an overall narrative discourse, bringing to life an environment in which the creation, projection and reception of foreign policy online can expand a state's power online, allowing them to achieve their foreign policy goals, and provide more effective management on the crisis while doing so.

Why medium theory is important to further explain the process of virtual state enlargement, is that it recognises that the process itself is a result of the 'nth' power of the digital device many actors now hold. Here we can see that the digital device has emerged with the power to create digital signals and online narratives, thereby providing states with the power to expand their nations power online, achieve their foreign policy goals, and provide more effective management on the crisis while doing so. In the policy realm, politico-diplomatic discourse as a policy qua medium can therefore been seen to generate a corresponding form of virtual enlargement (Chong 2010). In the case of MFAs and its serving diplomatic actors, a process of virtual enlargement can also be achieved through a variety of means, including audience socialisation online, contribution to regime norm-building via online means, projection of foreign policies via digital platforms, and increased engagement with actors through online networks (all brought about the 'nth' capability of the digital device). The two political crises examined within this body of work, demonstrate how certain diplomatic actors used a number of these processes to expand their virtual power during the conflict, and ultimately how they used soft power means, to convert their bases of anomalous power into instruments for virtual enlargement. Instruments which this research conceptualises as the novel practices of digital diplomatic signalling and the creation of online crisis narratives. Therefore, by recognising the framework and impact of soft power within the international order (in which the practice of digital diplomacy operates within), we can begin to assess and explore in our upcoming chapters, some of the feasible methods which MFAs can now use (and indeed in some cases are using) to exert their state influence and presence in the global information space.

## **2.4 Diplomatic Crisis Communication: Practice, Impact and Digital Capabilities**

Positioned within this framework of diplomacy as form of institutionalised communication, lies the distinct art of diplomats to practice it. This is particularly true during a time of crisis. However, crises are not how they used to be, and neither is the role and power of communication which happens within them. Contemporary online communication tools are used by diplomats and MFA's as a vessel to connect with their online audiences and provide up to date consular information to their citizens on the ground, whilst continuously acting as a central communication hub for all stakeholders during the crises period in question. As with any major crisis, whether it is domestic or foreign, the public citizen today expects its government to respond quickly, to gather and disseminate accurate information, and ultimately to use such information to inform and enact proper policy. Failure in this regard, can serve to fatally damage the reputation of an administration at best, or continue and exacerbate the crises at worst. Modern crises are also characterised by complexity, interdependence, and politicisation, and during them the pillars of normal life come crashing down. As a result, many social scientists and practitioners share a distinct urge to better understand crises, and for MFA's in particular, to manage and communicate once within them.

A key component of successful crisis management has always involved timely engagement with communications practices. Strategies of foreign-policy crisis-management cannot, or should not be, conceived of without a strict adherence to communicative practices. With the advent of a 24-hour news cycle and an increasingly internet-savvy audience with ever – changing technology at its fingertips, strategic crisis management has become more important than ever (Boin et al; 2005). According to Boin, Hart & Stern 'in times of crisis, communities and members of organisations expect their public leaders to minimise the impact of the crisis at hand, while critics and bureaucratic competitors try to seize the moment to blame incumbent rulers and their policies. In this extreme environment, policy makers must somehow establish a sense of normality, and foster collective learning from the crisis experience'. To mend or exacerbate the crisis, MFA's and their agents have always had to communicate effectively in spite of the strategic challenges faced, the political risks and opportunities encountered, the errors made, and pitfalls needed to avoid during a crisis. Contemporary crisis communications tactics remain worthy practices of crisis management in international relations, and are increasingly integrated in foreign-

policy communications in a variety of forms: traditional diplomatic activity, preventive diplomacy, propaganda, psychological operations, public diplomacy, cultural, cyber and media diplomacy.

One aspect of crisis communication which should be highlighted and has been touched upon during our discussion of the global information age is the acknowledgement that the decision-making process has become less hierarchical. As a result, key diplomatic functions that play a vital role during a crisis period (e.g. traditional representation, reporting, negotiation, and additional facilitation and coordination), have been enlarged. This situation reflects a shift away from clearly defined, more or less hierarchical relationships, towards a more fluid and dynamic, less hierarchical and well-defined organisation that must deal with crosscutting equities, continually changing boundaries and jurisdictions, and formal and informal agencies and interests.

Within this arena of crises communication, there arguably lies two core themes: the consular, referring to communication between diplomats and their public, and the political, which sees communication (tactically or not) centred more on the topic issues at play. While both themes reign strong within any crisis situation, the consular function has arguably adapted somewhat more naturally to contemporary technological advancements, or indeed has proved more malleable. This point is demonstrated through our upcoming case studies showing the marked difference in how, and to what extent, diplomatic accounts choose to actively engage in consular issues over political ones. One reasoning for this difference may arise from the acknowledgement that the consular aspect of diplomatic affairs has always proved less controversial than the political (controversial in this instance, referring to communicative activities that may prove to alter diplomatic relations in a negative manner). For example, informing citizens on where they can receive aid, or providing up-to-date information on Embassy contact points during a crisis remain substantially less controversial than speaking out on the political aspects of the crisis itself. Because there is less potential for conflict when speaking out on consular issues does not mean there exists less pressure on Embassies and diplomatic agents to do so. In light of the technological revolution, there has emerged increasingly more pressure for Embassies and their agents on every level, to act in a manner which ensures their citizens receive the most relevant and appropriate information concerning their current and future well-being. The technological revolution has only emphasised the growing importance of communication

with the broader public, both domestic and foreign, and the need to meet public expectations during a time of crisis or otherwise.

The political theme, however, is more complex. Due to its potential to create conflict between states or damage existing relations, the political dimension of crisis communication has proved less malleable to technological advancements than has the consular. Tracing the intractability of the political dimension requires an appreciation of its evolution. Historically, the political theme refers to communication between official bodies; that is, communication between receiving and sending states, amongst states themselves on the ground, and between national states and international organisations. This communication type usually came in the style of official demarches, collective representations, public broadcasts and statements, and official reporting to international bodies such as the UN, EU, ASEAN etc., with its primary aim to present the Ministry's position on the crises in question. Such a presentation of views would, and arguably does, have a number of direct consequences for the Ministry at large, the least of which is informing the public of their state's views, crafting a narrative for the receiving state to read, and sending both implicit and explicit signals to any parties involved. The political is perhaps the more skilful art of communication, requiring tact and in most instances careful crafting. In comparison with natural, humanitarian, and technical catastrophes, political conflicts usually have hidden or unspoken goals and meaning that invariably influence the choice of communication strategy and conduct of all actors who engage with it.

The ICT revolution has transformed the ways in which consular and political crisis communications take place, as discussed in the previous Section 2.2.3. Historically speaking, crises communication activities were part of the information work of diplomatic missions concentrated around informing elites. Yet today, governments and other diplomatic actors possess new tools in which they can communicate directly to the public without having to use traditional channels of mediation. The emergence of these new capabilities has had the effect of blurring the boundaries between the once rather distinct forms of political communication: propaganda, lobbying, and public diplomacy. What we immediately notice when comparing the contemporary crises of today, is that the platforms of social media have emerged as part of the diplomat's core arsenal when it comes to engaging with any and all level of crises communication. These platforms have given the diplomats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century new ways in which to make their voice heard and position

known. One only needs to glance at the world's current crises to see this thesis come to light and nowhere does it shine brighter than during times of crises, particularly during the conflicts this research chooses to explore – that of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict and the 2013/4 Euromaidan movement. The major shifts in diplomatic crisis communication and in particular, communicative capabilities, as a direct result of the information age, will be discussed below. Such a discussion will provide a worthy and coherent platform to build our upcoming conceptual framework in which these practices can be analysed and explored.

#### *2.4.1 Crisis Communication Capabilities*

Despite the growing area of research on how the technological age has affected diplomacy (in which we have expanded on above in (Section 2.2.2. and 2.2.3), one area that remains relatively unexplored by comparison, is the realm of crisis communication capabilities. While the preceding sections have alluded to these capabilities in part, due to their unexplored potential for projecting foreign policy message and reach during a crisis, and expanding a state's power, they are one area of diplomatic communication that now requires our detailed attention.

At the broadest level, communicative capabilities refer here to online tools that are used to carry out acts of diplomatic communication (e.g. sending out press briefing, making public a government's crisis position, crafting and projecting crisis state narratives, etc.). Such capabilities sit at the interchange between foreign policy activities in the global information age, digital diplomatic communication, and digital diplomatic crisis communication, and offer unexplored potential for analysing the use of unique and emerging digital tools during times of conflict.

Within our research we provide a focus on two capabilities in particular - diplomatic signalling and narratives. Despite both capabilities earning themselves a strong place in diplomacy's history books, an exploration and their comprehension of their use in the current era is yet to be fully understood. Put simply, the connections between how they *were* used and how they *are* being used has not been made. Through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological framework, demonstrated by two distinct case

studies in which to illuminate it, the upcoming chapters will address these very questions, reasons and connections. These chapters shine a spotlight on how both capabilities work in the digital age, and with what consequences. Before such analysis takes place, however, a firm foundation in which to build it must be constructed. We then turn to the *historic* use of diplomatic signalling, and narratives with diplomatic communicative practices to assess their relationship to crisis communication activities in general. We will then leave Chapter Three to speak to their practice within the digital age, and Chapter Four and Five to demonstrate empirical findings on both practices during two distinct times of crisis.

#### *2.4.2 Communication Capability: Diplomatic Signalling*

Communication is the essence of diplomacy, and the practice of signalling is therefore an essential component to this. Diplomatic communication to other polities is an important part of the execution of all diplomatic policies, with this communication having verbal as well as non-verbal elements. Indeed, our day-to-day verbal communication includes a sub-text of signals: some verbal and others non-verbal, some deliberate and others unintended, some subtle and others obvious. Methods of signalling range from physical gestures and facial expressions to choices such the order in which topics in a conversation are raised, what other people are present to overhear a conversation, and the tone or volume of voice used when talking about a certain topic. As noted by C. Jonsson (2010), the international diplomatic system may be described as a universal communications network where the exchange of signals is a professional preoccupation. Thus, we may think of diplomats as ‘intuitive semioticians,’ that is as conscious producers and interpreters of signs. In this vein, we can think of a diplomatic signal or define it as ‘a kind of sign which is used to generate a response of some kind’ (Jonsson and Hall 2005: 75).

With that said there is a fine line in distinguishing conceptually between a diplomatic message and a diplomatic signal, with this distinction lying in the argument that a signal can be used to reinforce a message or to contradict it. In short, it is way of packing a diplomatic message. It is not simply the message itself. For example, compare an invitation to dinner mentioned at the beginning of a conversation with a smile and a welcoming tone of voice with an invitation mentioned at the end of a conversation as an afterthought, in a hesitant tone. In the first case the signals reinforce the message, in the second, the listener

may feel that her presence is not really desired. Raymond Cohen (1987: 3) writes “States have become adept at extra-linguistic forms of communication...[these] do not replace language, rather they complement, illuminate and supplement it.” In diplomatic communication, as in communication between individuals, signals are frequently used to transmit messages. Actors of diplomacy often choose to use signals rather than direct communication for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is inappropriate for one actor to make too direct a suggestion or demand of another, or to transmit a message in person. A message passed through signals rather than directly also saves face for the receiving party, which can comply without seeming weak or refuse to comply without creating confrontation by simply ignoring the signals.

Signalling, in short, can therefore be seen as essential to diplomacy as to a busy airport (Jonsson & Hall 2002). One crucial difference however, is that there is much more scope for ambiguity in diplomatic signalling. Ambiguous signalling between pilots and air traffic controllers may be a prelude to disaster, but in diplomatic communication ambiguity is considered constructive and creative (cf. Bell, 1971:74). Jonsson et al. present the claim that there are several reasons why ‘constructive ambiguity’ characterises - and probably always has characterised - diplomatic signalling. While needing to communicate, polities want to conceal vital information from each other. Moreover, ambiguity may be a deliberate means to retain flexibility and to make signals disclaimable, allowing the sender to later argue, ‘I never said that’, or ‘this is not what I meant’, if the situation calls for it. This technique is particularly efficient when diplomats may wish to fly a ‘trial balloon’ – if during a crisis, for example, they do not have the time to present a clear position of where they may stand on the issue at play, or the situation is rapidly changing leaving them to be wary of presenting publicly a strong position. By using this technique, diplomats can avoid embarrassment and disassociate themselves from the message, if it turns out not to be a popular one, or receives a particularly negative response.

The possibility of duplicity and deception also contributes to the ambiguity of diplomatic signals. Sir Henry Wotton’s 1604 characterisation of a diplomat as ‘an honest man sent abroad to lie for his country’ has gained notoriety. The association of diplomacy with deception can be traced back to Ancient Greece. The Greeks identified Hermes with charm, trickery, cunning, and deception and subsequently transferred those traits to envoys; ever since they have continued to be associated with diplomacy in varying degrees (Frey and

Frey, 1999:14–15; cf. Brown, 1947). The fact that there is no way of knowing for sure which signals are false and which are true makes for a diplomatic penchant for mistrusting messages and always reading between the lines. ‘The fact that states send and pay attention to signals indicates that statesmen feel they are more apt to give true than false information’ (Jervis, 1970:70). Thus, there are obvious restraints on lying in diplomatic communication, the most important of which is the loss of reputation should the deception fail.

Ambiguity is often prompted by the need to take multiple audiences into account. Explicit and unambiguous signalling, while desirable Vis-a`-Vis one category of receivers, might have disastrous effects on the sender’s relations with another category of receivers. In diplomatic signalling, the potential audiences may be international and domestic. Another factor, contributing to the ambiguity of diplomatic signals, is the prevalence of non-verbal messages and ‘body language’ in communication between states. Digital diplomacy, in the spirit of hybridity, doesn't completely solve the problem of ambiguity. Videos and their derivatives, continue to display body language, and digital diplomacy is arguably just reshaping ambiguity through other means. Through the power of the retweet and reshare, or the signal that is sent in relation to how frequently an actor engages in the discussion online.

In sum, the tension between the need for clarity and the incentives for ambiguity, may at times impel diplomats to spend a large amount of effort on the formulation and interpretation of signals (Jönsson and Hall 2002). Jönsson and Hall write;

*signalling does not necessarily imply intentionality. Even unconscious, unintended behaviour and non-behaviour may convey messages in a diplomatic setting, something which is exploited in the digital age through the power of retweets, or following or not following certain actors. Hence, we may refer to signalling whenever one actor displays behaviour that is perceived and interpreted by another, whether or not it is spoken or intended or even within the actor’s conscious awareness (2002: 6).*

Perhaps one of the most seminal works on this subject matter is Robert Jervis (2009) work, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, which demonstrates that although decision-makers' perceptions of the world and of other actors may diverge from reality, this does not stop them acting on these perceptions. For Jervis, there are three main factors involved in perception; beliefs, images, and intentions. Perception involves a process of inference in which actors develop understandings (beliefs) about other actors (images) and what the others will do in given circumstances (intentions (ibid)). From this perspective, intentions are the actions the observer expects the actor will take under given circumstances—as opposed to the actions the actor himself plans or hopes to take. For an observer to predict an actor's intentions, he first must distinguish between internal and external influences on the actor's behaviour—that is, the degrees to which his behaviour is driven by situational constraints and by internal decision processes; and second, must try to understand the actor's internal decision process. Applied to states' intentions, Jervis hints at a framework much like prospect theory in arguing that states may be willing to pay higher costs and take greater risks depending on how they value the status quo or value changing the status quo. Applied to individual decision-makers, various factors can alter an actor's intended actions, including unexpected events, incorrect assessments of cause and effect, revised goals or values, and contexts for events that differ from those expected.

In a contemporary application of Jervis's ideas, it is argued that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990 in part because he misread the signals of American leaders with regard to the independence of Kuwait (Jervis, 1996). Leaders of the United States and Iraq in the run-up to the most recent Gulf War might have been operating under cognitive biases that made them value certain kinds of information more than others, whether or not the information was true. Jervis proved that, once a leader believed something, that perception would influence the way the leader perceived all other relevant information. 'Since all actors know (or quickly learn) that all public acts, except those self-evidently accidental or inadvertent, may be considered significant, the assumption tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy' (R. Cohen, 1987:20). Nevertheless, the tendency among diplomats and statesmen to look for message value in most behaviour and non-behaviour seems to rest on an implicit assumption of intentionality.

We may think of diplomats as 'intuitive semioticians,' that is as conscious producers and interpreters of signs. Although semiotics is rarely part of their formal education, diplomats

are by training and experience experts at weighing words and gestures with a view to their effect on potential receivers (Jonsson, 1990:31). We may also be reminded that hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, is explicitly associated with Hermes, the Ancient Greek deity of diplomacy (cf. Constantinou, 1996: 35). Academic semioticians emphasise the arbitrary nature of signs. Meaning does not reside in the message itself, but is produced through social interaction. Successful communication, according to semioticians, presupposes a common code, a certain (often unconscious) pre - knowledge that is necessary for understanding a message. A common code establishes what German hermeneutic philosophers call *Interpretations gemeinschaft*, initial commonality with respect to interpretation (Rommetveit, 1974:88). Professional diplomacy rests on such a shared code. On the other hand, diplomatic agents are members of separate national cultures with their specific codes. The code and conventions of the diplomatic culture do not necessarily take precedence over the code and conventions of national cultures. When interpreted by members of different national cultures who bring different codes to them, even verbal signs may produce different meanings. Conversely, national cultural conditioning does not represent 'a cognitive straight jacket' (Fisher, 1980:46). Both types of codes and conventions usually apply, in a varying mix.

Diplomats have to be content with saying both less and more than they mean: less, because their verbal and nonverbal signalling will never immediately convey their meaning; more, because their signalling will always convey messages and involve them in consequences other than those intended (Jönsson and Hall 2002). The interpretation of signals, in other words, includes both 'selective' and 'constructive' elements. Whereas the reasoning thus far primarily refers to contemporary diplomacy, there is reason to believe that these observations concerning diplomatic signalling tend to be timeless. Let us illustrate this with a number of examples of skilful uses of signal ambiguity taken from different eras and various parts of the globe. We start with a late example, taken from the Amarna Letters, recording diplomatic correspondence in the Ancient Near East more than 3,000 years earlier. These tablets reflect a keen and jealous preoccupation with status and reciprocity. In one such tablet, the Babylonian king recounts an incident that would seem to put him in an unfavourable light (cf. Jonsson, 2000:197–198). His initial bid for the pharaoh's daughter had been refused with reference to a marriage taboo ('from time immemorial no daughter of the king of Egypt is given to anyone'). Subsequently, the Babylonian king then requested the daughter of a commoner instead: 'Someone's grown daughters, beautiful

women, must be available. Send me a beautiful woman as if she were your daughter.’ The pharaoh again refused. Why should the Babylonian king recall a seemingly humiliating episode like this in his dispatch?

A possible answer may arrive in the latter part of the letter, where the Babylonian king offers his daughter to the pharaoh in marriage: ‘Should I, perhaps, since you did not send me a woman, refuse you a woman, just as you did to me, and not send her? But my daughters being available, I will not refuse one to you’ (cf. Jonsson, 2000:198). He goes on to demand a heavy bride price in gold and establish a deadline for payment. If the main purpose of the Babylonian king’s letter was to bargain for the highest possible bride price in return for his daughter, the references to the pharaoh’s dual snubs make sense. The king probably knew that his request for the pharaoh’s daughter would be refused. And the following ruse might have been a tactic to expose the pharaoh’s hypocrisy (the second refusal to provide a bride could not be accounted for by religious taboos) and gain the moral upper hand (Ibid). The Babylonian king, in short, made cunning use of the convention of strict reciprocity between Great Kings. By reminding the pharaoh of his failure to maintain the customary reciprocity, he hoped to increase the compensation for offering his daughter in marriage.

While the architects of diplomatic signalling in the Amarna period did not have to worry about multiple audiences, we can discern similarities with the previous example in the subtle manipulation of a common code to send messages beyond the manifest ones. Knowledge of prevalent conventions makes the signals perceptible and understandable by ‘insiders’.

The second example, highlighting adroit nonverbal signalling, rests on a numismatic analysis of the early efforts by Philip II to make Macedonia the core of Panhellenic unity in the fourth century BC (West, 1923). Philip’s early choice of coin standard was used to send powerful diplomatic messages to multiple audiences. Of the three existing standards from which to select (the Attic, the Rhodian, and the Phoenician) Philip chose the Phoenician. His rejection of the Attic standard signalled that he refused to recognise Athenian commercial supremacy. The popular Rhodian standard was almost as dominant in the Aegean during the fourth century as the Attic had been at the height of Athenian power in the fifth. While reflecting the lack of direct contact between Macedonia and the

cities where it was used, Philip's rejection of the Rhodian standard signalled that he was not looking toward Thrace and Asia Minor for commerce or alliances or conquest at that time.

The Phoenician standard was used by the Chalcidice League, a commercial rival and bitter enemy of Athens. By choosing this standard, Philip signalled to the sceptical Chalcidians 'that their interests were his, and that the Chalcidice peninsula and Macedonia together formed an economic unit in which Chalcidian merchants might claim a privileged position and a practical monopoly of trade and commerce' (West, 1923:33). Philip's adoption of the Phoenician coin standard 'was not a meaningless gesture, but the first step in the formation of a cooperative enterprise in which the Chalcidians were equal partners' (ibid: 36).

The final example comes from an episode from the 1971-72 American- Chinese parleys resulting in President Nixon's momentous visit to China. Within the conference press corps, there was a North Vietnamese journalist taking photographs, as his host, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, later told Kissinger apologetically. As such, Zhou could signal to North Vietnam (and ensure that Washington grasped) that China would not permit North Vietnam's problems to stand in the way of a rapprochement with the United States (R. Cohen, 1997:152). The example captures well several of the outlined dimensions of 'constructive ambiguity' characterising diplomatic signalling. The Chinese were able to exploit nonverbal behaviour to send desired messages to multiple audiences, while retaining deniability.

With that said, whether the practice is contemporary or historic, it is certain that diplomatic signalling is nowhere more essential than during *a time of crises*. The power of signalling has always been a key tool of diplomatic communication during times of crises, with the media invariably being used for this purpose (Jonsson, 1996). Using the media without attribution to sources is particularly efficient when diplomats wish to fly a 'trial balloon'. By using this technique, diplomats can then avoid embarrassment and disassociate themselves from the message if it turns out not to be a popular one, or receives a particularly negative response. During grave international crises, or when all diplomatic channels are severed, the media sometimes provide the only channels for communication and negotiation between rival actors. Take for example, the first phase of the 1979-1981 Iranian

Hostage crisis where the United States communicated with the hostage holders using the media (Larson, 1986). During the 1991 Gulf War, George Bush and Saddam Hussein hurled messages back and forth via the global news networks, forming a 'de facto hotline' between Washington and Baghdad (Newsom, 1996). Sparre (2001) and Spencer (2004) argue that the parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland conducted dialogues and exchanged messages through the media as formal negotiations among them were neither possible nor desirable. It was believed that the media dialogue in this case, helped both sides keep the peace process alive and while also exchanging significant messages.

In recent years, leaders have been using global communication more frequently than traditional diplomatic channels to deliver messages intended to alter an image or to open a new avenue of negotiation. As early as 1996, U.S. State Department spokesperson Nicholas Burns admitted;

*we use the briefings to send messages to foreign governments about our foreign policy. For example, I sometimes read carefully calibrated statements to communicate with the governments with which we have no diplomatic relation; Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea. Indeed, given the concentration of journalists in Washington and our position in the world, the United States is uniquely situated to use television to our best advantage, with our friends, as well as our adversaries.*

Leaders in other parts of the world soon began to employ the same technique. In January 1998, for example, the newly elected Iranian President Mohammed Khatami chose CNN to send a conciliatory message to the United States. CNN and the print media around the world alerted global audiences to the interview well in advance of the broadcast and the interview was extensively discussed afterwards. These cases mentioned are just but a fleeting reference to the historic use of signalling, particularly in relation to long standing security issues between states, or what we can call a 'short-term' crises. But it is the aim of this research to build on these previous examples, and with that, to explore the new world of diplomatic signalling in the digital age. Whether is carried out digitally or not, however, communication's importance and relevance (as discussed above) to the inner

workings of diplomacy still stands. It is exactly this continued relevance to diplomatic practice, moreover, that motivates this research towards understanding and conceptualising it for the modern day. Our upcoming chapter *'Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Crisis Narratives: A Conceptual Framework'* will seek to do just that.

#### *2.4.3 Communication Capability: Crisis Narratives*

The next communicative capability we turn to is the power of the crisis narrative. While distinct from the signalling communicative capability, this research presents the thesis that within the global information age — and during a time of crisis in particular — the signalling capability carries with it the ability to be used as a continuous communicative process. This matters to the narrative capability, because as the upcoming chapter will conceptualise, when used effectively the signalling process carries with it the potential to act as a tool through which diplomats can form, project and have received, their own state narrative. In short, a series of signals can work towards the sculpting and creation of a crisis narrative on behalf of the state. While both crisis communicative capabilities (signalling and narrative) can be viewed as worthy tools in their own right — in terms of their role and impact within an MFA's crisis communication strategy, and can stand alone for individual discovery and analysis (which we shall do in the upcoming section) — when both communicative capabilities are effectively combined, they arguably produce an even greater outcome for effective crisis management.

Turning then to the power of narratives as crisis communicative capabilities (pre - digital, or a stand-alone concept, as online crisis narratives will be explored in detail in our coming chapter), we can first say that within the political and social spheres, it is perhaps justified to claim that actors with vested interests are constantly engaged in narrating the conflict in which they find themselves. Whether it is it an unexpected hurricane, a terror attack, or an escalating military conflict, governments must quickly and efficiently disseminate a narrative that seeks to makes sense of their world. The diplomat on the ground must quickly act to become a master of communication, and if not, face the consequences of being left out of the crisis conversation, missing the opportunity to sculpt the narrative in their favour. Boin et al. (2005) have argued that such narratives should include an explanation of what has happened, what consequences can be expected, how the crisis is expected to be

resolved, which actors can be depended upon, and who should be avoided. At times of crisis in particular, persuasion becomes the key currency of crisis management and exploitation. Persuasion of course refers to a strategic or intentional use of tools to present a particular picture of the state during a crisis.

The idea of crisis narratives is anything but new. Nye argued that international affairs have become a matter of ‘whose story wins’ (Nye Jr, 2013; cf Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1999), referring in depth to the role of narratives in the conduct of international relations (Nye, 2008b, 2011). Many policy-makers and academics have argued that possessing an attractive strategic narrative has become vital for states seeking to exercise influence and maintain credibility in international relations. A narrative about a country's identity and how it expects to use power clarifies interests and direction internally, helps to ‘harness’ soft power generated by non-governmental actors, and creates expectations abroad. In their work, *Strategic narrative: A new means for understanding soft power*, Laura Roselle et al. write that ‘a compelling narrative can be a soft power resource, as people may be drawn to certain actors, events, and explanations that describe the history of a country, or the specifics of a policy’ (2014). By communicating a consistent conception of how a country exercises their power, domestic and overseas audiences can arrive at a shared expectation of how that country is likely to behave, opening the possibility for enhanced credibility and legitimacy for that country's foreign policy in the achievement of their objectives (Ibid).

In *the Evolution of Strategic Thought*, Lawrence Freedman builds on Roselle et al.’s point, writing that ‘narratives are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events’ (2006: 22). That is, if others are convinced that a narrative ‘fits’ within ongoing historical developments or can be understood in terms of those developments, then their responses become predictable. This cognitive dimension of narratives (understandings of cause/effect and means/ends) can work in parallel with a normative dimension. That is, interests and values can be constituted. Narratives can be used strategically to create or cohere identity groups and establish through them shared normative orientations (Ronfeld and Arquilla, 2001). For example, once individuals are convinced by a cause/effect narrative of climate change — that carbon emissions play a causal role and must therefore be limited — an identity group forms between those convinced by this, and they will distinguish themselves from ‘deniers’ in ‘the other camp’. Narratives can be seen as representations of a sequence of events and identities, and a

communicative tool through which political elites attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in achieving their objectives. Examples include the justification of policy objectives or policy responses to economic or security crises, the formation of international alliances, or the rallying of domestic public opinion.

As such, this research's conception of a narrative reflects Hajer's definition of storylines in politics: 'the key function of storylines is that they suggest unity in the bewildering variety of separate discursive component parts of a [policy] problem ... The underlying assumption is that people do not draw upon comprehensive discursive systems for their cognition, rather these are evoked through storyline's (1995: 56, italics added). That storylines are used to evoke certain cognition points to the strategic usefulness of narratives. They are strategic insofar as they suggest medium- and long-term goals or desirable end-states and how to get there, based on representations of the situation, the key actors, and 'causal beliefs' about how social and political processes operate and thus how certain actions could be expected to play out (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 3). They also involve political struggles over 'whose story wins' (Nye, in Gardels and Medavoy, 2009: viii). Critically, then, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals – they articulate end states and suggest how to get there. The self-understandings expressed through narratives reflexively influence a state's' perception of their interests and how the world works and should work (Harnisch and Maull (eds.) 2001; Tewes, 2002).

As many scholars of soft power have noted, the informational power of getting others to do what one wants through attraction, instead of coercion, defies sovereignty-bound ways of comprehending power. However, not all narratives are there to attract, but also to coerce. In the context of world politics, it makes far more sense to model attraction as a relationship that is constructed through representational force — a nonphysical but nevertheless coercive form of power that is exercised through communication. According to Janice Bially Mattern (2005b), representational force is a form of power that operates through the structure of a speaker's narrative representation of 'reality':

*a narrative expresses representational force when it is organized in such a way that it threatens the audience with unthinkable harm unless it submits, in word and in deed, to the terms of the speaker's viewpoint. The unthinkable*

*harm threatened, however, is not physical, for that would imply physical force rather than representational force. Instead the harm promised is to the victim's own ontological security – it is a threat that exploits the fragility of the sociolinguistic 'realities' that constitute the victim's Self' (2005: 586).*

When the author builds such a threat into the constructed narrative, they trap the victim with a 'non-choice' between compliance with the view she articulates or tacit participation in the destabilisation, and even 'death', of the victim's own subjectivity. Because this 'non-choice' leaves the victim no viable 'out', representational force is a very effective tool for actors whose purpose is to ensure the 'reality' status of some specific viewpoint (Ibid). Actors are likely to take advantage of this technique in world politics, where radical disagreement about the meaning of evidence is frequent, and the stakes of constructing a 'reality' can be high.

Whether a narrative is there to attract rather than coerce, a preliminary step towards elaborating information as power in a global information space is the recognition that information and those processes which are used to form and project it, are intrinsic political power resources in their own right. The nature of narratives as power resources proves particularly pertinent to our study of diplomatic crisis communication. Take for example, the series of crises of the Middle East (in all its forms), including one of our own case studies, the 2014 Israel – Gaza conflict. Since their inception, the narrative images of war and destruction surrounding these conflicts have been sculpted by those actors that were most powerful or even the most appealing to those who are receiving them. With every case of violence reported in the media turning into a prolonged tourism crisis in all the surrounding countries, the resulting narrative crafts the region as a problematic, unsafe area, which is dangerous for tourists (Haddad, Nasr, Ghiba 2015). Mansfeld (1994), for example, describes tourism in Israel through rising and falling cycles of visitors, depending on the particular conflict in which the country was involved. He also notes that a way a nation can work around the issues similar to those experienced by Israel (and indeed the state of Palestine) as a result of their involvement with war, is through a variety of crisis management models, including 'reputation management', 'issues management', 'crisis communication management', and 'image restoration'. According to Mansfeld, and a number of other scholars who deal with the relationship between crisis and communication

(Coombs, 1999; Beniot, 1995; Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006; Smith, 2003), the construction of alternative and ‘sellable’ narratives are one way, if not one of the primary ways (tools), which an MFA can use to help effectively manage the crisis in their favour.

*Narratives: context of crisis management*

Crisis management bears directly on the lives of citizens and the well-being of societies. The notion of ‘crisis management’ as used in this research is shorthand for a set of interrelated and extraordinary governance challenges. Crisis management is effective when a combination of tasks is accomplished: an emerging crisis is swiftly detected, responders understand what is happening, critical decisions are made by the right people, the efforts of responders are orchestrated, government communicates with its citizens, and the aftermath of a crisis is marked by proper accountability procedures and a willingness to collectively learn the lessons of that crisis.

None of these tasks are easy to perform. Information may not be forthcoming and communication is often difficult. The crisis response typically involves many organisations, public and private, pre-existing as well as newly emerging, increasingly so beyond national borders. Mass and social media scrutinise and assess the performance of crisis leaders and the impact of crisis response strategies, providing critics with a forum in which to air their grievances. It is in this atmosphere that MFA’s and their agents must shape responses and recovery operations, communicate with stakeholders, discover what went wrong, account for their actions, initiate steps for improvement, and eventually seek to re-establish a sense of normalcy. Crises create extraordinary circumstances for governance.

At the same time, crises also provide leaders with extraordinary opportunities to demonstrate their capacity to lead and fulfil aims that would be impossible to achieve under normal circumstances. When a sense of shock, vulnerability, loss and outrage pervades a community, crisis can produce strong criticism of the existing institutional order and of the policy processes that underpin it. Many crises nurture an appetite for radical change. Astute leaders will not hesitate to exploit this ‘window of opportunity’ (Boin’t Hart, Stern,

Sundelius 2017). As Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's chief of staff during the financial crises, put it: 'you never want a serious crisis to go to waste' (ibid: 4)

In the ever more densely 'mediated' political context of crises management, the capacity to capture public attention is a fundamental political – administrative asset. In a way, this capacity is inherent to political leadership: people expect leaders (in this case the representative of the sending state on the ground) to provide a believable and authoritative account that promises a way out of the crisis. They are expected to attribute conflicting interpretations of the critical events. To do this, leaders typically seek to direct or influence the behaviour of citizens that are affected or threatened by the crisis and the beliefs and attitudes of their many other constituencies, receiving state officials, international environment, press corps and general public. As previously noted, MFA's in an operational sense must inform (and sometimes instruct) citizens how to protect themselves during a natural or technical disaster. This might include communications about when and how to evacuate a stricken area, how to cope with or avoid contaminated food, or how to avoid contracting an infectious disease such as Ebola. Crisis communication is relatively straightforward, though technically quite complex, but for the most part, warning and informing the public tends to be apolitical.

This can quickly change, however, when MFAs politicians seek to impose a strategic definition of the situation that identifies culprits and pushes certain solutions that are clearly (or perhaps not so clearly) political in nature. According to Boin et. al 'most governments recognise crises for what they can offer: a podium from which to address a large and attentive audience' (2005: 149). Oppositions share this instinct also. Both know the stakes are high and seek to push their line of argument and act in a way that enhances their stature and protects or enhances their political capital (Ibid). While this may sound cynical, analysts and policymakers ignore this political reality at their own peril.

In times of crisis, citizens look to their leaders. The system is out of kilter, and MFA's and their agents are expected to chart pathways out of the crisis. The public also expects them to avert the threat or at least minimise the damage of the crisis at hand. They must explain what went wrong and what is going wrong. Narratives are a vital resource in doing so. Leaders must adapt, change or abandon routine ways of operating where needed and create public confidence in the new status quo. They should work toward enhancing community

resilience, which includes preparing society for future shocks (Ibid: 3). Crises can provide real-world ‘stress tests’ to the resilience of political systems and the crisis management capacities of diplomatic agents on the ground. They play out against a backdrop of public expectations (influenced in part by leaders themselves) that can be very challenging to meet. In some cases, the quality of crisis management makes the difference between life and death, chaos and order, breakdown and resilience. When MFA’s, their governments and their agents respond well to a crisis, the damage is limited. When emerging vulnerabilities and threats are adequately assessed and addressed, some potentially devastating contingencies simply do not happen. When crisis management fails, the impact increases.

One could say that it is only now that scholars and practitioners are truly beginning to understand that the meta-narratives used by citizens and the media to make sense of the world no longer apply, and that as people try to make sense of the new unfolding reality, they are bombarded by a myriad of different stakeholders each contradicting one another and each trying to frame the crisis to their own advantage. Citizens now expect their government and diplomatic officials to respond quickly to crises, to gather accurate information and to produce public positions (therefore beginning the narrative construction process) in a rapid and timely manner.

As noted within the previously explored crisis communicative capability of diplomatic signalling, changes in the realm of foreign policy have altered how this communicative capability is practiced, which we will now turn to in detail in the upcoming chapter as we seek to reconceptualise its practices in the digital age. These changes have been highlighted most during a crisis, where communication is key and policy is imperative. By projecting its foreign policy and by building a comprehensible narrative upon it that appeals to other powers or transnational audiences, a country may meet aims where the use of material resources and capabilities would otherwise fail to do so. Looking through the lens of individual agency during a crisis, we can also see that diplomats on the ground now must face novel choices regarding how they respond to changing contexts and uncertainty about the most optimal or fit set of policies, with any choice requiring justification. Because other actors in the system will be performing similar acts of narrative projection within their foreign policy, an actor must now continually refine and adapt their narrative in response to others’ communications and actions, and to critical events which may appear to

contradict another actor's narrative. Understanding the new environment in which these actors operate is imperative if a state is to successfully engage with crisis communication strategies, and the battle of crisis narratives in particular. Gaining such an understanding can prove a vital power to hold, in a world filled with informational overload and communicative chaos.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to explore and discuss the changing space in which foreign policy now operates. Before undertaking any analysis relating to how diplomatic agents are now projecting their foreign policy during times of crisis, one must first acknowledge the current environment in which policy is formed. As previously noted, if MFAs and their agents today succeed in defending their interests in the global information age, they must seek to understand the new environment in which their policies and practices now operate.

Alongside exploring the changing nature of foreign policy in the global information age, this chapter has emphasised the centrality of communication – digital or otherwise - to diplomacy, and in particular, its centrality during times of conflict. It assessed not only the historical role of diplomatic crisis communication and diplomatic communication more broadly, but also how each has been shaped and altered by the digital age. By demonstrating that diplomacy has a unique and essential relationship with communication — a relationship that has been unbreakable since diplomacy's very beginnings — this chapter has built a firm foundation on which to begin our conceptual exploration of the communicative capabilities in the digital age, and the empirical data we have found to test and explore our conceptual claims.

The preceding discussion has also shown that a key requirement of successful crisis management involves the existence and execution of successful communication practices. These practices include not only the formation of communicative policies, but the communicative capabilities used to project them: namely the use of signalling and narratives. The extent to which they are used and the way in which they are conceptualised in the digital age still remains a Pandora's box of sorts. The upcoming chapters will now open this box, beginning with a detailed analysis of its contents.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Crisis Narratives:

#### A Conceptual Framework

##### Chapter Highlights and Overview

- Re - conceptualises diplomatic signalling and narrative construction in the digital age;
- Provides a set of unique analytical lens in which to test and measure diplomatic crisis communication performance;
- Explores how, when used frequently, and effectively, both communicative processes can contribute and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement on behalf of the MFA during times of crisis.

Firmly situated within the previous discussions on the themes of communicative capabilities in the global information age, this chapter (re) conceptualises the process of diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives during the digital age. It explores how, when used frequently and effectively, both communicative processes can contribute towards a process of virtual state enlargement on behalf of the MFA during times of crisis. In order to conduct this exploration, this chapter will construct a unique conceptual and methodological framework divided into three distinct parts; a) the construction of a definitional framework for the process of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives, b) the presentation and discussion of five online mechanisms inherent to the online signalling process, all of which are intrinsically linked to the three distinct stages of online narrative creation: formation, projection and reception and c) a set of digital signalling typologies, which through the use of methodological and visualisation techniques serve as a comparative tool in which to test crisis communication performance, while also allowing us to compare and contrast an actor's use of these online communicative capabilities.

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### 3.0 Introduction

Set against the backdrop of the global information space, the practice and analysis of diplomatic crisis communication has undergone significant changes. These changes, while swift, have proven to be anything but linear, as a range of diplomatic actors have used them in a wide variety of ways. Such rapid developments undoubtedly call for a re-investigation into the age-old practices of diplomatic signalling and the creation of crisis narratives, as well as the construction of a fresh lens and structure in which to view and analyse these

diplomatic methods during the digital age. Through the development of a unique conceptual framework, this chapter takes on this particular challenge, seeking to understand and explore these new processes of digital diplomatic signalling and online narrative creation as modern crisis communication tools. Furthermore, it will examine how the Foreign Ministry's communication strategy can successfully incorporate these techniques in order to increase its communicative power on and offline during times of crisis or otherwise.

In terms of *diplomatic signalling* specifically, we now seeing the once formal, well crafted, and to some degree, secretive practice, (partially) lose its relevance for those who utilise and study it, being substituted instead with a communication process involving agents of all standing sending signals through public forums directed towards an audience group which is high in number, reactive, and delineated. Additionally, when used effectively<sup>23</sup>, the online signalling practice has the increasing potential to act as a tool through which diplomats can form, project and receive their own *online crisis narratives*, narratives which have proven a valuable communicative asset for an MFA and its agents during periods of intense conflict. Thus, there is a two-fold outcome for the online diplomatic actor utilising signalling mechanisms effectively. First, when analysed as a stand-alone process in and of itself, it creates for the MFA, *interalia*, increased foreign policy projection, a heightened presence of their crisis positions online, and, through a series of retweets and reshares, the multiplication of the state's crises message within and amongst the online diplomatic networks. Second, when viewed as a process which carries with it potential linkages to other communicative processes, we see that the outcome for using the digital signalling process effectively is the sculpting and creation of an online crisis narrative on behalf of the state.

While both communicative capabilities - DDS and OCN - can be viewed as worthy tools in their own right, in terms of both their role and impact within an MFAs crisis communication strategy, and can therefore stand alone for individual discovery and analysis, the combination of these two communicative capabilities combined brings another potential benefit for MFAs: the possibility of virtual state enlargement. That is,

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter One, (Section 1.1) for explanation and interpretation of the term 'effective' in relation to the use of the DDS and OCN.

they provide the means and opportunity for a state to exert their foreign policy power both on and offline. Thus, we can say that the outcome of DDS is OCN creation, but the effect is virtual state enlargement. This chapter now seeks to discuss these strategies (DDS and OCN) for ‘virtual enlargement’, which can be regarded as feasible methods where states can exert their influence and presence in the global information age.

As noted within Chapter One, a problem emerges from this approach, relating specifically to the fundamental aspects of the kind of knowledge it is possible to possess about these communicative processes in particular. Who legitimately contributes to both the signalling process and the narrative creation, and what status do the differing interests of those contributing to these communicative processes hold in relation to the supposed whole, particularly in terms of the crisis itself? How can signals and narratives be expressed across multiple social media channels and multiple narrators? And perhaps the ultimate question of ‘concern’, how can reception and eventual effects be determined, particularly in light of polysemy, multiple narrators and channels, and negotiated meanings? In short, what is the object of knowledge and for whom can this object be said to exist? (Antoniades et al., 2010; Dittmer, 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009; Wall, M. A. 2005; Bogost, 2006).

A means of resolving these theoretical issues is to orient communicative practices within the broader concept of discourse. While diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives are important factors in crafting and achieving certain foreign policy aims during a time of crisis, it is also important to investigate how they are *practiced*, particularly if this investigation has not been carried out in the digital age. The focus then shifts from signalling and narratives as a thing-in-themselves to their position within the context of production and consumption; in short, the relations among DDS and OCN, the practice of diplomatic crisis communication, and indeed diplomatic culture more generally. The term *critical geopolitics* assumes this perspective. Drawing on the premise that communicative representations of international affairs can influence the conduct of those affairs, we can then position these novel communicative practices within a mature body of theory on information globalisation, media and communication, and power relations. A critical geopolitics lens would say:

*not only to the material spatial practices through which the international political economy is constituted, but also to the ways in which it is represented and contested (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995: 7).*

Therefore, rather than taking maps and borders at face value, such analyses assess the impact the activities of groups and individuals have on representational boundaries in order to determine what such distinctions mean in practice (Pamment 2016). The implication is that there is contestation and negotiation between discourse and practice. Geopolitical discourse forms the building-blocks through which actors understand the world and make decisions amid complex struggles over ideas, power relations, and credibility (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1998; 80). These examples conceptualise and define international space in a rational manner *and* draw upon emotions, ideas, beliefs, and prejudices (Dittmer, 2010). They seek to explain and inspire in their attempts to influence. Therefore, these unique online communicative processes explored during our case studies are not facts in themselves, but rather act as one possible representation of a set of complex relations, produced in order to support a group of political interests. We can therefore seek to explore how these communicative practices in times of political crisis help the state dominate and sculpt the crisis narrative discourse in their favour, while also supporting their foreign objectives during a conflict.

The conceptual framework for this analysis therefore proposes a dialectical interplay to explore both the power and role of these communicative capabilities individually, and as mechanisms for virtual state enlargement collectively. This framework we present is threefold; a) the presentation of a definitional framework for each constructed communicative concept; b) a discussion of the set of five core mechanisms unique to the signalling process, and how each mechanism is shown to be intrinsically linked to the construction of online crisis narratives; and c) the construction of a set of digital signalling typologies and their visualisation upon a digital diplomatic signalling spectrum. First, the *definitional framework* breaks down the communicative capabilities of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives in all their forms, and discusses how each can be framed and investigated for the purpose of our research and otherwise. Second, the presentation of *five key mechanisms* allows for an in-depth exploration of the workings of the signalling and narrative processes, and provides a set of unique analytical lens with

which to test and measure the diplomatic crisis communication performance of online diplomatic agents overall. Finally, the creation of a set of *digital signalling typologies* emerges from these core mechanisms, presenting a methodological and visual outline explaining how a diplomatic online agent may best use these mechanisms to contribute towards a process of virtual state enlargement.<sup>24</sup> These typologies will be drawn upon further in Chapter Seven, where we aim to provide a set of policy recommendations based on the actions of those who we categorise as ‘high performing’ actors within crisis communication procedures.

At the broadest level, the aim of this chapter is to reconceptualise the practices of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation in the digital age, and bring with it a replicable framework for which others can go about understanding and analysing these methods further. Indeed, the very point of analysing these communicative capabilities through these signalling mechanisms and narrative stages is that it provides a more precise grasp on how communication, persuasion, and influence now operate within the online diplomatic arena. Using this conceptual framework, one can then trace how diplomatic actors strategically shape and are in turn shaped by narratives during times of crisis, allowing for a more compelling explanation of communicative influence in the digital age.

### ***3.1 Digital Diplomatic Signalling***

#### *3.1.1 A Definitional Framework*

Turning to the first stage of the conceptual development, we look to the creation of a definitional framework for the process of diplomatic signalling online. Here we deconstruct and reconstruct what digital diplomatic signalling actually is in all its forms and provide a mutually comprehensive starting-point to act as an evaluative reference-point for a rigorous analysis of our upcoming case studies and the data collected within them. The framework itself was created with inductive reasoning, where after detailed observation of digital diplomatic communications online, and in particular, diplomatic agents’ digital

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<sup>24</sup> As noted, virtual enlargement is the art of states enlarging their importance to the international community through non-material means, during a time of crises or otherwise.

communication during a time of crisis, the process of digital diplomatic signalling was first discovered. After its initial discovery, the process deconstructed and subsequently reconstructed in a bid to craft a concrete, appropriate, and explanatory framework for this novel practice of diplomatic communication. It is anticipated that this framework will act not only as a grounding tool for this research, but also for future work undertaken in the fields of diplomacy, communication, and crisis management.

For the purpose of our research, digital diplomatic signalling is hereby defined as:

*a message or process carried out through a digital medium, by state officials or entities of one state, and acts – whether intended or not – as a symbolic representation of the state’s position on the issue at play.*

Expanded on further, we can say that the process is;

*created and enhanced through a number of distinct, but interlocking online mechanisms; which are illustrated through five core categories; message content and structure, status of the sender, audience reception, frequency, and network power, with each serving both individual and cumulative functions for the creation of diplomatic signals online. Through the formation, projection and reception of online messaging, the process can therefore serve to craft online crisis narratives, hereby acting as powerful instruments for ‘virtual state enlargement’; a manner where states can exert and extend their foreign policy reach and presence through digital means.*

This definitional framework is the one which best encompasses and works towards explaining this new process of diplomatic signalling, and is therefore the key point of reference regarding it. At this point, it is perhaps worth repeating that even in a digital setting there is still a fine line in distinguishing conceptually between a diplomatic message and a diplomatic signal, with this distinction lying in the argument that a signal can be used

to reinforce a message or to contradict it. In short, a signal (digital or otherwise) can be seen as a way to package a diplomatic message. It is not simply the message itself.

However, if we truly wish to understand this new technique of diplomatic signalling, further dissection of this definition is required. First, it is necessary to examine what we mean by the term *digital medium*. Here, digital medium refers to all online platforms currently in use within diplomatic communication strategies, and for this research in particular, within diplomatic crisis communication strategies. It also refers to a host of digital platforms that diplomatic agents currently use for communicative purposes, diplomatic agents for communicative purposes, including information gathering, information dissemination and public engagement. It is clear that these platforms work as both lone tools for diplomatic communication and as complementary assets for existing offline strategies.

When looking at the digital medium in practice, through data discovery and analysis, we find that during times of crisis, Foreign Ministries have been shown to use a variety of platforms to meet their crisis communication needs, namely the online platforms of Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Foursquare, Flickr, Storify, and BuzzFeed (Burson - Marsteller 2016). Although bonded through the shared characteristics of information sharing, visual displays, and public and real-time interaction, each platform brings with it a set of unique online characteristics and diplomats consequently use them in a variety of ways, all in a bid to achieve a variety of communication aims.

However, if we draw on some cliché rhetoric, we can argue that ‘not all platforms are created equal, given that the level of integration into diplomatic communication strategies and actual communicative success when in practice varies from platform to platform (ibid)<sup>25</sup>. Two mediums in particular - Facebook and Twitter – have emerged as

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<sup>25</sup>The 2016 edition of Burson - Marsteller *Twiplomacy* study, which previously focused solely on Twitter, has been expanded to examine the use of other social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and more niche digital diplomacy platforms such as Snapchat, LinkedIn, Google+, Periscope and Vine. The Twiplomacy website includes live rankings and the first ever social media atlas for each country studied. The study shows how people in positions of power are increasingly tapping social media platforms to connect with the audiences most important to them. According to Don Baer, Worldwide Chair and CEO, of Burson-Marsteller: ‘as engagement becomes one of the critical measures of social media influence, our Twiplomacy study shows which political communicators are most successful on which social platforms and what we can learn from them’. The cross-platform study shows that world leaders and MFAs are increasingly taking an integrated approach across several social media channels, an indication of where more and more business

substantially more triumphant than the others in terms of their use and integration within current diplomatic crisis communication strategies. The increased usage of these two assets provides strong justification for this research to centre upon them for its own data collection and analysis.

With their 2016 study on MFAs practice of digital diplomats, Burson-Marsteller analysed diplomatic agents' use of both Facebook and Twitter and found that, as it currently stands, over 78% of all Foreign Ministers have adopted both platforms, making them the number one choices for diplomatic social engagement. The study notes that Twitter came out on top with an adoption rate of 81%, with Facebook not far behind at 76%. Both platforms were also shown to possess countless 'off shoot' accounts for Embassies on the ground. For example, according to the comprehensive Twitter list on @Twiplomacy, more than 4,100 embassies and ambassadors are now active on Twitter and that number grows daily. Among these new actors, the UK @ForeignOffice possesses the largest 'twiplomatic' network and maintains a public Twitter list with a record 237 ambassadors, embassies and missions on Twitter. Canada's Foreign Ministry is second with 184 missions and heads of missions on Twitter, followed by the Russian Foreign Ministry (160), the Polish Foreign Ministry (157) and Israel (146). The State Department and the Foreign Ministries of France, the EU, Sweden and Ukraine each list more than 100 diplomats and missions on Twitter. Through interviews and online data analysis, the study also shows that most Ministries today actively encourage the personal engagement of its Ambassadors and Embassies on both online platforms, illustrating that it has become increasingly difficult for Foreign Office diplomats to disregard using these digital tools.

Now it should be noted that although both platforms are rarely used in isolation, in the sense that a Foreign Ministry seldom engages with one and not the other, both platforms do display characteristics unique to themselves. For example, Twitter is best known for its idiosyncratic 140 character posts. Through it, an account can produce short sound bites of information, establish strong online networks and through a series of retweets, experience an ease of engagement and creation of dialogue with other actors that they may not achieve on other platforms. In comparison, Facebook enables Embassies to craft longer posts of

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leaders are likely to move as well. See more at: <http://www.burson-marsteller.de/press-releases/twitter-is-the-preferred-network-for-digital-diplomacy/?lang=en#sthash.XqRnGCco.dpuf>

information, develop a more extensive visual persona of the Embassy or Ambassador (through the creation of photos albums and directly posted online videos), manage and organise events through their page, and engage with other actors online through a system of the comments, likes and shares. Both platforms therefore achieve or allow for the attainment of similar goals, but with unique styles and methods.

However, whether used either in isolation or in tandem, both platforms create a number of positive consequences for all institutions and actors who use them. At the broadest level, both Twitter and Facebook lower a Ministry's costs of communication during the crisis, increase exponentially their messages potential to be heard and create impact, and acts as a tool for the Ministries direct engagement with its citizens around the globe. More specifically, they serve as a communication gateway between diplomats and the international sphere, allowing for the rapid transmission of information relating to consular assistance. Furthermore, in certain instances, especially in the context of political violence, humanitarian crises, and environmental disasters, these platforms can help discover, code, and track which areas suffered the most. Thus, while it seems that both platforms have their limitations, they also have their shared positives.

Moving to the next part of our definitional framework, we turn to the terms *state official* and *entities*. In this context, the term state official refers to members of a state who are capable of representing the foreign interests of the state to which they belong in a diplomatic capacity. According to the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations (1963), public officers commissioned in accordance with the law to superintend and transact the affairs of a government that employs them in a foreign country are known as either state officials or diplomatic agents.<sup>26</sup> These agents are of diverse orders, and are known by different denominations: Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors, Heads of Mission, or simply 'official diplomatic staff'. They embody the ultimate representation of the government that commissions them; they are seen as legates, nuncios, inter nuncios, ambassadors, ministers, and plenipotentiaries. The term state entity arises from the same legal perspective and refers to an institution which is charged with an official capacity to represent the interests of the state to which they also belong, be that an Embassy, Delegation or Central Foreign

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<sup>26</sup> Vattel, liv. 4, c. 5.

Ministry. In terms of our research, both terms represent the same core function and will be regarded as such.

The next concepts we turn to as part of our definitional framework are the themes of *intention* and *symbolic representation*. First, the issue of intention refers to whether or not the online message demonstrated a fixed agenda regarding what it intended or did not intend to say to its online audience at the time of posting. For example; an Ambassador sends a direct tweet condemning Hamas for rocket fire during the Israel-Gaza crisis, and signs her initials to the tweet. In this case, the intention is somewhat obvious – direct condemnation for Hamas for firing rockets. Thus, the meaning of intention in this case is simple, and something which perhaps does not need further explanation. However, it should be noted that, although within our crisis communication analysis we view the issue of non-intention as distinct from intention, we recognise that it in many cases the outcome is the same. That is, an online message portrays and crafts a meaning whether or not it was intended.

Such a case of ‘non-intention’ primarily occurs through an online diplomatic actor posting a series of retweets all of which craft a singular or similar discourse, or simply re-sharing or liking a series of online posts all of which portray similar content. This research advocates that there should be increasing recognition that re - tweets can be sent with the very intention of acting as a symbol for a state's position, and thus should be sent with as much consideration and care as a direct tweet itself. Arguably diplomats today have already realised the potential of the re-tweet to act as a message in itself, whether arising from their Ministry or not. Thus, the issue of direct or indirect tweets, or explicit or implicit messages, is an important aspect of online messaging to consider, as the packaging of the message provides a useful tool for a state to project and expand their foreign policy message and craft a state narrative which is in line with their states objectives, and project this narrative on a frequent basis to a large online audience, if they so desire.

Turning then to the concept of *symbolic representation*, we see that at the broadest level, it belongs to the camp of diplomatic communication which we have already discussed in depth within our literature analysis. Both offline and on, diplomatic symbols can arguably be used by MFA's as a strategic component within a diplomat's crisis communication toolbox and act as way Ministries can express their foreign policy position on the crisis

itself. How exactly they are can be used as a strategic component and tool is something we shall turn to in the upcoming section on Core Mechanisms (Section 3.1.2).

Within the online world, particularly the world of social media platforms, this research argues that each social media post can be viewed as both a direct message and a symbolic representation of a message (i.e. a message to be deciphered). What this research will demonstrate through its upcoming empirical analysis, is that social media platforms allow its users, particularly diplomatic agents, to create messages of symbolic importance (i.e. a diplomatic signal) through a process of online communication tactics (both implicit and explicit), involving the transmission of messages via a tweet or post, to which certain meanings are attached. Within the two empirical case studies, this research will show that particularly during a crisis, a diplomatic agent's online posts, and the overall discourse that the agent's post creates (when viewed cumulatively), can increasingly be taken as a symbol of their position regarding the issue at play, particularly when enacted during a time of crisis.<sup>27</sup> What this means is that a diplomatic agent's individual posts carry a symbolic meaning, as do the sum of their parts, allowing us to theorise that the overall signalling process itself carries with it innate meaning and symbolism. Thus, phrases such as 're-tweet does not equal endorsement' are becoming increasingly vacuous if it is shown to be coupled with an account re-tweeting 80% of the time, with their series of retweets crafting a singular or similar discourse, or re-sharing or liking a series of online posts all of similar content. As a consequence, online diplomats today should be content with saying both less and more than they mean: less, because their verbal and nonverbal signalling will never immediately convey their meaning; more, because their signalling will always convey messages and involve them in consequences other than those intended.

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<sup>27</sup> In this instance, symbolic representation does not imply, that every time a diplomat chooses to tweet or post, they do so with the intention of creating a symbol or actively hinting to a third party online. This research proposes the thesis, that today, despite the issue of intention every online post has the *potential* to send a signal. For example, a diplomat may choose to post infrequently about the crisis because they are confused about the crisis, and not because they wish to send a signal regarding how important they deem it based on their frequency of online activity. The critical voice could therefore ask the question, what distinguishes symbolic representation vs confusion? In the signalling process, this research does not delve into the intent behind the message because as noted previously we see DDS as *a message or process carried out through a digital medium, by state officials or entities of one state, and acts – whether intended or not – as a symbolic representation of the state's position on the issue at play. It is less so about the intent, and more about how the message is projected, portrayed, and received by millions online, and pertinent third-party crisis actors.* The issue of intention is however, explored when we analyse the formation of the narrative.

Now it is worth noting that, just as was seen with the use of digital medium, this research acknowledges that not all symbols are created equal and can be packaged in a number of different ways; direct tweets, subtweets (no Twitter handles of the subject; assumed knowledge of the issue at hand; plausible deniability), direct posts and indirect posts (re-sharing posts; assumed knowledge of the issue at hand; plausible deniability). The packaging of the symbol is extremely important, drawing here on one of diplomatic communication's core mantras; it's not just 'what you say', but also 'how you say it'. Indeed, this 'semantic obsession' within the realm of diplomatic communication rests on the realisation that 'speech is an incisive form of action', and it seems this realisation is no different online (Eban, 1983: 393). In fact, both behaviour and non-behaviour acts may constitute messages – particularly during a time of crisis - which leads to the conclusion that silence is also a form of packaging. The observations of one student of interpersonal persuasion are equally applicable to diplomatic communication: 'activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating.' (Watzlawick et al. 1967: 50). During times of crisis then, it seems that silence is as strong of a signal as any.

Thus, the theme of symbolic representation is regarded as one of high importance for this research, and plays a central role within the use of each fundamental tenant. Furthermore, when assessed cumulatively, these online messages and the new ways in which they are created, projected and received, can serve to act as an instrument of virtual enlargement. Here a tenet can work towards highlighting, enhancing and transmitting a state's foreign policies during a crisis, acting as non-material forces in the achievement of foreign policy goals.

The final portion of the definitional framework relates to the mechanisms used to create both digital signals and online crisis narratives. It reads that the process of digital diplomatic signalling is;

*created and enhanced through a number of distinct, but interlocking online mechanisms; which are illustrated through five core categories; message content and structure, status of the sender, audience reception, frequency, and network*

*power, each serving both individual and cumulative functions for the creation of diplomatic signals online. Through the formation, projection and reception of online messaging, the process can therefore serve to craft online crises narratives, hereby acting as a powerful instrument for ‘virtual state enlargement’; a manner where states can exert and extend their foreign policy reach and presence through digital means.*

While this section will not expand on these mechanisms of the signalling process and the makeup of the OCN, the inclusion of these sentences is deemed vital to the definitional framework of DDS, as they acknowledge that the process is complex and varied in that it consists of distinct parts which are unique to digital mediums. These final sentences also underpin one of this research’s core findings: that during times of crisis, diplomats are now granted new, digital means to engage in the long-standing practice of diplomatic signalling. Furthermore, it is clear that this engagement is carried out through a number of core mechanisms unique to the online world and, while the use of these mechanisms varies greatly between state officials and entities, their effective usage presents states with the possibility to create online crisis narratives of influence that appeal to official and non-official entities alike.

### *3.1.2 Core Mechanisms*

This section dissects the process of diplomatic signalling online and, at the broadest level, serves an almost purely analytical purpose, highlighting how the process of diplomatic signalling evolved during the digital age, and how diplomatic signals are now generated online. Its aim is to create a platform for a more explanatory and theoretical discussion concerning the crafting of online crisis narratives and the possible impact that this process creates in relation to foreign policy power and projection.

We now turning to the online mechanisms, of which there are five: *content making, status of the sender, audience reception, frequency* and *online network power*. Stemming from an in-depth analysis of the current literature and data available, these five mechanisms were created through deductive reasoning, and it is believed they best encapsulate each stage of

the signalling process, from who sends the signal, to how consistently they send it, how it is structured, and who may pick it up, with each mechanism therefore serving a unique purpose. When analysed individually, each mechanism acts as analytic spotlight in which to view how diplomatic signalling has evolved as a direct result of social media use, while also serving as a valuable comparative tool in assessing how online actors now use social media platforms during times of crisis. When analysed cumulatively, the mechanisms and their practice serve as a method to create a standardisation tool reflecting what style of diplomatic signalling possesses the greatest capability for an MFA projecting their crisis message and having official and unofficial entities in the digital age accurately receive it.

When analysing these mechanisms cumulatively, we will assess various combinations that best contribute to the process of virtual state enlargement. For example, high frequency of online messaging from an Ambassador or official of equivalent standing on topics directly related to the crisis at play create high engagement amongst peers and wider audience. While each mechanism is valid in its own right, it is the interrelationship and overall interaction between all five which ultimately allow for a rounded interpretation of the signalling and narrative process online during a time of crisis. A standardisation tool will also aid in creating a replicable method in which both communicative capabilities can subsequently be evaluated and explored. Finally, this research argues that while these communicative capabilities now play a central role within the practice of modern day diplomatic communication, their use among online diplomatic actors is not as uniform as one may think. In fact, these methods are used to varying degrees among relevant actors and are subject to a variety of restraints, namely the continued role and power of the offline political context.

### ***i. Content & Structure of the Message***

The first online mechanism is the content and structure of the online message. This mechanism deals specifically with the content an online account creates and can be further divided into two distinct parts: those who form it and what they form. At the broadest level, it relates to how the message was formed prior to its projection and how a diplomatic agent uses both when communicating during times of crisis. This mechanism looks not only at

*how* the message is formed but *what* exactly it is framing. During a time of crisis, specifically within the online signalling process, this mechanism matters because how a message or policy is created and subsequently packaged and projected is incredibly important.

Examining first the content of the message itself, we must assess how it was formed and who formed it. In order to reach conclusions regarding the content of these messages, we must utilise careful process tracing, textual analysis of online messages, and elite interviews. These methodologies will allow us to better understand the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of acts of online crisis messaging and the domestic and institutional pressures that influence their creation and projection.

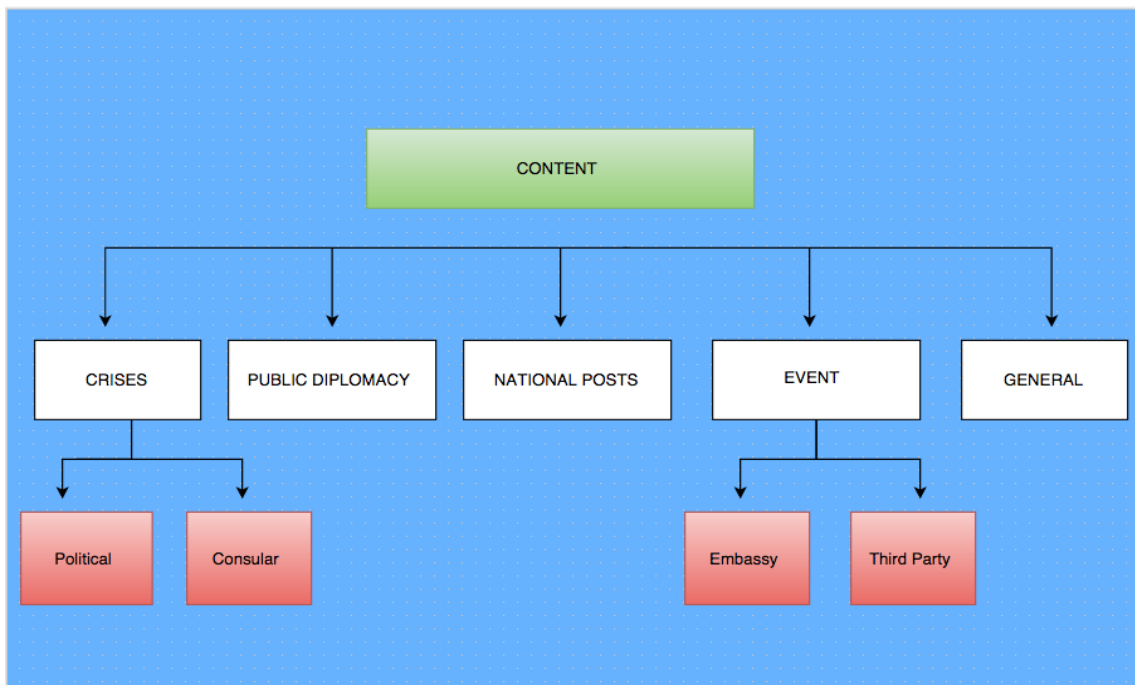
In regard to the more technical aspects of this ‘content of the message’ mechanism, we can begin with the basic assumption that the more posts an online diplomatic actor makes during the time of crisis (posts where the content of the message specifically relates to the conflict itself), the more times an online diplomatic engages in crisis discussion, will send a message or narrative to their online audience regarding how they view the crisis. Through active discussion of the conflict online, an agent can achieve a number of key aims; namely highlight their Ministry’s position on the crisis, engage actively with the relevant actors surrounding it, and create an online discourse which is frequently projected to a vast amount of online actors, to ultimately support their overall foreign policy agenda.

Now this discussion type relates not only to the amount of individual posts made concerning the crisis, but also *how* this discussion and attention compares to other topics the account focuses on during the crisis period. For example, an account may post 100 times about the crisis, but if these posts are lost within a sea of 1,000 posts within a time period, the noise of the other posts may dilute the core message, or create a situation where it may get lost within a mass of information sent. Additionally, an account may choose to dedicate 80% of their discussion time to the crisis, but if this discussion is indirect, impartial and non-descript, the ‘usefulness’ of these posts to highlight the Ministry’s position and support its foreign policy position is arguably questionable. This process of engagement arguably creates a diminished set of signals for other actors to interpret, and carries with them less potential for impact, online and off. In short, a lack of discussion, or lack of comparative discussion, arguably does not harness the power of these tools

efficiently and works to create a weaker discourse online for the Ministry utilising it. This message is further diluted if an account is compared to one that uses its communicative capabilities efficiently. In short, these actors are not winning in the battle for crisis narratives.

For the purposes of this research, we have decided to divide the discourse into 7 distinct categories: Conflict (Political Commentary); Conflict (Consular Assistance), Embassy Events, Third - Party Events, Public Diplomacy Strategies, National Posts, General. These categories were created through abductive reasoning and constructed after observing all online posts diplomatic accounts sent during our chosen time periods and categorising them based on this observation and analysis. The 7 categories constructed were therefore deemed the most appropriate categories to both illustrate the context of all messages sent and allow for a comparative discussion relating to who discusses what and how much they do so.

Figure 3.1 Content of the Message



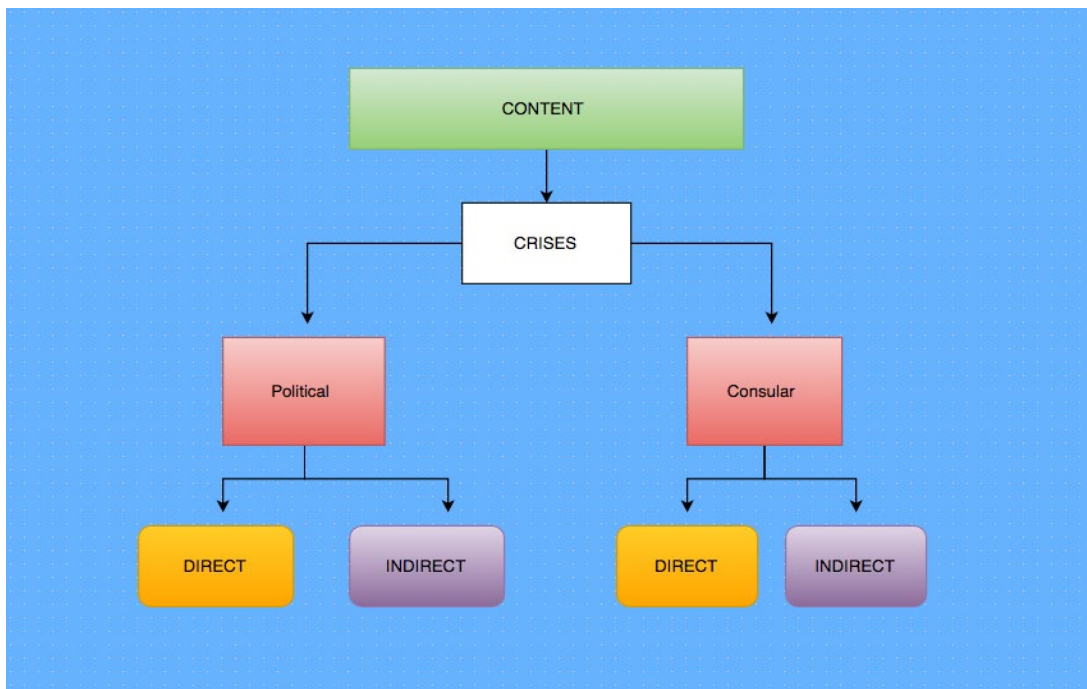
It is also worth highlighting the *structure* of a message, specifically how it is framed. In short, how a message discusses its subject matters just as much as the subject itself. Historically, the style and structure surrounding the context of a message was formal in tone, in keeping with its intended target audience and the status of the diplomat who sent it. This communication usually emerged as well constructed, well styled, and intended for its purpose. Today, however, a different picture is painted. Social media platforms by their very nature do not allow for such formality. Rather, their style of communication is informal in tone, short in length, and relaxed in structure.

Within social media, the framing of the message is extremely important in order to provide us with an understanding of how the message was sent, how the account engaged with other actors, and to what extent it did so. Within the Twitter and Facebook platforms, there emerges two clear structures of message: direct and indirect. Direct messages come in varied forms, namely official-to-official communication, which sees a diplomatic agent sending or aiming communication directly to official members of either the receiving state or other diplomatic agents online, or official-to-citizen communication, which refers to communication between a diplomatic agent and unofficial members of the receiving state or diplomatic realm, namely the citizenry. This style of message arguably creates the most potential for impact in how peers and wider audiences receive this message online.

An indirect message, although a 'diluted' one, can still be viewed as a signal of significance, particularly when the online agents who send it choose to do so on a frequent basis, thereby constructing a frequent crisis discourse within their account online. State officials using Twitter to 'retweet' or 'favorite' information another party posts, or 'liking' or joining certain groups or 'causes' on Facebook, can illustrate indirect digital messages. As compared to direct messages, these methods may be used to create doubt or ambiguity in whether or not the diplomat wishes to actually engage with an issue, or simply wishes to present the image of being involved in the conversation and dialogue taking place. For instance, many official diplomatic accounts use the phrase 'retweet does not equal endorsement (RT  $\neq$  endorsement)' as a method to prevent possible claims of interference. However, in many instances, although not a direct statement, it can be argued that a 'retweet', 'favourite' or 'like' does in fact equal endorsement, or at least to support or agreement some degree. As stated previously, ambiguity may be a deliberate means to retain flexibility and make signals disclaimable. Again, ambiguous signals allow the sender

to argue, ‘I never said that,’ or ‘this is not what I meant’ if the situation calls for it. This method or avenue of signalling may be preferential to some agents, as it allows them to be seen as active on certain issues with a low risk of legal or political reprimand for saying something they shouldn’t have.

Figure 3.2 Structure of the Message

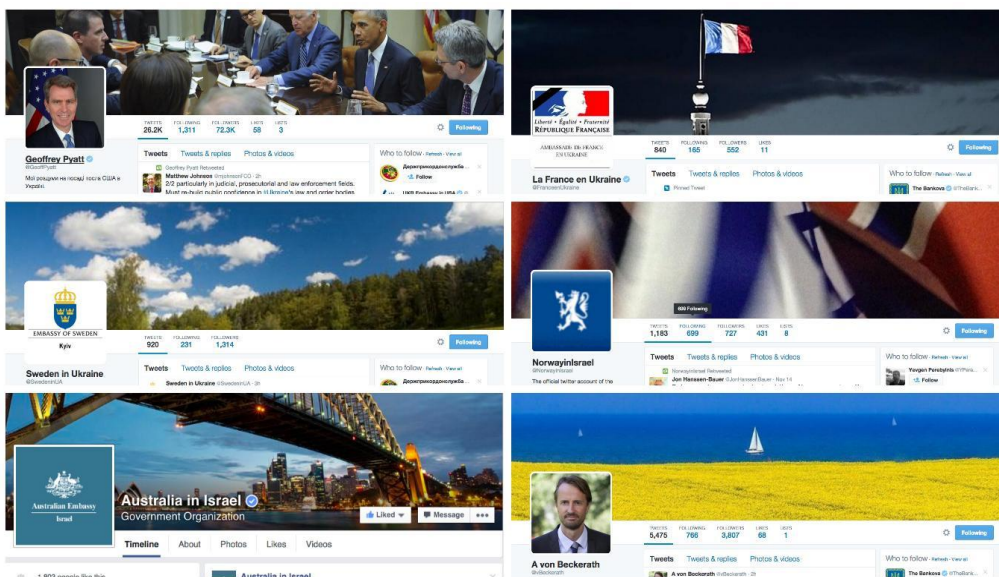


### *ii. Status of the Sender*

The next mechanism, the status of the sender, requires us to transition from the content of the message and how it was formed, to examining who actually sent it. This mechanism refers to the ranking of the diplomat who creates and sends the online posts, or to whom the online account is accredited. It consists of a hierarchical spectrum, ranging from a Third Secretary or junior diplomat at one end to an Ambassador or Head of Mission at the other (Hocking 1999). In the context of this research, the status of the diplomat refers specifically to all diplomatic agents who possess a Twitter and/or Facebook account during a period of

crisis and what the perceived diplomatic status attached to those accounts is. This mechanism has emerged as highly significant within the arena of crisis communication, based on the assumption that ministries seeking to send messages regarding their position in times of crisis will utilise the status of a Head of Mission or Ambassador to garner greater attention or create more effective signals working towards virtual enlargement.

Figure 3.3 Status of the Sender



Historically, an MFA has been structured around a strict hierarchical structure, ranging from, ranging from an entry-level member of the diplomatic corps at one end, to a Head of Mission at the other (Hocking 1999). While each Ministry has their own unique grading system, the average number of positions observed across the diplomatic corps was five, starting with the junior diplomat regularly referred to across Ministries as a *Third Secretary*, rising finally to the position of *Ambassador* or *Head of Mission*. Traditionally, diplomacy is well known for its adherence to this hierarchical structure, with an agent's roles, tasks, institutional attitudes, perceptions, and sentiments changing significantly as they advance through the ranks (Ibid).

The importance and power of a diplomat's status historically, only increased within a time of crisis. During such moments, rigid diplomatic internal power structures held fast, with acts of public diplomatic communication being seen as unique and reserved primarily for Heads of Mission, Foreign Ministers or Deputy Ambassadors of high standing. Junior diplomats rarely, if ever, carried out and delivered public messaging. During conflict, the diplomatic corps carefully crafted these messages, seeking the approval of the Foreign Ministry before making any publication and oral presentation, and delivered them in a setting appropriate to the message and sender and the approval of the Foreign Ministry was necessary before making any publication or oral presentation. This hierarchical structure was particularly adhered to if the crisis message had the potential to reach numbers and actors on a grand scale; a scale which we today would see as minute compared to the modern global audience online (Hocking 1999). Moreover, the fact that high-level officials primarily carried out these acts combined with the cost, effort, and organisation required to generate them meant that such messages were rare.

This strict adherence to hierarchy, arose following the rise of sovereignty as the constitutive logic of the political order in Europe, diplomats representing a sovereign as his or her direct impersonations were bestowed with the same divine authority as the sovereign, and ranked hence hierarchically above all other officials in the service of the sovereign (Anderson 1993, Hamilton and Langhorne 1995). According to Bàtora (2016: 23), “this shift entailed that the status of the ambassador increasingly became an object of interest of the aristocratic circles and a diplomatic career gradually become the domain of aristocracy...[thus] status differences in diplomatic hierarchy became commonplace in diplomatic dealings throughout European capitals”. Fast – forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where through official written diplomatic communication we see the continued importance and homage paid to hierarchy within the diplomatic institutions. As Harold Nicolson ([1939] 1988: 106) instructs his readers:

Figure 3.4 Harold Nicolson instructing his readers on the importance of diplomatic hierarchy

The words used in termination [of a letter] vary according to the rank of the person addressed. To an ambassador, the Secretary of state signs as follows:

I am, with great truth and respect,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

[...] To a minister, the termination is identical except that the word 'regard' is submitted for the word 'respect'. To a chargé d'affaires, both the respect and the regard are omitted and the line ends (somewhat curtly perhaps) with the word 'truth'.

The hierarchical composition of diplomatic services was also bolstered by the processes of bureaucratisation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This involved implementation of elements of bureaucracy of offices, including but not limited too; clearly defined sphere of officials' competence; impersonal official obligations; fixed salaries, and not least promotion dependent upon judgment of superiors (Bàtora 2016). As the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century German contemporary observed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

*the strictest order prevails from top to bottom, unconditioned obedience is the rule, and as is right and proper, everyone obeys without protest or contradiction, whether his opinion may be .... Acquiescence is the first and highest law'* (Busch 1897, quoted in Lauren 1976: 31).

Hierarchy hence no longer was just a professional norm inherent in the foreign service, but through bureaucratization it became embedded in the structure, rules and standard operating procedures of foreign Ministries. According to Bàtora (2016), lines of authority and communication were standardized and foreign ministers could to a greater extent than before act as unified organisational actors. Moreover, the growing complexity and volume of relations that had to be handled meant also that an increasing number of decisions were made by various officials in the bureaucratic line, even middle – ranking ones, because “it

was no longer possible for almost every question to go the minister himself for the final decision, as had hitherto been normal” (Anderson 1993: 118). With the introduction of the telegraph, embassies were to a greater extent integrated to the overall bureaucratic machinery of foreign ministries (Jones 1983: 116 – 138). Thus, the once fairly extensive and infringed and foreign policy decision – making became more centralised (Hamilton and Langhorne 1995: 132). However, the digital age, and in particular a political crisis carried out during a digital age, we are beginning to see some possible signs that Embassies are become more decentralised once more, simply as a direct result of ‘real-time’ pressures to respond and reactive instantaneously, leading to a possible weakening of diplomacy’s historic allegiance to hierarchy, something we shall now explore in detail.

Moving forward to the present, we see that, while diplomatic practice is still structured around an existing hierarchy, a number of diplomatic scholars are making arguments that the world of digital diplomacy, particularly social media, is opening up and tearing down these historic hierarchies. In turn, they contend that this allows for a restructuring and dispersal of power within the diplomatic realm at large. (Wolfe 2008; Hanson 2012; Ross 2014). Now while this argument may possess a certain element of truth in the sense that a junior diplomat can today craft and send tweets, or write on a Facebook wall on behalf of their Embassy, we would argue that the existing hierarchy still stands, because a) as previously mentioned, a diplomatic message is rarely posted without the previous sanctioning from a higher authority and b) interpretation and symbolism plays a leading role within the practice of online communication, allowing us to conclude that the perceived status of the online diplomatic account is an extremely important aspect within the digital signalling process at large. This means that there is still a very obvious correlation between status and the strength of the message within the practice of diplomatic communication and that novel techniques such as mass communication and social media platforms have not fundamentally altered this belief.

Within the online signalling process itself, this mechanism matters because *who* sends the messages matters. Although today’s online posts are created for and received by a large audience following, a following that are not shown to possess any official ranking of status, these posts arguably *receive* greater attention based on the status of actor sending them. In fact, this research posits that if anything, the new techniques of social media have only made it easier for actors to manipulate and alter this status within the signalling process.

Using the status and online ‘prestige’ or clout of their Ambassador or Head of Mission on the ground, Central Ministries can harness social platforms to craft and send strong, direct signals concerning the crisis at play and ultimately have their national position heard. They can recognise that today, an Ambassador online holds a beacon of relative communicative strength and that their influence and prestige is useful for furthering foreign policy positions, having their Ministries voice heard, and ultimately creating frequent, strong, and direct crisis diplomatic discourse heard by many. Indeed, this very ease of online communication has allowed for Ambassadors to quickly and conveniently construct successful online discourses that achieve those aims.

### *iii. Frequency*

The frequency mechanism is an interesting one to explore and one which many of today’s analyses of digital diplomacy and crisis communication strategies tend to overlook. In the context of this research, frequency refers to the proportion of time a diplomatic agent spends online during a time of crisis, and what type of signal this sends to their online audience about the situation. Specifically, it refers to the average amount of posts an agent makes on their platform per day, and how this time is used to discuss the crisis and project their policies.

Within the online signalling process itself, this mechanism matters because how important the diplomatic agent deems the crisis, or is perceived to deem the crisis, matters. Specifically, if a diplomat chooses to post frequently during a crisis, they arguably signal to their online audience that they deem the crisis worthy of discussion and that they wish to be viewed as an active actor within public discourse surrounding it. Thus, what seems to be the conscious choice of an online actors – actively engaging in the crisis communication dialogue as a whole and on terms which are frequent – creates signals which are better able to contribute towards a process of virtual enlargement. Additionally, if the online actor is not alone in their frequency of activity - backed by other diplomatic agents online through with their own active online discussions - this arguably signals that not only does the diplomat view the crisis worthy of discussion, but so do other actors around them. Put quite simply, people do not choose to discuss things online that they do

not deem in some way important or relevant to their account. Diplomats in this instance prove no different.

In contrast, the diplomatic agent (and their counterparts) actively choosing to stay silent or post irregularly within the crisis also sends a signal, albeit a different one: that the diplomatic agent does not deem the crisis worthy of discussion, or is a topic they do not wish to engage with publicly for a host of reasons, including domestic political pressures and international crisis contexts. Indeed, according to Bell, in diplomatic communication, ambiguity even in the form of silence, can be considered constructive and creative, as polities attempt to conceal vital information from each other or simply see silence as deliberate means to retain flexibility and make signals disclaimable (Bell, 1971: 74). Either way, silence continues to act as a signal and a tool for diplomatic communication.

Historically, we have seen the role of time have a strong evolution within the diplomatic sphere, both for diplomats who worked during times of crisis, or otherwise. Indeed, Paul Nickels in his book 'Under the Wire' talks about how the telegraph, which many regard as the first real game changer for modern diplomatic communication, threatened to rob diplomats not only of their 'free' time but of their very sense of time. Many of the landed aristocracy, with their cherished rural estates and outdoor activities, felt stronger ties to natural cycles, particularly the seasons, than did the bourgeoisie, with its roots in the city. To take a prominent example, Bismarck disliked what we perceived as sterile, bureaucratic routine and let most things slide until he faced a challenge. As chancellor, he oversaw similar labour patterns at the foreign ministry, which lacked regular working hours (Busch 1988). But such task orientation appeared wasteful to the bourgeoisie, which attempted to synchronise and accelerate labour by setting it to the clock. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the German Foreign Ministry had absorbed some of these professional attitudes; for example, it sought to dissuade diplomats from believing that 'the presence of officials at their posts is...only necessary when great, important and urgent business is at hand or there are matters of special nature with which to deal' (Thompson 1967; 42). Rather it sought to inculcate the idea of 'steady activity' (*stetige Beschäftigung*) (Davison 1993).

However, like many other workers, diplomats have never accepted these encroachments upon their temporal culture without a struggle, a struggle which is also played out today with the new role of social media. At times, they simply disregarded the new demands. A

British diplomat wrote in his diary about an unpleasant surprise that awaited him when he returned from an evening of carousing in Vienna: ‘I got home, found a note from the Ambassador asking me to come around and decipher a telegram, so trotted round and began it. But it was a whopping great thing and very dull, so I didn’t finish it and went to bed’ (Hammond 1858)<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, Sir Frederic Rogers, the British Colonial Office undersecretary, described the ‘presence of mind’ that he exercised in order to resist reading a long, seemingly highly important cipher telegram that arrived during dinner and threatened to disrupt dessert’ (ibid).<sup>29</sup>

However, whether diplomats were a fan of this new technology or not, we can certainly say that the most significant characteristic of the telegraph was its speed, particularly during a crisis. Telegrams travelled like lightning across continents and oceans. Even with the additional time required for coding and handling, telegrams were typically available within a few hours of being sent. This speed brought many advantages to policymakers who found that they could respond rapidly to far off crises of whose very existence they would previously have remained ignorant for weeks. But the telegraph also brought disadvantages. The ability to act quickly placed new time pressures upon political leaders, especially since telegraph could inform newspapers and an expectant public just as swiftly. The acceleration of international disputes posed challenges to foreign ministries, which frequently used delay as a tool in resolving international crises. The long pauses caused by relatively slow communication had previously allowed tempers to cool, providing time for careful, methodical diplomacy, and offering harried political leaders an opportunity to conceive creative solutions to complex problems. Indeed, both the positive and negative developments of the telegraph were played out again with the rise of television and the emergence of the 24-hour news channel – all of which restructured and altered the role of time for diplomats during times of crisis (Nickles 2001; Hanson 2012).

Moving forward to today we see that the increasing place of ‘*real-time*’ diplomacy and the subsequent pressure on agents to not only receive information within this constructed notion of real-time, but also respond to it, has created a substantial conceptual shift in how

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<sup>28</sup> Frederic Rogers to Lady Rogers, Nov. 1869, in Letters of Frederic Lord Blachford, Under-secretary of State for the Colonies, ed. George Eden Marindin (London: J. Murray, 1896).

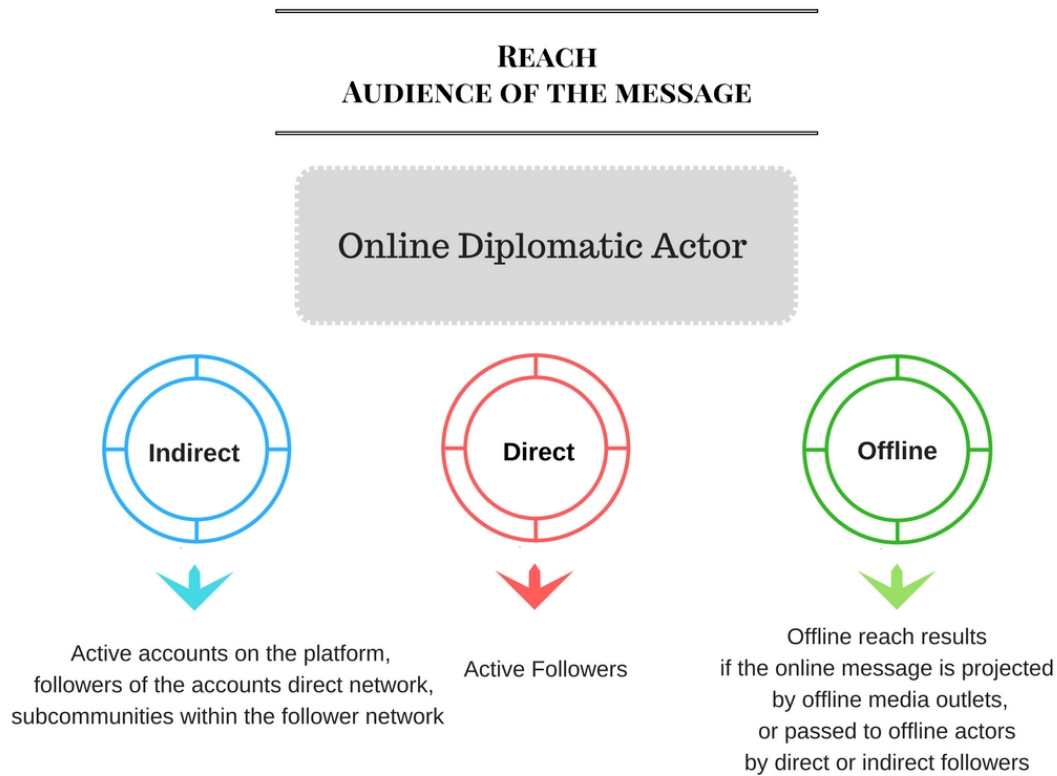
<sup>29</sup> Hammond to Malmesbury, 21 Sept. 1858, in Jone, British Diplomatic Service, 124. J.R. quoted in Bowman, Masters and Lords.

we, as both academics and practitioners, choose to or are now perhaps forced to view the idea of time. Today diplomatic agents have the power to update their audience on current events rapidly, issue Ministry statements instantly, and engage in real - time dialogue with their online partners. However, such power comes at a price, with the pressure of a real-time response beginning to cause tension between a required rapid response and the need to have most diplomatic communication sanctioned before it is made publicly, something which invariably slows down the speed of response. Indeed, there is increasing validity and strength in the argument that we should not view the opportunity to engage in frequent crisis communication dialogue purely as a positive development, but also acknowledge its negative traits; one example being that today, diplomats not having enough time to deliberate on issues or official stances before publicly speaking, or no longer having an ‘excuse’ to remove themselves from the diplomatic dialogue (in this case crisis dialogue) if they do not wish to, in some instances creating communication errors as a result. This is an interesting area to explore and one that we shall address as we begin to analyse our data in relation to these claims.

#### ***iv. Reach of the Message (Audience)***

The next mechanism moves from the content of the message and its sender to who may possibly receive it online. At its core, reach relates to the audience of the online diplomatic account and the role they now play within the online signalling process. It refers to Twitter followers, Facebook friends and subscribers, and those actors who are seen as active and engaged on social media platforms today. In the context of this research, it refers specifically to the cohort of online actors who during the crisis possessed a Twitter and/or Facebook account and thus had the possibility of directly and indirectly receiving digital signals sent by diplomatic actors online.

Figure 3.5 Reach of the Message



Within the online signalling process, this mechanism matters because how many actors receive diplomatic agents' online posts matters. Today, online posts are primarily created for, and received by, a group of directed followers and have increasingly become the foundation for nearly all strategies of online communication. Within the arena of crisis communication, this mechanism has emerged as a highly significant one, due to the primary assumption that during a time of crisis, diplomatic agents do not send nor craft online posts with the thought that they will be ignored, but rather craft and send posts with the very intention that they will be read. This intention is of course assumed to have substantially more impact if the actor is shown to possess a high numerical following, and less so if the number is lower. For example, if the target audience of the agent's online posts was less than 100, its potential for creating a set of strong signals concerning the

crisis at play is arguably be less than if the target audience figure was that of 10,000<sup>30</sup>. Online diplomatic actors are therefore aware that when they post a message during a time of crisis, their followers (and possibly these followers' followers) will more than likely receive and read it (or they must assume this to be so), therein acting as a signal regarding their position and policies on the crisis at play. During a period of conflict, diplomatic agents must therefore regard their social media use as a key method in which to craft, through a series of online posts, an overall discourse relating to their Ministry's official position on the crisis itself and to subsequently use their online platforms as an avenue in which to highlight this position to both official and nonofficial actors. Additionally, unlike language which is an explicit form of communication, signalling usually involves subtlety, therefore placing a high role of dependence on the signal-receiver or observer's receptivity. Thus, numerical audience analysis and comparison between online accounts is vital if we wish to fully understand the new role and power of the audience within the evolved process of diplomatic signalling.

Additionally, diplomatic actors are increasingly viewing online posts during a time of crisis, not only in terms of who they may reach directly, but also the potential they have to reach others. So while direct followers, friends, and subscribers play a core role in how the message is received and consequently act as the nexus of our analysis, indirect receivers of the message also matter in terms of how the overall reception of crisis discourse and signals.<sup>31</sup> Today, social media opens up the possibility for the message of the diplomatic agent on the ground to gain an indirect audience at an exponential rate, and therefore both those who seek to craft crisis communications policy and those who choose to analyse it must acknowledge its importance.

Historically, we have seen that the audience plays a key role within diplomatic signalling. During a time of crisis in particular, both sending and receiving states alike considered the process and power of diplomatic signalling a highly important communication tool, and therefore was regularly used as means for communication. As official channels were the only sanctioned method of communication during a crisis, nearly all diplomatic

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<sup>30</sup> This is unless the 100 followers in question makeup a large percentage of top connected diplomats online. Through their own sub networks, these followers then have the potential to expand the messages reach and impact at a much greater rate than compared to 100 unofficial actors/followers.

<sup>31</sup> Indirect followers refer to those who may receive the message through a retweet or reshare, or through an offline media outlet, which may have picked up the online message and reconstructed into the offline space.

communication during this time was limited to high-level officials of a state. If agents therefore wished to engage in the signalling process, the communicative method was primarily seen in the form of Demarches, Collective Representations, and Note Verbal, with these methods delivering the diplomatic message straight to official members of government and, as a result, having little contact with an audience outside of the official remit. For example, only the intended addressee, not anyone else, read the diplomatic tablets contained in the Amarna Letters. Similarly, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, diplomats were still, by and large, seen as members of an ‘aristocratic international’, having a sophistication communication system which was restricted to their own official network, and having little contact with other sections of society (EA, 27, 28). Of course, there were obvious drawbacks to the exclusively bilateral communication system of the Amarna Letter. For one thing, the lack of a wider audience made it more difficult to incur commitments<sup>32</sup>. While making communication simpler in many respects, a strictly delimited audience also narrowed the register one could play upon in employing various commitment tactic.

For arguments sake, we can say that in some cases the intended target audience of the signal was indeed the public themselves, but, due to the methods of delivery available to the diplomat, this intention was rarely achieved; with officials of the receiving message mostly choosing to keep it to themselves, especially if this message contained criticisms of their state. Take for example the first phase of the 1979-1981 Iranian Hostage crisis, where the United States used traditional media sources to communicate and send diplomatic signals to a very specific audience: the terrorists themselves holding the hostages. Additionally, during the 1991 Gulf War, George Bush and Saddam Hussein also hurled messages back and forth via the global news networks, thus forming a ‘de facto hotline’ between Washington and Baghdad (Newsom 1996). In their work *Megaphone diplomacy in the Northern Irish Peace Process*, Sparre and Spencer (2004) also wrote on the process of diplomatic signalling, presenting the case of parties in the conflict in Northern Ireland conducting dialogues and exchanged messages through the media because formal negotiations were neither possible nor desirable. In this case, it is argued that the media

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, Tushratta’s problems in convincing Akhenaten that his father had indeed made a vow to send gold and establish good relations stemmed in part, from the commitment (EA, 26, 27, 28).

dialogue in this case helped both sides keep the peace process alive and exchange significant messages.

Although these cases differ substantially in terms of their political leaders and the diplomatic actors who sent signals, they both reflect situations in which the audience for signals were usually known or had concentrated demographics to some degree. In the Iranian Hostage crisis, we saw the United States communicate with the terrorists through the traditional media, and during the Gulf War, we saw communication directed at official state members (Larson 1986). In both cases, the U.S. was aware that the audience was primarily made up of those who were interested or engaged directly in the crisis itself, or were actively tuning in to the existing media broadcasts already. These are but a few examples, but can be replicated time and time again through further historical cases, showing us succinctly that target audiences for diplomatic signals recipients have historically played a key role within the process of offline diplomatic signalling, although their numbers and demographics were usually known, even if this information was in some instances extremely limited. Overall these cases demonstrate that the potential for the signals impact was arguably much less than what the diplomatic realm experiences today, purely due to the limitations of the communication medium itself.

However, in the modern day the advent of electronic media has made the differentiation among audiences has become more difficult, and diplomats have been forced to discuss their policies publicly and to a wide range of audiences. This represents a problem for the finely calibrated signalling of classic diplomacy, which was characterised by constructive ambiguity to allow for varying interpretations among strictly delimited audiences. We see diplomatic agents now operating within a system of diplomacy which is vastly more diverse and complicated than say 50 or even ten years ago, forcing practitioners to conform less and less to a single, structured template within their daily role. We also see social media, with its power of international attraction, greatly expanding the role and power of audience's online, audiences who now have the power to receive, interpret, and respond to any process or individual act of diplomatic signalling. Today's diplomat must therefore craft their message with the knowledge that not only will an increased number of audience members see it, but that this audience itself will be varied and distinct. They must be aware that, when they are communicating online, they are communicating not only to their national audience, but a plethora of international ones too. Whereas we have seen

diplomatic signalling traditionally addressed to exclusive and clearly delineated audiences with a diplomat afforded a high degree of control to vary their message accordingly, social media has made the differentiation among audiences substantially more difficult and complex. Additionally, this new role of multiple audiences has increased ambiguity within diplomatic messages, as although explicit and unambiguous signalling is desirable *Vis-a-vis* one category of receivers, it may end up having disastrous effects on the sender's relations with another category of receivers; something which the online diplomat must now take into account.

With that said, this research acknowledges that the role of the audience within the process of reception is not just about numerics – that is the onscreen figure of how many people follow you – but also about *engagement* and *interaction*, an aspect of diplomacy which the unique tools and mechanisms social media creates amplify and push forth. Today, diplomatic agents find themselves with the power to not only directly send signals to their domestic citizens and international followers, but also to engage with them, speak to them, and interact with them on a real-time basis. Diplomats are no longer only required to speak *at* their audience. Rather, through direct messaging, public retweets, and public replies, they must now actively listen, engage and interact with them on a regular and real-time basis. The consequence of this for diplomatic crisis communication is that diplomats now face a growing pressure to actively listen to their audience and engage with them in order to create online communication accounts which aid them in their foreign policy aims and work towards crafting strong and effective diplomatic discourse online. Therefore, social media amplified what we already knew: engagement within diplomacy matters. However, with the increasingly pervasive nature of social media platforms, diplomats can no longer sweep this acknowledgment under the rug. If they are to remain a relevant and powerful actor both on and offline, they must take advantage of it in all its forms.

#### ***v. Online Diplomatic Network***

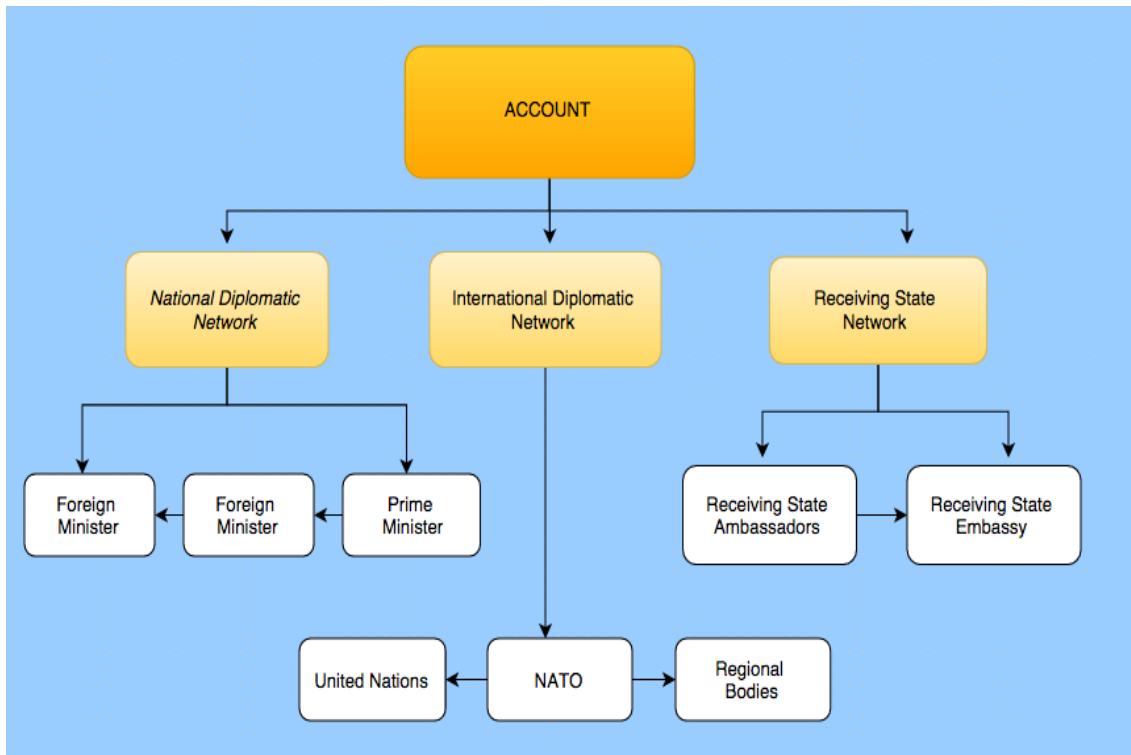
After dealing with who sends the signal, to how frequently they send it, what it is about, and who receives it, the final mechanism deals with is how other diplomatic actors online receive and respond to these signals. It relates to online diplomatic network power and the

role it plays within digital crisis communication today. Although a novel mechanism online, its premise is not entirely new, based as it is on the existing assumption that networks are a fundamental unit of social organisation underneath and above the nation-states and are social structures which can readily carry out the business of the diplomatic craft. Within the signalling process itself, diplomats have long deemed networks a useful communication tool, working not only as methods of message diffusion and dissemination amongst actors, but also as an arena in which qualities reflective of the effect of those relations are imbedded – shared norms, ideas and values. Today they allow the sharing of enhanced and reinforced messages online and have emerged as a tool of significance within the realm of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic communication.

Historically, network power played a role within the practice of the diplomatic craft both in and outside a crisis framework. One of the first examples of network diplomacy came in the form of collective representations – which were seen as statements of support or joint *de´marches* (particularly during times of crisis), and offered advantages over those of an individual diplomat’s comment (Davis 1943; Zhou 1996). For one, these collective representations redressed the balance between the diplomatic agent and their host, which tended to be skewed in favour of the receiving State in bilateral diplomatic relations. The logic behind such collective representations arguably lay in the belief that the receiving state and international stage could view a lone diplomat speaking out on certain crises as a possible embarrassment, but would view a group of embassies together as a force that was dangerous to ignore. The use of the diplomatic network therefore strengthened the diplomatic signal itself, whilst providing additional support for those who decided to send it.

However fast forward to today and what do we see? At present, we see the motivation behind the use of diplomatic networks arguably remaining the same, but with social media and the unique mechanism it now affords expanding this motivation and potential for impact at a rate never before seen. Ambassadors now can easily retweet the words of their fellow colleagues on the ground, reshare the posts of their Foreign Ministries or international organisations, or at the push of a button provide online support to any actor in the world. Thus, through the tools of online media, diplomatic agents now possess the opportunity to connect and engage with each other far beyond the once confined realms of a *Joint de´Marché* or a *Collective representation*.

Figure 3.6 Example of Online Diplomatic Networks



To focus on the power of the online network within our research specifically, we will first turn to the anatomy of the online diplomatic network as illustrated above. By this we refer to all the diplomatic actors who possess a Facebook and/or Twitter account during a time of crisis and the online network they created. Our analysis will divide this online diplomatic network into three distinct networks: national, international, and receiving state, all of which are shown to play various communicative roles and contribute to varying degrees of the virtual enlargement process for an account during crises.

We will first examine the *national diplomatic network*, which consists of all online diplomatic actors accredited to the Foreign Ministry account, namely their respective Foreign Minister, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, National Parliament etc. While use of this online network is particularly effective for an individual account to *inter alia* quickly share information from their Ministry, link to a national press report or highlight the words of their Foreign Minister during this time, it is arguably not a novel

mechanism in diplomatic crisis communication. Obviously, a diplomatic agent on the ground acting as a mouthpiece for their Ministry is an innate practice of crisis communication dating to the very beginning of diplomacy. However, the direct result of this online network should not be dismissed as it does ensure that the agent's message can be sent at a faster rate, to an increased audience, and on a much more frequent basis. In turn, this all serves (as illustrated above) to project and signal the diplomat's crisis messages with varying degrees of communicative effect. That being said, it does not fully utilise this new strength of online network power within the signalling process today. For this we turn to the second component of the online diplomatic network, the *International Diplomatic Network*, which refers to all online diplomatic accounts accredited to international bodies: United Nations, World Trade Organisation, Organisation of the Security and Co-Operation in Europe etc. We can argue that, compared to national diplomatic networks, online diplomatic actors retweeting and resharing within international online networks can work towards creating a set of stronger signals on a crisis and illustrate through new means their loyalty to and position on certain international opinions. For example, if the Ambassador of Ireland utilises their account to regularly retweet, quote and/or share the online posts of international bodies such as the United Nations, NATO or the OSCE, this arguably sends a signal to their online audience that they stand behind official international opinion on the crisis, that they wish to have their name attached to this stance, and that they deem this opinion worthy of sharing with their followers.

Finally, the last online network comes in the form of the *receiving state diplomatic network*, which is made up of all diplomatic actors who are accredited to the receiving state in which the crisis is operating; Embassy accounts, United Nations Missions etc. The effect of using this network is similar to using that of the international one illustrated above, in that it demonstrates a unified message from all Ambassadors or Embassies who choose to retweet or share it, helping to create a shared discourse amongst all actors on the ground, and in turn sends a stronger signal for all actors who engage in the network regarding the state's position on the crisis.

The proposed power of this mechanism arises from the assumption that actors sharing and publicly supporting each other's views grants the potential to reinforce and fortify certain messages within a crisis. Thus, it seems that, through a host of new avenues afforded to

them on the platforms of Twitter and Facebook, online agents can today use online networks as a tool to craft both effective crisis communication strategies online and diplomatic signals of varying degrees of impact regarding the crisis itself. Diplomatic actors now have the ability to connect, interact, and engage with their online networks on a regular and real-time basis, and through resharing, and retweeting posts within their diplomatic networks, can seek to enhance the reach potential of the message whilst also publicly demonstrating their support for it. This research therefore argues that network power can therefore be regarded as a powerful signalling tool during a time of political crisis, and that diplomatic actors should recognise its potential accordingly.

### **3.2. Online Crisis Narratives**

#### *3.2.1 Digital Diplomatic Signalling + Online Crisis Narratives = Virtual Enlargement*

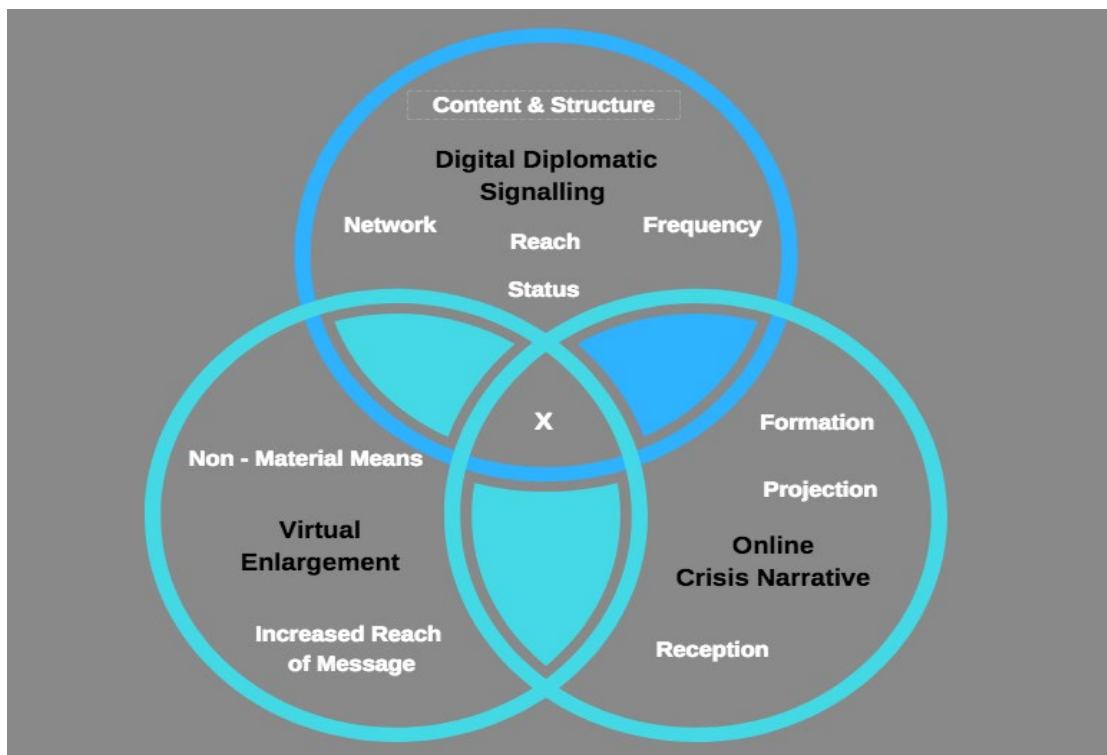
Before we turn the definitional framework of online crisis narrative, it is necessary to address one aspect of this research which is difficult to make explicit in its explanation: the connection between use of the digital diplomatic signalling mechanisms and how they create and add to the overall process of online crisis narratives. The outcome for the online diplomatic actor using the signalling mechanisms effectively is twofold. First, when analysed as a stand-alone process in itself, it creates for the MFA, *interalia*, increased foreign policy projection, a heightened presence of their crisis positions online, and, through a series of retweets and reshares, the multiplication of the state's crises message within and amongst the online diplomatic networks. Second, when viewed as a process which carries with it potential to linkages to other communicative ones, we see that the outcome for using the digital signalling process effectively is the creation of an online crisis narrative on behalf of the state.

Therefore, while both communicative capabilities - DDS and OCN - may be viewed as worthy tools in their own right, both in terms of their role and impact within an MFAs crisis communication strategy, and can therefore stand alone for individual discovery and analysis (which these definitional frameworks provide), when both communicative capabilities are effectively combined they bring with them the opportunity for MFAs

something more: the possibility of virtual state enlargement. That is, they provide both the opportunity and the means for a state to exert their foreign policy power both online and off. Thus, we can say that the outcome of digital diplomatic signalling is online crisis narrative creation but the effect is virtual state enlargement. Here strategies (DDS and OCN) for ‘virtual enlargement’ are feasible methods with which states can exert their influence and presence in the global information age. This research, through conceptual exploration, data analysis, and policy recommendations, seeks to provide these strategies.

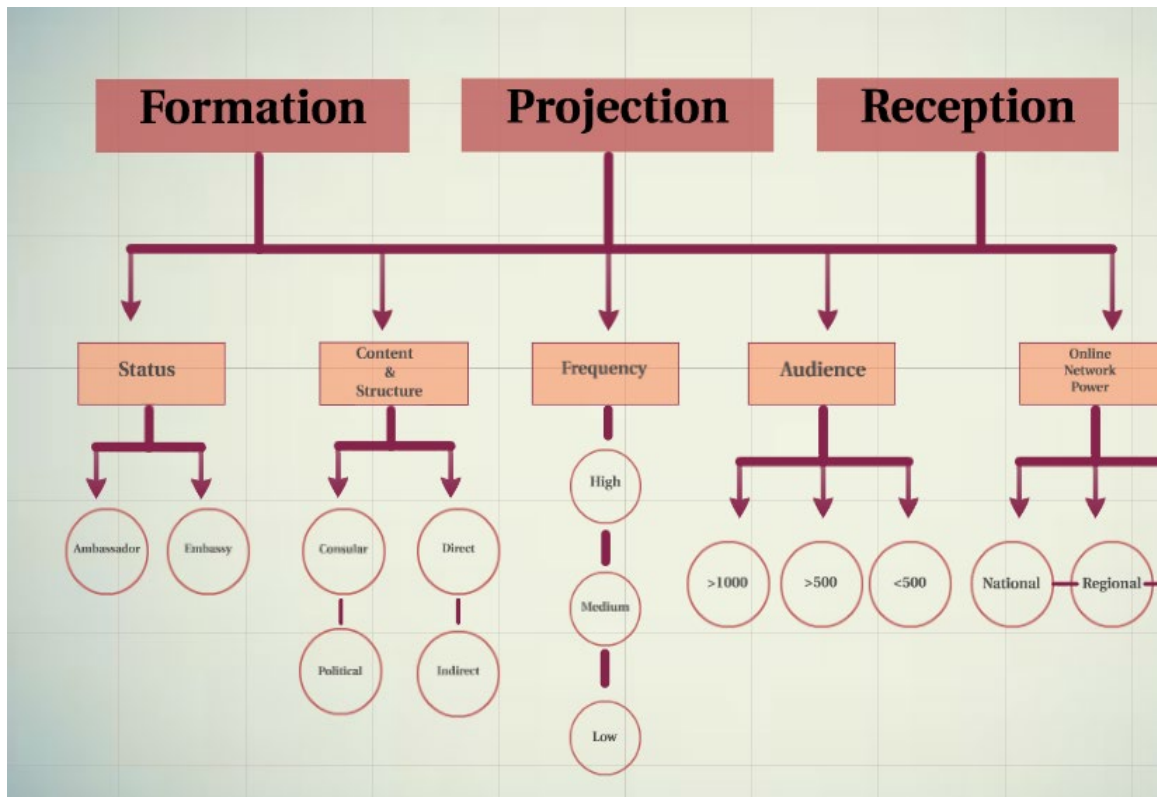
The figure below further illustrates an outline of each communicative capability, its processes, and its connection to its possible outcome of virtual enlargement; ‘x’ being the crux of this research. Here we have a basic formula: (effective) DDS + OCN = VE.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 3.7 Connection of Core Components



<sup>33</sup> The connection between OCN, and DDS must also be expanded upon and explored, with its connection and potential for impact, lying at the heart of this research. Here we can see that under each heading within the online crisis narrative framework (formation, projection and reception), an individual mechanism of the DDS process is linked. These mechanisms are therefore seen as tools to make sense of how crisis narratives are developed and projected. Thus, each mechanism can be assessed for its potential to do just that; form, project, and received a state's foreign policy. The links between these mechanisms are shown below with Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.8 Narrative and Signalling Connections



### 3.2.2 Online Crisis Narrative: A Definitional Framework

In a world of information overload and chaos, narratives have continually acted as a tool with which diplomats can seek to establish order and craft a story about their country's identity and how it expects to use its power on the international stage. As noted within Chapter Two, these functions are particularly pertinent to a crisis period, where a state can seek to craft a narrative to help clarify their interests and direction internally, 'harness' their soft power, and create expectations abroad regarding their strategies and objectives. By communicating a conception of how their country exercises its power, domestic and overseas audiences can therefore arrive at a shared expectation of how that country is likely to behave, opening the possibility for enhanced credibility and legitimacy for that country's foreign policy. A worthy objective for an MFA to achieve during a crisis.

Today also we can say that the communicative processes of *online* narrative creation have emerged as a concept which can, in part, provide intellectual purchase on the complexities of diplomatic communication, particularly regarding how influence works in a new media environment within a political crisis scenario. This is because digital platforms have allowed for thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of crisis narratives to emerge and have the power to be heard within an online context. Although primary actors within a crisis do not hear or respect all narratives within the crisis, there still exists substantially more voices than there did even a decade ago. Thus, the sheer existence of this number of narratives creates increased pressure on an MFA to have their voice heard above the noise. In short, the battle for narratives has transformed into a sort of war in itself. As the struggle for narratives is played out online, the construction of a narrative which is well projected and received by a wide-ranging group of actors allows states to order the online noise and establish their own story amongst the competing online voices. Based on previous analysis, it is clear that, engagement in the narrative process goes much further than simply having your voice heard. It is about the outcome and effect of virtual state enlargement; the art of states to enlarge their importance to the international community through non – material forces (Chong 2012). Of course, this outcome is only achieved if the communicative capabilities are used in a strategic manner, something we shall explore in greater detail in the upcoming sections.

But the question must be asked: today, within the global information age, what makes one narrative heard and not another? The disorienting and disruptive effects of crises tend to provoke many competing answers to this question. While many of the initial accounts prove arbitrary, short-lived, and lacking long-term consequences for power relations and overall social dynamics, some do get *selected* as the basis for crisis-management and/or for attempts to move beyond crisis. While some narratives need to convince only a few key policy makers or strategists leading to more administered, indirect, market-mediated, or molecular changes that involve limited participation from subaltern groups, others are effective only through their capacity to mobilise significant support from a broader range of social forces. Such transformative narratives connect personal experiences, the narratives of key stakeholders and organised interests, and grand narratives that provide broader context for making sense of the crisis. In the latter cases, the plausibility of narratives and their associated strategies and projects depends on their resonance (and hence capacity to reinterpret and mobilise) with the personal (including shared) narratives

of significant classes, strata, social categories or crisis-affected groups. Moreover, although many plausible narratives are advanced, their narrators will not be equally effective in conveying their messages and securing support for the lessons they hope to draw (Jessop 2014).

In this instance, we have also seen the importance of forums. It is clear that the offline power of the state continues to remain a vital component of how a state's crisis narrative is heard amongst the increasing plethora of voices online. Thus, powerful narratives without powerful bases to back them are less effective than more 'arbitrary, rationalistic and willed' accounts that the powerful consistently pursue through a de facto exercise of power. Within the context of a global crisis, this factor has proved impactful due to some international institutions and nation-states emerging as more important or better respected in terms of engagement with their message, retweets, and shares when compared to their contemporaries. We see this within the online community, where larger states such as those in the P-5, or those that have a higher GDP, emerge as the dominant voices within the online crisis narratives. Of course, particular theoretical and policy paradigms shape their individual narratives and power limits their serious consideration of radical alternatives. Thus, while we may speak of social media as the great equaliser and the tool which allows all policies and narratives to be heard and interpreted on an equal footing, this is simply not always the case. Rather, we see that for a powerful narrative to emerge, it needs a powerful base for implementation.

Therefore, while seeing narratives as tools for political purposes in the digital age, this research accepts Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle's, proposed definition of a narrative:<sup>34</sup>

*means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and*

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<sup>34</sup> Miskimmon et al. focus on the nature of *strategic* narratives. Although building on their work, this research does not explicitly adhere to the claim that all narratives are strategic. That is, they are planned, formed and with clear intent. It recognises that some narratives may emerge which are not intended, but it more a question of how they are projected and received which gives the narrative power, as opposed to how strategically it was formed by the MFA and state. With that said, Miskimmon et al. provide a worthy framework and explanation regarding how to gauge the concepts of narrative construction and projection, and will be used throughout our research, as we seek to measure OCN under their definitional framework proposed above.

*international actors... [they are tools] for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate. They are narratives about states and the system itself, both about who we are and what kind of order we want (2013: 2).*

As expanded upon in detail within Chapter Two and Three, Miskimmon et al. (2013:2) break down the inner workings of a narrative, writing a ‘narrative involves three interconnected and complementary dynamics, understood as the process of narrative formation, narrative projection and narrative reception’. Narratives then, directly address how a message is created, in what form it is published, and how others receive it online and off. Thus, it is vital that those seeking to strategically create narratives must pay as much attention to the reception and interpretation of narratives as to their formation and projection, since it is in reception that meaning is made and any attractiveness, engagement and scope for persuasion are located and experienced (Skuse et al., 2011). Nye himself says as much, explaining that, ‘what the target thinks is particularly important, and the targets matter as much as the agents’ (Nye Jr, 2011: 84).

As such, an MFA can, by projecting and expanding the reach of its foreign policy during a crisis and by building a comprehensible crisis narrative that appeals to other powers and transnational audiences, seek to meet foreign policy aims where the use of material resources and capabilities is not feasible. Looking through the lens of individual agency, we can see that diplomats on the ground must now, during a crisis, face novel choices about how to respond to a changing context and uncertainty about the most optimal or fit set of policies, such that any choice requires justification. Since other actors in the system will be performing similar acts of narrative projection within their foreign policy, an actor must continually refine and adapt their narrative in response to others’ communications, others’ actions, and in response to critical events which may appear to contradict other actors’ narratives. Thus, understanding this new environment in which these actors operate is imperative if a state is to successfully engage with crisis communication strategies, and in particular the battle for crisis narratives online. Therefore, we must turn now to the three stages of the online crisis narrative construction: formation, projection, and reception.

### 3.2.3 Formation

International relations scholars have always looked at the formation and evolution of great powers' ideas about themselves and the international system, or put more concisely, the formation of narratives, or, in the case of our own research, crisis narratives. At its core, explaining the formation of the narrative involves understanding actors' foreign policy goals and types of communication. Here agenda setting, legitimation, diverting attention, securing acquiescence, enhancing popularity and mobilisation are all examples of communicative goals. According to Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013), narratives may be designed with short-term and/or long-term goals in mind. Beyond these goals, diplomatic actors can use different types of communication in construction of crises narratives including persuasion, argument, and representational force. Indeed, understanding an actor's foreign policy aims or communicative practices is a central issue in the study of crises narratives and diplomacy more broadly. At the domestic level, in each phase of the policy-making process – agenda setting, decision making and implementation – diplomatic actors must seek to set the terms of the debate, and ultimately affect the process of thinking about and deciding on policy, and guide how the policies themselves are played out.

Beyond crisis communicative aims which are focused on agenda setting and policy legitimacy within a political crises context, diplomatic actors may have broader long-term goals associated with cultivating a positive perception of themselves over time in the international realm. This is related to the very concept of soft power that highlights the importance of 'getting other to want you want' (ibid: 9). As Hayden notes, 'how soft power resources are vested with rhetorical capacity...are not elaborated in most depictions of soft power' (51). In order to address this, we must put forth the claim that it is a diplomatic actor's ability to construct narratives which enhance their state's appeal to foreign audiences. This echoes Hayden's description of 'policies'...as strategic arguments in support of soft power actions...and packed with assumptions about the nature of agents (actors), proper vehicles of influence (role and plot), and achievable outcomes (future goals)' (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle: 9). Thus, depending on the type of influence actors want – long or short-term - they may choose to use media differently and have different expectations regarding how the media can help achieve their aims and objectives.

In the case of this research, we have seen that online platforms appear to be opening up the formation of crises narratives in particular. Not simply *during* the crisis, i.e. using the device to form a narrative and project a message in ‘real-time’, but *before* the crisis actually takes place. Pre-crisis, this research places a particular emphasis on the existence of a code of digital practice within a Foreign Ministry and a culture of training for its diplomatic agents that ensures they have a firm foundation in which to build and use their digital expertise to form a narrative during a crisis. The existence of a clear code of practice and regular training for all levels of diplomatic agents removes a culture of fear that surrounds many Ambassadors and Embassies when it comes to using social media platforms to form their message. Instead, it creates an environment in which they can form their message faster, backed with the confidence that they are following protocol and policy. Of course, regular consultation with the central HQ is needed within the crisis to ensure that Embassies form their narrative and messages correctly and in precise alignment with the state’s directive. In short, having a code of digital practice and digital training to ensure its effective implementation is necessary to an effective holistic approach to forming a crisis narrative.

Finally, in the case of our research and methodological framework, we do restrain ourselves to state actors, namely MFAs and diplomatic agents representing them on the ground, forming narratives.

#### *3.2.4. Projection*

Who projects the narrative, represents the narrative, and is the guarantor of its credibility? These are important questions when discussing the projection of narratives online during times of crises. Of course, it is crucial to outline or conceptualise how a narrative is formed, but without examining how the narrative is packaged and projected we are missing out on a crucial component of the process.

According to Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2013), the projection of narratives in today’s global information age presents significant opportunities and challenges for actors. There is no doubt that the mass media environment has become increasingly complex as the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have progressed, albeit unevenly, to an era of global information

and the communicative power that in turn brings to all actors online. The literature in communication and political communication increasingly (and rightly) acknowledges this new environment and how the type of media can affect how messages are projected and constructed. (2013: 10). In light of the digital technologies we analyse here, this point is increasingly relevant to the creation of crises narratives in a number of ways, including increased interactivity, and accelerated and distorted time horizons (2013: 9). In addition, just as we have seen with the structure of the message, a focus on diplomatic actors requires us to acknowledge that some actors will be more adept at communication in different medias and operate with different degrees of effective communication success (in terms of reach, presence and reception of the message) – a running theme through this online signalling process and the upcoming data analysis.

The development of communication technologies has increased the number of people who can communicate in public. Robin Brown argues that, ‘the diffusion of communications technologies, ranging, from the telephone to the Internet, is producing a more open, more public, political environment and that this environment modifies the type of political strategies that work’ (ibid: 10). Actors – in this case diplomatic actors – must take into account an environment in which others may challenge both them and their messages. Steel claims that the ‘forms of technology (such as the Internet) accelerate the dissemination of information so that such information remains slightly ‘ahead’ of a power attempting to classify and regiment it’ (ibid).

This increased reach and availability of communication technologies allows diplomats and MFAs to expand their foreign policy interests at a rate and extent never before seen; Ultimately, this provides them with the power and opportunity to project a crisis narrative. In short, methods of narrative projection are essential to the creation of a crisis narrative and carry with them the power to dominate the crisis communication discourse and sculpt the conversation in the MFA’s favour and in line with their objectives. As was previously explored, within a crisis communication strategy we see methods of projection through not only the online platform itself, but the signalling mechanisms of frequency, audience reach, structure of the message, and use of online diplomatic networks. How we measure this projection is discussed in detail in the upcoming chapter on methodological tools and framework.

### 3.2.5 Reception

Set within the definitional framework and placed firmly alongside the process of formation and projection of online crises narratives, we now turn our attention to the reception and spaces of receptions of the online messages. Indeed, the process of reception of a crisis narrative is subject to contestation because there is competition to determine who has a chance to receive the narrative. However, in the age of the digital it is perhaps justified to claim that the concept of ‘contestation’ has been increasingly re-conceptualised thanks to the large audiences now available online. For example, while a diplomat may know they have 532 followers on their Twitter account, they also recognise that Twitter is a public forum and their message is open to all those netizens active on Twitter, all of whom have the power to contest the message and narrative. Furthermore, it is also arguably better to have more active followers of influence (in this case, other diplomatic actors and official actors within the receiving state) who actually have the potential to receive and listen to the message projected, as opposed to a mass of followers who do not engage with the message projected and have no interest in its content.

As was previously noted, a major problematic issue within this research emerges from some of the fundamentals of the knowledge it is possible to possess about narratives. In particular, the puzzle of how to determine reception and eventual effects, especially in light of polysemy, multiple narrators and channels, and negotiated meanings proves challenging. One previously discussed means of resolving these theoretical issues was to orient the narrative within the broader concept of discourse. Of course, while recognising that the reception of narratives is an important factor in measuring its ‘success’, it is also important to investigate how they are *practiced*. The focus then shifts from the narrative as a thing-in-itself to its position within a context of production and consumption. In short, the relations among crisis narratives and the practice of diplomatic communication to achieve state objectives. Thus, while the study of the process of reception is indeed a vital aspect of an OCN, this study recognises its limitations in its measurement of it.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> The study of the process of reception can involve a whole methodological toolkit built on years of political communication literature. Interesting methodologies that are particularly well suited for understanding how people make sense of narratives include Q-methodology and focus groups. Soft power analysis in particular may seek to identify whether audiences find one’s country attractive, appealing, welcoming or worth emulating. The analysis of the narratives through which policy or public audiences make sense of the world also give for a more penetrating analysis. The methodological goal, is of course is to identify whether audiences come to understand international affairs in the terms of the OCN formed and projected in different

methodological toolkit used to study the reception of the online crisis narratives will be discussed in detail in the upcoming methodological chapter.

### **3.3 The Outcome: Virtual Enlargement**

Virtual enlargement is defined as the art of states to enlarge their importance to the international community through a variety of methods and means (Vukadinovic 1971; Commonwealth Secretariat 1985; 1997; Cooper and Shaw 2009). As noted within the Introductory Chapter, strategies for ‘virtual enlargement’ are feasible methods in which states may seek to exert their influence and presence in the global information age. These strategies – in which DDS and OSN are key components – are now considered alongside material resources as a determinant of whether emerging great powers are able to shape a new systemic alignment. These strategies therefore carry with them the potential to act as communicative tools for foreign policy power projection, and virtual powers of engagement as the ‘battle for crisis narratives’ is played out online. These strategies, in which the signalling mechanisms and the connected stages of the narrative creation play key roles, emerge as powerful tools where states can project their values and interests in order to extend their influence, manage expectations, and alter the discursive environment within which the crisis conversation operates.

Indeed, the ever more densely ‘mediated’ political context of crises communication within which the MFA now operates and the capacity they are presented with to enhance their virtual presence and project their crisis narrative is arguably becoming a fundamental political-administrative asset. In a way, this capacity is now inherent to Ambassadors and Embassies on the ground. In short, this is because representative diplomatic leadership is one of the vital aspects of successful crisis management during a crisis. People have always expected leaders (in this case the representative of the sending state on the ground) to provide a believable and authoritative account that promises a way out of the crisis. They are urged to explain what went wrong and what is going wrong. Narratives in this instance have proven a vital resource in achieving some of these aims, with Ambassadors or Heads

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ways. Thus, the challenge – and the promise – of studying narratives (online or off) lies in the conceptual underpinning that invites the use of multiple methodologies to inform our understanding of influence in the world as we know it.

of Mission typically seeking to direct or influence both the behaviour of citizens the crisis affects or threatens and the beliefs and attitudes of their many other constituencies: receiving state officials, international environment, press corps and general public. Crises, then, can provide real-world ‘stress tests’ to the resilience of political systems and the crisis management capacities of diplomatic agents on the ground. They play out against a backdrop of public expectations (influenced in part by leaders themselves) that can be very challenging to meet. In some cases, the quality of crisis management makes the difference between life and death, chaos and order, or break down and resilience. However, when dealt with correctly and with leaders meeting the expectations of their through communication means (or otherwise), they present feasible methods and provide a vital opportunity in which states may seek to exert their influence and presence in the global information age.

The process of virtual enlargement is one that remains under researched and underexplored in this context. This is in part because the global information age has altered the environment in which all states now have to operate. It has created an environment in which smaller states can compete more effectively with larger states regarding how they choose to exert and extend their communicative influence online. This increased power of smaller states to compete on a more equal level is particularly pertinent during a crisis, where states can seek to ensure their narrative is the one heard within the vast amount of information online in order to achieve greater influence. Indeed, the emerging global media environment – in particular the advent of Internet based means of mass communication – has been a key driver behind the increased focus on the ‘intangibles of war’, the non-material forces which states use to extend presence and reach. Here new types of media have bolstered the weaker side’s chances of turning the virtual dimension of war into a decisive arena. And just as the invention of gunpowder revolutionised military clashes on the physical battlefield, so has the coming of new media types inarguably transformed the fight for perceptions in the cognitive domain.

Another reason why the process or concept of virtual enlargement remains under researched is that it continuously proves extremely difficult to measure and quantify. Given the current state of methodological tools presented to us, we cannot say with direct certainty that either projecting a state's crises narrative at an exponential rate, increasing engagement with official and nonofficial actors, or creating direct dialogue between crisis narratives

online, alters the crisis in a direct manner. There are too many variables within a crisis (back - channel diplomacy, secret diplomacy, international public opinion, and offline media environment) to make the claim that engaging with these communicative capabilities (even effectively) can alter the crisis in a direct and isolated manner. However, we can argue that through increased projection and reception of a crisis narrative, a state can certainly virtually enlarge their presence within the crisis communication dialogue, thereby increasing their ability to manage the crisis within their own Ministry and at an Embassy level. We have argued that when these mechanisms are performed right, an MFA can increase their online presence, order the crisis narrative to some degree, give meaning and leadership to its citizens regarding the situation, and sculpt the crisis discourse in their favour. Our upcoming data chapters provide strong evidence to support these claims. Thus, at some level, the process of virtual enlargement has to be more than a subjective constant, and if it is to be measured in anyway, it requires some type of analytical framework, or process of measurement. This chapter, and this research as a whole, has sought to move the process of virtual enlargement beyond a transmutable concept and proposes the hypothesis that, when used effectively, the two communicative capabilities of DDS and OCN can equate to virtual enlargement or at the very least correlate or correspond to the process.

Finally, when addressing the concept of virtual enlargement, we argue that just because states are today awarded the ability to wield these unique processes to augment and amplify their foreign policy message and objectives does not mean that they actually use them. Indeed, even if they do utilise them, this does not mean they do so them effectively. This chapter has delved into this concept of effective use of communicative capabilities through an exploration of the inner workings of the digital signalling and online narrative process and how each mechanism and narrative stage carries with it the potential to enhance a state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create a coherent and appealing message to officials and non-officials alike. To further illustrate how these capabilities are used most effectively in practice, we turn to the creation of a set of typologies in order to establish a barometer of combinations of mechanisms which will work best to achieve the process of virtual enlargement.

### 3.4 Digital Signalling Typologies

With the definitional frameworks and core mechanisms firmly in place, the final piece of the conceptual puzzle, digital signalling typologies, can be created. These typologies emerge from the core mechanisms of the signalling process illustrated above and provide an avenue for us to empirically categorise their use. When constructed, they allow us to group together diplomatic agents' use of these online mechanisms and to put labels on this new practice of diplomatic communication and how it varies amongst actors today. Once the typologies are created, we will have standard categories which can be used to describe who is using this new practice best and who is not. Finally, the creation of these digital signalling typologies emerges from the core belief that diplomatic agents use digital technologies and communicative capabilities in very distinct manners. If one is to truly go about understanding how diplomatic signals and crisis narratives are evolving in the technological age, we require not only acknowledgement of this belief, but also the tools with which to illustrate and explain these practices in a tangible manner.

As with many qualitative studies, this research builds on the premise that types are constructed as a way to comprehend, understand, and explain complex social realities on the ground. Indeed, their usage in this research proves no different. Here, the construction of a set of typologies act as a methodological tool which allow us to view and categorise this process of online signalling in a manner which is standardised, structured, and replicable. However, there currently exists very different steps for analysis carried out in single studies, and few general approaches for type construction exist within the current literature. Furthermore, those who engage in type creation frequently use different concepts of types (e.g. ideal types, empirical types, structure types, prototypes etc.), without the concept of a 'type' remaining explicitly defined (Hauptert 1991; Juettemann 1981, 1989; Mayring 1990, 1993).

With that said, this research does pick a conceptual path, choosing to create our typologies within an empirical type framework. Justification for this choice emerges from the work of Becker (1968/1950), McKinney (1969, 1970), and Bailey (1973), who, in addition to Weber's work on ideal types, point to the argument that both the empirical regularities and correlations (*Kausaladaequanz*) and the existing meaningful relationships (*Sinnadaequanz*) must be analysed in order to achieve a suitable interpretation of typical social action (*eine*

‘richtige kausale Deutung typischen Handelns’) and to develop understandable (‘verstaendliche’) types of social action, therefore: sociological rules (Weber 1921; 5). This argument is further expanded to show that, on the one hand, empirical investigations always need theoretical knowledge, because investigations cannot be carried out in a purely inductive fashion (Kelle 1998; Kluge 1999). On the other hand, empirical investigations must also form the basis for qualitative social research if meaningful statements about social reality, not just empirically remote constructs, are to be made. It is therefore only when empirical analyses are combined with theoretical knowledge that ‘empirically grounded types’; may be developed. Types can therefore nearly always be viewed as constructions, which are dependent on the attributes that should form the basis for the typology. This argument forms the foundation for this research’s typology creation and seeks to justify its very use.

Table 3.1. Digital Diplomatic Signalling Typologies

	<b>High (3)</b>	<b>Medium (2)</b>	<b>Low (1)</b>
Content & Structure	Heightened Online Discussion of Conflict (over 2 posts per day), Direct Structure	Regular Online Discussion of Conflict (1 post per day), Combination of Direct and Indirect Structure	Rare Online Discussion of Conflict (less than 1 post per day), Indirect Structure
Status	Ambassador or Head of Mission	Embassy	Embassy or Junior Diplomat
Audience	High Numerical Audience (over 1,000), Active Engagement with Audience	Average Numerical Audience (Between 500-1,000), Average Engagement with Audience	Low Numerical Audience (Less than 500), Weak Account Engagement with Audience
Frequency	High Use of Online Account (over 2 posts per day)	Average Online Activity (1 post per day)	Inactive or Irregular Use of Online Account (less than 1 post per day)
Network	High Connection, and Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online	<i>Any</i> Connection, and Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online	Non-Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online

For the online diplomatic signalling process, we can create three distinct typologies: *High Performance*, *Medium Performance* and *Low Performance*. While distinct, these typologies are based on an attribute space resulting from the combination of selected attributes and their dimensions - in our case the mechanisms *of content & structure*, *audience recipient*, *status of the sender*, *frequency*, and *network power*. Here every typology emerges from the result of a grouping process in which an object field is divided in some groups or types with the help of one or more attributes. This grouping process draws on the work of Lazarsfeld (1937), and Barton (1951) who present the claim that when constructing a type, elements within it have to be as similar as possible, in this case of our core mechanisms (internal heterogeneity on the ‘level of the type’) and the differences between these types have to be as strong as possible, seen here through high, medium and low performance (external heterogeneity on the ‘level of the typology’). Lazarsfeld and Barton espoused the claim that every type—in spite of all the differences, which can exist with regard to formal qualities like the degree of abstraction and complexity or the time-space links etc.—can therefore be defined as a combination of its attributes. Furthermore, since all possible combinations often do not exist in reality and/or the differences between individual combinations of attributes are not relevant for the research question, single fields of the attribute space can be summarised in a typological process called reduction (ibid). It is very effective in order to concentrate on the existing variety and to reduce it to a few relevant types, which we shall now illustrate.

### *3.4.1 Performance Types*

#### *i. High Performers*

The High-Performance typology represents a combination of mechanisms which best illustrate how a diplomatic actor may use the online mechanisms to contribute most effectively towards a process of virtual state enlargement. Here, each mechanism is used to its greatest potential to enhance the state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create a coherent and appealing message to officials and non-officials alike. We therefore call this category high performance and its users high performers. Below, we propose a number of possible scope conditions for an account to fall within this type:

<b>H<sub>a</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	X ≥ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Heightened Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Head of Mission
<b>Target Audience:</b>	High Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Direct
<b>Network Power:</b>	Increased use of National/Regional Diplomatic Networks Online

*ii. Mid-range (Medium) Performers*

The Medium Performance typology represents the combination of mechanisms, illustrating how an actor uses these capabilities during times of crisis. Within this typology, we see actors engaging with these capabilities to various degrees, but only taking full advantage of one or two online mechanism in a bid to project and extent their crisis messages online. Additionally, an actor may engage with all mechanisms but to a very limited and average extent. Thus, what this typology illustrates is a mixture of both high and low performers with a number of possible scope conditions proposed:

<b>H<sub>b</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	X ≤ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Regular Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Head of Mission
<b>Target Audience:</b>	High Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Indirect
<b>Network Power:</b>	None or limited use of National/Regional Diplomatic Networks Online

<b>H<sub>c</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	$X \geq$ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Regular Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Embassy
<b>Target Audience:</b>	Low Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Direct
<b>Network Power:</b>	None or limited use of National/Regional Diplomatic Networks Online

### *iii. Low Performers*

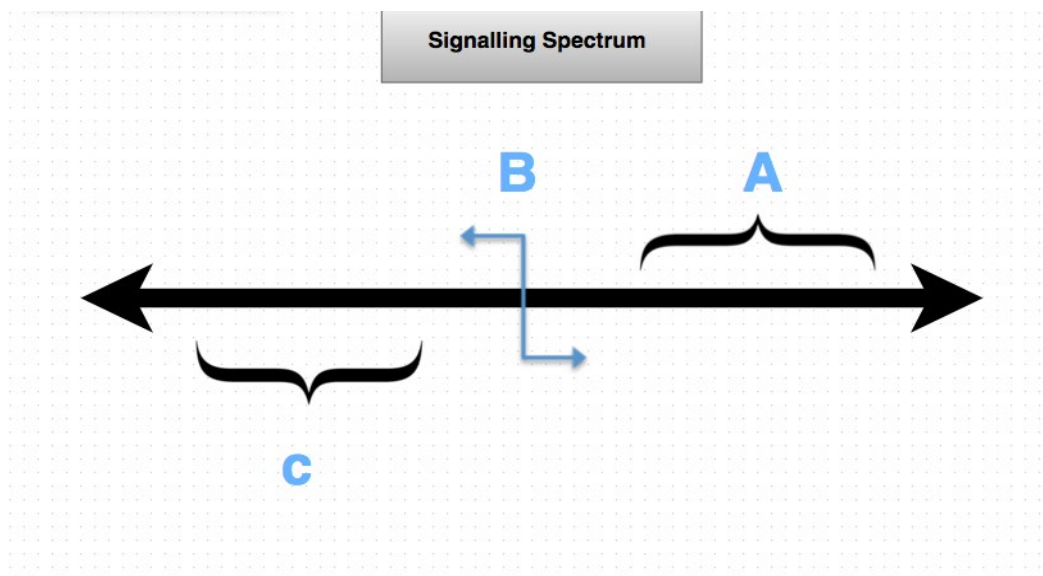
The final typology is that of Low Performers, which represents a combination of mechanisms illustrating how an online diplomatic account uses the process of digital diplomatic signalling with the least effect during times of crisis. We can call this category low performance and its users low performers. Here we propose a number of possible scope conditions for an account to fall within this type:

<b>H<sub>d</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	$X \leq$ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Rare Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Junior Diplomat
<b>Target Audience:</b>	Low Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Indirect
<b>Network Power:</b>	No use of National/Regional Diplomatic Networks Online

### 3.4.2 Visualisation of Typologies

For visualisation purposes, we can seek to place these typologies and the actors who fall within them on what we can call a *digital signalling spectrum*. This spectrum has two primary functions: visual and comparative. Visually, it allows us to illustrate the outcome of the data mined within the analysis of the online mechanisms and narrative creation. It also allows us to demonstrate at how individual accounts engaged with both communicative process online during the crisis, particularly in terms of their procedural communicative clout. Comparatively, it acts as a useful tool to compare and contrast not only how individual actors used both capabilities, but also how their use varied between online platforms and the crisis themselves. As a tool of comparative analysis, the spectrum creates a mechanism with which we can discover possible trends within this revised practice of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation. In turn, these trends can inform future practice and research. The Spectrum is divided into 3 fluid categories: Section A corresponding to the high performers, Section B to ‘mid-range performers’, and Section C ‘low performers’.

Figure 3.9 Digital Diplomatic Signalling Spectrum



At its core, this spectrum allows us to illustrate where certain accounts fall regarding their use of the online signalling process and where these accounts may stand compared to their contemporaries during the time of crisis. By constructing a unique spectrum for each crisis, we also have an opportunity to compare the crises themselves. Illustration of these hypotheses will be undertaken once they have been tested empirically. As noted previously, we will undertake this test through the analysis of an individual online account's use of the signalling and narrative processes, as demonstrated through the lens of the fundamental tenants and narrative stages during the time frame in question.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Firmly situated within the previous discussions on the themes of communicative capabilities in the global information age, this chapter has (re) conceptualised the process of diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives during the digital age. It has explored how, when used consistently and effectively, both processes can contribute and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement for the MFA during the crisis at play.

The (re)conceptualisation and exploration of these novel communicative capabilities and their outcomes and effects was achieved by the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological framework which was divided into three distinct parts: a) the construction of a definitional framework for the process of digital diplomatic signalling and online narratives; b) the presentation and discussion of five online mechanisms inherent to the online signalling process, which were all firmly situated within the formation, projection, and reception of online narrative construction; and c) a set of digital signalling typologies which, through the use of methodological and visualisation techniques, served (and will serve) as a comparative tool in which to both test crisis communication performance while also allowing us to compare and contrast an actor's use of these online communicative capabilities.

Through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological framework, this chapter has illustrated the hypothesis that, through its ability to create OCN, DDS developed as a powerful tool for engagement and foreign policy power projection, ultimately allowing states to enlarge their importance to the international community

through a variety of methods and means. Overall, through the creation of this framework, this chapter has crafted an understanding of how these new processes of DDS and OCN have the potential to act as modern crisis communication tools, and how a Foreign Ministry can incorporate them into a new online communication strategy during times of crisis or otherwise.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodological Framework and Crisis Background

#### Chapter Highlights and Overview

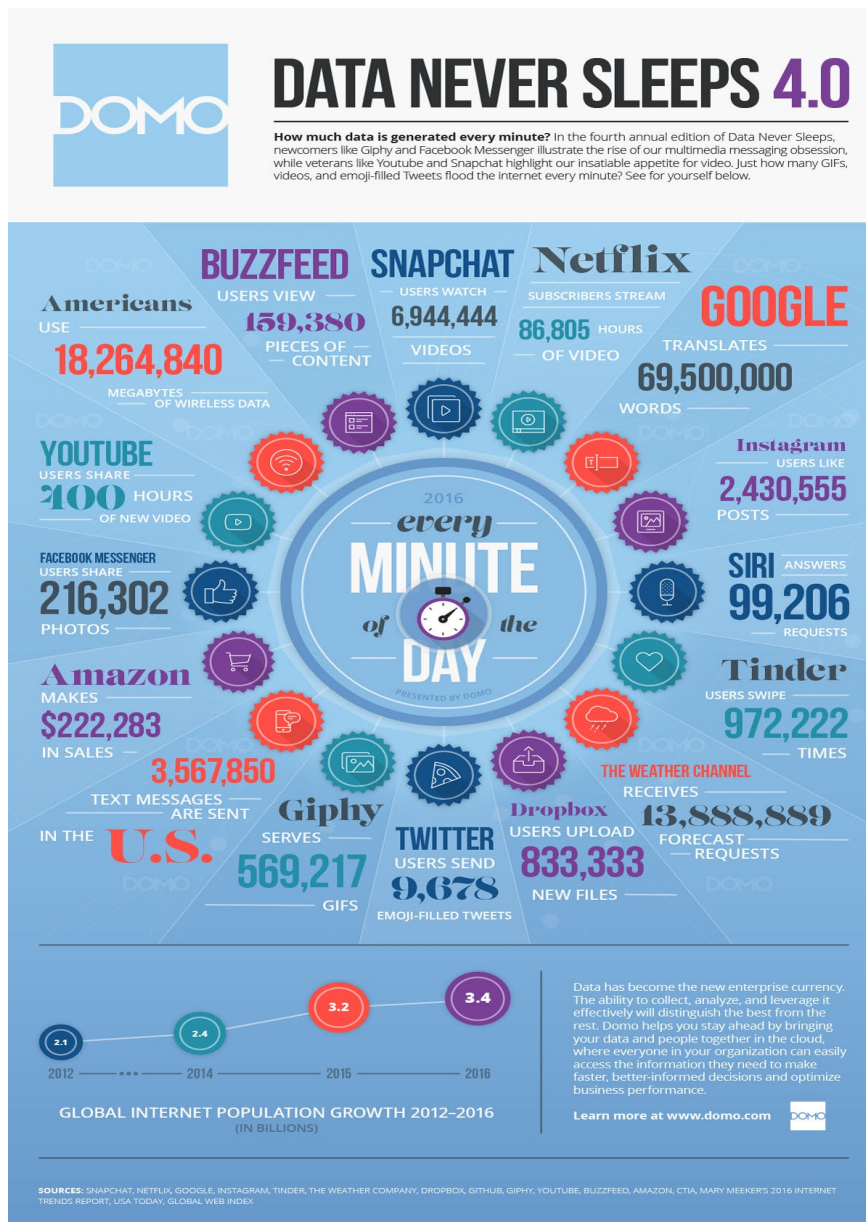
- Outlines the overarching methodological framework of this research, providing a particular focus to the nature of the digital device, and the concepts of affordances and ‘thick data’.
  - Presents an exposé of the methodological tools which were used to accurately capture the unique mechanisms of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives.
  - Ruminates on the ethical considerations of the research design and provides justification for how these considerations were dealt with.
- 

#### Section I

#### 4.0 Introduction

Contemporary society is marked by the pervasiveness and ubiquity of digital technologies of communication and, consequently, by a deluge of digital data that has saturated our everyday lives (Galinandro and Gandini 2017; 1). Indeed, the extent of this deluge is captured by an infographic that has gone viral, disseminated by the social media company Domo (2016) and entitled “*Data Never Sleeps: How much Data is Generated Every Minute?*”. This infographic is a pictorial representation of what happens on the Internet on each day in 2016. For instance, we learn that Google receives more than 2 million search queries, 571 new websites are created, YouTube users upload 28 hours of new videos, Instagram users share 3,500 new photos, brands and organisations on Facebook receive 34,722 likes, over 100,000 tweets are sent, and so on. But even thinking about this data circulating on the Internet makes us ruminate on the new ways and methods in which we can now track and visualise it. In the case of MFAs and digital diplomatic activities, diplomats also seek to discover new methods to both track their online activity and its possible impact for their institution at large.

Figure 4.1 Data Never Sleeps (2016)



In the context of our proposed questions, this research employs mixed, mutually supportive methods, relying on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection. This approach results from the objective and subjective strands of diplomatic signalling and online narratives, and it reveals in part the complexity of studying this space. As noted, it

may be helpful to think about the study of signalling and narratives as dips into a fluid environment and that our analytical choices for examination depend on what aspect of the signalling and narrative processes we are seeking to explain and discuss (Miskimmon et al., 2013: 14–16). Thus, in answering the core questions posed in Section 1.5, this research, through a combination of relevant and up-to-date methodological approaches, provides interesting insights, into novel and contemporary issues for modern diplomatic practice, while opening up the subject area in its entirety for further discussion and academic examination.

Before we explore in greater depth the details of the methodology used, it is worth clarifying the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study. This thesis is structured around the proposition that how we ‘read’ and interpret diplomatic communication activities shapes how we, as diplomats and academics, respond to and interpret it. It does not imply a definitive or mono-causal relationship between meanings, interests, behaviours and outcomes, but contends that we cannot fully explain interests and behaviours, and thus, the outcomes of interactions, without being aware of how actors understand the entities and social worlds with which they interact. We contend that meanings constitute only one -- albeit one critical and relatively under-explored -- determinant of behaviour, and that the empirical story we present is necessarily more complex than this conceptual and methodological framework suggests. Such a view, embracing the complementarity of certain academic approaches, is indeed the only one compatible with the ontology underpinning this thesis, namely that we can approach objects from multiple perspectives and that how we do so profoundly affects what we see. In short, this research highlights one piece of the complex puzzle that is diplomatic communication in the digital age, and should be read as one, complementary approach, to a range of other approaches that might do better at filling in other gaps of this complex and multi-faceted problem.

This chapter will be divided into three distinct but interrelated parts. The first section will provide an overarching methodological framework, which includes a presentation and discussion on the nature of the digital device, the concept of affordances within these digital devices, and the use of ‘thick data’ to guide and frame our methodological progress. The second section will include an exploration and exposé of the methodological tools used for collecting, collating, and analysing the data used to accurately capture both the unique

mechanisms of DDS and the three stages of the OCN creation. The third section ruminates on the ethical considerations of the research design and provides justification for how these considerations were dealt with. A particular focus will be given to the ethical concerns arising from conducting elite interviews, namely *negotiating access and information provided to participants, consent of participants, data protection and acknowledgement* and *power imbalance*. Discussion of the limitations of each aspect of this methodological toolkit will be incorporated throughout.

## **4.1 Overarching Methodological Frameworks: Digital Devices, Affordances, and Thick Data**

### *4.1.1 Digital Devices*

Before we enter into an explanatory analysis of these digital devices, the distinction between digital data and digital devices should be made. Both terms are regularly becoming conflated as synonymous and are emerging as an increasing area of convergence.

First, let us make clear that digital data is *generated* by digital devices. In this context, the word ‘devices’ can have two meanings; a common-sensical one and a sociological one, with the latter related in part to the sociology of culture and science (Lash 2002: Thacker, 2005). Generally speaking, a device is a tool, ‘an object or machine that has been invented for a particular purpose’ (Cambridge University Press, n.d). In the case of this research, a device is a personal computer or a smartphone which holds a number of purposes, namely the connection of users and the generation and projection of data online. In sociology, the term ‘device’ refers to a ‘heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourse, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative, measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions’ (Foucault, 1980: 194), as well as actors operating within this ensemble which is implied in the production of knowledge about society (Latour, 1990).

The same implication applies to our research and to Internet based study in general, which can both be described as a socio-technical ecosystem composed of several digital devices.

Devices in this instance can be framed as heterogeneous ensembles of ‘computer network, scanners, algorithms, software...applications, different actors, institutions, regulations and controversies’ (Ruppert, Law and Savage, 2013: 31). Here the ensemble of human and nonhuman actors is widely implicated in both the construction and measurement of a new form of social reality. According to Ruppert et al (2013), Twitter is a digital device which makes it possible to:

*materialize new forms of sociality and ways for people to interact and know about themselves and others. At the same time Twitter gives rise to various knowledge practices or methods: academic researchers, data journalists and policy surveillance units develop combinations [...] of analytical procedures (algorithms, software), infrastructures (computers, networks) and personnel (analysts, IT experts) to analyse the data that it generates (Rupper, Law and Savage, 2013: 24).*

Within this domain of social research methodology, the notion of the device is intriguing because it ‘highlights the relative fluidity of the distinction between object and method’ (Marres & Welteverde, 2012: 14). Put simply, it implies that the methodological instruments used to study social realms are also involved in the process of construction of the very reality they intend to study, and not only through its measurement (Latour, 2010). Thus, throughout this work, we acknowledge that the device with which the online diplomat chooses to engage played a core role in how their foreign policy was projected online and how their crisis narratives were formed. For instance, had smart phones not carried with them the potential for diplomats to publicly project their online narratives on a real-time basis, engage with their citizens directly, and gather information for their foreign policy analysis from an exponential range of sources, the reality constructed online may have proved very different.

The notion of a digital device or devices is not only pertinent in framing our methodological investigation, but it also works to shed light on the methodological toolkit used for this investigation, since it allows us to conceptualise the way certain mediums of communication (in our case, the platforms of Twitter and Facebook) work, while at the same time understanding how we should make use of different tools to gather evidence and

make sense of (or measure, under certain conditions) the forms of sociality deploying onto such mediums.

#### *4.1.2 Affordances*

The notion of the device then brings to us the concept of ‘affordances’. This concept is crucial to our approach to analysis, which aims to address digital data from a methodological point of view, as well as to contextualise the opportunities and constraints that the digital realm now poses to the study of digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) and online crisis narratives (OCN) set within the overall framework of diplomatic crisis communication in the modern age.

In sociology, the term ‘affordances’ refers to the socio-technical architecture of digital media and its capacity to shape the agency of social actors (Papacharissi, 2011). Affordances here do not limit the freedom of online actors; rather they set specific opportunities and constraints on their actions and interactions. Boyd, Golder and Lotan’s (2010) description of affordances is noteworthy in that they explain how agents today participate in a digital environment context, where they perceive affordances based on their experience and the actions of others. Indeed, scholars studying Twitter have shown evidence that suggests that the number of affordances used in Twitter (e.g. hashtags, mentions, URLs, etc.) by individuals, is related to the communities to which they belong, and the standards (rules) in which this community holds (Holmberg et al., 2014). The desire, then, for users of new media to act for an audience has led to ‘the popularization of tools that afford people the ability to interact with many individuals at once vitalizing the performer/audience relationship’ (Litt, 2012: 330). Litt (2012: 337) argued that ‘the features available, or lack thereof, may impact the actual audience as well as provide or hide clues about the actual audience’. In this way, affordances of social media applications (such as curators, algorithms, and/or audience feedback mechanisms) can influence the way in which users envision their audience. Papacharissi’s et al., (2010: 2) give further weight to this claim, noting that as Twitter and Facebook participants embraced ‘the technology and its affordances, a series of conventions emerged that allowed users to add structure to tweets ... users developed ways to reference other users, converged on labels

to indicate topics, and devised language to propagate messages'. We saw these affordances emerge within our own research, with the creation of hashtags which made crisis information more visible and easier to find, the emerging trend of structuring a crisis message as indirect, and the somewhat unspoken code (although made explicit in some accounts) that a retweet does not equal endorsement of policies or positions.

Table 4.1 Examples and descriptions of affordances available in Twitter

Table 1. Examples and descriptions of affordances available in Twitter

<u>Type</u>	<u>Functionality</u>
<b>Account creation</b>	Users can create multiple accounts; this can be used for the creation of personal and professional accounts
<b>Report number of tweets</b>	Users can view how many tweets they or someone else have made over time
<b>Report number of followers</b>	Users can view how many users follow tweets they or someone else have made at any specific time
<b>Report number of followees</b>	Users can view how many users the account owner follows at any specific time
<b>Profile</b>	Users can create a profile in Twitter that can be used to describe their presence on Twitter
<b>Profile image</b>	Users can upload images to be shown on their Twitter profile pages
<b>Hashtags</b>	Users can add hashtags (#Obama) to their tweets
<b>User mentions</b>	Users can mention (@obama) other Twitter users in their tweets
<b>URLs</b>	Users can link (http://foo.com) to other material in their tweets
<b>Retweet</b>	Users can retweet (RT:) someone else's tweet
<b>Mark tweet as inappropriate</b>	Users can mark a tweet as inappropriate
<b>Block user</b>	Users can block other users from accessing or responding to their tweets
<b>Delete tweet</b>	Users can delete their own tweets

Within the practice of digital diplomacy as a whole, we see these affordances either continue to emerge or exist, with online diplomatic actors sculpting and moulding their online actions to what they believe to be acceptable diplomatic communication practices

online or what they believe has emerged as acceptable practice. For example, until the rise of ‘Trumplomacy’ (referring here to President Trump’s use of Twitter and not a form of diplomacy in and of itself), we saw many of these affordances quickly develop online, with diplomats being shown to never publicly condemn other official actors online, making sure that they made disclaimers such as ‘retweet does not equal endorsement’ and rarely, if ever, getting involved with public disputes with other actors (official and nonofficial) online. These affordances stood alone as limitations or rule but have together created what we can now call an unspoken code of practice online; a code which quickly became evident as we began to review and analyse our selected case studies. Through our examination of the five fundamental signalling mechanisms and three stages of narrative production, there quickly emerged a clear trend in how diplomatic agents engaged with their crises communication activities online. These trends can otherwise be labelled digital ‘affordances’, as what we saw was that, despite being provided with many novel opportunities online, projection of policy online, engagement with peers, and frequency of crisis discussion, what was discovered was that on average, these online diplomatic agents were in fact choosing to reject these new opportunities. Instead, they chose to work within the historical diplomatic communication constraints created by decades, if not centuries, of diplomatic protocol or practice.

Despite the opportunities that the online world brings to MFAs, many of these constraints have arguably now overflowed into the digital world and created a host of what we can now call ‘digital affordances’. With that said, affordances ‘do not dictate participant’s behaviour, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants’ engagement’ (Boyd, 2011: 61-62). In his study *Networking in Everyday Life*, Hogan (2008: 15) insisted that affordances in new media environments had become access points to social structures and one’s own network, writing that ‘social life is moving from a focus on space - time social constraints to affordance- based social access’. He noted that the shift from interacting directly with social structures to interacting with access points in these new media contexts can ‘alter our sense of social structure and our capacity to interact with it’ (Hogan, 2008: 14). Participants in social media platforms - in our case, online diplomatic actors - can utilise affordances to access their network of connections (in this case, the online diplomatic network), while those who do not utilise affordances will have arguably had fewer opportunities to interact with their social networks.

### 4.1.3 Thick Data

The term ‘thick data’ emerged in the literature (ethnography in particular) around the 1990s, most notably as the ideas of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz were gaining influence within the field of ethnography. The term ‘thick data’ quickly became associated with ethnographic work which produced detailed and sense descriptions of the cultural practices under study and emphasised the necessity of qualitative approaches for any research investigation (Geertz, 1973). Today, thick data is data which is brought to light using qualitative, ethnographic research methods that uncover people’s emotions, stories, and models of their world. It’s emotion and background story, that’s difficult to quantify, and that comes to us in the form of a small sample size, which gives us an incredible depth of meanings and stories. Thick Data is the opposite of Big Data, which is quantitative data at a large scale that involves new technologies around capturing, storing, and analysing vast amounts of data. For Big Data to be analysable, it must use normalising, standardising, defining, and clustering, all processes that potentially strip the data set of context, meaning, and stories. Thick Data can rescue Big Data from the context-loss that comes with the processes of making it usable.<sup>36</sup> A thick data approach was critical to our analysis overall, but also to one fundamental signalling mechanism in particular, and that is the *content of the message*, where it was a necessary to step back from the vast amount of data produced by the social media analytic tools, in order to make sense of what the Embassies and Ambassadors were actually discussing and saying when they chose to engage online. An

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<sup>36</sup> Our thick data approach to social media research also relates to virtual ethnography and netnography (Hine, 2000, 2015; Kozinets, 2010). These approaches typically include a broad spectrum of methods inspired by the fundamental principle that methods should co – evolve with their objects of study and continuously adapt to their fields. These methods produce large sets of qualitative data in different forms: field notes, interview transcripts, and a deep understanding of the culture under study, its language, rituals, and symbols. Thus, by putting forth the notion of thick data, we do not wish to dismiss the idea of big data which was used for the collection of Twitter data and a number of signalling mechanisms, but do wish to articulate a connected approach to it, at different levels. The first difference between thick and big data can be expressed in terms of scale. Here we see a dataset composed of a relatively small collection of data points or cases (as was seen with our selected online diplomatic actors, with these numbers being further reduced based on their performance for our narrative analysis). Alongside the use of quantitative tools, our analysis in this instance had the ability to be performed single – handily via human coding and with little algorithmic assistance, in contrast to the Big Data strategies when computational support is required. Sloan & Anabel Quan – Haase noted that ‘just like ‘big’ in ‘Big Data’, a ‘small N’ is a fuzzy notion depending on the nature of data points (2017: 202). She provides the example that ‘over a hundred participants, a corpus of semi-structured interviews is generally deemed large, while a hundred of 140-character messages will be considered a small sample’. Smallness notes, ‘needs to be appreciated in relation to the idea of manageability, which itself implicitly refers to the amount of human work, and needed to achieve the analysis’ (ibid). In sum, ‘small data is too small to be representative in a statistical sense, and small enough to be processed by a small team of human analysts in order to produce an exhaustive representation of a situated phenomenon’ (ibid).

approach framed by thick data probed us to ask questions such as, during the crisis period; where the online diplomatic accounts discussing the crisis specifically? What was their tone? Was it direct, indirect, ambivalent? A thick data approach allowed us to unpack the vast amount of content collected, and analyse it with more depth of insight and on a more humanised level.

Another way in which thick data differs from Big Data is by the research questions it affords us. Where big data is relevant to investigate connections among users, clusters, and large-scale trends (again, we have used portions of big data in terms of tracing and collecting vast amounts of data on both platforms for each online account), thick data aims to capture the specificity of these uses, their motives and what they mean for the subjects. As Alice Marwick puts it:

*Identifying large – scale patterns can be useful, but it can also overlook how people do things with Twitter, why they do them, and how they understand them. Quantitative studies often determine connections and networks, and interpret them ‘objectively’ ex post factor, based on statistics and numbers. Instead, qualitative research seeks to understand meaning-making, placing technology use into specific social contexts, places and times (2013: 119, author’s emphasis).*

The process of ‘thickening’ data, which guides this research in part, stands in line with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry, which recognises that a social phenomenon can only be understood 1) in context; 2) through fine-grained accounts; 3) in light of the meaning attributed by actors to their own actions (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Scütz, 1967). Drawing on this idea, as suggested by Sloan & Anabel Quan – Haase, this research engaged in simple three-layer model of data thickening (2017: 202). When undertaking social media-based analysis on a small dataset<sup>37</sup>, the first layer consisted of contextualising the information generated. Here we sought to understand the

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<sup>37</sup> A small data set in this case was regarded as up to 25 online diplomatic actors, and a maximum of 4, in our online crisis narrative analysis.

circumstances in which the chosen online crisis communication practices emerged, as well as the technical affordances and cultural conventions which shaped them. A second layer was added by enriching this contextualisation with ‘thick descriptions’ of the practices under study. These descriptions were produced through active engagement with the field of inquiry and the data itself, as any ‘social products’ or digital practices cannot be understood independently, but must be viewed from the multiple perspectives of the actors and the meaning-making processes which they produce (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). The third layer then sought to capture the users’ experiences and the meanings they attributed to them. The content of this layer was produced through direct interactions with the subjects whose practices were the object of study, in an effort to make explicit their understanding of what they do online and the value they attach to it (c.f Sloan & Anabel Quan – Haase: 203). Within these three main layers -- contextualisation, description, and signification -- sub-layers can be distinguished in order to meet specific research objectives. Focusing on the presentation of the online account also served to enrich the second layer by adding details about the visual organisation of online profiles, and indeed visualising the data of accounts for a visual interpretation for comparison.

One core aspect of this research which was framed by a ‘thick data’ approach, was our investigation into the *content* of the message and the content analysis conducted on the messages gathered. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech note ‘an important way of providing credibility of findings is by collecting rich and thick data, which correspond to data that are detailed and complete enough to maximise ability to find meaning’ (2007: 244)<sup>38</sup>. Thus, this is exactly what we have sought to do within this research; we sought to use a ‘thick data’ approach as a methodological guide and motivation in conducting the content analysis of the Tweets and Facebook posts sent by online diplomatic agents during the selected crises, and to ultimately maximise our ability to find meaning within them.

The methodological investigation conducted regarding the content analysis of this work, can be divided into a number of distinct but interlocking sections. First, was the collecting and collating of the online data. On Twitter, this achieved by using the Twitonomy

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<sup>38</sup> Onwuegbuzie and Leech reflect on the validity of qualitative research, and the role of in which thick data places within it. This is particularly pertinent to one aspect of our research, and that is how we collected, collated and analysed the *content* of the message. Here a qualitative approach and the aforementioned concept of ‘thick data’ played a pertinent role in how this tenet was analysed.

application, which allowed for each diplomatic account's messages (during the selected timeframe) to be easily collated, viewed, and analysed via an Excel document, a document produced by the application itself. On Facebook, collecting the online data proved a much more extensive process, requiring manually tracing each Facebook post of each online diplomatic actor during the selected time frame, and then manually inputting each message into an Excel sheet for each individual account. After the collection of data was undertaken for both processes, what we were left with, was a structured and categorised Excel document which clearly showed each Facebook or Twitter post, for each online diplomatic actor selected. This stage then created a firm foundation on which to begin the second aspect of our content analysis, that of coding and categorising of the data gathered. In the case of both platforms, this was achieved manually, and not through an online methodological tool. In short, the aim during this stage was to code and categorise the data gathered, as although raw data can be very interesting to look at, they do not help the reader to understand the social world under scrutiny, and the way the participants view it, unless such data have been systematically analysed to illuminate an existent situation. Thus, once the data was collected (manually or through Twitonomy), we then engaged in content analysis on each tweet and Facebook post generated. Although highly time consuming, content analysis of every tweet was necessary, if we were to a) understand exactly what the actors were saying within in their own online crisis discussion -- or what they were not saying-- and b) collate and categorise the content into the seven distinct content categories which online diplomatic agents were shown to project during the crisis. Coding and categorising the data therefore played an important role in our analysis, enabling us to subdivide the data and assigning categories to the online posts gathered.<sup>39</sup>

The seven distinct content categories which emerged from our content analysis on *all* online posts, sent by *all* online diplomatic actor's accounts were as follows: Political Commentary, Consular Commentary, Public Diplomacy Strategies, Embassy Events, Third Party Events, National Posts and General. These categories were created by deductive reasoning after all the online messages were collated (through Twitonomy for the Twitter application, and manually for the Facebook application) and content analysis

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<sup>39</sup> Codes usually are attached to chunks of varying-sized words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one, for example, a metaphor (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Seidel and Kelle (1995) view the role of coding as noticing relevant phenomena; collecting examples of those phenomena; and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures.

was performed upon them. The seven categories were deemed the most appropriate in which to code and illustrate the context of the messages gathered for further analysis. Creating categories in this instance triggered the construction of a conceptual scheme that suited the data. This scheme helped us to compare across data, to change or drop categories and to make a hierarchical order of them.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that this research does not consider data to be neutral or viewed as a readymade entity. It is of the position that, as scholars of digital practice, we should always be aware of the frames used to construct data, be it online or off (Markham, 2013). To put it another way, data is not just sitting there, waiting to be gathered and consumed by researchers (Gitelman and Jackson, 2013), nor it is self-explanatory. Rather, data ‘should be cooked with care’ (Bowker, 2004: 183-184), that is, trimmed, prepared, and dressed before they can be useful and enlightening. With such a prospect in mind, thickening data can be seen as a particular form of ‘data cookery’ besides others (formatting, labelling, standardisation...). But this way of cooking data takes special care to respect the highly situated nature of qualitative data, and its many dimensions.

#### **4.2 Tools for Investigation: Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Crisis Narratives**

A number of DDS mechanisms all fall within our quantitative analysis framework: structure of the message, status of the message, reach (audience), frequency and online diplomatic network power. As noted in the conceptual framework, these tenets are all

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, we have seen content analysis increasingly being used to study online data. Mendoza and Poblete (2010), for example, used content analysis to understand how social media responds to rumour. Oh et al. (2010) perform content analysis to show the vulnerability of Twitter users to being exploited in a terrorist attack by sharing situational information online. Qu and Wu (2009) classified 2266 discussion threads from the Tianya discussion forum following the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, revealing four major roles of the online forum (information, opinion, action, emotion). Starbird and Palen (2010) conducted a content analysis of retweeting practices during emergency events, finding that widely retweeted messages are more likely to be about the event than non-retweets, and that users are more likely to retweet the messages of media organisations and emergency services. Zhou et al. (2010) study tweets resonance in the Iranian election crisis, analysing retweeting patterns, and organising retweets into breaking news, non-time-sensitive material, rumors and misinformation, spam, and others; they find that tweets by celebrities, regardless of content, had the greatest tweet resonance. Robinson (2009) uses structural textual analysis to determine patterns of social relations in collective memory negotiation in the Katrina/New Orleans blogging community. Sutton (2010) manually collected and analysed tweets iteratively surrounding a single issue, using keyword and hashtag searches. Mendoza and Poblete (2010) also use retweet tweet analysis to compare how truth and rumour are handled in a crisis.

unique processes to the digital age and must be analysed with the most appropriate, up-to-date and relevant tools for their investigation.

Online tools for social media analytics, namely Twitnomy, Visone, and Netvizz, were used to discover, collate, and categorise how these mechanisms were used by the diplomatic agents in the two selected case studies. Due to their consistent analytical makeup, these tools allowed for a concrete comparison between all actors analysed, a consistency not able to be achieved even by the most rigorous qualitative methods. Although it perhaps does not need repeating, it may be worth stating that the DDS mechanisms and each stage of the OCN are intrinsically linked (as presented by figure 1.3). What the discovery and analysis of the digital signalling mechanisms allow for is a holistic interpretation of the OCN to emerge. Before we begin to explore and expand on the tools used to uncover these processes, a comparative outline of the crisis in terms of the tools used is illustrated below.

*Table 4.2 Data Set and Methodological Tools Used*

<b>Crisis</b>	<b>Twitter Actors</b>	<b>Tweets</b>	<b>Elite Interview</b>	<b>Facebook Actors</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Elite Interview</b>
<b>Israel – Gaza</b>	15 actors	1077 <sup>41</sup>	2 <sup>42</sup>	18 actors	276 <sup>43</sup>	2 <sup>44</sup>
<b>Euromaidan</b>	9 actors	1776 <sup>45</sup>	2 <sup>46</sup>	14 actors	574 <sup>47</sup>	2 <sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This figure was comprised of 15 accounts, posting on average 3.99 per day, for a crisis period of 76 days.  
<sup>42</sup> Elite interviews were comprised of 2 high performing actors: the U.K. and EEAS Embassy accounts.  
<sup>43</sup> This figure was comprised of 14 accounts, posting on average 0.202 per day, for a crisis period of 76 days.  
<sup>44</sup> Elite interviews were comprised of 2 high performing actors: Canada and the U.S. Embassy.  
<sup>45</sup> This figure was comprised of 9 accounts, posting on average 2.10 per day, for a crisis period of 94 days.  
<sup>46</sup> Elite interviews were comprised of 2 high performing actors: the U.K. Embassy and Swedish Ambassador  
<sup>47</sup> This figure was comprised of 9 accounts, posting on average 0.438 per day, for a crisis period of 94 days.  
<sup>48</sup> Elite interviews were comprised of 2 high performing actors: the U.K. and U.S. Embassy accounts.

<b>Stage of Research</b>	<b>Methodological Tools</b>	
	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>Facebook</b>
<b>Content</b>	Content Analysis	Content Analysis
<b>Structure</b>	Twitonomy	Manual Selection
<b>Audience</b>	Twitonomy	Manual Selection
<b>Frequency</b>	Twitonomy	Manual Selection
<b>Status</b>	Twitonomy	Manual Selection
<b>Online Diplomatic Network</b>	Twitonomy	N/A
<b>Formation</b>	Process Tracing/Content Analysis/ Elite Interviews	Process Tracing/Content Analysis/ Elite Interviews
<b>Projection</b>	Twitonomy/ Elite Interviews	Netvizz/Elite Interviews
<b>Reception</b>	Twitonomy/Elite Interviews	Netvizz/Elite Interviews

#### 4.2.1 Twitonomy<sup>49</sup>

Twitter has quickly become one of the most popular objects of study in the academic community.

This is arguably due to a number of characteristics of the Twitter platform:

- **Message size:** Twitter messages are relatively short (comparable to an SMS), which results in relatively homogeneous corpora. In comparison, Facebook posts, emails, or blog posts may vary in length considerably, which makes it more difficult to create balanced, comparable corpora.
- **Sample size:** Several million messages are published on Twitter every day, i.e. it is possible to get large amounts of data, even for very recent events.
- **Metadata:** Twitter messages provide all kinds of metadata, e.g. username, date of creation, language, geolocation, and many more.
- **Availability:** Most Twitter data is publicly available, even for passive users of Twitter, i.e. for people who have no registered Twitter account.
- **Accessibility:** Twitter data can be accessed and downloaded relatively easy via a pre-defined Application Programming Interfaces (API).

The landscape of software tools that can be used for the analysis of Twitter is vast and diverse. A basic way to categorise tools is by means of their analytic focus; a great number of Twitter tools are dedicated to social media analytics, i.e. they focus on social networks of Twitter users (e.g. follower growth) and how successfully a Tweet is distributed in the Twittersphere (user-centric tools). Important parameters for these analyses are follower counts, retweet counts and favorite counts. Twitonomy, Twittercounter, MyTopTweet, Riffle, and TweetReach are among these tools, but there are also more generic social media

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<sup>49</sup> Twitonomy. See more at; <https://www.twitonomy.com/>

analytics tools such as Sumall, which not only allow users to monitor Twitter, but also other services such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

For the purpose of this research, we used Twitonomy as the primary mode of data collection and analysis for the structure of the message sent on Twitter, its frequency, use of online diplomatic network, and reach and reception of message. This informed a number of DDS points, and the projection and reception of the OCN at large. Twitonomy, is an online software package that provides insight into any user's public tweets, retweets, replies, mentions, hashtags, and so on, by searching recorded archives of tweets. It can also perform search analytics on users, hashtags, and keywords and export findings for further analysis. In short, it is the use of a 'dashboard' presenting statistics of a user's social media account.<sup>50</sup>

Within our research, we used Twitonomy to generate our findings in a number of stages. First, the online diplomatic account was chosen and imputed into the application. Here an upgraded programme of Twitonomy allowed us to select the specific crisis dates within our case studies, and with that, only generate the data which corresponded to that period. The ability to localise and focus, only the data generated during our chosen time frames was essential for our data collection and analysis process and to also compare and compute Twitter interactions between users, during our chosen crisis dates. Information on the platform was then generated, which included;

- total number of tweets
- total number of retweets (forwarding another user's tweet to one's followers)
- number of followers (Twitter users who have followed a profile to receive its tweets in their home streams)
- the age of the Twitter profile
- the number of followers the account possessed (and who those followers were)
- the structure of the messages sent (indirect or direct)
- the top 3 most retweeted or favorited messages by the accounts users

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<sup>50</sup> For more research on his topic see 'The Use of Twitter by Radiology Journals: An Analysis of Twitter Activity and Impact Factor (2016), *Science Direct*, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1546144016305579#bib10>

- up to the top 10 actors the account engaged with.

These parameters were then used to investigate our selected online diplomatic accounts, and they provided us with the necessary data to analyse the fundamental signalling mechanisms as noted above. An example of the data generated can be seen in the figure below.

*Figure 4.2 Polish Embassy Account to Israel analysed by Twitonomy*



**@PLinIsrael** שגרירות פולין

6,176 tweets 363 following 815 followers 34 listed

Joined Twitter on March 19, 2012 as user #529250880

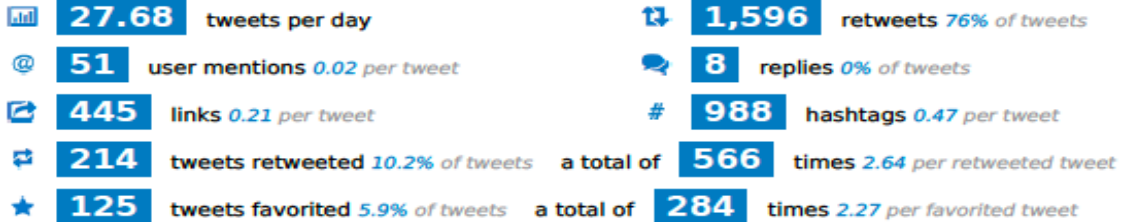
ברוכים הבאים לטוויטר של שגרירות פולין בתל אביב

<http://t.co/XBWA1o7gRF>

RTs are not endorsements 2.25 followers/following

42 listed/1,000 followers

**2,104** tweets from June 12, 2014 to August 26, 2014



### Tweet history



### Users most retweeted



### Users most replied to



### Users most mentioned



It is important to note, however, that there are limitations for collecting Tweets not only on Twitonomy, but via any social media analytics tool. According to Twitter's terms of use, redistributing Twitter content outside the Twitter platform is prohibited; in practice, this means it is not possible to precompile Tweet corpora and to share them in a way they are readily accessible for academic research. A workaround for these limitations that can be used to share corpora of Tweets with others nevertheless is described by McCreadie et al. (2012): Tweet corpora may be shared as a list of numerical identifiers (IDs) that can be used to reconstruct Tweet content via the Twitter API. The Twitter API is a pre-defined

interface with which developers can communicate with the Twitter platform. This approach is, however, rather impractical, as it involves basic programming skills to build Tweets within the API by using their IDs as input (Burghardt 2015).

Another problem here is that Tweets that are reconstructed via their ID may change through the course of time, i.e. they may be deleted, their message content may be modified, and, of course, the number of retweets and favourites may change. For an example of this type of available Tweet ID corpora, cf. the TREC 2011 Microblog Dataset. This essentially means that there are no readily available corpora of Tweets that can immediately be used for academic studies. Rather, scholars are required to create their own collections of Tweets via the Twitter API, though there are a number of tools and services that provide a graphical user interface for the Twitter API, such as the Twitonomy application which we have used for the purpose of our work.

The final limitation was that the twitter API can only grab 3,200 tweets at maximum. For users with fewer than 3,200 tweets, you can generate their data through Twitonomy (or similar applications,), but there currently exists no reliable method to try capturing an archive of a specific user's tweets between a span of dates. Although this did not prove a vital issue for this research, as most online accounts came under the figure of 3,200, there was one account that proved a notable exception: the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, due to having a frequency average of 20 times per day, produced 11,300 tweets by the time this research was undertaken. This research was unable to locate or analyse these tweets by the time the study commenced. This limitation has further consequences for this study, as should researchers want to replicate this study from the start (e.g. downloading all the tweets), there is a time constraint when analysing popular users. For this case study, there was a time difference of six months between the initial dataset and downloading individual users' tweets. The case of the U.S. Ambassador indicates that replicating a study is difficult, as the environment is constantly changing. As Bruns remarks: '[...] a scholarly publishing industry in which journal articles and book chapters can sometimes take more than two years from submission to publication; (2013, para. 3.2). It is conceivable that it is virtually impossible for researchers to repeat some studies after a certain amount of time. Thus, scraping the tweets and downloading them as close to real-time as possible is one way to mitigate these challenges. These limitations should be kept in mind when seeking to replicate this study.

Along with the increased relevance of network analysis and the growing size of considered networks, adequate software for social network analysis is becoming more and more important. Now, visualising social networks is more than simply creating intriguing pictures; it is about generating learning situations: ‘images of social networks have provided investigators with new insight about network structure and have helped them communicate those insights to others’ (Lerner et. al. 2009: 331). Alongside the analysis of online diplomatic networks produced by the Twitonomy application, was the need to *visualise this information generated*.

Additionally, inappropriate drawings of networks are misleading or, at least, confusing. Thus, we intended to pay special attention to the visualisation of the networks we generated. For this we choose to use the software visualisation tool, Visone. This was used to plot and graph the online diplomatic networks, aiming to bring together efficient algorithms of methods of analysis and suitable graph drawing techniques for the visualisation of networks. An important aspect of Visone is that it is specifically designed to allow experts and novices alike to apply innovative and advanced visual methods with ease and accuracy. Through imported data collected on the online diplomatic account, Visone in this case, allowed for the generation of a number of data points in terms of the online diplomatic network we sought to analyse and visualise; in particular the in-degree, out-degree, and betweenness centrality parameters of the network.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Netvizz

A powerful and easy – to – use tool for extracting data from Facebook is Netvizz, and it was the primary methodological tool for our analysis of the Facebook platform. For the purpose of our research, we used Netvizz as the primary mode of data collection and analysis for the reach and reception of message on Facebook in particular.

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<sup>51</sup> *In-degree* centrality refers to an actor who receives many ties within their network, i.e they are characterised as prominent actors within it. *Out-degree* centrality refers to the actors who have the possibility of exchanging and or dispersing information quickly to other actors online. *Betweenness centrality* is a measure of centrality in a graph based on shortest paths. It quantifies the number of times a node acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other nodes. This measure favours nodes that join communities (dense sub networks), rather than nodes that lie inside a community. All parameters are explained in detail in Chapter Five, Section 5.1.5.

Netvizz is a web application created by Bernhard Rieder with the purpose of making available a tool that allows researchers to ‘generate data files in standard formats for different sections of Facebook social networking service without having to resort to manual collecting or custom programming’ (Rieder, 2013: 436). There are only two primary conditions with which the researcher must comply in order to use Netvizz properly:

- Create/have a personal Facebook account and allow Netvizz access to the related data;
- Consult the documentation available on the Internet in order to get acquainted with the basic functions of Netvizz as well as its possibilities and limitations in terms of data extraction.

Netvizz is a free tool that allows users to gather a wide range of data from Facebook groups and pages. To put it simply, for both groups and pages, Netvizz returns two kinds of output<sup>52</sup>:

- A tabular file (in .tab format) with user activities around posts (e.g number of likes, comments, shares, etc.)
- A graph file (in. gdf format) through which it is possible to reconstruct networks of interaction among user, and among users and content. In regard to Facebook Pages, Netvizz reconstructs a related like network, which is a network made of the pages liked by a given page.

In order to illustrate the Netvizz outputs more thoroughly as well as the tool's potential for data analysis, we describe a sample from one of our online diplomatic actors; the United States Embassy account during the Euromaidan crisis.

The first step in our analysis was choosing the starting point (or seed) for the digital exploration. In this instance, choice for an account was straightforward, and come from the discovered and pre-selected diplomatic actors who were active online within the receiving

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<sup>52</sup>For an expanded look into the Netvizz application and its relevance to social media analytics, see Alessandro Caliendo & Alessandro Gandin (2016), *Qualitative Research in Digital Environments: A Research Toolkit*, Routledge, New York.

state during the determined timeline. Once we established our seed page, we programmed Netvizz to extract data from our selected page. Specifically, we set Netvizz to retrieve the 500 most recent posts on the Embassy page and to retrieve data from both the page and its users. Once launched, Netvizz returned a file containing the last 500 posts stored in the Embassy page (all of which were in the documented time frame chosen for analysis). Among these, the most relevant metadata are:

- Type: the specific type of post according to Facebook's classification (link, photo, status and video);
- Link: the link (eventually) embedded into the post;
- Post published: the number of likes collected by the post
- Comments: the number of commented collected by the post;
- Comment likes: the number of likes collected by the comments to the post;
- Shares: the number of shares collected by the post;
- Engagement: the sum of likes, comments, comments likes; and
- Post ID: the identification number of the post

All these metadata are native devices that were used to sample the database and orient its exploration – for example, by filtering and ordering the posts according to the number of likes, comments and shares they receive as well as by concentrating on the most frequent type of content or date, allowed us to see the extent to which the followers or those who 'liked the page' engaged with the account.

### *4.2.3 Elite Interviews*

The use of elite interviews was a necessary divergence from our previous quantitative research. They were used with the motivation to understand on a holistic level, the consciousness or many instances unconsciousness use of the signalling mechanisms by online diplomatic agents. This methodological tool was chosen with the recognition that elite interviewing has established itself as a widely implemented research tool in the study of diplomacy and international relations, displaying the potential to be an extremely valuable, appropriate and rewarding technique for forming understandings of political events and discourses. This is not to say that in many instances, it can prove to be a challenging, daunting and even confusing approach.

However, despite the initial hesitations or challenges of conducting elite interviews, this methodological tool was considered imperative to the study of our work, namely in its ability to directly focus on the diplomatic actors' formation of crisis narratives, driven by the acknowledgment that political and intellectual elites, due to their privileged status, are often the most visible producers, consumers and recyclers of identity narratives in politics and society. Elite interviews therefore allowed us to gather intelligence, which could seek to explain some of the domestic political pressures evident when studying policy narratives, how national and international narratives constrained (or in some cases did not constrain) themselves while crafting their message, and how political actors conceived the realm of the possible during the crisis period at large. Indeed, in the age of emergent phenomena and transformational diplomacy, the task of intelligence gathering, of which the process of elite interviews falls directly under, is a salient concern (Bjola and Holmes 2015: 7). Intelligence in his instance, is more about contacts and listening to the actors who engaged, in this case and what their motives were, rather than the 'black and white' practice and execution of crisis communication strategies themselves. Thus, one of the methodological tasks for the new e-diplomat and those who seek to study it is an immersion into the cultural practices of the Ministry itself, its practices, its policies, its cultural and, specifically in this case, its digital communicative practices.

Now in contrast to the proliferation of sources for discourse analysis, particularly the abundance of online textual and audio-visual material, gaining access to elites could have proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the research process, especially for an

PhD researcher in the early stages of their research. As was the case within this work. Thankfully, for this study, we had unique points of entry, which allowed us to gain access to the elite interviews needed. The primary point of entry in this instance was to approach diplomatic practitioners from the Irish Foreign Ministry and the European External Action Service whom I had previously worked with, and request if they had any relevant contact points for the Embassies and diplomatic actors I wished to interview. Making contact with practitioners who were already part of established diplomatic networks, and the associated familiarity and trust that these diplomatic recommendations brought with them then proved vital for gaining access to these wider networks. Such an approach, revolving around personal connections and networks, proved invaluable to gaining access to the pool of interviewees needed for this research. This method proved far easier and achieved greater success than a convoluted and often fruitless series of emails and telephone calls to the secretaries or assistants of busy politicians, senior academics or civil servants. A tactic that had been used in previous research, and proved cumbersome and time consuming.

Turning to how the interviews were selected for this research, they were chosen directly from those actors who emerged or were categorised in the ‘high performing’ category i.e. the diplomatic actors who used all five online digital diplomatic signalling mechanisms to the greatest degree in order to project and expand their foreign policy message. The following actors (noted below) were selected and approached for interview. In total three interviews were undertaken for the Euromaidan conflict (as opposed to four, due to the U.K Embassy to Ukraine coming out as a high performer in both the Facebook and Twitter platforms), and four interviews were undertaken for the Israel – Gaza conflict. All actors accepted the request for interview.

#### *Euromaidan 2013/4 crisis*

- The Embassy of the United Kingdom to Ukraine, Kyiv (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
- The Embassy of the Sweden to Ukraine, Kyiv (The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden)
- The Embassy of the United States of America to the Ukraine, Kyiv (The United States Department of State)

- The European Delegation to State of Israel, Tel Aviv (European External Action Service)
- The Embassy of the United Kingdom to State of Israel, Tel Aviv (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)
- The Embassy of the United States of America to the State of Israel, Tel Aviv (The United States Department of State)
- The Embassy of Canada to the State of Israel, Tel Aviv (Global Affairs Canada)

The interviews lasted between 30mins to one hour, and were centred around open – ended interview questions. Open – ended interview questions emerged as the structure of choice, as they provided broad parameters where the participants could formulate their responses without a strict framework which may limit their answers or halt the dialogue during the interview (Zeegers & Barron 2015). Participant centred open – ended interviews also encouraged, dynamic interaction between the participant and the researcher (Ibid), thereby assisting us in capturing the participant’s perception, knowledge and experience. In this case our research, the interviewees were not given the questions before hand, unless they requested them.<sup>53</sup>

When requesting an interview, the Embassy, Ambassador or Press Secretary (depending on whom the initial contact was made with) was told that the interview conversation would centre on their respective MFAs online communicative practices during the relevant crisis period. And that a discussion would take place in order to better understand what their MFA’s motivations were regarding their communicative practices and how and why they played out the way they did. The recipients of the request were also informed that the interview would not be recorded, as it was acknowledged that the information provided and discussion undertaken would be sensitive to their diplomatic institution. In addition to this, when the interview request was being made, the recipient was given the opportunity to have a press officer present during the interview, to ensure that the information provided by the

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<sup>53</sup> Only one interviewee made that request, the United States Embassy to the Ukraine, and the questions were then provided before the interview was conducted.

Embassy official was a) correct and b) could be publicly spoken. Only one interviewee request that a press officer was present during it<sup>54</sup>.

Finally, it should be noted that the overall interview process was framed by the work of Bjola and Holmes (2015), who when writing on how to construct and undertake an elite interview, write that a rule of thumb for these conversations is that they ultimately allow the diplomat to tell their story. Our interview questions were there simply to provide cues to the story of the interviewees, and we did not seek to push the interviewee in any direction in the hopes of getting the answer we wished for. In other words, our task as an analyst was to listen and provide appropriate cues. For example, we asked the Swedish Ambassador to Ukraine, ‘can you tell me how you engaged in the formation of the online crisis narrative?’, or ‘did you realise that by using these certain online mechanisms you created a narrative of your Ministries foreign policy?’ Here, we expected to hear that there were active consultations on how to engage online in the crisis, however what we actually heard was that there was little active consultation during the crisis itself, and that the actor was not away that these online mechanisms created and projected signals relating to their foreign policy. Instead, we were told, that what was relied upon was the existing code of digital practice, the confidence that the Ambassador who knew the MFA’s policy position on the crisis (and, indeed, was updated regularly on this as events unfolded) and in his own words, simply relying on ‘basic judgment’ on how and what to post and what to not post. Following this rule of thumb allowed us to deduct (post interview analysis), how and why an Embassies and MFA’s online crisis communication strategies/activities were projected and engaged with in the manner they were. Put simply, it afforded us an avenue to achieve the central aim of the interview; to garner an in-depth and detailed explanation of the actor’s online crisis communication strategy and their consciousness (or subconscious) motivations behind it. The elite interviews therefore, allowed for a more comprehensive understanding regarding the process of narrative formation and the motivation behind certain actor’s online actions to emerge.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The interview containing a press officer was the United States Embassy to the Ukraine.

<sup>55</sup> The actors selected for interview, were comprised of the high performing actors within the overall digital diplomatic signalling process. Within the Israel – Gaza crisis, 4 actors were chosen; United Kingdom & EEAS (Twitter), United States and Canada (Facebook). Within the EuroMaidan crisis, 4 actors were also chosen: United Kingdom & Sweden Ambassador (Twitter), United States and United Kingdom (Facebook).

Finally, it should be noted that a number of key considerations arose when conducting and interpreting these elite interviews, all of which arose under the frame of ‘ethical concerns’, which will be discussed in – depth within the upcoming section on the ‘*Ethics of Research Design*’.

### ***4.3 Ethics of Research Design***

Discussions surrounding our methodological tools and framework cannot be discussed without reference paid to the ethical considerations of our research design. Discussions surrounding the ethics of social research, bring us into a realm in which the role of values in the research process, becomes a topic of concern, and this research proves no different. It is crucial to be aware of the ethical principles involved when undertaking any aspect of social research, and to be aware of the very nature of these concerns. As it is only if researchers are aware of the ethical issues involved in their work, can they can make informed decisions about the implications of their research choices. If nothing else, the researcher should be aware of the possible disapproval and possible censure that will be a consequence if they make certain kinds of choice (Bryman 2016: 213).

Now as previously mentioned, the availability of social media opens up new avenues for researchers to collect data at relatively ease, especially from sources that may have historically been difficult to access. This ease of access has led to a massive surge in social media analytics (whereby posts or chats are analysed via qualitative methods or aggregate numerical data collection). The order of magnitude of data and the speed with which it is made available (approaching real time) all serve to make social media a potential tool to revolutionize research in numerous fields (Wyatt 2002). Indeed, this very piece of research would not have existed without the ability to access through online methodological tools vast amounts of data, and also the ability to gain entry into the insight and actions of actors who historically would have remained comparatively less vocal on sensitive situations i.e. political crises.

These new research avenues however, are not without their ethical challenges. Potentially difficult considerations surround the purpose and value of the research, benefits and harm

to participants, as well as privacy, informed consent, and confidentiality (Swirsky, Hoop, Labott 2004). While these latter considerations arise while undertaking offline research, internet based or digital research is very different from traditional research and as such brings about a new set of ethical challenges. Or at the very least, creates a new perspective on existing ethical challenges for social research. One of the primary issues of these new set of ethical challenges is that while procedures are well established for obtaining ethical approval for traditional research, how far these can be transferred directly to Internet-mediated research is difficult to decipher and has yet to fully understand by researchers and practitioners alike. Furthermore, while the ethical issues of social media research have been much debated (Till 2001, Capurro & Pingel 2004) the attitudes of social media users (either posters or lurkers) and researchers have rarely been sought (Moreno, Grant, Kacvinsky, Moreno, Fleming 2012). Researchers are therefore currently seeking guidance from a wide variety of sources, such as individual institutions, research supervisors, subject specialist guidance (Alim 2014), and increasing guidelines proposed specifically for research using social media (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013; Markham & Buchanan 2017).

Accepting that the intricacies regarding social media ethics are still being worked out, and debated, this research has taken guidance of the Association of Internet Researchers, who recommend that when engaging in Internet based social research, researchers can start by considering the ethical expectations established by the venue (<http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>, accessed 21 July 2017). For instance, is there a posted site polity that notifies users that the site is public and specifies the limits to privacy? Or are there mechanisms that users can employ to indicate that their exchanges are private? The Association recommends that the more the venue is acknowledged to be public, as in the case of this very research the platforms of Facebook and Twitter, the less obligation there is on the researcher to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of individuals using the venue, or to seek their informed consent. A further issue which arose during this research, is that there was such a vast amount of people involved in the submission of posting online during the chosen crises. This namely came in the form of the interactions between diplomatic agents and unofficial online participants. The vast amount of data present online made it difficult from the beginning, if not impossible, to seek informed consent. Thus, this research took the ethical motivations proposed by Hewson et al. (2003) who suggest that data which has been deliberately and voluntarily made available in the

public Internet domain, such as social media platforms, can be used by researchers without the need for informed consent. This thinking is also in line with Livingston (2005: 39) who argue that such electronic communications should be used for research only if:

- the information is publically archived and readily available;
- no password is required to access the information;
- the material is not sensitive in nature;
- no stated site policy prohibits the use of the material.

Livingston then suggests that if these conditions are met, informed consent needs not be obtained. As the online data for this research was collected and collated via the public platforms of Facebook and Twitter, all conditions according to Livingston were met (which this research aligns itself with).

#### *4.3.1 Elite Interviews and Ethical considerations*

The chief concern of this research lies with the ethical issues that arose in relations between the researcher and research participants in the course of an investigation, namely the conducting of elite interviews. Elite and professional interviews can pose particular ethics challenges because of the specialist professional roles of your potential participants, and recognising this also reveals that concerns about limits to confidentiality in social science research are not necessarily restricted to participants who are potentially vulnerable to risk of harm.

In recent years, a small but growing body of research has documented the issues and dynamics associated with interviewing ‘elite’ participants in qualitative research (e.g. Duke, 2002; Harvey, 2011; Hertz & Imber, 1995; Mikecz, 2012; Smith, 2006). The term ‘elite’ is not always defined within this body of literature, but is generally used to describe individuals or groups who ostensibly have closer proximity to power or particular professional expertise (Morris, 2009). In the case of this research, these individuals referred

to diplomatic officials from selected Embassies. A variety of challenges and ethical concerns associated with researching elites have been documented in the literature, of which a number arose during this very research project, ranging from gaining access to the interviewees (as discussed above), to the suggestion that elite participants may seek to exert too much control over research and manipulate dissemination processes (Smith, 2006). With that said, although ethical concerns arose at the beginning of the research project, not all these fears reached fruition, and proved to play little to no role in the interviewing process. The concerns which did bear fruit, were dealt with promptly when they did arise. What they were and how they were dealt with will now be discussed.

Some examples of the ethical challenges initially present when thinking about the elite interviews were as follows:

- There may be a power differential when interviewing people who are used to setting their own agendas.
- Specialist professionals can be difficult to access, and it could have been difficult to find alternative interviewees if they declined to take part.
- Elite professional participants are often very busy, and fit research into small amounts of time in between other meetings. These participants can sometimes be intimidating, or impatient, and may hurry you through the initial consent process. Perhaps they feel they have already consented - even though you have not been through your consent process. Ensuring the consent process would be done officially was therefore an initial concern.
- In other cases, a professional interviewee may have been nominated by their manager to take part in your research, raising the question of whether their participation is truly voluntary, or whether it is presented as a requirement of their job.

Recognising these challenges from the outset was vital to the makings of our research design, as it allowed for the construction of an interview process which would limit the possible challenges that we were to face when engaging in the process itself. The following steps were taken in constructing and carrying out the elite interview process as prescribed

in the ‘Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), Best Practice Guidance’ for elite interviewing.<sup>56</sup>

- *Negotiating access and information provided to participants*; as prescribed in the CUREC guidelines, although initial contact was made through professional or social networks, request for access was made through a formal letter requesting the interview which contained the following information:
  1. the name of the study;
  2. the name and status of the researcher carrying out the study and their contact details. This included my work email, and personal phone number;
  3. a brief rationale of the study, including its purpose and value;
  4. why the individual was being invited to take part in the research;
  5. an explanation of what the participant would be asked to do, and where the interview/ survey would be conducted and an approximation of how long it would take;
  6. assurances about the option of confidentiality and use of data including who would have access to the data, how it would be stored and what would happen to the data at the end of the study;
  7. a statement that if desired by the participant, data would be anonymised;
  8. a statement of what the degree of control of the interviewee over the final report would be if anonymity was not desired.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For more information see:

[https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/curec/documents/BPG\\_03\\_elite\\_interviewing\\_v1.0.pdf](https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/curec/documents/BPG_03_elite_interviewing_v1.0.pdf)

<sup>57</sup>As noted by the CUREC guidelines, it is a matter of researcher judgment in elite interviews as to whether or not the letter includes the information that people may withdraw at any time from the interview process as this is deemed axiomatic given their powerful status. This research believed that it was necessary to include this clause.

- *Consent of participants*: In elite interviews, it is often argued that requiring written consent is not appropriate. This is because it is held that this type of person understands the situation s/he is in and in granting an interview is implicitly giving informed consent. However as per CUREC guidelines, consent here was not assumed, before the letter was sent to the participant. The letter was also read again at the start of the interview, asking specifically about consent, and requesting it again then at that moment.
- *Data Protection and Acknowledgement/Anonymity Issues*: As mentioned previously, as well as the normal careful data protection routines, where elite interviewees requested anonymity, extra care was taken. Clearly false names/ or code numbers were used in any records but in using quotations etc. in any written material it was important to ensure that contextual information did not immediately reveal ‘who said what’. This research therefore followed the CUREC guidelines concerning anonymity in elite interviews, which stated:

“

*if appropriate, elite interviewees may need to be made aware that text could inadvertently reveal who they are, and aware of the possibility of being misquoted. Elite interviewers may consider offering interviewees the opportunity to check the use of direct quotes, and view contextual information which will be available in the research report but they should consider the appropriateness and practical feasibility of following through with this. All negotiations need to be done with care ensuring that academic freedom is maintained while keeping within the laws of libel and as far as possible meeting interviewees’ legitimate concerns. However, if ‘expert’ interviewees do not wish to be individually identified, views may be used in a more aggregated way and the maintenance of confidentiality should be possible to achieve using the standard procedures of qualitative studies” (CUREC 3).*

- *Power Imbalance*; The challenge of the power imbalance arises for most researcher participants when engaging in elite interviews processes, and this research proved

no different. This challenge however was easily overcome, by simply being prepared to handle these imbalances when planning the research in the initial stages, prepping well for the interview, and knowing the questions and the topic to the highest degree. This intense preparation proved a worthy tool in meeting any of the challenges associated with possible power imbalances during the interview process.

Taking these steps greatly decreased both the ethical concerns and challenges which arose during this proportion of this research. Indeed, rigor in elite interviews is more straightforward, and more closely analogous to traditional journalists' ethics and rules of engagement. Knowing as much as possible about the context, stance, and past behaviour of the interview subject before beginning the conversation was a vital aspect in overcoming these ethical concerns or challenges. Being aware of these ethical challenges and seeking to deal with them directly, also enabled our research to probe more deeply into the respondent's idiosyncratic stances, and ultimately gave the respondent more material with which they could effectively develop his or her own explanation of past behaviour and their communicative strategies as a whole.

Finally, on the note of ethical consideration, we can say that debates surrounding the ethics of Internet research and the development of guidelines for researchers are ongoing, and still have a considerable way to go in terms of consensus on how to conduct internet research in the most ethical manner possible. Indeed, it remains unlikely that a consensus on the ethical considerations on using social media research will ever be reached. Perhaps this is hyperbole, but at the moment this is what seems likely. What we do know however is that each Internet research project requires an individual assessment of its ethical issues and selection of the most appropriate methodological approach. This research has sought to do just that; to be guided by the ethical principles bound in traditional research, whilst navigating the new waters of ethics in the field of internet research.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been threefold a) to provide an overarching methodological framework of this research, which included presenting, exploring, and discussing what we mean by the term ‘digital device’, the concept of ‘affordances’, and ‘thick data’, and how each informed our methodological processes; b) a discussion and analysis of the methodological tools used for collecting, collating and analysing the data used to accurately capture both the unique mechanisms of DDS; content and structure of the message, frequency, status of the diplomacy, audience (reach) and online diplomatic network, and the three stages of the OCN creation; formation, projection and reception and c) a rumination on the ethical considerations of the research design and justification for how these considerations were dealt with during the research process. A particular focus was given to the ethical concerns arising from conducting elite interviews, namely *negotiating access and information provided to participants, consent of participants, data protection and acknowledgement* and *power imbalance*. The limitations of each aspect of methodological toolkit were also discussed throughout.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CASE STUDY ONE:

#### **Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Narrative Creation During the 2014 Israel-Gaza Crisis**

##### **Chapter Highlights and Overview**

- Provides justification for the case study selection, and an insight into how each online diplomatic actor was selected for discussion and analysis.
  - Explores the generation of digital signals deployed by diplomatic actors during the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis;
  - Analyses the formation, projection and reception of online crisis narratives by a select number of diplomatic actors;
  - Using both communicative capabilities as unique analytical filters, assesses the overall diplomatic crisis communication performance of online diplomatic actors during the crisis;
  - Evaluates how both communicative processes, served (or did not serve) as instruments for virtual enlargement during the time of conflict.
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### **5.0 Introduction**

In line with previous chapter discussions, this chapter examines and seeks to empirically demonstrate the use of social media platforms by online diplomatic actors during the Israel – Gaza conflict, to include the outbreak of violence that occurred beginning the summer of 2014. This particular conflict provides a powerful lens in which to view the changing processes of communicative capabilities in the digital age, and to test and validate our theses that a) the processes of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation have evolved significantly as a direct result of technological advancements; b) effective use of digital signalling mechanisms by online actors assists in crafting and projecting frequent and ‘sellable’ crisis narratives, which stand in line with MFA objectives; c) through dominating and sculpting the overall crisis discourse, online narratives serve as tools in which states can virtually enlarge their power; and d) the offline political context remains one of the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and with what structure, diplomatic actors engage with crisis communication dialogue. The proposed set of theses have been validated with

empirical evidence and corresponding analysis, which is grounded in a context that is recent, relevant, and impactful for the practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy.

Set within the global information space, this chapter explores digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) and online crisis narrative (OCN) creation during the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis. While both concepts act as filters in which to holistically analyse diplomatic crisis communication performance, the outcome of this performance is what we can henceforth label 'virtual enlargement' (or a lack thereof). As discussed during the conceptual framework, although proving difficult to quantify, at some level we must begin to view virtual enlargement as more than a subjective constant if the concept is to hold any value, or relevance, in the digital age. As such, by exploring the five digital signalling mechanisms and three stages of online narrative creation during the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis, one can examine the efficacy of this thesis.

The chapter is divided into four distinct, but interlocking sections. The first turns to the case study itself, providing a justification for its choosing, and an exploration of how each online diplomatic actor was selected for analysis. Each facet of the crisis, from its background to the actors involved and its defence for analysis selection, is deemed a vital component of the methodological exploration and must be extrapolated upon and discussed with precision. The second section sees an evaluation and analysis of the DDS process utilised by the selected diplomatic actors during the crisis. Using each online signalling mechanism as a unique analytical lens, we explore and evaluate how diplomatic actors utilised their online platforms to project their foreign policy message and reach, increase their engagement with crisis actors, highlight their MFA's consular information and ensure that their state's position was heard amongst the ever-increasing voices online. An assessment will be undertaken in relation to how each mechanism was used and by which actor, whilst simultaneously creating a comparative assessment between these actors. This assessment allowed for a strong foundation on which to base our upcoming policy recommendations and strategies for the creation of best MFA communication practices, as extrapolated upon in Chapter Seven, *'A Note to Policymakers'*.

Firmly linked to the five core mechanisms of DDS, the third section of this chapter sees the creation of a set of *digital signalling typologies*. The purpose of this creation was to build a scenario, or set of circumstances, that best illustrate how the five digital

mechanisms were used by the online diplomatic actors during the crisis. As expanded upon in the conceptual framework, the construction of a set of typologies acts as a methodological tool to view and categorise the DDS process in a standardised, structured, and replicable manner. Through conceptual construction, typologies enabled us to label this new form of diplomatic crisis communication and to trace how it varies amongst actors today. This research creates three distinct typologies, allowing us to categorise and code the crisis communication performance of all actors based on their holistic use of all the signalling mechanisms: *High Performers*, *Medium Performers* and *Low Performers*. We then selected the top performing actors for online narrative analysis, and their propensity to achieve virtual enlargement as result of their effective engagement with the digital signalling mechanisms.

The fourth and final section of this chapter analyses the online narrative the formation, projection and assessment of four high performing actors in particular: The *United Kingdom* and *EEAS* on Twitter, and the *United States* and *Canada* on Facebook. An analysis of OCN allowed for a reflection on the outcomes of the signalling process itself, and opened an examination regarding its impact and influence for diplomatic actors engaging in the signalling process online. Upon further review, we discovered that through calculated use of the DDS process, the diplomatic agent creates a crisis narrative on behalf of the state through the formation, projection and reception of online messages - a power vital to hold in a world filled with informational overload and communicative chaos. By expanding the account's audience reach, increasing its network of actors, ensuring its message is heard by and expanded by its followers' retweets and shares, the evidence shows that actors enhance narrative capability toward a process of virtual state enlargement (to various degrees). The chapter then ends with the possible limitations of our findings, commenting also for avenues of future research.

The contribution of this chapter to the domains of diplomatic studies, is threefold: 1) expose and confront the changing nature of diplomatic crisis communication in the digital age; 2) shed light on the use of two communicative capabilities (digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narrative), exploring how, to what extent and with what comparison both capabilities are used by agents during a crisis; and 3) theorise and empirically demonstrate how both communicative processes serve (or do not serve) as instruments for virtual state enlargement during a time of conflict. These findings are of use to practitioners and

scholars alike, and allow for the crafting of a set of best practices for MFAs and their agents during a crisis. This research suggests, that when used correctly, these best practices contribute towards effective crisis management during a 21st century crisis.

This chapter presents a number of key empirical findings:

### *Digital Diplomatic Signalling*

- The process of diplomatic signalling was shown to have been substantially altered by the new role and practice of social media.
- Use of signalling mechanisms varied significantly in terms of individual actor use, thereby creating varying spectrums of effective crisis communication for online actors within the crisis.
- The majority of actors were reluctant to directly discuss the crisis online, both in terms of the content of their online discussion and how they packaged and projected their online crisis messages.
- Although reluctant to engage in direct crisis discussion, the top posts for all actors, in terms of audience engagement, were those which directly discussed and addressed the crisis at play.

- *Typologies*

- The majority of actors demonstrated a varied use of signalling mechanisms via their online diplomatic accounts, and as such were typed as ‘medium’ performers.
- Without exception, the top performers on both platforms came from ‘Western’ states<sup>58</sup>. Due to their global power and digital resources, these performers

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<sup>58</sup> The exact scope of the Western world is somewhat subjective in nature, depending on whether cultural, economic, spiritual or political criteria are employed. Many anthropologists, sociologists and historians oppose ‘the West and the Rest’ in a categorical manner (Goody 2007). The same has been done by Malthusian demographers with a sharp distinction between European and non-European family systems. Among anthropologists, this includes Durkheim, Dumont and Lévi-Strauss (ibid). As the term ‘Western world’ or ‘Western state’ does not have a strict international definition, governments do not use the term in legislation of international treaties and instead rely on other definitions. For the purpose of this research, countries of the Western world are generally considered to share certain fundamental political ideologies, including those of liberal democracy, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality (although there are notable

dominated the online crisis discourse. Through their increased reach of message, high performers carried the crisis narratives in their favour.

- The overall results of the typology spectrum illustrate that while signalling mechanisms played a central role in efforts toward digital diplomatic communication, their use amongst actors is not as uniform as one may think. Rather, these were utilised to varying degrees and constrained by a variety of circumstances, namely the continued role and power of the offline political context to shape communication practices. As such, we conclude that social media is perhaps not the great equaliser that it was once thought to be.

- *Online Narratives*

- While all actors created an online crisis narrative, those who viewed the signalling mechanisms as part of a holistic process, crafted the most consistent (in terms of frequency of engagement) and the most ‘sellable’ narratives in terms of achieving their MFA policy objectives.
- By projecting and expanding the reach of their foreign policy narrative, an MFA was shown to meet its foreign policy aims where the use of material resources and capabilities would fail to do so.
- Enhancing a state narrative served to contribute to a process of virtual state enlargement for the high performing actors, primarily through the increased projection and reception of their foreign policy position and objectives.

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exceptions, especially in foreign policy). All of these are prerequisites, for example, for a state to become a full member of the European Union and therefore from modern political point of view all European Union member states from the Western, Central and Eastern Europe are considered part of the Western world.

## Section I

### *5.1 Case Study Justification Israel – Gaza 2014 conflict*

To analyse the unexplored potential of the unique, and emerging digital communicative capabilities during times of political crisis, this research examines two core case studies: the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict and the 2013/4 Euromaidan crisis.

Picking illustrative case studies for these propositions has proven difficult, in part because no two crises are completely alike in their political context, players, or power endowments. They also exhibit different degrees of ingenuity in marshalling communicative power for projection. Nevertheless, it can be argued that despite the structural imperfections of these cases, they serve as illustrations and exploratory vehicles for both the limitations and potential of the digital state exercise of communicative power during times of crisis.

Both cases work in unison to illustrate the process of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation during the digital age, and both offer a distinct comparative context for an exploration of the variation in digital platforms use between crises. The comparative context of both cases and the stark geopolitical and strategic interests surrounding them allow for further questioning of the extent to which the offline political context continues to play a role within the realm of diplomatic crisis communication today. Finally, at the unilateral level, each case deals with a political crisis situation. Both cases also originate within a similar time frame and are dealt with largely under the same diplomatic actors, which provides us with a solid framework for comparative assessment. There also exist trustworthy and detailed primary and secondary sources for both cases. This is a particularly pertinent point given the difficulty of finding effective sources on crisis communication activities online.

Turning specifically to the Israel - Gaza crisis, we must first make clear that despite the Israeli – Palestine conflict being labelled, a ‘recurring’ or ‘unresolved’ crisis - that is a crisis which is continuously played out time and time again, by a set of continuous historical and unresolved issues by similar actors - the crisis of 2014 was chosen because it was seen as unique and relevant to our studies within the realm of crisis communication for a number of reasons. *First*, the outbreak of violence came after almost two years of

relative calm, one of the longest periods of peace since the conflict began, and it emerged just months after the latest round of peace talks collapsed (Sousa, Hagopian, Stoller 2014). *Second*, the use of military technology by both sides was substantially more advanced than in the earlier periods of violence. Here, Hamas publicly claimed responsibility for the use of drone technology, acknowledging the use of two distinct types: one to gather intelligence and another to fire munitions (ibid). As a direct consequence, Hamas were able to reach cities that were much further north in Israel than they ever before, leading the Israeli state to argue that some 5 million people were now living within striking distance of Hamas' newest rockets (ibid). *Third*, and perhaps one of the most important aspects for this research, was that the 2014 period of violence between the Israeli state and the Gaza Strip was arguably one of the most publicly and openly discussed crisis periods within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict thus far (ibid). The catalyst for such an open and public discussion was undeniably the unique role of social media within the field of crisis communication, and the extent to which it was used, not just by the actors directly involved in the conflict, but also the international community at large as method to highlight, discuss and analyse the conflict. Such a popularity of discussion and the abundance of data it subsequently created (indeed offline, as well as on), makes it an extremely interesting case for analysis and discussion.

Finally, what makes this case interesting from a digital diplomacy perspective is the offline political context within which the public discussion operated, allowing us then to assess whether the power and potential of online media truly outweighed the presence and framing of offline national strategies, an argument which has gained traction with the rise of social media within crisis communication analysis. Indeed, the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is one which is a notoriously divisive issue within the international arena at large, with nations crafting distinct policy approaches to the conflict (both historical and present) and with that demonstrating an even greater distinction in how they actually carry out their policies on the ground. Furthermore, the conflict is one which has arguably created less 'official' public discussion amongst 'Western' nations (and those nations which show the most frequent practice of digital crisis communication overall), subsequently furthering our case regarding whether or not the power of the new online mechanisms has been shown to surpass the offline political context & strategies in which it operates. In short, just because there exists new potential for crisis communication – in particular diplomatic signalling

and narrative creation - does this mean it has actually been harnessed by those who have the power to use it? This case provides an interesting lens in which to explore this issue.

Regarding the crisis timeframe chosen for analysis, the dates range from 12 June 2014 to 26 August 2014. The justification for these is as follows: 12 June 2014 marked the abduction of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. As previously noted, Israeli leadership placed the responsibility for their abduction on Hamas, and on 30 June, corpses of the teenagers were found. On 8 July 2014, Israel launched the formal military operation *Protective Edge* in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, and on 17 July 2014, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. The frequency of violence from both sides, came to an end after 50 days of conflict when a ceasefire was agreed upon on 26 August 2014, brokered by Egypt.

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Both cases work in unison to illustrate the process of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation during the digital age, and both offer a distinct comparative context for an exploration of the variation in digital platforms use between crises. The comparative context of both cases and the stark geopolitical and strategic interests surrounding them allow for further questioning of the extent to which the offline political context continues to play a role within the realm of diplomatic crisis communication today. Finally, at the unilateral level, each case deals with a political crisis situation. Both cases also originate within a similar time frame and are dealt with largely under the same diplomatic actors, which provides us with a solid framework for comparative assessment. There also exist trustworthy and detailed primary and secondary sources for both cases. This is a particularly pertinent point given the difficulty of finding effective sources on crisis

communication activities online. Indeed, this study originally started out with five cases in mind but reduced its analysis to two, due to source availability.

Turning specifically to the Israel - Gaza crisis, we must first make clear that despite the Israeli – Palestine conflict being labelled, a ‘recurring’ or ‘unresolved’ crisis - that is a crisis which is continuously played out time and time again, by a set of continuous historical and unresolved issues by similar actors - the crisis of 2014 was chosen because it was seen as unique and relevant to our studies within the realm of crisis communication for a number of reasons. *First*, the outbreak of violence came after almost two years of relative calm, one of the longest periods of peace since the conflict began, and it emerged just months after the latest round of peace talks collapsed (Sousa, Hagopian, Stoller 2014). *Second*, the use of military technology by both sides was substantially more advanced than in the earlier periods of violence. Here, Hamas publicly claimed responsibility for the use of drone technology, acknowledging the use of two distinct types: one to gather intelligence and another to fire munitions (ibid). As a direct consequence, Hamas were able to reach cities that were much further north in Israel than they ever before, leading the Israeli state to argue that some 5 million people were now living within striking distance of Hamas’ newest rockets (ibid). *Third*, and perhaps one of the most important aspects for this research, was that the 2014 period of violence between the Israeli state and the Gaza Strip was arguably one of the most publicly and openly discussed crisis periods within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict thus far (ibid). The catalyst for such an open and public discussion was undeniably the unique role of social media within the field of crisis communication, and the extent to which it was used, not just by the actors directly involved in the conflict, but also the international community at large as method to highlight, discuss and analyse the conflict. Such a popularity of discussion and the abundance of data it subsequently created (indeed offline, as well as on), makes it an extremely interesting case for analysis and discussion.

Finally, what makes this case interesting from a digital diplomacy perspective is the offline political context within which the public discussion operated, allowing us then to assess whether the power and potential of online media truly outweighed the presence and framing of offline national strategies, an argument which has gained traction with the rise of social media within crisis communication analysis. Indeed, the Israeli – Palestinian conflict is one which is a notoriously divisive issue within the international arena at large, with nations

crafting distinct policy approaches to the conflict (both historical and present) and with that demonstrating an even greater distinction in how they actually carry out their policies on the ground. Furthermore, the conflict is one which has arguably created less ‘official’ public discussion amongst ‘Western’ nations (and those nations which show the most frequent practice of digital crisis communication overall), subsequently furthering our case regarding whether or not the power of the new online mechanisms has been shown to surpass the offline political context & strategies in which it operates. In short, just because there exists new potential for crisis communication – in particular diplomatic signalling and narrative creation - does this mean it has actually been harnessed by those who have the power to use it? This case provides an interesting lens in which to explore this issue.

Regarding the crisis timeframe chosen for analysis, the dates range from 12 June 2014 to 26 August 2014. The justification for these is as follows: 12 June 2014 marked the abduction of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. As previously noted, Israeli leadership placed the responsibility for their abduction on Hamas, and on 30 June, corpses of the teenagers were found. On 8 July 2014, Israel launched the formal military operation *Protective Edge* in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, and on 17 July 2014, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. The frequency of violence from both sides, came to an end after 50 days of conflict when a ceasefire was agreed upon on 26 August 2014, brokered by Egypt.

### *5.1 2014 Israel-Gaza War: Crisis Background and Context*

Before we attempt to begin our analysis on both crisis, we must first seek to establish the context in which they are initially placed. Thus, we find ourselves shining the spotlight on the Gaza Strip and the nation of Israel, its territorial history, and the violence which escalated beginning 12 June 2014.

Sandwiched between Israel and Egypt, the region of Gaza, a 25-mile long and 7-mile wide finger of land along the Mediterranean, has been at the centre of geopolitical tug-of-wars for its entire existence, and it has emerged as a recurring flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the last four decades (Sachar 2013). Originally a Canaanite settlement, Gaza was best known in ancient times for its strategic location as an important trading centre for

Asian, European and North African markets, with the desirability of the territory resulting in frequent battles for its control. It was conquered by the Philistines in the 13th century B.C., raised by the Hasmonean Kingdom and suffered incursions from the likes of Napoleon and Alexander the Great, whose army put the entire male population to death for refusing to surrender.

Gaza's longest modern stretch of occupation came after the region fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1517, under whose sway it remained for four centuries, until the dissolution of the Empire following World War I. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the territory saw itself incorporated as part of the League of Nations mandate of Palestine under British rule, but before the mandate was to end, the newly formed United Nations (UN) hastily accepted a plan for the Arab-Jewish partition of Palestine (under which the land of Gaza fell), to be allotted to the Arabs beginning November 1947. The British mandate officially ended May 15, 1948, and on the same day, the first Arab-Israeli war commenced. Here, the Egyptian forces entered the town of Gaza - which became the headquarters of the Egyptian expeditionary force in Palestine - and as result of heavy fighting in autumn 1948, the area around the town under Arab occupation saw itself reduced to a section of territory 25 miles (40 km) long and 4–5 miles (6–8 km) wide, soon earning its title, the Gaza Strip. Its boundaries were officially demarcated in the Egyptian-Israeli armistice agreement of February 24, 1949.

Following these events, the Strip remained under Egyptian military rule from 1949 to 1956 and again from 1957 to 1967. From the beginning of the rule, the area's chief economic and social problem was the presence of large numbers of Palestinian Arab refugees, who were living in extreme poverty in squalid camps. The Egyptian government did not consider the area part of Egypt and did not allow the refugees to become Egyptian citizens or to migrate to Egypt or other Arab countries, where they might integrate into the population. Israel also did not allow for the refugees to return to their former homes or to receive compensation for their loss of property, and such treatment led to severe discontentment and anger amongst the refugee population, creating the foundations for what was to be soon known as fedayeen (Arab guerrillas operating against Israel). The fedayeen were seen as a fractured but powerful Arab group, with their attacks on Israel emerging as one of the primary causes precipitating the Sinai campaign during the Suez Crisis of 1956, when the strip was again taken by Israel. Following strong international

pressures, the strip quickly reverted to Egyptian control in 1957, but this was not to last; in June 1967, Israel occupied the region once more, and would do so for the next quarter century.

The next two decades saw the citizens of Gaza continue to suffer social and economic hardship, and denied of their basic human rights. This oppression culminated once again with a violent clash with the Israeli state when, in December of 1987, rioting and violent street clashes between Gaza's Palestinians and occupying Israeli troops marked the birth of an uprising which came to be known as the *intifāḍah* (Arabic: "shaking off"). This revolt was seen as unique in the history of this crisis, as it brought international attention to the Palestinian cause, becoming also the birth of the political party Hamas, which was created as a Palestinian extension of the popular Muslim Brotherhood Organisation which had already swept through Egypt and much of the Arab world. Here Hamas gained momentum in the occupied region, particularly in Gaza, by establishing educational and social programs for disenfranchised Palestinians, but drew international condemnation for its tactics of rebellion against Israel, including terror attacks and suicide bombings.

The winds of power changed once again in 1994, when Israel began a phased transfer of governmental authority in the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority (PA) under the terms of the Oslo Accords that were signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Although a monumental move, hardship in the region was far from over; the fledgling Palestinian government, led by Yāsir 'Arafāt, struggled with such problems as a stagnant economy, divided popular support, stalled negotiations with Israel over further troop withdrawals and territoriality, and the threat of terrorism from militant Muslim groups such as Islamic Jihad and Ḥamās, both of which refused to compromise with Israel and were intent on derailing the peace process. Despite this transfer of authority, both sides continued to engage in dialogue; however, a breakdown in negotiations between the PA and Israel was to result in a more extreme outbreak of violence, termed the second, or *Aqṣā, intifāḍah*. Here, in an effort to end the fighting, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced in late 2003 a plan which centred on withdrawing Israeli soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip, and in September 2005 Israel started the withdrawal of forces and settlements from the region, and control of the Gaza Strip was transferred to the PA, although Israel continued to patrol its borders and airspace.

However, it was not until the 2006 parliamentary elections in the volatile region that Hamas' popularity was regarded as officially cemented, winning 74 out of 132 seats, a result that shocked Israeli and Western observers alike. The victory prompted harsh sanctions by Israel, including power cuts, heavily restricted imports, and border closures, with the United States and the European Union adding fuel to the fire by declaring the strip a hostile entity and placing the organisation on its official list of terrorist groups. Facing sustained rocket assaults into its southern settlements, in January 2008, Israel once more broadened its sanctions, completely sealing its border with the territory and temporarily preventing fuel imports. However, in June of that year, after months of negotiations, both parties agreed to implement a truce scheduled to last six months; but was threatened shortly thereafter as each accused the other of violations, which escalated in the last months of the agreement. When the truce officially expired on December 19, Ḥamās announced that they did not intend to extend it, and broader hostilities erupted shortly thereafter as Israel, responding to sustained rocket fire, mounted a series of airstrikes across the region—among the strongest in years—meant to target Ḥamās. After a week of airstrikes, Israeli forces initiated a ground campaign into the Gaza Strip amid calls from the international community for a cease-fire. Following more than three weeks of hostilities—in which perhaps more than 1,000 were killed and tens of thousands left homeless—Israel and Ḥamās each declared a unilateral cease-fire.

Although conditions remained tense between either party, 'hot' or active violence was not to be seen again until March 2012. Viewed as the worst outbreak of violence covered by the media in the region since the 2008–2009 crisis, conflict began on 9 March when Israel carried out a targeted airstrike in the Gaza Strip killing Zohair al-Qaisi, the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC). Palestinian militant groups soon retaliated by launching a series of rocket attacks, to which Israel responded in the same vein. On March 13, Egypt brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militant groups. Hamas did not participate in the fighting directly and insisted that all-out war would 'be devastating to the Palestinian people' (Brulliard 2012). The peace was not to last; in November, Israel launched another airstrike, killing Ahmed Jabari, chief of the Hamas military wing in Gaza (Kalman 2012). This event resulted in active and prolonged rocket fire from both sides. According to Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 158 Palestinians were killed, including 102 civilians, 55 militants, one policeman, 30 children and 13 women. The Israel Defense Forces, however, presented statistics showing that out of 177

Palestinians killed, 120 were militants (BBC 2014). Regarding the international reaction, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and other Western countries expressed support for Israel's right to defend itself, and they also condemned the Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel (Tovah 2012). Iran, Egypt, Turkey, North Korea and several other Arab and Muslim countries condemned the Israeli operation (The Express Tribune 2012; The Bahrain News 2012). A cease-fire was to be brokered once more by Egypt, and after days of negotiations fighting was to cease on 21 November (Kirkpatrick 2012; Owens 2012). Both sides claimed victory.

### *Operation Protective Edge: Crisis Context 2014*

However, as history had shown, although peace was made, it was not to last; leading to the conflict of 2014, now known as *Operation Protective Edge* (Hebrew: מִיבְּצָע צוּק אֵיטָן, Miv'tza Tzuk Eitan, lit. 'Operation Strong Cliff') and the point of crisis we focus on for our analysis (Arnaout 2014; Anadolu 2014)<sup>59</sup>. Here our case study centres on the violence, which intensified in the summer of this year, culminating in a full-scale war, and one which was arguably far deadlier than the previous in 2008-2009. The immediate events within the crisis were as follows:

On Nakba Day, 15 May 2014, two Palestinian youths -- Nadeem Siam Nawara, 17, and Mohammad Mahmoud Odeh Abu Daher, 16 -- were killed by Israeli sniper fire using live ammunition near Ofer military prison in the West Bank city of Beitunia. On 12 June 2014, three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the West Bank: Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah. Israel blamed Hamas for this act, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu saying that he had 'unequivocal proof' that Hamas was involved and that the abduction was linked to Palestinian reconciliation (Amnesty 2014; Kershner 2014). The IDF stated that the two men Israel suspected of having kidnapped the teenagers were known members of Hamas. No evidence of Hamas involvement was offered by Israeli authorities at the time (ibid; Tait 2014). Their bodies were discovered June 30, and on the same eve, a barrage of rockets were launched from Gaza at Israel and Israeli warplanes

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<sup>59</sup> Turkish Anadolu Agency reported that an Israeli military spokesman had explained that the non-literal translation of the operation's name into English was to 'give a more 'defensive' connotation; (AA 2014). The IDF's official Arabic name for the operation, translated into English, is 'Operation Resolute Cliff'.

carried out numerous airstrikes in Gaza. Israel then arrested more than 300 Palestinians, many of them members of Hamas, and more than 1,000 private homes were raided.

Following these events, a sharp escalation of violence continued, including the kidnapping of a Palestinian teenager and his apparent death by burning in apparent retaliation (July 2), coupled with increasing rocket fire between both sides, which saw *Operation Protective Edge* officially commence on 17 July (ibid). While continuing its airstrikes, the Israeli operation was expanded to a ground invasion of Gaza, with the stated aim of destroying Gaza's tunnel system (Sobelman 2014; Borschel 2014). In the following weeks, the world then watched as thousands of airstrikes and thousands of rockets were fired from both sides. Analysts of the crisis spoke about how Hamas, after losing the support of its former staunch ally Syria and to a lesser extent Iran, and seeing the Egyptian authorities crack down on smuggling tunnels following the overthrow of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi (ibid), had become increasingly isolated in Gaza, and attacking Israel, they argued, may be a way for Hamas to try to boost its popularity and obtain concessions in any eventual long-term ceasefire. Israel however, showed no mercy for the citizens of Gaza, who were forced to endure its airstrikes under the continued harsh restrictions forced upon them, notably restriction of movement, and access to humanitarian relief. At the close of the crisis, it was reported that anywhere between 2,142 (Al Mezan 2014) and 2,310 (Ma'an News Agency 2015) Gazans were killed and between 10,626 and 10,895 were wounded (including 3,374 children, of whom over 1,000 were left permanently disabled) (Ma'an News Agency 2015; Ramallah 2015). 66 Israeli soldiers, five Israeli civilians (including one child) and one Thai civilian were also killed, and 469 IDF soldiers and 261 Israeli civilians were injured (BBC 2014). The Gaza Health Ministry, UN and some human rights groups reported that 69–75% of the Palestinian casualties were civilians (ibid).

To resolve the crisis, or tame the violence, a number of diplomatic efforts were made. These included efforts by the then United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, like the meeting in Paris with European G4 foreign ministers and his counterparts of Qatar and Turkey (Middle East Eye 2014). Egypt also brokered a number of ceasefires between Hamas and Israel, all of which were broken by both sides. That was until 26 August, which saw agreement on a long-term ceasefire, officially ending weeks of fighting leaving more than 2,200 people dead (ibid). The United Nations and the international community at large were shown to publicly welcome the

truce, but in a statement via his spokesman, the then-Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon openly warned that ‘any peace effort that does not tackle the root causes of the crisis will do little more than set the stage for the next cycle of violence’ (BBC 2014).

### ***Who are the Key Players?***

#### ***i. Hamas***

Stemming from an Arabic acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas as it is known today, originated in 1987 at the beginning of the first intifada or Palestinian uprising against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Litvak 1998). Formed originally with the dual purpose of carrying out an armed struggle against the Israeli state (led by its military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades) and delivering social welfare programmes to the Palestinian people, its charter defines historic Palestine (including present-day Israel) as Islamic land and rules out any permanent peace with the Jewish state. It has, however, offered a 10-year truce in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967: The West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem (Ibid). It insists, though, that millions of Palestinian refugees stemming from the 1948 war must be allowed to return to homes in what has now become part of the official Israeli state - a move that critics argue would threaten Israel's very existence (Knudsen 2005).

Since 2005, Hamas has engaged in the Palestinian political process, becoming the first Islamist group in the Arab world to gain power democratically (before forcibly taking control of its stronghold of Gaza). Building on this process, 2006 saw Hamas win a victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, but tensions with the rival Fatah faction of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas also heightened. Deadly clashes between Fatah and Hamas erupted in Gaza in June 2007, after which Hamas set up a rival government, leaving Fatah and the PA running parts of the West Bank not under Israeli control. The divide still stands today.

Hamas is also harnessing the power of social media for its cause. The group has been honing its own message on Twitter while increasingly bringing responsibility for the effort

in-house, instead of relying on outside activist groups to get its message across. Both the military and political arms of the organisation operate accounts. The Arabic account of the military arm has attracted more than 58,000 followers. The group did have a popular Facebook account with 2.7 million likes, but it was removed by the platform in February 2015 after complaints were made by a number of users, accusing it of containing graphic violence, which violated Facebook's terms of use. The account has been recreated under a new name, and currently stands at nearly 300,000 likes (Ynet News 2014). The group has also learned some of the flexibility that goes along with social campaigns. In one well-publicised instance, an Israeli woman responded to a Hamas tweet in Hebrew, correcting its grammar. Hamas wrote back to explain how the mistake was made and thanked her.

Figure 5.1 Tweet from Al-Qassam Brigades, military wing of the Palestinian Hamas organisation



During this period of conflict in question, Hamas posted reports of civilian casualties on both their Twitter and Facebook pages in English, Arabic and Hebrew. The English-language Twitter account of Hamas' military wing in particular, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam

Brigades, provided regular updates on casualties resulting from Israeli air strikes and reports on its own rocket activity, mirroring the IDF's account. Additionally, the Qassam Brigades operated several Twitter accounts in different languages, including Arabic and Hebrew, some of which have, at times, been suspended. Using the hashtags #GazaUnderAttack, #Gaza, #Stop Israel, and #PrayForGaza, the accounts defend the Qassam Brigades' actions and highlighted the plight of Palestinian civilians. In a tweet apparently aimed at the international community, the group said Palestinian casualties were 'not just numbers'. 'It's not just about taking pictures of dead people, 'we're now telling [the story of] this family, and how they were eating breakfast when they were killed' said Ihab al-Ghussain, a longtime Hamas member and now a spokesman in the Gaza government (ibid).

#### ii. Israeli Defence Force (IDF)

The Israeli Defence Force is the military arm of Israel. In comparison to the population size of Israel, it is a large military force, having 176,500 active personal, 465,000 reserves & 78.8 per 1,000 capita – with the latter being 4<sup>th</sup> in world, coming just after the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (IDF 2016). Military service within the state is compulsory for all citizens, with some minor exceptions.

Just like Hamas, the IDF engaged in the war for hearts and minds online. Amongst its most popular social media accounts is its official Twitter account (@IDFspokesperson) in English, with 504,000 followers. During the conflict in question, it provided dozens of updates every day on military activities plus graphics, photographs and video, as well as data on airstrikes and rocket launches, it also commented regularly on Hamas's motives and actions and posted 'infographics', such as one purporting to show how Hamas uses Palestinian homes as military command centres and weapon storage facilities. These infographics, however, were regularly taken up by Hamas online and reworked to display the latter's point of view online. Additionally, the IDF regularly used the power of the hashtag to expand the impact and reach of their message. For example, before the 2014 World Cup final, it asked its followers to retweet its posts on the number of rockets fired

from Gaza using the hashtags #WorldCup and #GERvsARG in an effort to maximise its reach.

Figure 5.2 Tweets from the Israeli Defence Force, the military forces of the State of Israel, and Al-Qassam Brigades, military wing of the Palestinian Hamas organisation.



The IDF is also active on YouTube and Facebook, using all techniques available to the platforms to drive home their message. One video posted by the IDF on its YouTube account for example, entitled *15 Seconds: Not Enough Time*, compares the time it takes for athletes to run around a track with the time Israeli civilians have to take cover from incoming rocket fire. The video caption reads: ‘During a rocket attack, Israelis living near Gaza only have 15 seconds to reach a bomb shelter. Even the world’s fastest man wouldn’t make it on time.’

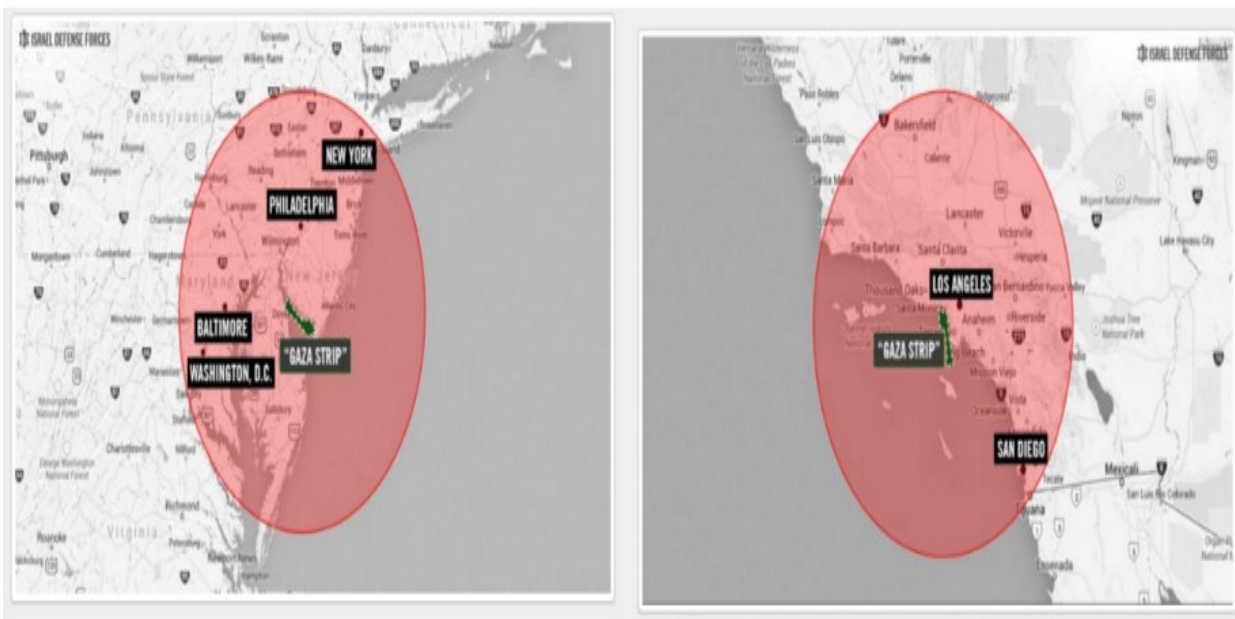
Using the power of networking and outsourcing of message dissemination on Facebook, Israel regularly recruits hundreds of students to assist in its *hasbara*, or public diplomacy campaigns. These individuals – some of whom are paid – act openly and covertly, with many engaging in below-the-line online discussion threads to promote Israeli interests. At the start of the conflict in question, students at the Interdisciplinary Centre, a private college in Herzliya, launched a social media campaign on Twitter and Facebook, ‘Israel Under Fire’. According to its leader, Yarden Ben-Yosef, more than 400 students have volunteered for the programme, running five Facebook pages in five languages (English, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and German). They also run a website, [israelunderfire.com](http://israelunderfire.com), which posts in 21 languages and claims to contain only factual data – ‘there is no propaganda, no exaggeration, no lies’ (Benedictus 2016). ‘We counter Palestinian propaganda and explain the Israeli perspective,’ Ben-Yosef said. ‘Social media is another place where the war goes on. This is another way to tell our story’ (ibid). He conceded that the students used pictures and data provided by the Israeli government but insisted it had no say in how the group used such information. ‘This is part of the *hasbara* effort – we’re working for the same goal, but we do it in our own way’ (Ibid).

Finally, the IDF has also created an application available on its blog, asking people to ‘imagine’ if Hamas lived in their country and fired rockets at their hometown. It offers a series of maps that superimpose the Gaza Strip on other countries, including the US or the UK, as a way to demonstrate the security threats it faces. The app is aimed at helping people understand the scale of the rocket threat (IDF Blog 2014).

Figure 5.3 Image of application made by the Israeli Defence Force, Application for Public Use



Figure 5.4 Application demonstrating the Israeli-Gaza geographical context, if played out on the East or West Coast of the United States



### *iii. Prime Minister of Israel*

The current Prime Minister of Israel is Benjamin Netanyahu, who was an active player within the 2014 crisis. Historically, the office of the Prime Minister has emerged as a key role in the ongoing conflicts, becoming the voice and public face of Israel during the time of crisis. Men such as Ehud Olmert, Ariel Sharon, and Ehud Barak were shown to favour direct and public leadership style, positioning themselves at the heart of the conflict through the use of frequent media events, speeches directed not only towards a national audience, but the international community at large, and in some unique instances, completing bypassing legislative and judicial branches of government to enact laws or call upon the military.

Online, the Office of the Prime Minister currently has two primary accounts; Facebook and Twitter, with 562,000 likes and 509,000 followers respectively. The Twitter account is perhaps the most controversial and has come under fire a number of times, both during the crisis and otherwise. The most controversial case of late was the PM's dealing on Twitter, in response to the closing of the Iran Nuclear Deal. As the deal was being announced, the prime minister's office tweeted in Farsi that 'hundreds of billions of dollars the regime will receive from this agreement will be spent on terrorism and arms and not on hospitals and schools'. His office said that tweet and two others from Netanyahu received several thousand responses that included statements of support, questions, and uncivil responses. Not to be out-Tweeted, Iranian President Hassa Rouhani tweeted in English: 'To our neighbours: Do not be deceived by the propaganda of the warmongering Zionist regime. #Iran & its power will translate into your power'.

Figure 4.5 Tweets by Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel



#### iv. Diplomatic Actors Offline

In the case of this research, offline diplomatic actors refer to all Embassies and Consulates on the ground in Tel Aviv, Israel. This encompasses all the sending states to Israel and those who have active diplomatic relations within the country. At the time of writing, there are 87 diplomatic missions accredited to the State of Israel. 27 (31.03%) of these missions come from the European Union, 15 (17.24%) from African Union, 4 (4.49%) from Mercosur, 4 from ASEAN 4 (4.49%), and 1 (1.14%) from CariCom, alongside other key international players including the United States, China and Russia. The Middle East and its allies continue to remain underrepresented in Israel.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See I. Pape *The Modern Middle East; second edition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010; I, Pape *The Israel/Palestine Question, 2nd Edition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006; Bridging Narratives Concept, in Rotberg RI (eds), *Israel and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict; History's Double Helix*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 194-204. See also B. White 'Trump and Palestine – so what now?' BenWhite, Last Accessed <https://benwhite.org.uk/2017/02/17/trump-and-palestine-so-what-now/>

Figure 5.6. Nation States accredited to the State of Israel, with an offline representation on the ground



#### v. Diplomatic Actors Online

For a scholar of digital diplomacy, one of the most interesting aspects of this case emerged with the new role and place afforded to a variety of actors online. While previously playing a role within the crisis offline, the majority of these actors had, up to this point, not been afforded access to a platform which was so open and public, and one which transferred to them instantly the power to highlight, discuss, and engage with the conflict on a scale and rate never before seen. The primary cause behind such developments was the emergence of social media platforms and the unique role they began to play within crisis communication for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

While there continues to emerge an expansive and ever-growing list of actors who are afforded the opportunity to play a substantial online role within the crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Non-Governmental Organisations, Lobby Groups, national and international citizens or

netizens which they are increasingly being referred to), for the purpose of this research, we seek to focus on the role of *official* diplomatic actors online. While this phrase ‘official diplomatic actors online’ is relatively inclusive, at its core it is used to frame the diplomatic entities which are 1) accredited to a receiving state; 2) serve on its ground during a time of crisis; and 3) demonstrate an active presence online (under the name of the sending state). This term expands to include Embassies, Ambassadorial postings, Consulates, and Delegations. It is these actors which form the bedrock of our analysis and through individual, cumulative, and comparative analysis, allow for the construction of justified conclusions, prediction of future trends, and ultimately work towards creating an insight into how 21<sup>st</sup> century communication tools are being used by diplomatic agents to create diplomatic signals and craft crisis narrative online.

Out of the 87 offline diplomatic actors accounted for, 26 (29.8%) currently were seen to have a presence online. Broken down, we can see that 15 out of these 26 actors (57.6%) were accredited to the European Union, while the remaining 9 (46.1%) comprised of key international players, including the United States, Canada, Norway, Australia, Japan, Thailand & Kenya.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding the actor’s choice of online platforms, we saw that of the 26 missions who were active online, 14 (53.8%) used a single social media platform – either Twitter or Facebook, with 5 (19.2%) using Twitter as a solo platform<sup>62</sup>, and 9 (34.6%) using Facebook<sup>63</sup>. 12 actors (46.1%) were seen to use both platforms in unison. As a point of reference, it can be noted that, at the time of writing, no mission was discovered using a third social media

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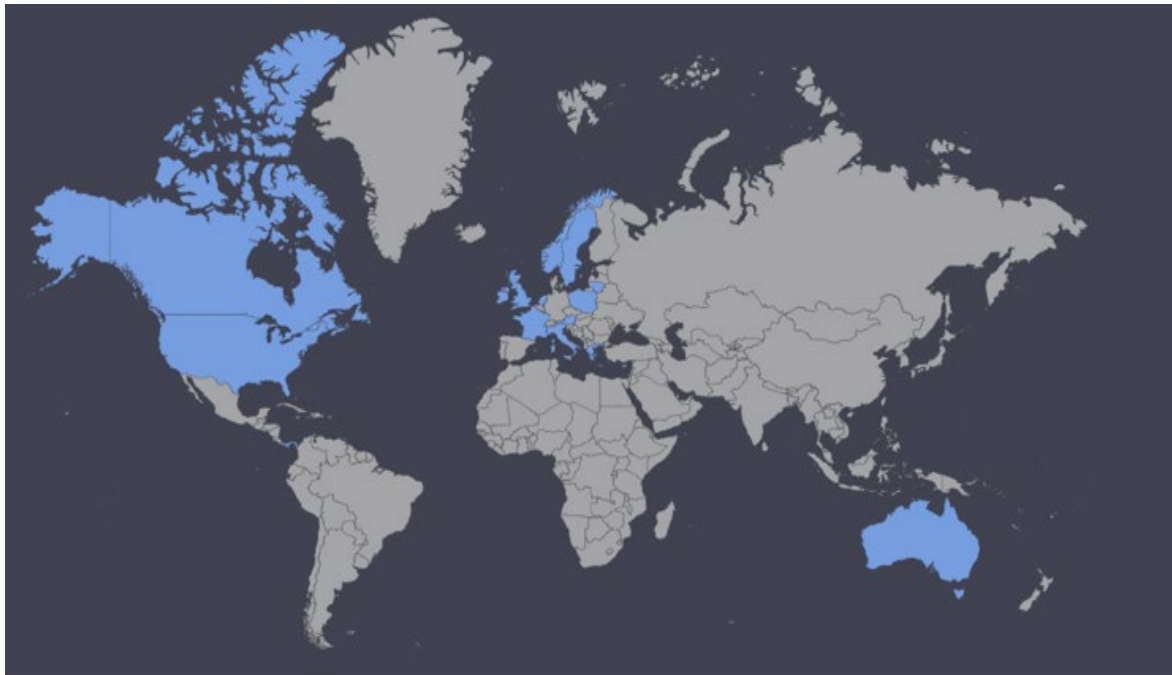
<sup>61</sup> The high presence of European and ‘Western’ missions online is perhaps not surprising, for a number of reasons. First, Israeli bilateral relations have been historically strong across the European Union, the United States, and Canada. 27 (31.03%) of the 87 Missions accredited to Israel on the ground come from European states alone. Second, Europe is one of the leading regional blocs when it comes to their use of social media for diplomatic purposes, with nearly every nation state having a presence online. Europe and the West’s strong ties with Israel and already-active digital policy online is something to note when assessing the power of the offline political context over online diplomatic communication (P Berck, J Lipow 1994; Sousa, A Hagopian, N Stoller 2014; A Knudsen 2005). This phenomenon shall be expanded on further on in this work.

<sup>62</sup> Out of the 26 diplomatic actors discovered online, 17 have created a Twitter account, either using it as a solo platform or in conjunction with other online platforms. Of these 16 diplomatic actors, 11 (68%) come from Europe, with the other 5 hailing from Australia, Canada, Norway, Panama, and the United States.

<sup>63</sup> Out of the 26 diplomatic actors online, 21 have created a Facebook account up camp on Facebook, either using it as a solo platform, or in conjunction with other online platforms. Of these 21 diplomatic actors, 11 (52.3%) come from Europe, with the other 10 hailing from Australia, Belarus, Canada, India, Japan, Kenya, Panama, South Sudan, Thailand & the United States.

platform, whether singularly or in conjunction with any other. Furthermore, only the United States Embassy explicitly linked the use of both their Twitter and Facebook accounts online, i.e. promoting their Twitter account on Facebook and directing possible followers to the alternative platform. Aside from this case, all other online actors operating on both platforms were not shown to connect or highlight the duality of their communication in anyway. Finally, although the number of online diplomatic actors continues to expand, for the purpose of this research, we are choosing only to focus on those which were open and active during the crisis itself.

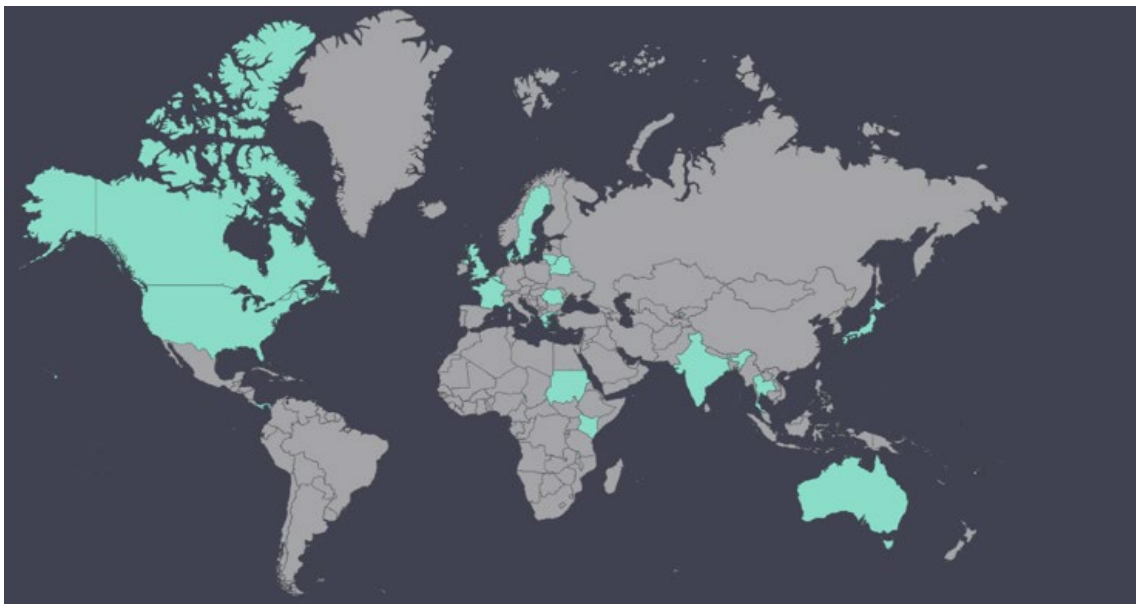
*Figure 5.7. MFA's accredited to the State of Israel, with an online representation on Twitter*



1. Australia - @AusAmbIsrael (AMB)
2. Austria - @Kuglitsch (AMB)
3. Canada - @AmbCanIsrael (AMB)

4. EEAS - @EUinIsrael (EMBASSY)
5. France - @Ambfranceisrael (EMBASSY)
6. Greece - @GreeceinTelAviv (EMBASSY)
7. Ireland - @EamonnMcKee (EMBASSY)
8. Italy - @AmbTelAviv (EMBASSY) <sup>64</sup>
9. Lithuania - @LTembassyIL (EMBASSY) <sup>65</sup>
10. Netherlands - @NLinIsrael (EMBASSY)
11. Norway - @NorwayinIsrael (EMBASSY)
12. Panama - @EmbajadaPma (EMBASSY)
13. Poland - @PLinIsrael (EMBASSY)
14. Sweden - @SwedeninIL (EMBASSY)
15. United Kingdom - @UKinIsrael (EMBASSY)
16. United States - @USEmbassyta (EMBASSY)
17. United States - @AmbShapiro (AMBASSADOR)

*Figure 5.8 MFA's accredited to the State of Israel, with an online representation on Facebook*



<sup>64</sup> The Italian Embassy to the State of Israel, though an active Twitter user, will not be used for our research analysis, as the online account was only created in February 2015.

<sup>65</sup> The same can be noted for the Lithuanian Embassy to the State of Israel. Although an active Twitter user, it will not be used for our research analysis as the online account was only created in November 2014.



1. Australia; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Australia-in-Israel/172830686252216?fref=ts>
2. Belarus; <https://www.facebook.com/BelarusinIsrael?fref=ts><sup>66</sup>
3. Belgium; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-Belgium-in-Tel-Aviv/296723953677532?sk=info&tab=overview>
4. Canada; <https://www.facebook.com/CanadainIsrael>
5. Denmark; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-Denmark-in-Tel-Aviv/296723953677532?sk=info&tab=overview>
6. EEAS; <https://www.facebook.com/Europe.in.Israel?fref=nf>
7. France; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ambassade-de-France-en-Isra%C3%ABl/98524317894>
8. Greece; <https://www.facebook.com/GreeceInTelAviv>
9. Hungary; <https://www.facebook.com/hungaryinIsrael>
10. India; <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInIsrael?fref=ts>
11. Japan; <https://www.facebook.com/EOJIsrael>
12. Kenya; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kenya-Embassy-Israel/686062841490404><sup>67</sup>
13. Lithuania; [https://www.facebook.com/lrambizr/photos\\_stream](https://www.facebook.com/lrambizr/photos_stream)
14. Panama; <https://www.facebook.com/PanamaInIsrael>
15. Poland; <https://www.facebook.com/polishembassy.telaviv>
16. Romania; <https://www.facebook.com/ambasada.romaniei.7>
17. South Sudan; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-Sudan-Embassy-State-of-Israel/1521098551493062><sup>68</sup>
18. Sweden; <https://www.facebook.com/SwedenInIsrael>
19. Thailand; <http://www.thaiembassy.org/telaviv/en/home>
20. United Kingdom; <https://www.facebook.com/ukinIsrael>
21. United States; <https://www.facebook.com/U.S.EmbassyTelAvivIsrael>

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<sup>66</sup> The Embassy of Belarus to the State of Israel will not be used for our research analysis, as the online account was only created in November 2014.

<sup>67</sup> The same can be said for the Kenyan Embassy to the State of Israel, with the account only being created, October 2014.

<sup>68</sup> The same can be said for the South Sudan Embassy to the State of Israel, with the account only being created, December 2014.

## Section II

### 5.2 Creation of Digital Diplomatic Signals

This section investigates the use of online diplomatic signalling mechanisms during the 2014 Israel – Gaza conflict. More specifically, the mechanisms' potential for expanding foreign policy reach and presence during the crisis, increasing diplomatic engagement with official and nonofficial actors, and extending online and offline awareness of an MFA's crisis position and strategy. The investigation also serves as a tool in which to highlight, at the broadest level, the changing nature of diplomatic signalling during the digital age. That is, how the process has evolved during the last two decades, and what novel methods actors are currently using to generate diplomatic signals online.

The five aforementioned online mechanisms serve as analytic tools in which to uncover the untapped and under researched potential of this practice. While each mechanism was explored and analysed individually within the data set, comparing and contrasting their use between diplomatic agents was also a core component of this section. An assessment of the interrelationship between all mechanisms and how they worked in synergy to build and craft online narratives was also undertaken. This enabled a coherent and balanced analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis communication activities to emerge. Although the exploration and analyses regarding the role of these platforms to craft signals and generate narratives was viewed as a vital task in its own right, we sought to deepen our understanding of diplomatic crisis communication within the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a whole by connecting this research to a larger picture of diplomatic crisis communication strategies and management.

#### *5.2.1 Content and Structure of the Message*

At the broadest level, the first online mechanism relates to the content of the message and the structure in which it is packaged. Our analysis looks at how the message is framed and what exactly it is choosing to frame. During a crisis, and within the online signalling process specifically, this mechanism matters because what a diplomat's types and texts matters, and how present it to the public sphere does also. For a detailed analysis of this

mechanism and justification for its inclusion within the signalling process, see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2.

To begin to make sense of the message crafted online, a ‘thick data’ approach to this process allowed us to step back from the vast amount of content produced by our selected social media analytic tools. Once all content had been collected and collated (using Twitonomy for the Twitter application, and manually for the Facebook application), we then performed a comprehensive content analysis (as expanded upon in Chapter 4). As a result, these seven categories were deemed the most appropriate in which to code and illustrate the context of the messages gathered for further analysis: Political Commentary, Consular Commentary, Public Diplomacy Strategies, Embassy Events, Third Party Events, National Posts, and General.

*Table 5.1 Crises Communication Content*

<b>Content of the Message</b>	<b>Example</b>
<i>Political Commentary</i>	Comments concerning the political nature of the crisis, the state's position regarding it, or the actions of other official crisis actors.
<i>Consular Commentary</i>	Comments concerning the consular crisis issues; highlighting emergency contact information, Embassy opening hours, and aid delivery points.
<i>Public Diplomacy Strategies</i>	Highlighting programs either run by the Embassy or MFA HQ, which serve a public diplomacy purpose; film festivals, exchange programs, and business partnerships.

<i>Embassy Events</i>	Publicising events taking place at the Embassy within the receiving state.
<i>Third - Party Events</i>	Publicising events which take place outside the Embassy, but within the receiving state.
<i>National Posts</i>	Commentary on domestic news, national holidays, and/or state events.
<i>General</i>	Posts dealing with abstract issues including site maintenance, and job vacancies.

This analysis was achieved in two key stages; 1) an exploration and examination of the overall content discovered on the platforms, with a focus here on all the messages sent from each online account during the entire duration of the crisis; and 2) an analysis of the online posts which were directly related to the crisis (either political and/or consular commentary). This two-stage analysis allowed us to highlight how each diplomatic account chose to speak about the crisis (and to what extent), and how they situated their crisis discussion within their overall online dialogue.

The structure of the message refers to how the message was packaged and framed. On social media platforms in particular, the framing of the message has become a point of high interest, with the near pervasive disclaimer on official diplomatic accounts that ‘retweet does not equal endorsement’. This disclaimer recognises that the structure of the message carries discursive weight and has the potential to send a signal to its online audience. Whilst it is still up for discussion whether a retweet actually equates to an endorsement or not (whether implicitly or otherwise), the public acknowledgement of its power amongst a wide range of official actors demonstrates in itself that it matters, or at the very least should be considered when crafting a message.

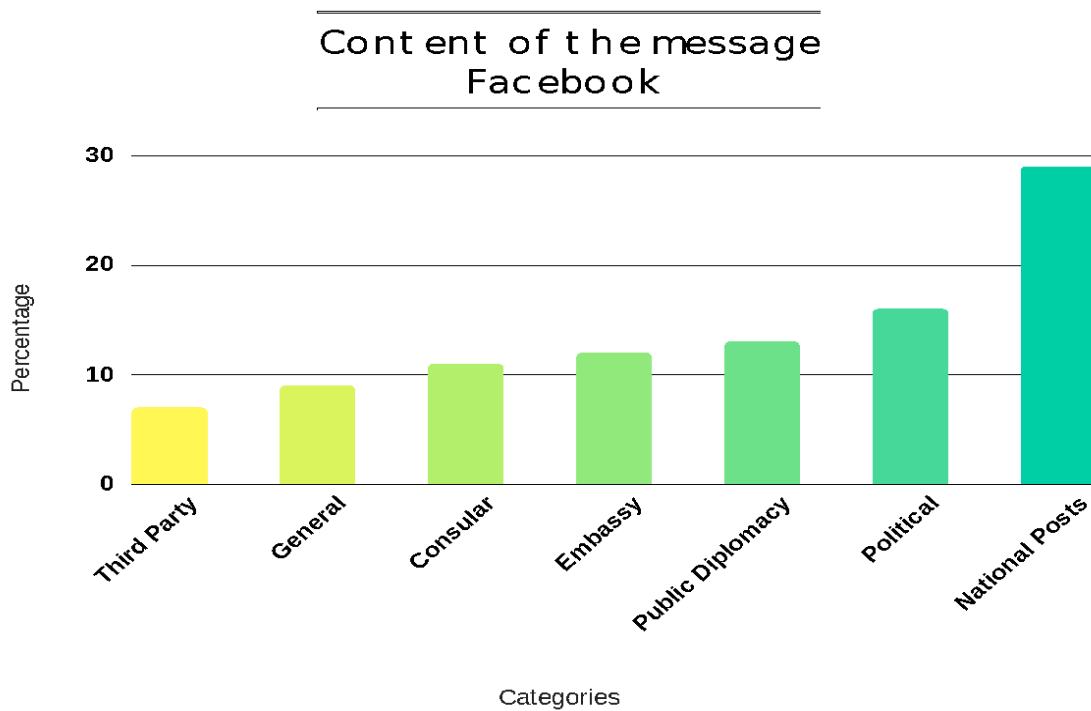
On both of the chosen platforms, we find that the structure of the message emerges through two clear paths: direct and indirect (as expanded upon within the conceptual framework). In this particular case study, we explore the following: did online actors package their messages indirectly through retweeting and resharing? did they engage with the messages of other actors through retweeting or resharing? did they seek to create unique content and with that craft an original crisis discourse that helped to expand their foreign policy reach and presence?

### *Content*

From 12 June – 28 August 2014, the collective number of posts sent through the Facebook platform, by all analysed diplomatic accounts, totalled 280. The breakdown of the content posts was as follows:

1. Conflict (Political Commentary): 47 (16.2 % of the overall conversation online)
2. Conflict (Consular Assistance): 32 (11.4 % of the overall conversation online)
3. Embassy Event: 34 (12.1 % of the overall conversation online)
4. Third - Party Event: 22 (7.8 % of the overall conversation online)
5. Public Diplomacy Strategies: 37 (13.2 % of the overall conversation online)
6. National Posts: 82 (29.2 % of the overall conversation online)
7. General: 26 (9.2 % of the overall conversation online)

Figure 5.9 Content of all Facebook posts sent by online diplomatic agents



Shining a spotlight on these categories, we see that the **national posts** category had the highest percentage of the overall conversation with 29.2%. This means that nearly a third of all Facebook posts made by diplomatic actors during the crisis were related to national events and domestic news. This content ranged from commentary on national holidays and domestic news updates, to an MFA highlighting the achievements of individual national citizens or national sporting team victories.

Figure 5.10 Polish Embassy Tel Aviv, national Facebook post

**Polish Embassy Tel-Aviv** shared **Consulate General of Poland in New York's** photo.  
12 July 2014 · 🌐

**Consulate General of Poland in New York**  
12 July 2014 · 🌐

**#Anniversary** of Jan Karski's Death  
Jan **#Karski** died on July 13, 2000, at the age of 86.... [Continue reading](#)

He died in Washington, D.C., where he is buried. His casket was wrapped in the Polish white-and-red flag and the flag of the United States. A yellow Star of David, brought by Marek Edelman from the Warsaw Ghetto, was also placed there to symbolize Karski's devotion to the Jewish people. During the ceremony, a letter from Bill Clinton, President of the United States was read.

During World War II, as a courier of the Polish Underground State and emissary of the Polish government-in-exile, Jan Karski traveled undercover to the West to report on the life in Nazi-occupied Poland. He was one of the first people to provide the world with an eye-witness account of the ongoing extermination of the Jews of Europe.

Although Karski's mission failed to elicit the intervention he sought, "the meaning of his humanistic message could not be erased or muddied either by time or evil forces." as

Write a comment... 😊 Post

An Embassy's dedication to this type of content is in one sense, not surprising, as online platforms allow for Ministries to promote their national brand and to highlight their domestic workings. A key proportion of a sending state's online audience is their own national citizens who reside in the receiving state, and who may follow the account to keep connected. Messages which seek to deal with issues concerning the sending state seem appropriate, in other words, and relevant for a diplomatic account to engage.

During a time of heightened crisis and disrupted activity, however, it is perhaps justified to argue that what is actually most appropriate, relevant and needed in this instance, is for an online account to centre its content discussion upon the crisis itself. Discussing the current crisis online, or even highlighting an awareness of the events transpiring within the receiving state, would only work to strengthen the MFA's foreign policy position, thereby increasing their communicative presence and reach. Through manipulating or strategizing

how an account engages in content discussion during the crises period, online diplomatic actors and their MFAs can demonstrate to their online audience, the centrality of the current crisis to their foreign policy aims. Or at the very least, acknowledging the crisis situation sends a signal that it is deserving of state attention. This manipulation can be achieved by ensuring that the crisis is the number one topic discussed on the account during the time period, particularly when compared to other categories such as Embassy or Third-Party Events. This type of strategizing could prove a valuable signalling tool for MFAs and their online diplomatic accounts during a crisis, and could become an effective component of their crisis communication practice.

With that said, during this conflict, such engagement was not seen. After collating and coding all content generated by online diplomatic actors, there was shown to be little public consideration given in relation to how the crisis was discussed online, both when analysing the crisis discussion in isolation and when comparing it to the other categories defined. We saw that on average, online accounts dedicated 16.2% of their conversation to *political commentary* on the crisis. Within this category, we saw the *United States* come out on top with 57% of their conversation dedicated to *political commentary*, the *United Kingdom* in second with 44%, and *Canada* third with 35%. What is very interesting to note, is that of the 18 actors analysed, 6 did not comment at all on the crisis, instead choosing to post nothing on political or consular issues. This lack of commentary by such a high proportion of online accounts, or indeed failing to acknowledge the crisis at all, explains to some extent the low average for this category. This may also allow us to initially presume that (unlike the Euromaidan case which we shall discuss in the upcoming chapter) a culture of silence concerning the Israel-Gaza conflict prevailed, where accounts may have feared online or institutional backlash if they spoke out directly.

Figure 5.11 Content of the political commentary sent by all online diplomatic actors on Facebook

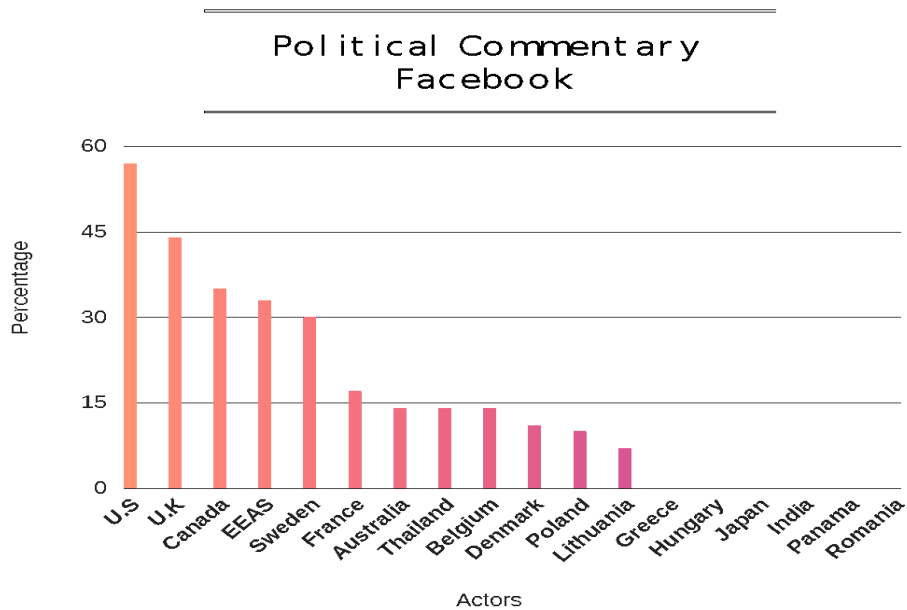
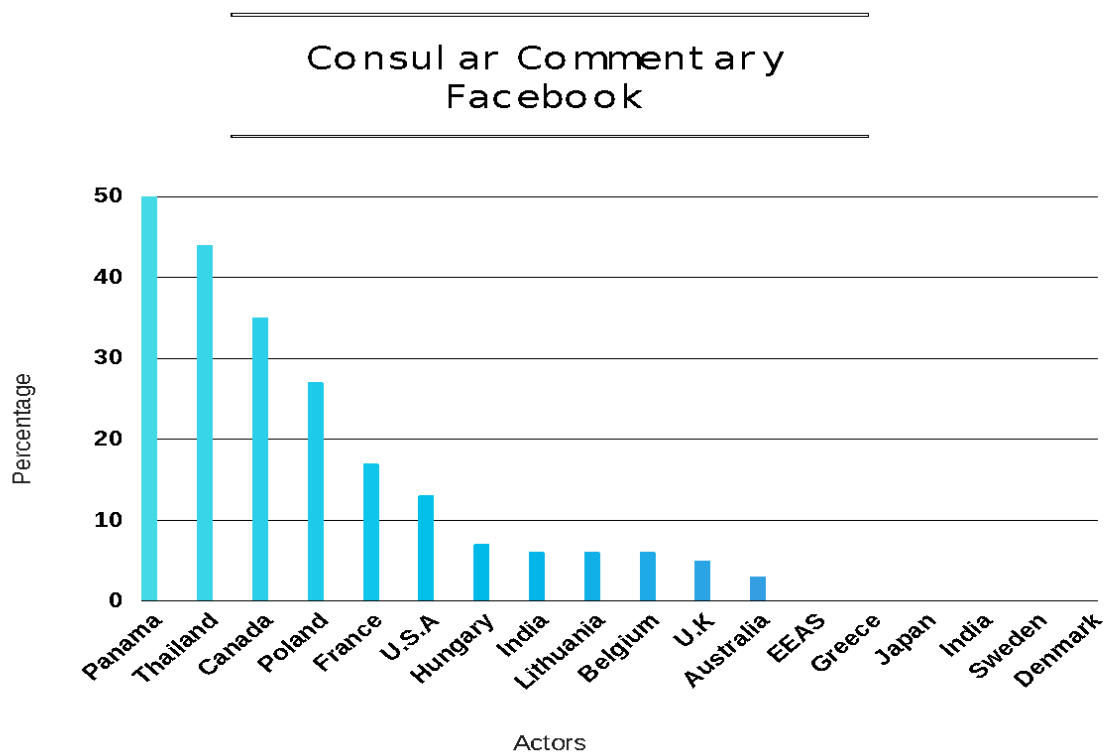


Figure 5.12 United Embassy Tel Aviv, Political Commentary Post



What is surprising, however, is that this culture of silence pervaded discussions concerning *consular* issues. On average accounts dedicated 11.4% of their conversation to this category during the crisis, with the highest actor in this category being *Panama* dedicating 50% of their conversation. However, it should be noted that Panama only posted 2 times throughout the entire crisis, so it is likely a false interpretation to view Panama as the account that dedicated the most comprehensive commentary to consular issues online. *Thailand* came just behind this with 44% (posting 27 times overall), with *Canada* following suit with 45% and Poland with 27%, (posting 56 and 66 times respectively). Again, somewhat surprisingly, 6 out of the 18 accounts analysed posted nothing about consular issues during the entire time period in question.

Figure 5.13 Content of the consular commentary sent by all online diplomatic actors on Facebook



Even when combining both political and consular crisis commentary, we see that overall, diplomatic actors dedicated 27.6% of their online conversation to issues or messages relating to the conflict itself, still an arguably low figure for crisis commentary on behalf of the MFA during such a tumultuous time period. If an active conflict was happening on an Embassy's doorstep, one might presume that that is *exactly* the topic of conversation that the Embassy or Ambassador would choose to talk about to their online audience, either from a political or consular angle, and indeed do so on a regular basis. But as this crisis demonstrated, this was not the case. We hypothesise that this was in part because of the offline political content and the 'culture of silence' that existed surrounding the conflict in question. Historically, we have seen how a 'culture of silence' plays a prevalent role when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This has been discussed by the Western states and their media, and has continuously emerged as a site of conflict which fails to attract the criticism which other conflicts of this scale seem to do so.<sup>69</sup> Although diplomats today are awarded the opportunity to discuss a crisis on a scale and reach never before seen, this does not mean they are going to do so. This crisis demonstrates as much. What this lack of commentary during the Israel-Gaza war teaches us, is that the online world and its potential for communicative change, may not have changed policy and practice as much as we think it has. Diplomatic actors are still very much bound by convention, and the offline context still limits the actor's online workings.

Turning to the **Twitter** platform and the *overall* conversation generated within it, what we see in comparison to the Facebook platform, is a substantial increase of the political commentary of online accounts, with an average discussion of 34.1% per account dedicated to this category. However, in the *consular assistance* category, we actually see a decrease in conversation, with an average of 9% for all online accounts analysed. The other five categories coded show a similar range of figures when compared to the Facebook platform. However, unlike the Facebook platform, commentary on the crisis was the key point of crisis communication discourse, but still proved an arguably low figure overall.

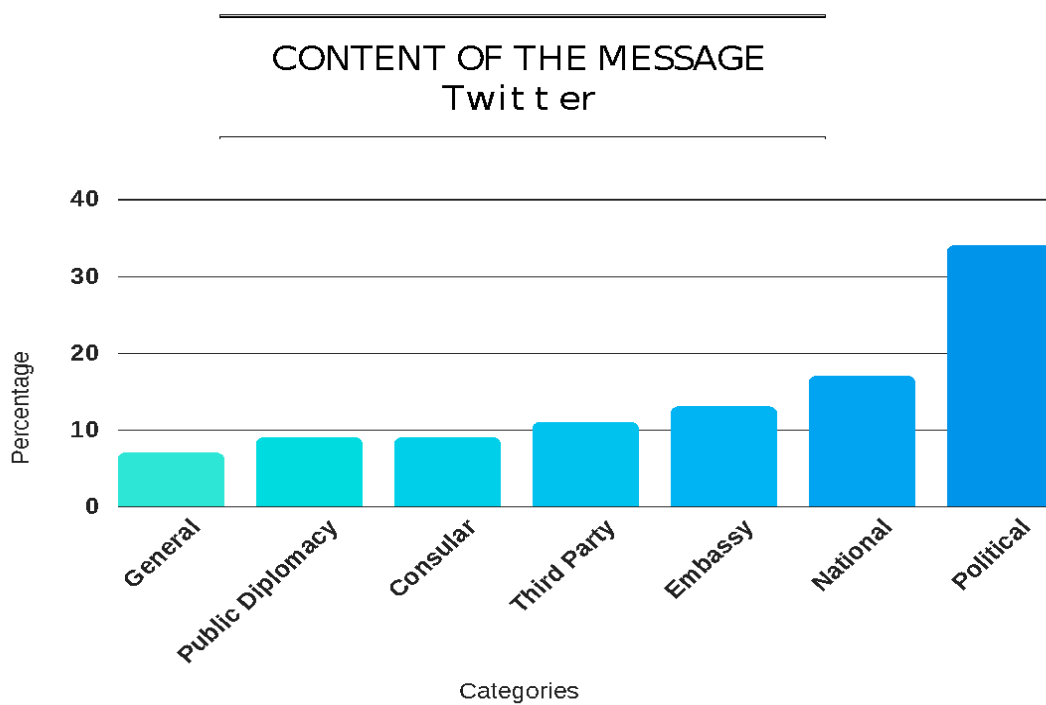
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<sup>69</sup> For more on this 'culture of silence' surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see I. Pape *The Modern Middle East; second edition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2010; I. Pape *The Israel/Palestine Question, 2nd Edition*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006; Bridging Narratives Concept, in Rotberg RI (eds), *Israel and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict; History's Double Helix*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 194-204. See also B. White 'Trump and Palestine – so what now?', BenWhite, Last Accessed <https://benwhite.org.uk/2017/02/17/trump-and-palestine-so-what-now/>

*Coding the Conversation*

1. Conflict (Political Commentary): 34.1%
2. Conflict (Consular Assistance): 9%
3. Embassy Event: 13.1%
4. Third - Party Event:11.8%
5. Public Diplomacy Strategies: 9.3%
6. National Posts: 17.2%
7. General: 7.2%

*Figure 5.14 Content of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter*



Breaking down the political commentary category, we see *Canada* ranked highest with 58%, just one point higher than the highest-ranking actor on Facebook (United States) within the same category. *Sweden* came second with 50%, and *Norway* with 48%. What is interesting to note, is that on this platform, only one account (Panama) failed to comment on the crisis at all, which proves in stark comparison to the Facebook platform which saw 6 accounts failing to acknowledge it.

Within the *consular assistance* category, we see *Canada* once again, come out on top with 42% of their conversation dedicated to consular issues relating to the crisis (making their entire crisis conversation dedicated to the conflict itself). *Austria* came just behind with 26%, and *Australia* followed suit with 13%. Only 3 out of the 14 accounts analysed made the decision to post nothing at all concerning consular issues during the entire time period in question. The lack of consular commentary in this instance is arguably a surprising discovery, as one of the fundamental responsibilities of a diplomatic agent on the ground is to protect their national citizens and to provide timely, accurate and appropriate consular advice. In short, warning and informing the public on issues regarding their safety tends to be apolitical.<sup>70</sup> Even if the offline political context did create for the actors a ‘culture of silence’, it is still questionable as to why the consular conversation was so strictly regulated. The failure of diplomatic actors to use this communicative method to connect with their citizens during this crisis is an issue of increasing concern within the execution of diplomatic crises communication strategies and something we will turn to and seek to question in our upcoming analysis.

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<sup>70</sup> This is of aside from the EEAS who for reasons of regional policy, currently do not engage in public consular recommendations, unless directly approached.

Figure 5.15 Content of the political commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter

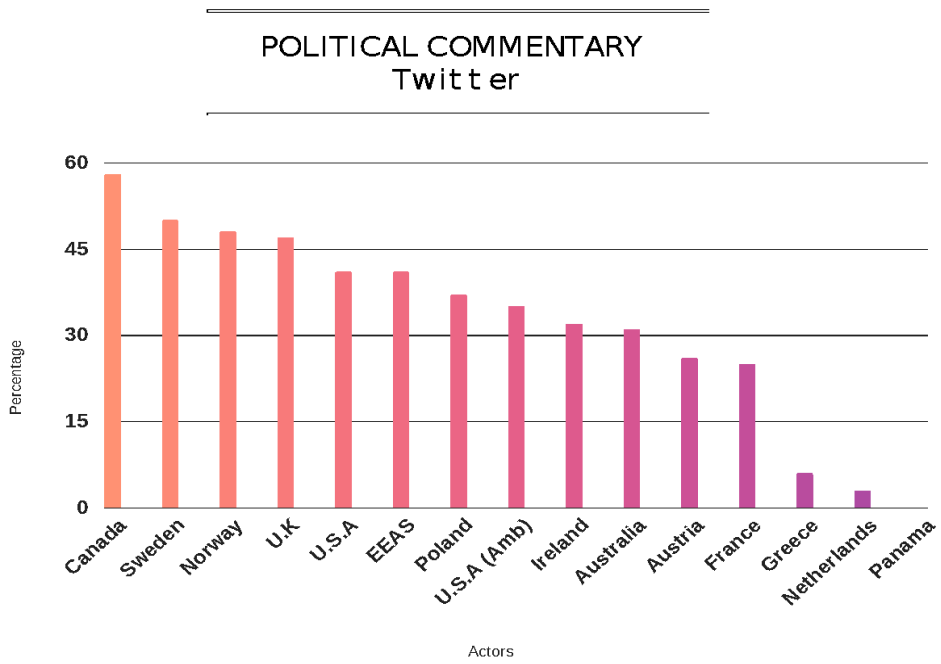
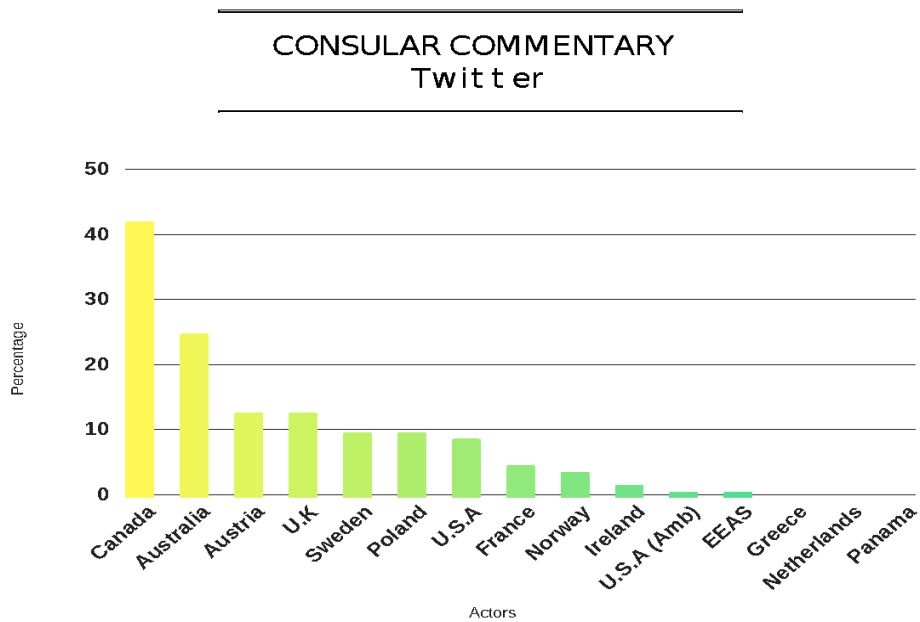


Figure 5.16 Content of the consular commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter



## *Discussion*

From the data presented, it is clear that if actors engaged in a conflict related discussion, Twitter was their platform of choice. Political commentary discussions on Twitter were nearly double that of the Facebook platform, with 34% and 16% respectively. Drawing from selected interviews with those diplomatic actors, the reasoning behind this choice lay in the belief that Twitter was seen as the platform that allowed for a more rapid response to crisis events. Twitter was seen as ‘real-time’ diplomacy at its finest, and when compared to Facebook, presented a more viable medium to connect with citizens instantaneously. Although recognising their right *not* to respond online to the crisis discussion until their policy and strategies were set, many interviewees stated they felt increased pressure to engage with the crisis discussion online, particularly on Twitter, as in a number of instances the crisis was a trending hashtag, thereby generating online attention towards their account. The interviewees also commented that they preferred to use Twitter over Facebook due to the ease of engagement that the platform created for their accounts online, specifically through the use of retweets. The final reason for the use of Twitter over Facebook, was that it was regarded as an easier tool for information gathering. Interviewees commented that hashtags, while creating increased time pressures for many Embassies to respond, also brought a plethora of information which the Embassy could mine to see what was credible, what was useable, and what topic they should publicly respond to during the crisis. The hashtag mechanism, in other words, became an easy and concise way for Embassies to sift through the online noise.

With that said, Facebook was used for a number of communicative strategies not shown on Twitter. For example, Q&A’s sessions were used on Facebook by the U.S. and Swedish Embassies. Although these Q & A sessions were not frequent (taking place a total of 2 times for the U.S. Embassy and 3 times for the Swedish Embassy), what they did provide was an opportunity for citizens (of the nation state and the receiving state) and journalists to ask a set of wide - ranging questions on the crisis, (e.g. the MFA’s policies concerning the crisis, citizens consular concerns, to even basic concerns ranging from why the crises was taking place in the first instance). In each session, there was a considerable amount of questions from citizens simply wondering who the main crisis actors were, and what their main motivations were. In short, these Q & A’ s demonstrated that many people simply wished to understand the complexities of the crisis, and turned to their Embassy – experts

and representatives – for this understanding. Facebook, provided a unique tool for educating the public, and with that a tool, MFAs sculpted the crisis narrative in their favour.

Interestingly, those actors which dominated the discussion through heightened crisis related content, were shown to be the same actors on both platforms: Canada, Sweden, EEAS, U.S.A, and U.K. For these actors, increased conversation allowed them to heighten their conflict discussion online, project their foreign policies, and expand their message reach, while increasing their potential for engagement with a wide variety of actors. Such online activity not only signalled that these actors were engaged with the crisis at play, but that they also wished to do so publicly. The heightened crisis conversation enabled these actors to create a more consistent (in terms of frequency of engagement online)<sup>71</sup> and stronger discourse on the crisis overall.

Aside from the actors highlighted above, however, overall discussion on the conflict on both platforms was low, not only if one views these figures in isolation but also when we compare it to our upcoming case study, which showed an average crisis discussion of 49%. These figures and their results raised a number of further questions in relation to a diplomat's crisis communication strategies in the digital age. Amongst others, these included; Were the agents who failed to engage (or engaged very little) with the crisis discussion online, given training in social media communication before their posting? Was their lack of activity guided by a digital code of practice, or was it a result of a lack of resources? Finally, were they aware that, their lack of public discussion could send a signal to the crisis actors that they do not deem the crisis worthy of any type of discussion (political or consular)?

Whatever the reason for their lack of discussion, it is justified to posit that by failing to use the most prominent and popular tools for public communication during a crisis, many actors cut themselves out of the real-time crisis conversation, and substantially hindered how their voice was heard within it.

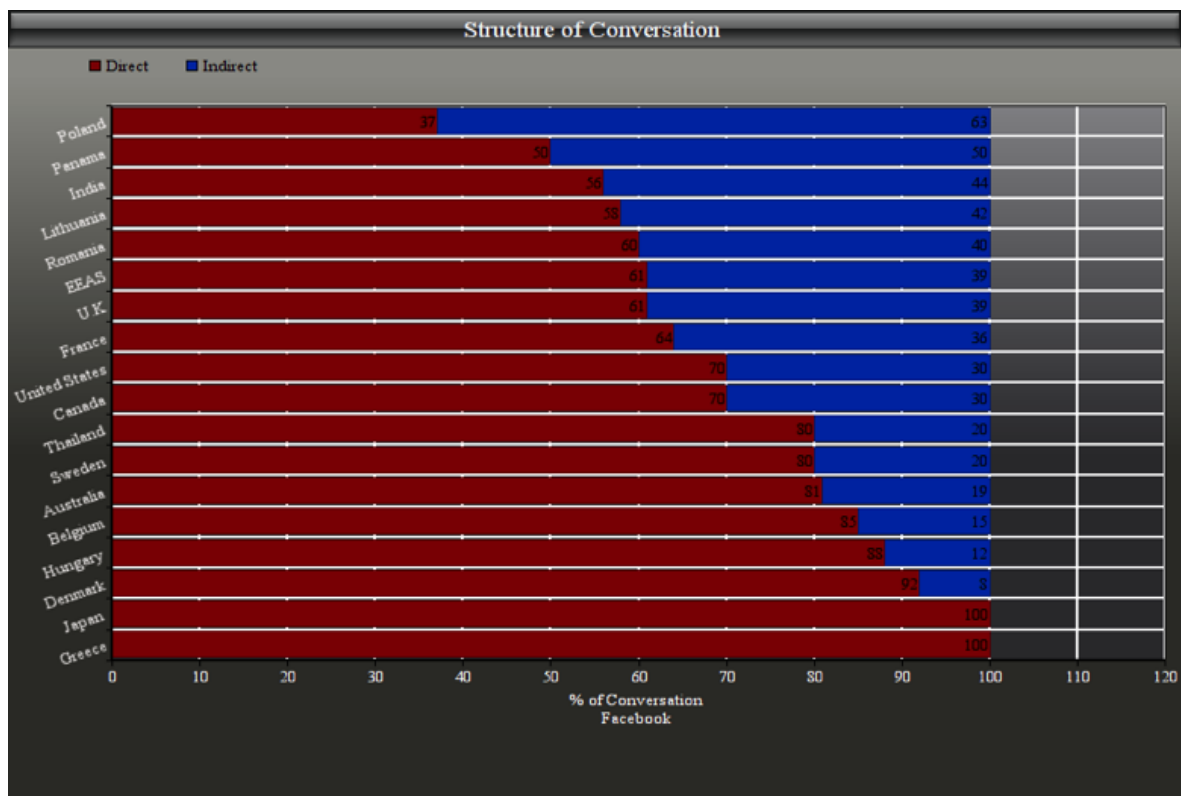
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<sup>71</sup> Within the two core data chapters, the concept of a 'consistent' narrative, or a 'consistent' message, refers to the actor's frequency of engagement online. If for example, an account was labelled as 'consistent' in their narrative formation or projection, this means they frequently engaged not only with posts online, but with posts which addressed political or consular themes. It does not mean, that their message was always consistent (as policies and positions regularly change during a crisis, as the crisis enters varying phases), but it does mean, they were actively involved in the online crisis discussion on a frequency basis.

## Structure

To look at how the content of the discourse was packaged, we turn to the structure of the message. Exploring first the Facebook platform, we see that of the 16 online accounts analysed, 14 had over 50% of their overall messages structured as direct postings. Greece and Japan displayed the highest proportion of these direct posts, each having a 100% percentile. Denmark followed closely with 92% and Hungary with 88%. Poland (63%), and Panama (50%) fell into the grouping of having 50% of their overall crisis postings structured as indirect posts.

Figure 5.17 Structure of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Facebook

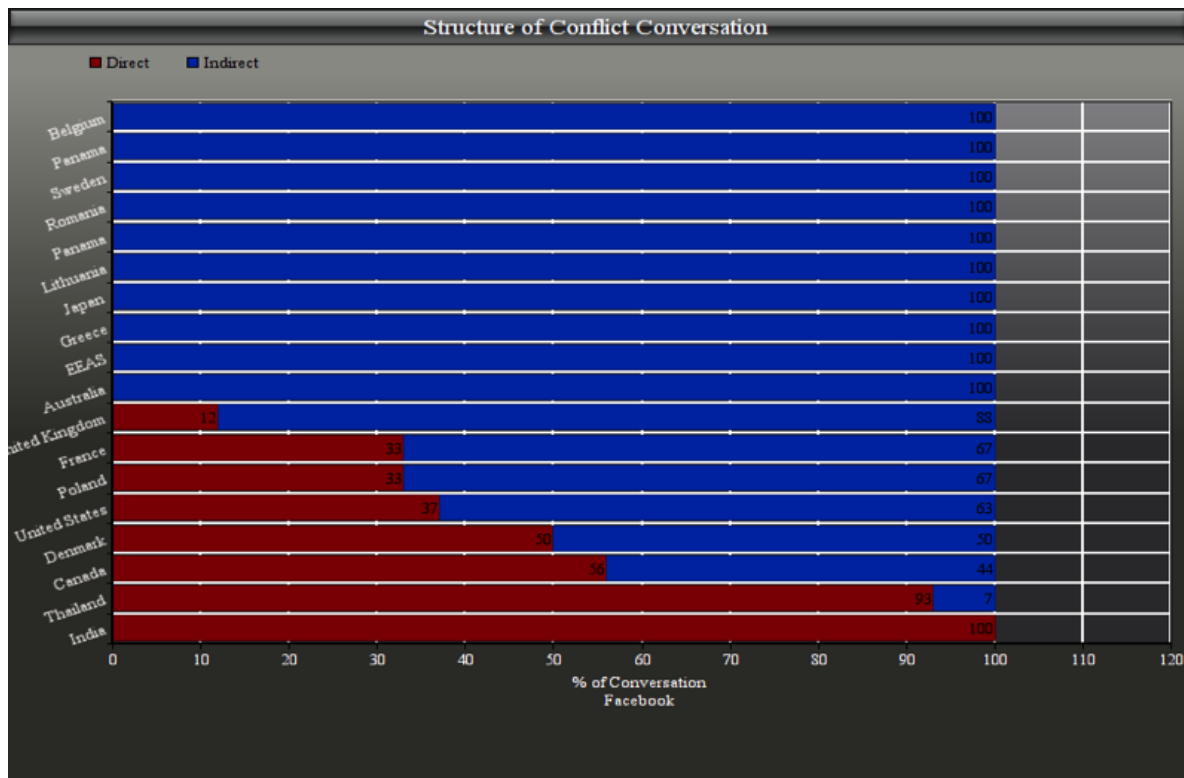


Turning to the messages that were directly related to the conflict, of the 16 Facebook accounts analysed only 4 fell into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as direct posts: India (100), Thailand (93), Canada (56), and Denmark (50). However, we

must not take the leaders of this category at face value, noting the relationship between frequency and message structure, with India displaying the highest proportion of direct tweets on the conflict with 100%, but their conflict commentary equating to 0.04% of their overall conversation online during this period. This account may not be seen as a truly representative picture of an Embassy that discussed the crisis directly. In stark comparison to India's 0.04%, Thailand, Canada, and Denmark displayed 93%, 56% and 50% of their postings as direct, respectively – and had 53%, 64% and 14% of their overall conversation dedicated to the crisis.

Perhaps what is most interesting concerning the conflict structure, is that 7 accounts showed a total of 100% *indirect* messages when posting about the conflict: Australia, EEAS, Hungary, Belgium, Panama and Sweden. Comparatively, we saw 10 accounts choosing not to post a single direct message concerning the conflict; Australia, Belgium, EEAS, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Lithuania, Panama, Romania, and Sweden. Both are extremely high percentages, and created a strong trend to emerge that many actors were choosing not to comment on or disseminate any direct messages regarding the conflict itself. What should also be noted is that 3 accounts (Lithuania, Romania and Japan) showed zero posts relating to the crisis, once more calling into question the power of the political context upon diplomatic crisis communication strategies, and the role that 'a culture of silence' continued to play concerning this war.

Figure 5.18 Structure of all messages relating to the conflict, sent by online diplomatic actors on Facebook



Of the 14 **Twitter** accounts analysed, 10 accounts showed 50% or more of their overall conversation during the crisis structured as direct messages, with Netherlands having 93% of their messages as direct, France 89%, and Austria 79%. Conversely, we saw 3 accounts fall into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as indirect posts; with Poland, Greece and the United States Ambassador turning out 76%, 71%, and 63% of their messages as indirect, respectively. When focusing on the messages that were solely conflict related, however, we saw this high average of direct messages quickly change. We saw that only 2 online accounts fell into the grouping of having 50% (or more) of its postings as direct messages on the conflict; Austria 73% and EEAS 55%.

Turning to the messages that were directly related to the conflict, only 4 out of the 14 Facebook accounts analysed fell into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as direct posts; India (100), Thailand (93), Canada (56), and Denmark (50). While these were high percentages for any account to display when discussing the crisis directly, the

lack of actors doing so showed there was a strong trend amongst some accounts not to comment on or disseminate any direct messages regarding the conflict at all.

Figure 5.19 Structure of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter

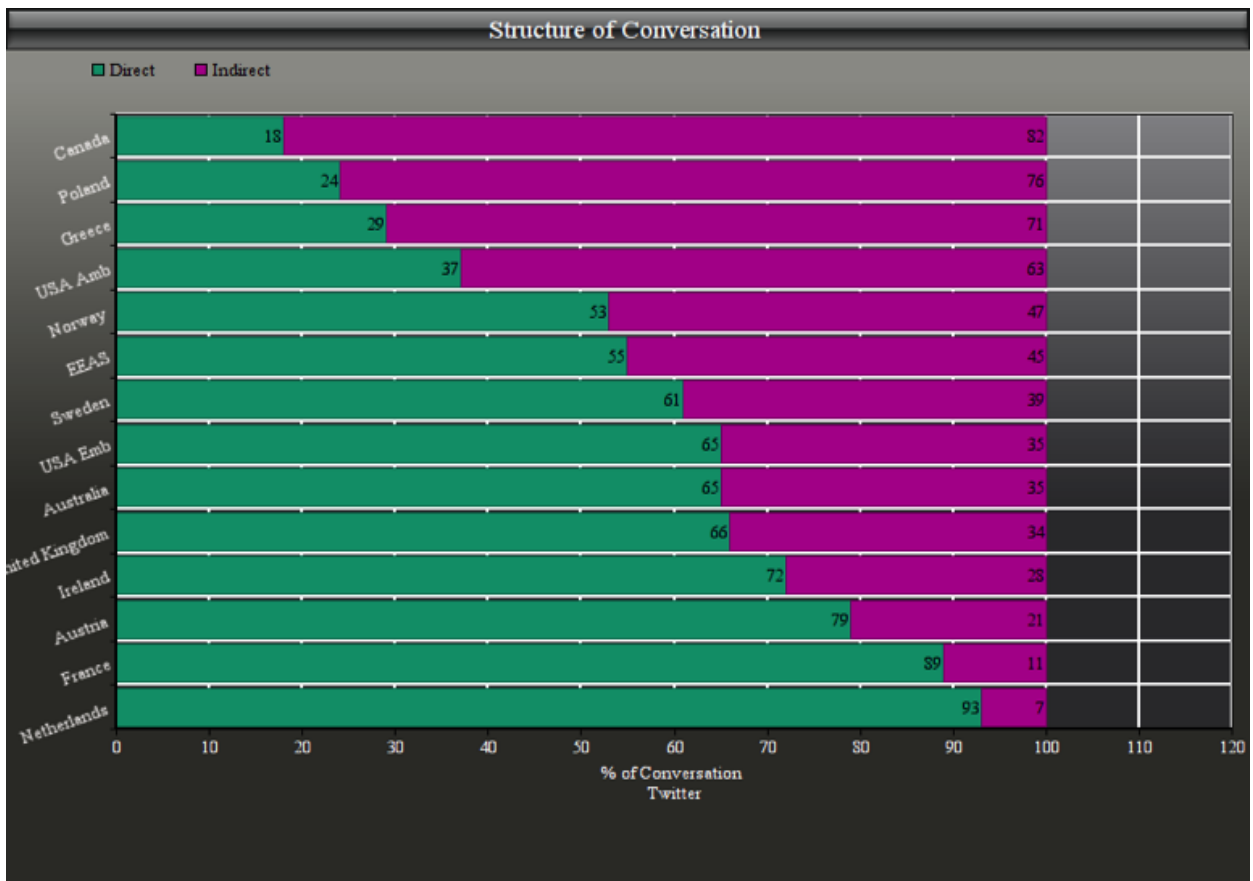


Figure 5.20 Structure of all messages relating to the conflict sent, by online diplomatic actors on Twitter



### Discussion

From the data presented, a clear trend emerged in how this mechanism was used on both platforms, and by nearly all agents across the board. Looking at the online crises conversation specifically, we saw the majority of analysed actors displayed a distinct preference - that of indirect posts - regarding how they structured their messages when choosing to engage with the crisis dialogue online. 12 actors on the Twitter platform, for example, showed indirect engagement as high as 100%. This was in stark comparison to how the same actors chose to engage with non-crisis related discussion, the overwhelming amount of which was direct.

This glaring comparison between how agents packaged their conflict and non-conflict discussion matters, because it demonstrates that the online diplomatic actors were aware of how to engage in direct conversation on their accounts, and to do so regularly. Secondly, the analysis shows that when it came to discussing the crisis, many actors simply turned this online engagement into indirect discussion, or to no discussion at all. The variation between these structures and the type of messages structured is necessary to highlight, as it allows us to discount the argument that the diplomatic actors may not have been aware of how to use their accounts correctly due to the lack of a digital strategy or digital crisis communication knowledge. Instead, it allows for a focus on more relevant reasons behind their apparent resistance to directly comment on the crisis, namely the culture of silence as discussed previously, and the pervading power of the offline political context.

With that said, such dependence on indirect messages during a time of crisis is not surprising, as indirect structures help create an ambiguity online, and allow the actor to retain flexibility over their message and make their signals disclaimable if they so wish. This tactic of signalling also allows actors to be seen by others as active discussion participants within the crisis discussion, but with a low risk. That is, a risk of legal or political reprimand for saying something they perhaps should not have. Such flexibility also gives diplomats room to argue, 'I never said that,' or 'this is not what I meant'. As a result, indirect communication has become a preferential tactic for many online diplomatic actors during a crisis.

In a number of these cases, however, (e.g. the United States, United Kingdom, and the EEAS) an indirect message could still be viewed as a signal of significance, particularly when the online actors marry this technique with strategic use of other mechanisms such as high frequency rates and high engagement with their audience, thereby constructing a consistent discourse on their account online. For example, many official diplomatic accounts offer a disclaimer using the phrase 'retweet does not equal endorsement' or '(RT ≠ endorsement)' to illustrate that their messages are indeed indirect, and arguably also to prevent possible claims of diplomatic interference. However, even if an account made such a disclaimer, if 100% of the accounts retweets send the same message and back the same foreign policy position, it may be assumed that a RT does in fact equal endorsement. Crafting a consistent and coherent discourse on your account, even if it is done solely through the mechanism of indirect messages, generates a crisis signal. Even those actors

interviewed were aware of the symbolic power of an indirect message, and the possible impact it could create if sent.

### ***5.2.2 Reach of the Message (Audience)***

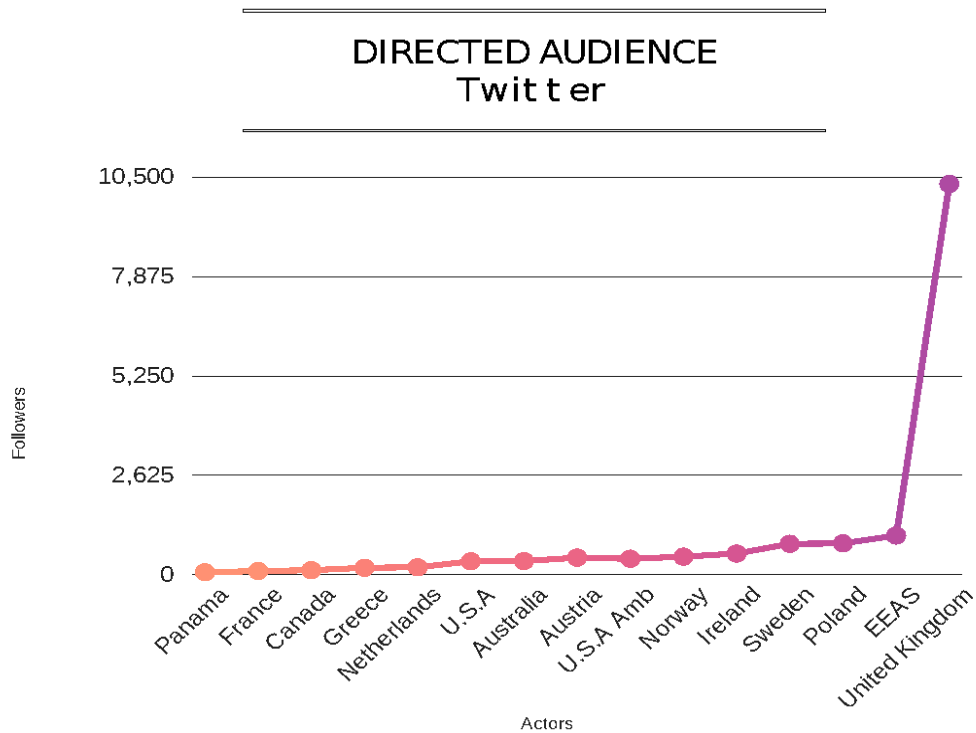
The 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis highlighted how Embassies used the audience mechanism as a tool in which to generate, project, and strengthen their foreign policy messages concerning the crisis at play. Communication rising out from the crisis illustrates that the audience's role has been substantially altered by social media via diplomatic crisis communication practices. This was revealed most clearly in terms of increased audience size, the ability of audiences to 'actively listen', and the opportunity for them to 'speak back' to the online messages sent. The evolving role of the audience is best viewed through two measurable primary mechanisms: numerical audience membership and audience engagement.

Taking the first mechanism, of numerical audience membership, we saw that on **Twitter**, there was an average of 1,017 followers per online diplomatic account. This ranged from 84 followers with the French Embassy, to 10,314 with the United Kingdom. Although little variation was seen between all accounts analysed, two actors did stand out for their substantially higher audience count; the EEAS with 1,023 and the United Kingdom with 10,314. For the sake of argument, if we exclude the outlier of the United Kingdom from our analysis, we find an average of 407 followers, a figure arguably more reflective of the average audience count, for the data set in question.

On the **Facebook** platform, we saw direct audience numbers increase substantially for nearly all diplomatic accounts, when compared to the Twitter platform. Here the range of followers, spanned from 165 with the Belarus Embassy account, to 40,492 with the United States Embassy. The average number of followers was 6,373, an average once more altered due to the outlier presence of one actor in particular, the United States Embassy. If we exclude the United States from this data set, we find an average of 4,478 followers, a figure

more reflective of the average number of subscribers. Facebook also showed greater audience variation between accounts compared to Twitter.<sup>72</sup>

Figure 5.21 Followers of online diplomatic actors on Twitter



<sup>72</sup> Variation between the audience figures on both the Facebook and Twitter platform stood at 0-10,500 audience (Twitter) and 0 – 45,000 (Facebook). This wide range between audience numbers was also seen even when the outlier (highest performer in the category) for each platform, was removed. Removing the outlier, we then saw a range of 0 – 12,500 (Facebook) and 0 – 1,060 (Twitter). The variation of figures within the audience membership category can be explained by a number of core reasons: frequency of use, date of creation and the presence of an existing digital strategy. See Appendix for further explanation on this subject.

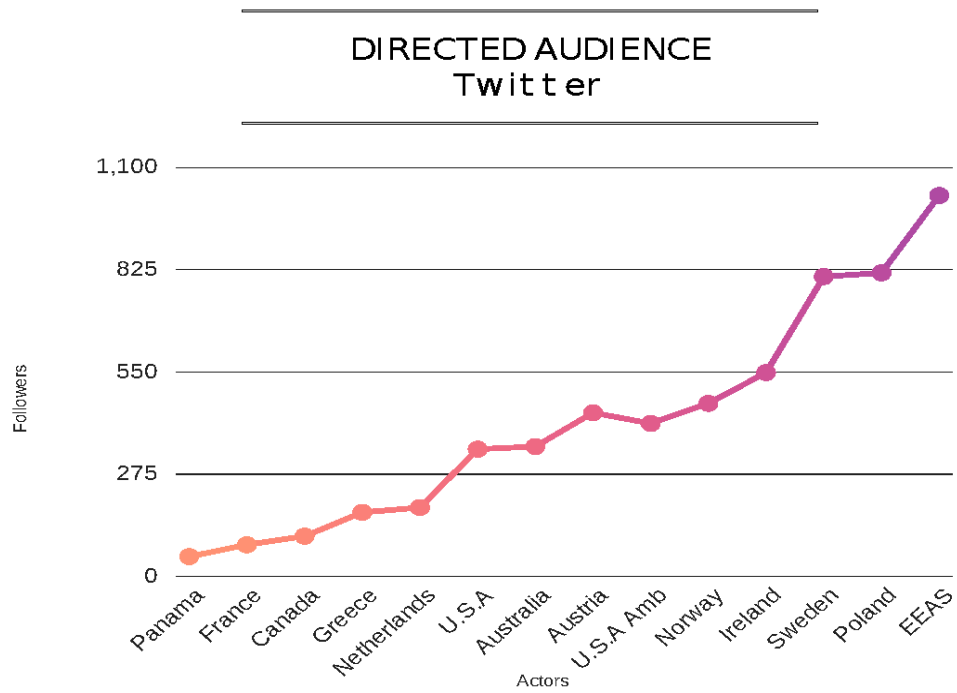
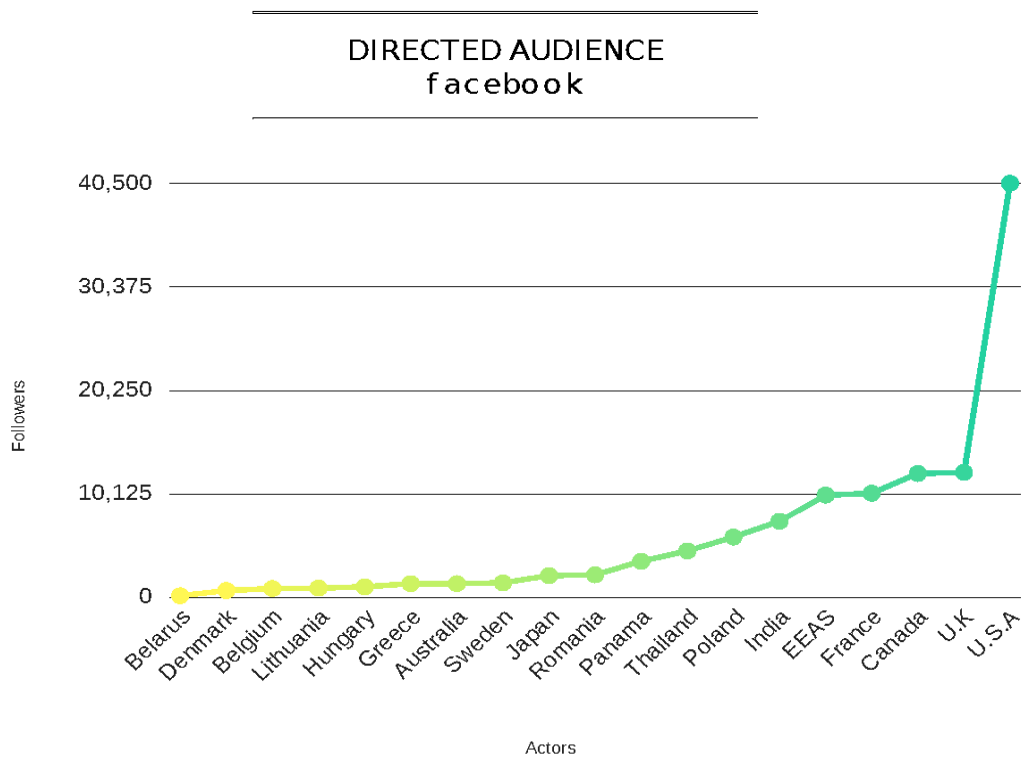
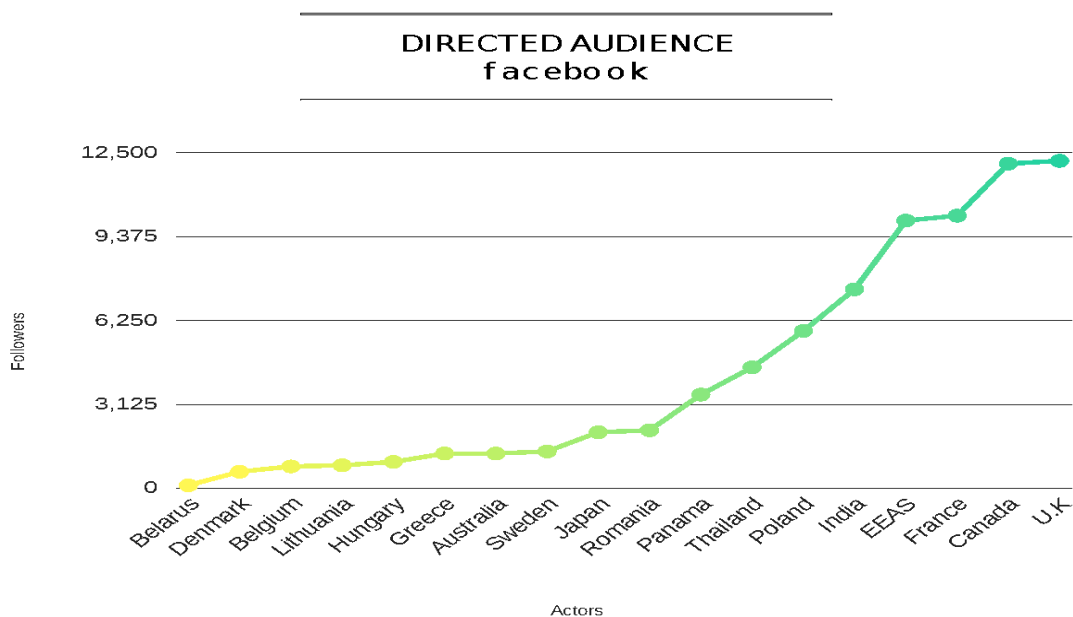


Figure 5.22 Followers of online diplomatic actors on Facebook





### *Engagement and Interaction*

Moving from a purely numerical analysis of the audience, we turn to another aspect of this mechanism which can best illustrate how the role of the audience has been altered during the digital age; and that is through the practice of online audience engagement. Here direct online engagement is seen as a unique practice to 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic communication, and in the case of this research, refers to how, and to what extent, the actual online Embassy or Ambassadorial account engaged (through retweets and favourites on Twitter, and reshares and likes on Facebook), with their online audience. Figure 5.15 for example, illustrates and visualises how each diplomatic actor engaged with the platforms online audience through the two mechanisms of ‘retweets’, and ‘favourites’. For the Facebook platform, engagement was quantified by how many ‘likes’ or ‘shares’ an online diplomatic account engaged in towards other accounts during the time period. That is how many times an online diplomatic account ‘Liked’ another accounts post, or how many times they ‘shared’ another account post on their individual page. As noted in the methodology discussion, these barometers for engagement were quantified and analysed via Twitonomy for Twitter, and Netvizz for Facebook. Although confining engagement to these conditions

is limited to some degree, they are conditions which are replicable and testable within our chosen methodological toolkit.

This research illustrates clearly that today, diplomatic actors are now finding themselves with the power to not only send direct communications to their domestic citizens and international followers, but to also engage with them, speak to them, and interact with them on a consistent and real-time basis. These new opportunities afforded to MFAs and their agents have emerged as a direct result of the new communicative tools found on social media platforms.

If we turn to the **Twitter** platform we can see that there emerged low levels of engagement during the conflict, with online actors engaging on average, 46% of the time online. Here the United States Embassy account proved to be the most active within our data set, engaging 100% of the time, whilst Panama stood once more, as the actor on the lower end of the scale, choosing not to engage at all. Second to Panama, was Ireland, engaging 4.8% of their time online. Engagement on the **Facebook** platform proved harder to quantify, but through an analysis conducted through the Netvizz application, we saw that on average, engagement for a diplomatic account was 34%, with the United States coming out on top with 79%, followed by Australia with 64%. This was compared to Panama and Belgium who demonstrated no online engagement, and 1% respectively.

Figure 5.22 Overall engagement of online diplomatic actors on Twitter

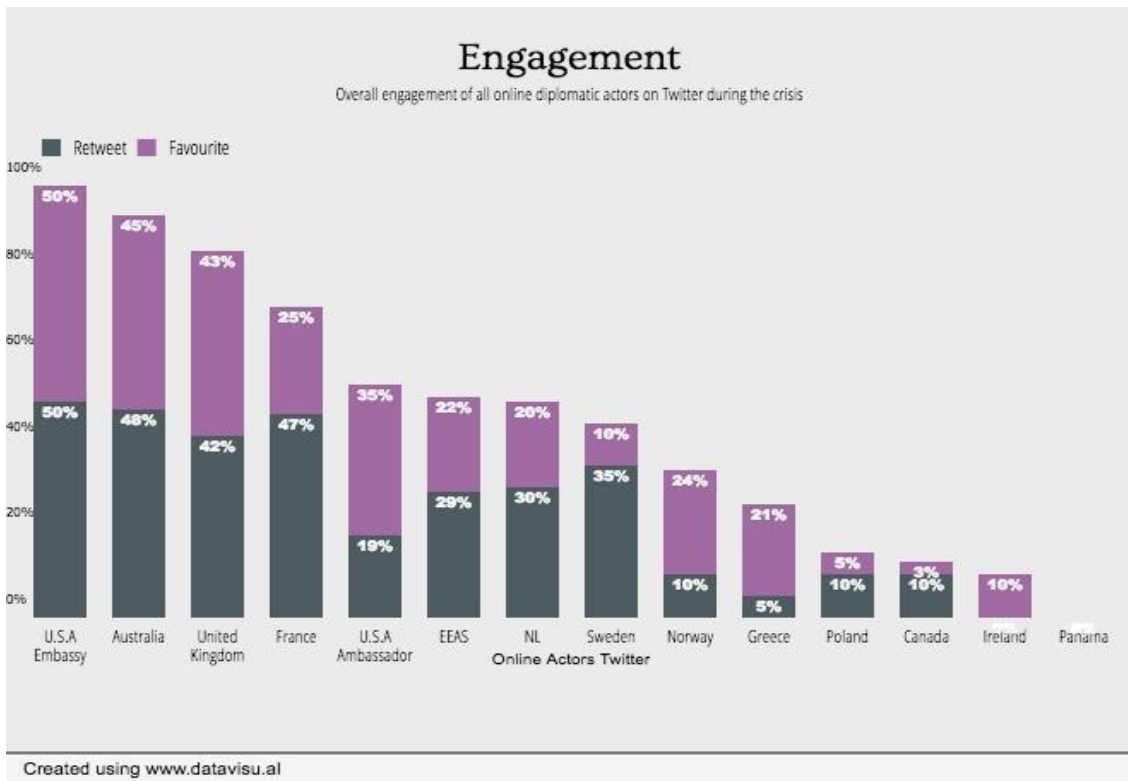
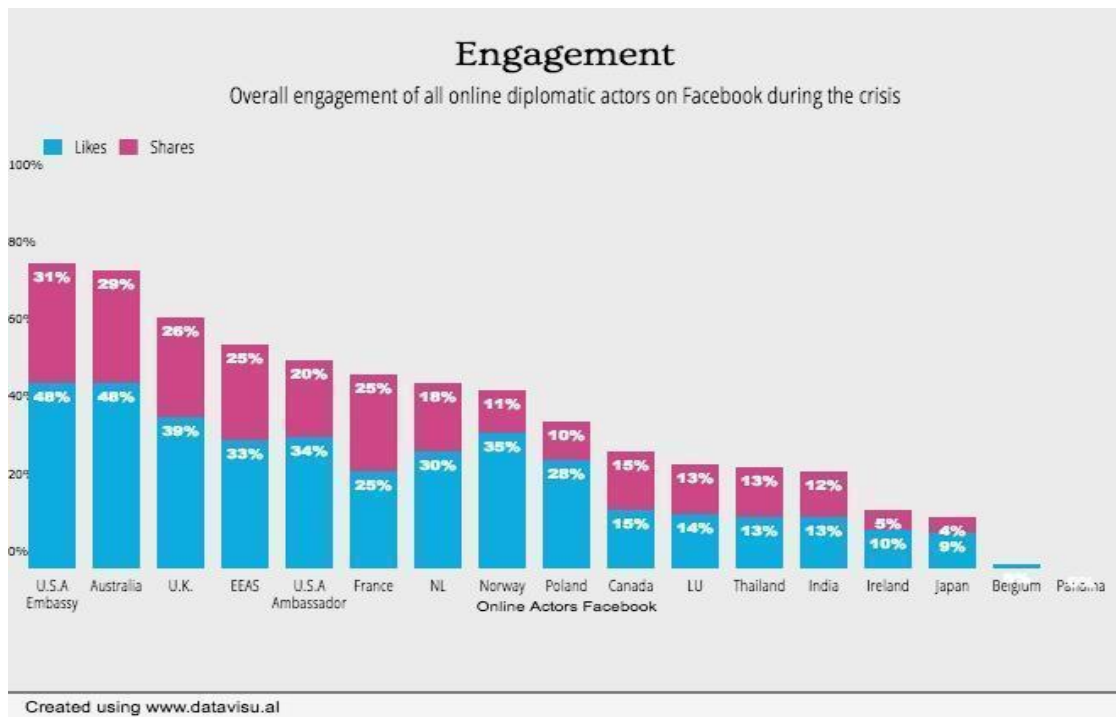


Figure 5.23 Overall engagement of online diplomatic actors on Facebook



This aspect of this audience engagement has emerged as an important tool within a diplomat's crisis communication toolbox, as agents now face a growing pressure to utilise this very power if they wish to create online communication accounts which aid them in their foreign policy aims, and work towards creating a strong and effective diplomatic crisis discourse online. Within the digital signalling process itself, engagement plays an important role, as frequent engagement by a diplomatic agent, sends a strong signal in terms of highlighting how the online diplomatic account and their respective Foreign Ministries view the crisis; that they deem it important, worthy of discussion, and wish to highlight this importance, by directly engaging with their audience at large. In contrast, a lack of engagement by actors such as Panama and Belgium signalled disinterest in the crisis, or worse apathy. Even if this was not the case for these actors, diluted engagement or no engagement at all, arguably cut them out of the crisis conversation to some degree, essentially removing one of the best ways in which they could have had their position on the crisis known. What the Israeli - Gaza case therefore showed us, is that once again, only certain diplomatic actors were shown to take advantage of these new powers and opportunities afforded to them, whilst others failed to harness them at all.

### *Discussion*

which were active), while Twitter offered a potential of 288m active users in the same quarter. This is not to mention the millions of other users who also might see an accounts online message, if the account's posts were transmitted to cable news and/or print media. With that said, while recognising the countless layers of projection that an online post can now travel, this research believes that a direct following count is still a tangible and testable parameter in which to judge the original reach of the message.

Levels of online engagement were shown to vary significantly between actors and platforms. Once more, we saw Twitter emerge as the platform with the most engagement between its actors and audience. Those actors who were shown to display the highest engagement level on Twitter were also those shown to do so on Facebook. For the U.S., U.K., EEAS and Australia, engagement proved important in their crisis communication strategies across the board. This was further backed by our series of elite interviews (in which the U.S., U.K. and EEAS took part), with interviewees stating that they were actively

encouraged to engage with their online followers within their MFAs digital code of practice. Both the U.K. and the EEAS stated that direct online engagement was seen as a method to ensure their policies and crisis strategies were represented and interpreted fairly online and off. This meant practices such as correcting those who misquoted their Embassy or MFA, or speaking with others who may not have understood their crisis position. By doing so, Embassies informed the public on their correct policies. A growing amount of studies have shown that increased online engagement directly correlates to the generation of more online followers, with each engagement activity expanding the account's communicative visibility and reach (Burston - Marsteller 2014, 2015, 2016). For the digital signalling process itself, increased engagement by Embassy agents presented a strong signal in terms of highlighting how they, and their respective Ministries, viewed the crisis. That is, that they deemed it important and worthy of discussion, and wished to highlight as much through direct engagement with their audience at large. The outcomes created by their online engagement ultimately magnify the state's power to enlarge itself in a variety of ways. This mechanism's contribution toward virtual state enlargement may be one piece of the larger puzzle, but it is an extremely important one when carrying out crisis communication activities. As unique tool for 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic communication, this practice's power and potential should be continually recognised and utilised by MFAs during times of crises and otherwise.

We see that 'Western' states once again emerge as leaders in the field with the U.S., U.K., Canadian, and French accounts leading on Facebook, and the U.K., EEAS, Sweden, and Ireland on Twitter. Although having a large following did not send a signal in itself, an account's base of followers did allow for the creation of a more public space, where the MFA's crisis message could be heard by many, their policies retweeted and reshared, and engagement sparked amongst their followers. An increased following online also meant that these accounts had increased opportunity or likelihood that their online crisis narratives would be heard amongst the plethora of voices online.

This research recognises, however, that the audience count for each account was far greater than the direct numbers generated here. During the period in question, Facebook (for example) offered its accounts an audience potential of 1.52bn users in the third quarter of 2014 (752m of

### 5.2.3 Status of the Online Diplomat

Transitioning from the message's content, structure, and audience, the next mechanism turns its analysis toward the status of the sender. At its most basic, this mechanism refers to the ranking of the diplomat who sends online posts, and to whom the account is accredited.<sup>73</sup> In the context of this research specifically, 'the status of an online diplomat' refers to all diplomatic actors who possessed a Twitter and/or Facebook account during a crisis period, and how the ranking of their diplomatic status may affect the messages sent, in terms of how it is received and perceived amongst actors both online and offline.

Within the arena of crisis communication, this mechanism has emerged as one of high significance, primarily due to the assumption that a message will possess greater potential for impact if backed and sent by a Head of Mission or Ambassador on the ground. That is, a message will garner greater attention and consequently create stronger messages of influence in relation to a state's crisis policies and objectives. Although historically, Ambassadors have been provided with platforms to express their position on the crisis (positions informed by MFA policy), they have not been granted one as expansive as social media until recently. Recognising the novel power of the online medium, we can assess if MFAs and their agents took advantage of the new opportunities awarded to them during this conflict in particular.

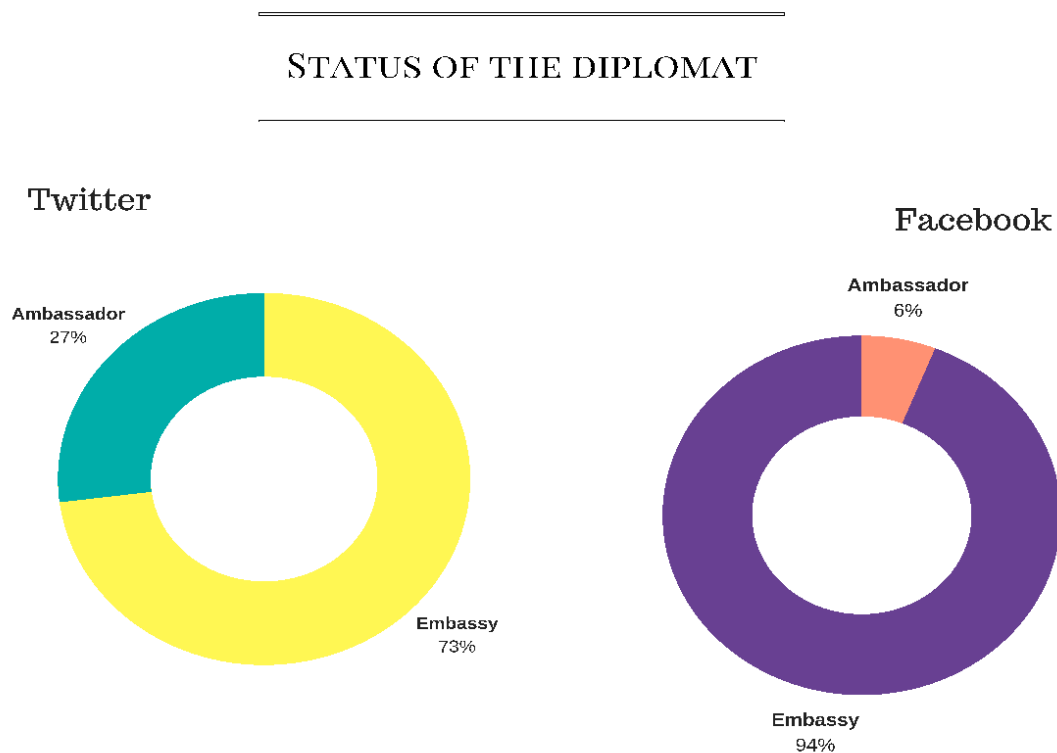
In contrast to Ambassadorial accounts, we found that the Embassy account was the most common status during this crisis (on both platforms).<sup>74</sup> On **Twitter**, Embassy accounts made up 73.3% of all accounts analysed, with the remaining 26.7% of accounts being **Ambassadorial**: *Australia, Austria, Ireland, and the United States*. On **Facebook**, Embassy accounts rose to 94.7%, with only 1 **Ambassadorial** account present during the crisis (*France*).

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<sup>73</sup> Status in this instance refers here to a hierarchical spectrum, ranging from a Third Secretary (or junior diplomat) at one end, to an Ambassador or Head of Mission at the other.

<sup>74</sup> For the purpose of this research, we are also seeking to include the Delegation of the European Union as an Embassy account. Although working in tandem with other European Union Embassies abroad; providing consular assistance to European citizens and coordinating the Union's policy & practice on the ground, since their creation post 2008 Lisbon Treaty, European Delegations are increasingly being viewed simply as European Embassies both within and outside of the Union. At the very least, this is the direction they seem to be heading in, and therefore are included within this study (J Bátorá 2008 - M Comelli, R Matarazzo 2011 - PJ Cardwell – 2012 - M Furness 2012).

Figure 5.24 Status of the sender of online diplomatic actors on Twitter and Facebook



### *Discussion*

When analysing the use of this mechanism, we saw a clear trend in its use by online diplomatic actors. The majority of online accounts preferred to use the status of an Embassy account, with Facebook in this instance, having a majority of 96%. However, through ‘first person framing’ of the online crisis discussion, the Ambassadorial accounts on Twitter projected a stronger discourse on the crisis, and created a more directed and informal tone when discussing the crisis online. Through the use of a first-person narrative, they also crafted more relatable accounts in which their audiences could engage. This was backed by the fact that all Ambassadorial accounts analysed, displayed a higher than average level of engagement amongst their online followers.

Shining a spotlight on the Ambassadorial accounts, we discover an interesting practice. Although a number of MFA accounts were titled and created in the Ambassador's name,

there seems little evidence to suggest that the Ambassador ran the account themselves. In the case of the French Ambassadorial account on Facebook, for example, there showed no mention of a first person or direct viewpoint on the crisis. Rather, posts were made only in the third person, therein reflecting the discourse and structure that was seen on the corresponding Embassy accounts. This failure or disregard to use the status of the Ambassadorial account to strengthen their crisis message (or present a more direct position on the crisis) can be regarded as a wasted opportunity for a MFA's crisis communication strategy. This practice builds on previous claims that MFAs have been hesitant to express their views on the crisis from the viewpoint of a single actor, preferring instead to create a crisis discourse through the use of third party phrasing and indirect messages.

This trend was also seen on Twitter.<sup>75</sup> The contrast, however, was the United States, who was shown to be the only actor to possess both an active Ambassadorial & Embassy account. The United States operated both in contrasting ways, using the Embassy account to send information on consular issues and updates on national posts, and the Ambassador account to discuss more political posts concerning the crises. Both U.S. accounts, however, displayed similar characteristics, including frequency of use, content discussion on the crisis, and engagement with online networks.

The existence of both accounts, and the distinct way in which they were used, demonstrated a strategic use of this mechanism, emerging as a result of two primary reasons: 1) a pre-existing digital strategy, and 2) a strong interest in the bilateral relations between the sending and the receiving state. First, we found that the United States Embassy in Tel Aviv was guided by a concrete and detailed digital strategy created by the State Department. Within this strategy, there was written guidance to create both an Ambassador and Embassy account on both social media platforms, and to have their use interlinked when commenting on domestic and foreign policy. There was also an explicit suggestion to use both accounts in a distinct manner, with this distinction created through the use of different

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<sup>75</sup> Examples of this latter practice can be illustrated with a number of prominent Heads of States Twitter accounts. Take President Obama or Prime Minister Cameron for example. Here, both individuals had (during the 2014 timeframe) an account under their personal name with a substantial number of followers, but publicly stated that they did not construct nor send all the Tweets on the platform. With their messages instead, being constructed by members of their digital team. Their personal Tweets however, were shown to be signed off with their initials. The logic behind such a practice resides in both the belief, and growing evidence, that gaining and maintaining a large online audience, requires frequent posting and regular engagement, something which officials of this standing may not realistically have the time to do. Such a practice however, allows their account to remain active, without personally taking the time to curate it.

viewpoints or frames (institutional and Ambassadorial). The suggestion to create two separate accounts has not been taken up by all United States Missions around the world. Its use by the Embassy in Tel Aviv could also have been attributed to the fact that the United States has strong historic ties to the Israeli State and has always expressed open support to the current government, particularly during a crisis (Chomsky 1983; Reich 1984; Little 2008). Still, the presence of two online diplomatic accounts belonging to the same Foreign Ministry expanded the reach of the Ministry crisis communication message (simply through a directly increased audience base as seen in the target audience). More than this, the effective practices of frequency, content discussion, and online network power mechanisms on both accounts and their use of idiosyncratic tendencies online curated a stronger public discourse for the United States to engage with their foreign policy objectives within the region.

#### *5.2.4 Frequency*

The penultimate mechanism, that of frequency of activity, is an interesting one to explore and one regularly overlooked within the current analysis on digital diplomacy and crisis communication strategies. Frequency refers to the proportion of time a diplomatic agent spends online during a period of crisis and the type of signal this sends to their online audience regarding it. Frequency is regarded as tool that creates a perceived level of importance in how MFAs view the crises at play. In the context of this research specifically, it refers to the average number of posts an agent makes on their platform per day, and how these were used by the agent to discuss the crisis online.

The Israel-Gaza conflict highlighted the role of frequency within diplomatic crisis communication strategies and provided a clear context in which to analyse them. Taking the **Twitter** platform, we see that on average, an online diplomatic actor posted 3.99 times per day, with the most frequent poster being the Polish Embassy (average of 27.68 times per day), and the least being the Embassy of Panama which remained inactive during the entire crisis. It should be noted that this average was somewhat skewed with the outlier of Poland. If we exclude Poland from our analysis, the average of all accounts significantly decreased to 1.83 per day. There was also shown to exist little variation between accounts

with a range from 0 to 7 posts per day. Only five actors chose to post less than once a day: *Austria, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, and Panama*. With that said, the **Facebook** platform showed a very different frequency. We saw that on average, an online diplomatic actor posted once every five days (0.202 times per day) — a substantially lower figure when compared to the use of the Twitter platform. Unlike Twitter, however, little variation between accounts was seen in this instance, with a frequency range of 0.025 to 0.379, with the majority of accounts centring on the average of once every five days (0.202).

Figure 5.25 Overall frequency of activity for online diplomatic actors on Twitter

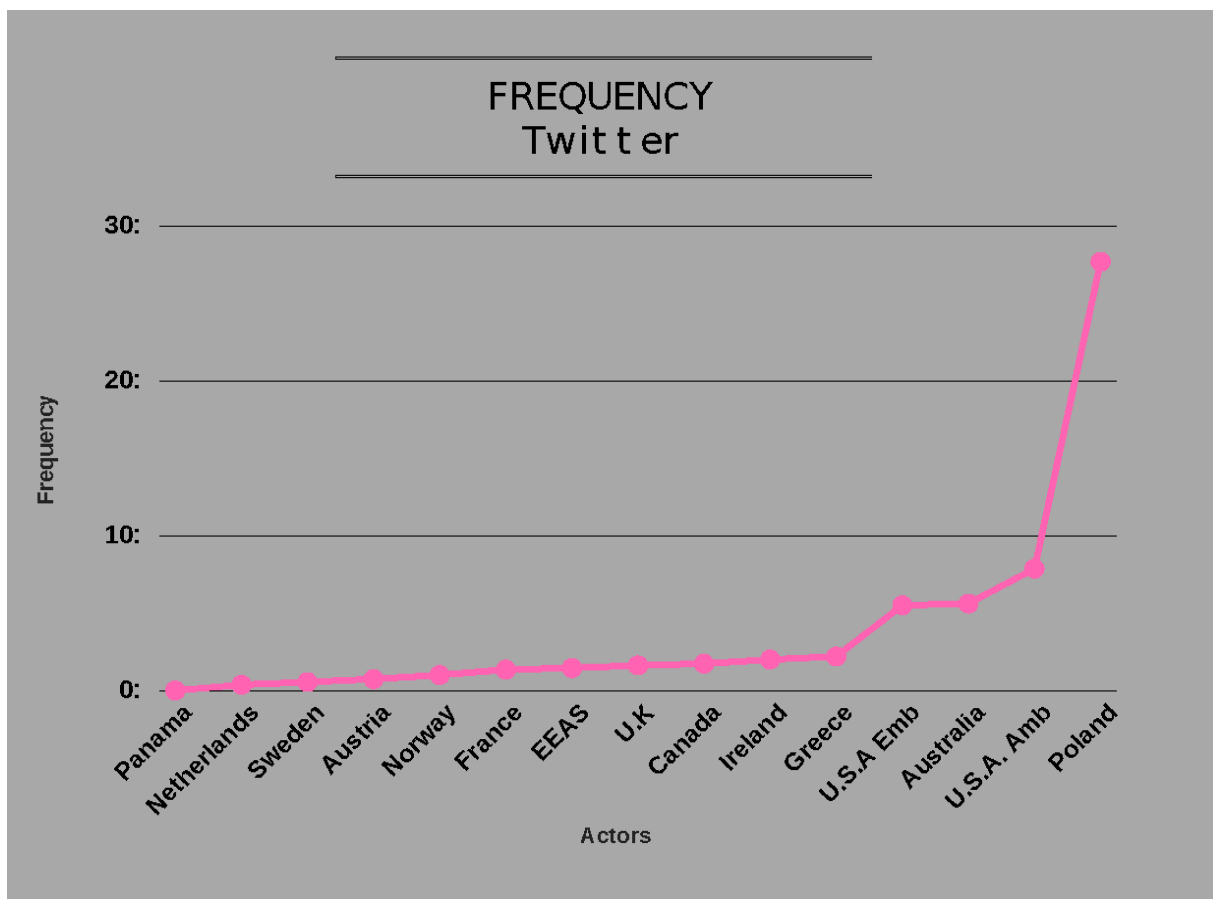
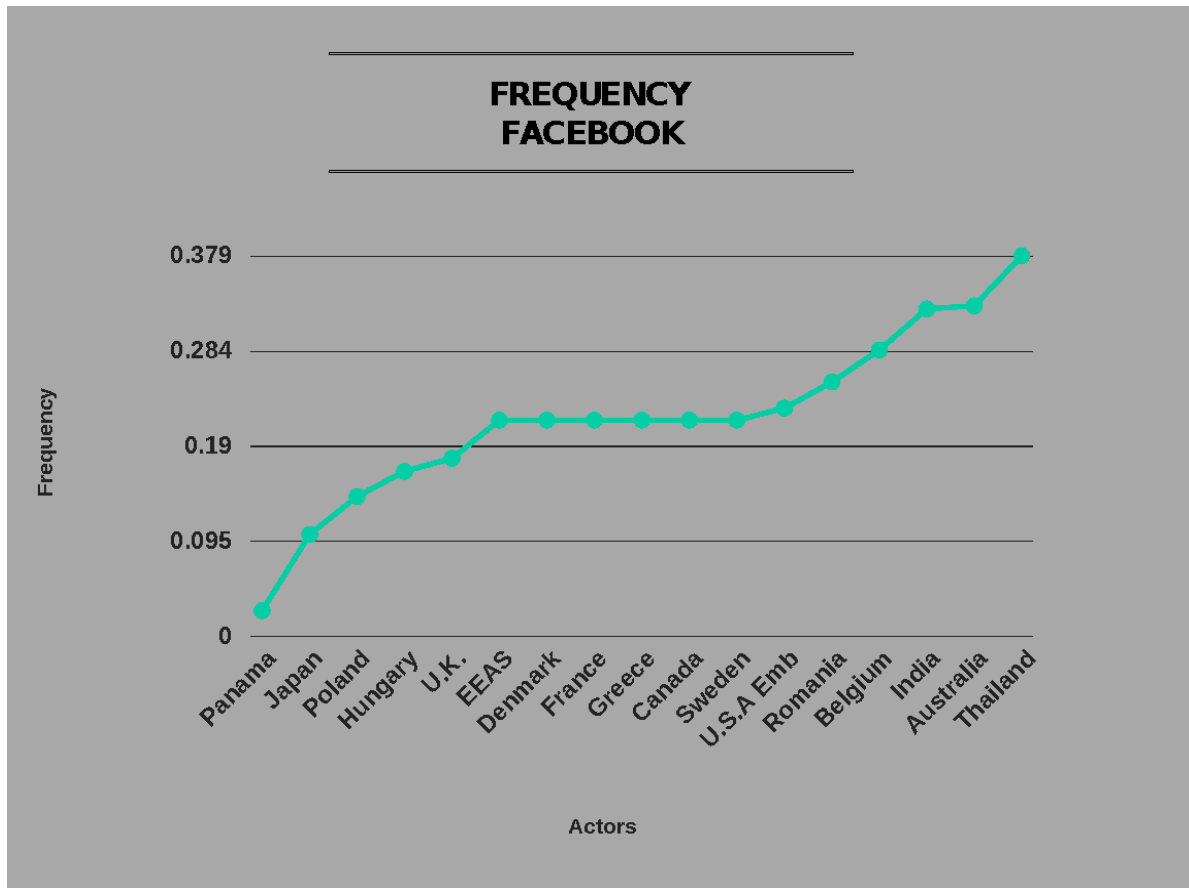


Figure 5.26 Overall frequency of activity for online diplomatic actors on Facebook



It is important to note that frequency and its use should not be viewed in isolation. When making claims on how frequency generates and enhances signals we must also look at *how* exactly this frequency was used by the account in question. This means posing questions such as: did the account post frequently, but choose not to discuss the crisis online? Did it post infrequently, but provide a direct focus on the crisis discussion when it did? and what are the possible consequences for each action, in terms of the signals it sends regarding the crises?

From the graphs below, we can see that on both platforms, there emerged little variation between frequency levels, but a stark contrast did exist between the amount of time each actor dedicated to discussing the crisis online. We saw that while the United States

Ambassador posted an average of 8 times per day, for example, they dedicated only 50% of their conversation to the crisis itself. Compare this to the Canadian Embassy, who posted an average of 2 times per day, but dedicated over 98% of their conversation to the crisis. The argument being proposed here is that even if an account posts over 20 times a day, their ability to sculpt the crises narrative in their own favour arguably goes unused if their posts do not engage in the crisis dialogue and discussion at hand. This is something to consider when making further judgments on how a Ministry should incorporate and deal with the issue of frequency within their crisis communication strategies.

Figure 5.27 Correlation between frequency and conflict conversation activity for online diplomatic actors on Twitter during the Israel – Gaza conflict June/July 2014

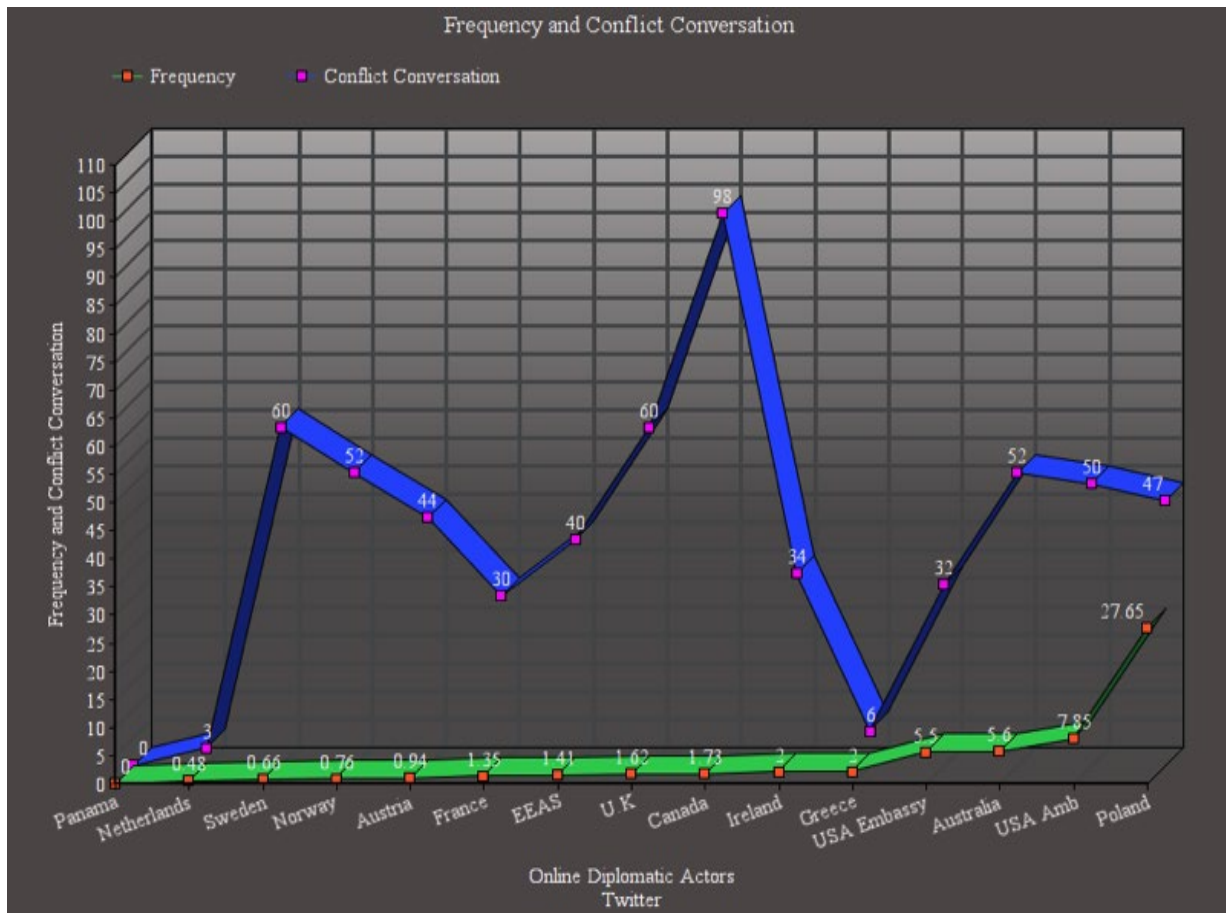
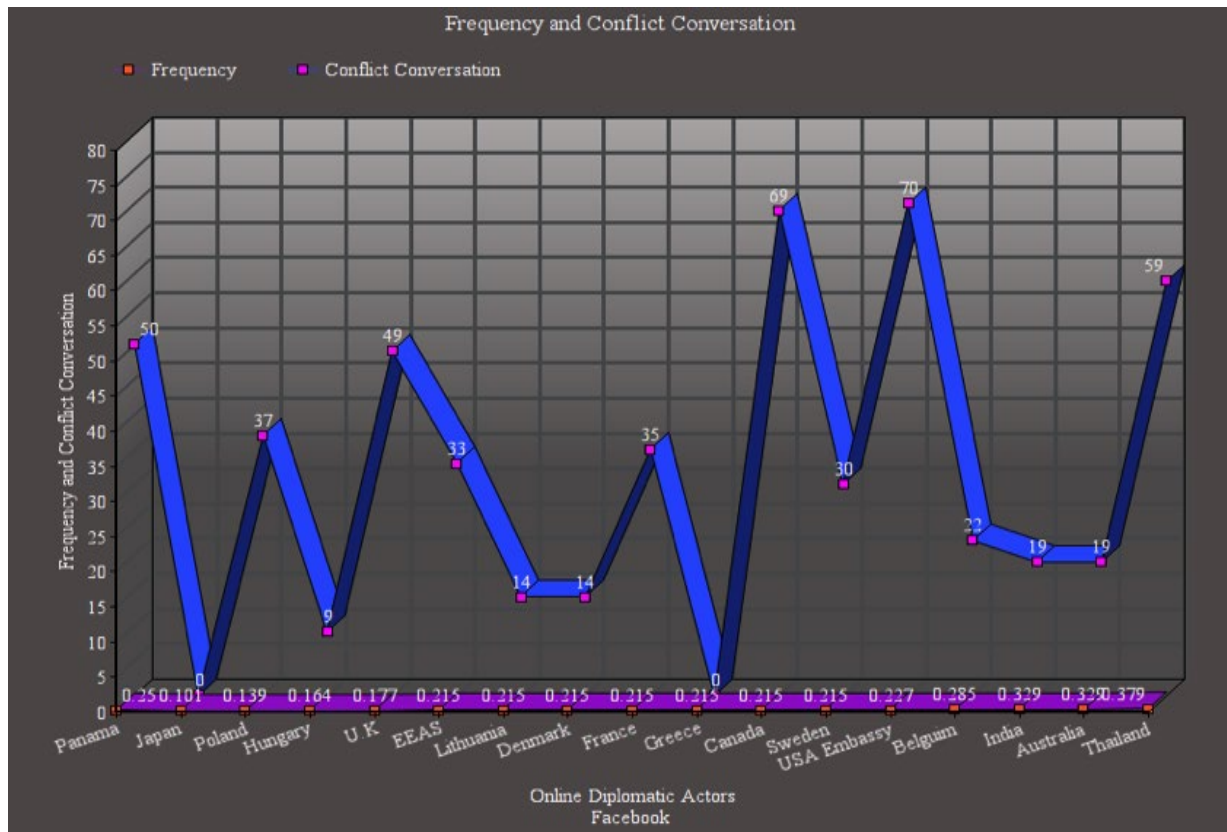


Figure 5.28 Correlation between frequency and conflict conversation activity for online diplomatic actors on Facebook during the Israel – Gaza June 2014 crisis



### Discussion

From the data presented, we saw Twitter emerge as the platform of choice for increased online activity. Twitter showed an average frequency posting of 1.3 posts per day, compared to Facebook with 0.234 posts per day. According to the online diplomatic actors interviewed, this preference of platform can be explained for a number of reasons, foremost, the power of the trending hashtag. Almost immediately after the crisis began, there emerged a number of core hashtags (i.e. #IsraelGaza #PrayforGaza #Gazaunderattack #BoycottIsrael and #PrayforIsrael), each acting as a gateway for information that enabled online users to instantaneously navigate the emerging dialogue online. Diplomatic actors interviewed also noted that in a number of instances, they sought to use these trending

hashtags strategically to ensure their message was heard and recycled by those who were also searching the crisis dialogue. Interviewees noted that they used Twitter more frequently than Facebook in part because it provided them with an ease of connection to their online audience in a way that Facebook did not. Whether the result of the digital interface or the ease in which they could follow other actor's online, diplomats regarded Twitter as a tool to connect more easily with official and nonofficial actors. Online actors also utilised Twitter more than any other platform due to the high levels of press and media outlets active on the platform. Diplomatic actors sought online media as a gateway for information gathering, whilst also hoping that through them, their own message and policies would reach the mainstream, thereby shaping the crisis narrative in their favour. Finally, interviewees also responded that Twitter provided them with a means to gather information faster and from a wider range of sources. As such, they could project their message to a more active audience and increase their engagement with official and nonofficial actors alike. While all interviewees recognised that Facebook did provide these actions, they believed that their potential outcome and impact would be more extensive on Twitter.

Regarding those actors who displayed a low level of activity upon both platforms, we can say that (as noted within the conceptual framework) low frequency, coupled with a lack of conversation generated on the crisis, represented a failure on behalf of these actors to compete in the battle for crisis narratives and proved a missed opportunity for the account to highlight and exert their foreign policy influence online. By failing to use the most prominent and popular tool for public communication during a crisis, these actors (whether consciously or not) cut themselves out of the real-time crisis conversation, and substantially hindered how their voice was heard within it.

As noted previously, during times of crises, frequency levels should not be viewed in isolation, but in relation to the projection of crisis discussion. While an actor might be engaging frequently online, they risk losing their ability to craft a narrative and to project their policies to an increased number of online actors if their engagement is not shown to be centred on the crisis (be this political or consular discussion). We see this scenario played out in the case of the Greek Embassy, where it was not simply enough for the Embassy to tweet every day during a crisis, if these tweets were shown to have zero connection to the crisis itself. At best, this signalled that the MFA wished to remain silent

on the crisis, but at worst, that it did not deem the crisis worthy of discussion for themselves or their citizens who were seeking out vital consular information. In comparison to the Greek Embassy, a number of actors were shown to engage frequently online, while also ensuring their engagement was conflict related. As a result of these practices, such accounts emerged as sites where actors consistently crafted their crisis narrative and extended their foreign policy and reach.

Finally, it should be noted that the *overuse* of the frequency mechanism brings possible drawbacks for the online account holder, namely an overload of information for its online audience. Poland, for example, posted over 27 times per day during the crisis. Such a high frequency level could have created an information overload for the online audience. It is questionable whether or not the audience would actually have read every tweet, and links it provided. With that said, this research is still of the argument that increased engagement online sends a clear signal to all those watching, and that the MFA deems the crisis worthy of discussion and wishes to demonstrate this publicly.

### ***5.2.5 Online Diplomatic Network***

After focusing on which actors sent online messages during the crisis, to how frequently they sent them and to who may have received them, the final mechanism analyses how online diplomatic actors interacted with one another. That is, how they used their own online social networks to highlight their foreign policy message during the crisis.

As expanded upon in the conceptual framework, this mechanism relates to the power of the online network, and the novel role it plays in digital crisis communication practices today. Although a unique online mechanism, its premise is not based on the assumption that networks are fundamental units of social organisation under and above the nation-states — social structures that can readily carry out the business of the diplomatic craft. Networks have long been seen as an effective communication tools by diplomatic actors, working not only as methods of message diffusion and dissemination amongst actors, but also as arenas that are imbedded with qualities that reflect the effect of those relations (shared norms, ideas and values). Online networks allow messages to be shared, enhanced

and reinforced, and have emerged as a tool of significance within the realm of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic communication.

As discussed within the conceptual framework, three distinct network categories have emerged that the diplomat can use to expand their message reach, promote their crises narrative and support other official actors who display policy stances, similar to their own. Turning to the conflict and how the Twitter platform was used, we sought to discover how digital diplomatic actors engaged with these three distinct categories. The Twitnomy application was used to gather information concerning how and to what extent each online diplomatic actor engaged with their networks during the crises. The application provided information relating to the three distinct categories of interaction - *retweets*, *favourites* and *mentions* – and within each category specified the top ten actors that the online account in question engaged with most. In some cases, if the account was shown to be less active within one category, the application did not provide the full set of the actors for each category, but simply provided the closest number to it. After undertaking an analysis of each account, it became clear that during a crisis, a diplomat agent was likely to engage with five different diplomatic networks overall: national, international, receiving state, receiving state national, and members of the online press.

Our analysis used the information gathered from Twitnomy to illustrate how each online actor engaged with these five distinct networks during the crises. The table below illustrates these findings. For our analysis of the online diplomatic network, however, we will only analyse the first three categories due to their direct links to diplomatic network power, beginning with the national diplomatic network.

Figure 5.29 Use of online networks for diplomatic actors on Twitter



### National

Interaction with national online networks was by far the most extensive network engaged with for all social media accounts analysed. That is, the interaction between the Embassy on the ground and their Central Foreign Ministry and National Parliament constituted the network most engaged during the crisis. This includes the Central Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the sending state's Prime Minister or President, the National Parliament and their affiliations, and any subset account of the Central Foreign Ministry online. For all accounts analysed, the top three actors that each account interacted with belonged to their national network, with 13 out of 17 having national networks in their top five. The *United Kingdom* had the highest concentration of national network interaction (shown below) with nine of their top ten actors belonging to the national networks, and only one from the press corps. Aside from the *Netherlands* or *Panama*, who did not interact with any online networks during the timeframe, *Australia* and *Austria* had the lowest concentration of national

network interaction, with four out of their top ten actors coming from their national networks, and the rest dispersed between international, receiving state, press, and Israeli national networks.

### *International*

As seen in Figure 5.22, a diplomatic actor's engagement with their online international network was substantially lower than their use of the national network. We discovered that for all accounts analysed, engagement with an international network actor was present in the top three categories for only one account (*Ireland*). A total of nine accounts were shown as not engaging with this network at all (*Australia, EEAS, Norway, United Kingdom, United States Embassy, United States Ambassador, Netherlands, and Panama*).

The distinct lack of engagement with this network could be explained for two reasons. First, unlike national networks, the voice of the international community is not always supported during a crisis. That is, the online diplomat account may not have felt compelled or pressured to retweet, favourite, or share the international network's information. Second, although the voice of certain actors within the international community may be supported during the crisis, the online diplomatic actor may not have been granted the sanctioning from Headquarters to publicly support their message online. Sanctioning takes time and requires the diplomat to go through the appropriate channels to gain the approval of the Embassies' superiors back home. Although this is a simple point of logistics, it removes the opportunity for the online actor to use the power of real-time communication afforded to them — to ensure that the crisis message would be heard at the time when it is perhaps needed most. When seeking to explain the lack of engagement with international networks by online diplomatic accounts, both reasons should be acknowledged and addressed when crafting a crisis communication strategy. Using this network strategically can ultimately serve to enhance an MFA's crises message, while also demonstrating an alliance and coherence on the crisis position amongst a range of actors.

## *Receiving State*

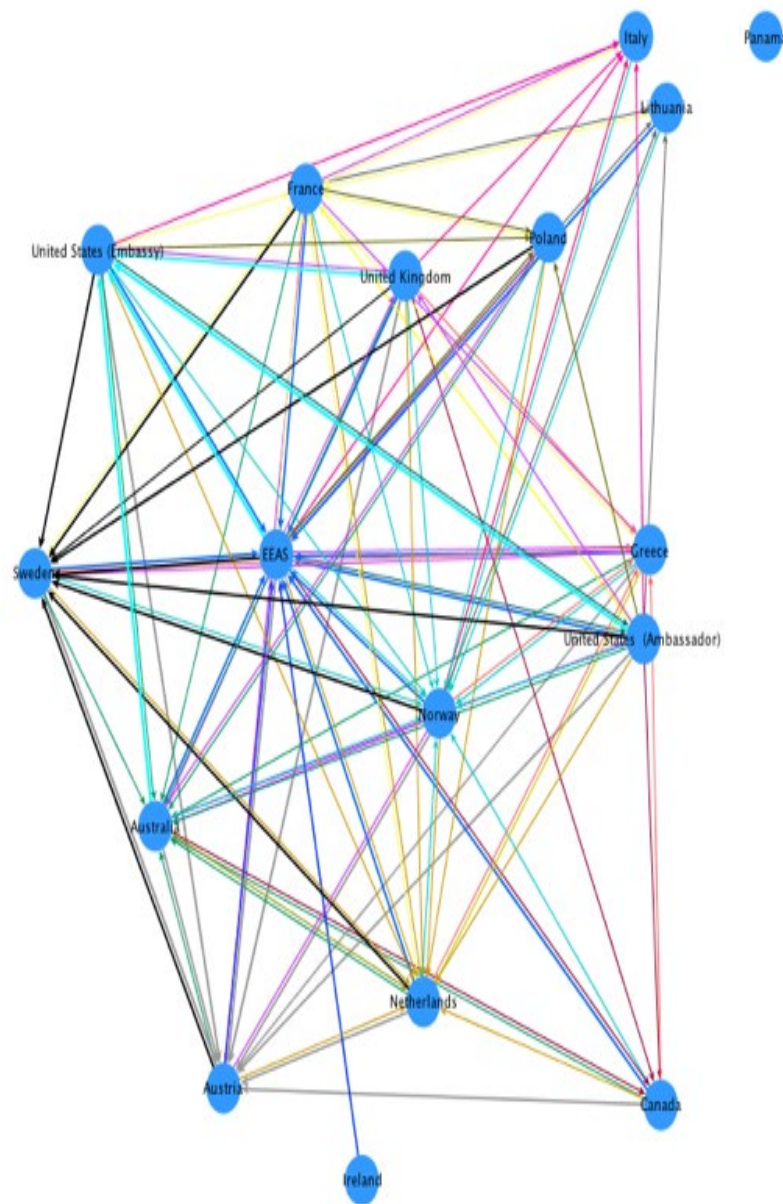
The final network we turn to is the *receiving state diplomatic network*. As previously noted, this network is centred on all diplomatic actors who are accredited to the receiving state in which a crisis is unfolding, and are also shown to have an active presence online during it. By engaging with this network, diplomats can enhance their collective crisis narrative and establish a stronger position regarding regional and international policies concerning the crisis itself. By gaining a place of prominence within the receiving state network (such as the EEAS during this crisis as shown below), actors can ensure their message and narrative are heard amongst the important influencers of the diplomatic community. Gaining this place of prominence within the network, just as the EEAS did, undoubtedly contributed to their process of virtual enlargement during the crisis, and should certainly be seen as a central goal for any diplomatic crisis communication strategy today. The online receiving state network can be seen as a strategic tool, if the actor is positioned correctly within it.

To discover how these actors interacted with their receiving network during this crisis period in particular, we now analyse the centrality of the networks.<sup>76</sup> Centrality referring here to the number of ties a node has to other nodes within the online platform. Actors who have more ties are awarded multiple ways and resources in which to reach their foreign policy goals and objectives, making them relatively advantaged in comparison to their peers. Within this network analysis, we pose a number of key questions: did actors follow each other in the receiving network? If so, who was the most followed? Who was the least? Who emerged as the central hub of information and who was positioned on the outskirts of the network? To answer these questions, we look at three core parameters of analysis that enable us to further understand how the receiving network was used, and consequently, how these messages were disseminated regarding the MFA crisis position and policies: *indegree*, *outdegree* and *betweenness*.

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<sup>76</sup> As noted within our methodological chapter, Twitter is the sole platform in this analysis category, as at present, no application exists, to test with any real validity the use of online diplomatic network on Facebook. In comparison, Twitter social analytical tools provides a depth of data needed in order to accurately gauge this mechanisms and make predictions based upon it.

Figure 5.30 The online diplomatic network within the receiving state, made by sending state actors during the Israel – Gaza June 2014 Crisis



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### *Indegree*

In-degree centrality refers to an actor who receives many ties within their own network, i.e. they are characterised as prominent actors within it. Recognising the importance of other actors following their account and the discourse it disseminates amongst them, actors

seek to direct ties to their account. Demonstrating a high degree of centrality during a crisis opens the potential for a Ministry’s message to disseminate amongst those ‘heard the loudest’ within the network. As information gathering continues to remain a core component for any Ministry’s crisis communication strategy, making sure that their policies and crisis position are visible online to a wide range actors may in turn affect how other actors sculpt their policies in light of it. That is, the node with the highest indegree centrality creates the greater possibility for other Ministries and receiving state actors to actively listen to online messages created from this account and alter their own policies accordingly. During the battle for crises narratives, this is an important power to possess.

Table 5.2 Indegree network

	Indegree
EEAS	11.864
Norway	11.864
Australia	10.169
Netherlands	10.169
Austria	9.322
Sweden	8.475
France	7.627
Greece	5.932
Poland	4.237
Canada	3.39
USA Embassy	3.39
U.K.	2.542
USA Ambassador	2.542
Ireland	0
Panama	0

During the Israel-Gaza crisis, the EEAS and Norway nodes had an in-degree centrality absolute value of 11, meaning there were 11 other nodes/online actors following these accounts. This means that both online actors retained the highest possibility and power to have their message heard, and to have it heard on a consistent basis. The group’s normalised value was 100 (all possible other nodes are connected to the *EEAS* and *Norway* nodes). The average indegree was 8.57 (which means that each node was on average,

followed by 8.57 other actors, out of a possible 15). *Ireland* and *Panama* had an absolute value of 0, demonstrating no followers within the receiving state network – something that distinctly dilutes their legitimacy as a working communication online platform. With the described benefits accrued to the EEAS and Norway due to their high in-degree centrality, nations like Ireland and Panama should work towards increasing their in-degree score by increasing their follower base (methods on how to increase your follower base can be noted in the target audience mechanisms analysis above).

### *Out-degree*

Out-degree centrality refers to the actors who have the possibility of exchanging and dispersing information to other actors throughout their online network. Actors with high out-degree centrality are often characterised as influential. The *EEAS* and the *United States* Ambassador nodes demonstrated an out-degree centrality absolute value of 11 (that is, both nodes connected with a possible 11 other nodes/online actors within the network). The normalised value here is 100. The average out-degree found within the receiving state was 8.57 (which means that each node was on average, followed by 5.88 other actors, out of a possible 15). Panama was found to have an absolute value of 0, showing no other actors following them within the receiving state network.

Out-degree centrality should be regarded by a receiving state diplomatic network as tool of strategic importance for a crisis communication strategy. A high out-degree of centrality enables an online actor (and their respective Foreign Ministry) to gather increased amounts of information online, establish where other diplomatic actors may stand on the crises in terms of their policies and position, and with that, sculpt and project their own crisis narrative accordingly. As the battle for narrative continues during a crisis discourse, becoming aware of what others are saying, and how they are projecting their own crisis narratives, proves to be a vital resource in how MFAs engage their own strategies for crisis communication management. If actors wish to increase their potential to disperse information to a greater audience and expand their crises message and reach, they should seek to increase their out-degree centrality. Doing so would allow them to use their online

diplomatic network more effectively, and position themselves as a more influential actor within it.<sup>77</sup>

Table 5.3 Out - degree network

	Out-Degree
EEAS	11.864
USA Ambassador	11.017
USA Embassy	9.322
UK	8.475
France	8.475
Norway	6.78
Australia	6.78
Sweden	5.932
Netherlands	5.932
Greece	5.932
Poland	5.085
Canada	5.085
Austria	4.237
Ireland	0.847
Panama	0

### *Betweenness Centrality*

Betweenness centrality measures the extent to which a node lies on paths between other nodes. Nodes with high betweenness centrality carry the potential to possess considerable influence within an online network by virtue of their control over information passing between others. They are also the ones whose removal from the network will most disrupt communications between other nodes because they lie on the largest number of paths taken by messaging. Betweenness can be calculated as an absolute value, as well as in terms of

<sup>77</sup> However, within the Israel-Gaza crisis, this limitation did not ring true, as the actor with the highest out-degree EEAS, also demonstrated the highest in-degree, meaning that their message was not only heard within the online network, but they also had the potential to hear the message of others.

a normed percentage of the maximum possible betweenness that an actor or node could have had.

Within the receiving state network, we discovered that once again the EEAS was the leader in this field, having a betweenness absolute value of 49, which is almost 4 times more than Australia, who came second with an absolute value of 11. This illustrates that the EEAS is the node that has the most power to connect all other nodes within their network, and as such, carries the greatest potential to influence others.

However, aside from the EEAS, this online network demonstrated an extremely low average for betweenness centrality amongst this network as whole, with an average of 5.67 (although this figure was substantially altered by the outlier of the EEAS). If we remove the EEAS from the analysis, we see a betweenness centrality of 2.9, arguably more reflective of the betweenness centrality for each account. If actors who had the lowest value of betweenness centrality (*Panama, Ireland, Lithuania and Italy*) wanted to increase their score (and with that, build their potential to become greater connectors within the networks), they must join more communities or sub networks online. This can be done by increasing not only their out-degree centrality, but also by ensuring that they follow a varied group of actors within the overall online networks, from members of the press corps, to national networks, to official actors within the Israeli state. This would then allow them to use the online diplomatic network more effectively, and position themselves as a more influential actor within it.

Table 5.4 Betweenness Centrality

	Betweenness Centrality
EEAS	49.522
Australia	11.94
Norway	13.531
France	12.246
Netherlands	2.5
USA Ambassador	1.585
USA Embassy	1.585
Sweden	1.435
Greece	0.781
UK	0.504
Canada	0.354
Poland	0.309
Austria	0.309
Ireland	0
Panama	0

### Discussion

From the data gathered, we saw a clear trend in relation to how online diplomatic accounts used existing online networks. This trend came in the form of a heightened engagement with the national diplomatic network. Extensive use of the national network enabled diplomats to enhance their crisis messages and also revealed a number of ‘other findings’ about the nature of online crisis communication during the conflict. First, it demonstrated that diplomatic accounts felt most comfortable engaging with actors from their national network, or those who were accredited to their respective states. When posing the question to diplomatic agents why this was so, the answer provided from all participants centred around the ease in which the national network (or the ‘core network’ as some participants referred to it) could be used to disseminate information, further policy objectives or underscore a national decision regarding the crises at play. This ease, according to participants, was not only simply due to the fact that actors could engage with certain networks, but arose from the knowledge (and assurance) that the content they retweeted or shared within the network was already sanctioned by their Ministry, serving only to further

their foreign policy aims and objectives. In short, the margin for error for engaging with this network was minimal.

The ease or confidence to engage with national networks online was not seen when engaging the other networks. As noted by the participants, this was because not all actors outside the national network directly represented their state interests. Even within regional groups, there was always the possibility that policies did not reflect their own, and that a message may be retweeted or shared that was not directly in line with the state's foreign policy goals and objectives. It is not surprising that online accounts were shown to engage less frequently with international networks in comparison to their national ones. All participants noted that during a time of crisis in particular, they would always choose engagement with their national network to enhance their Ministry's views on the crisis and highlight a particular message, while also ensuring they kept in line with their Ministry's policies and positions.

Although engaging the national network may have been as the 'safest' or most tried option, in terms of crisis communication management and strategies, engagement with other networks could possibly generate stronger signals by highlighting or expanding the MFA's policies and helping to achieve its crisis objectives. It is expected that an Embassy or Ambassador act as a mouthpiece for their Central Ministry during a crisis, with the echo function of the 'on the ground diplomat' having evolved as an intrinsic practice of diplomatic crisis communication. People expect this to happen, and therefore do not sit up and take notice when it does. This is not to suggest that use of this network is not without its benefits. With direct use of the national network, for example, the agent's message is sent to an increased audience and on a more frequent basis. By comparison, however, using one's national network alone creates less impact or leverage than engagement with the international or receiving state networks.

Both forms of network engagement are key strategic communicative mechanisms and should be viewed as such when MFAs create and carry out their crisis communication activities in the modern day.

## Section III

### 5.3 Digital Diplomatic Signalling Typologies

Grounded firmly within the framework of the five core mechanisms of the digital diplomatic signalling process, we can now create a set of *digital signalling typologies*. The purpose of this creation is to build a scenario or set of circumstances that best illustrate how these five digital mechanisms are used by diplomatic agents online. As expanded upon in the conceptual framework, the construction of a set of typologies acts as a methodological tool to view and categorise the process of online signalling in a standardised, structured, and replicable manner. Through conceptual construction, typologies allow us to label how this new practice of diplomacy varies amongst actors today. As noted with Chapter 3, this research has created three distinct typologies: *High Performers*, *Medium Performers* and *Low Performers*.

While distinct, these three typologies are based on the combination of selected attributes and their dimensions. As expanded upon within the conceptual framework, an evaluative rubric has been constructed with each performance category scoring a number out of 3: High Performance (3 out of 3), Medium Performance (2 out of 3) and Low Performance (1 out of 3). Each online diplomatic actor received a score for how they deployed each mechanism during the crisis period in question, with their total score then determining which typology they were categorised into. This leads the online accounts analysed on Twitter to receive a highest possible score of 18, and on Facebook a highest possible score of 15. These scores ultimately reflect each online diplomatic account communication performance based on the online signalling process.<sup>78</sup> While it proves effective to categorise the performance of these actors, particularly for visualisation and comparative purposes, we must not take this outcome solely at face value, but in conjunction with the in-depth individual analysis of all the online mechanisms provided above.

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<sup>78</sup> The variance in highest total scores between platforms is due to the absence of a Facebook analysis on the online diplomatic network power mechanism.

Table 5.5 Signalling Typologies

	<b>High (3)</b>	<b>Medium (2)</b>	<b>Low (1)</b>
Content	Heightened Online Discussion of Conflict (over 2 posts per day),	Regular Online Discussion of Conflict (1 post per day),	Rare Online Discussion of Conflict (less than 1 post per day), Indirect Structure
Structure	Direct Structure (over 60%)	Combination of Direct and Indirect Structure (30-60%)	Indirect Structure (over 60%)
Status	Ambassador or Head of Mission	Embassy	Consulate or Junior Diplomat
Audience	High Numerical Audience (over 1,000), Active Engagement with Audience (over 60%)	Average Numerical Audience (Between 500-1,000), Average Engagement with Audience (30-60%)	Low Numerical Audience (Less than 500), Weak Account Engagement with Audience (less than 30%)
Frequency	High Use of Online Account (over 2 posts per day)	Average Online Activity (1 post per day)	Inactive or Irregular Use of Online Account (less than 1 post per day)
Network	High Connection, and Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online	Any Connection, and Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online	Non-Engagement with National and International Diplomatic Networks Online

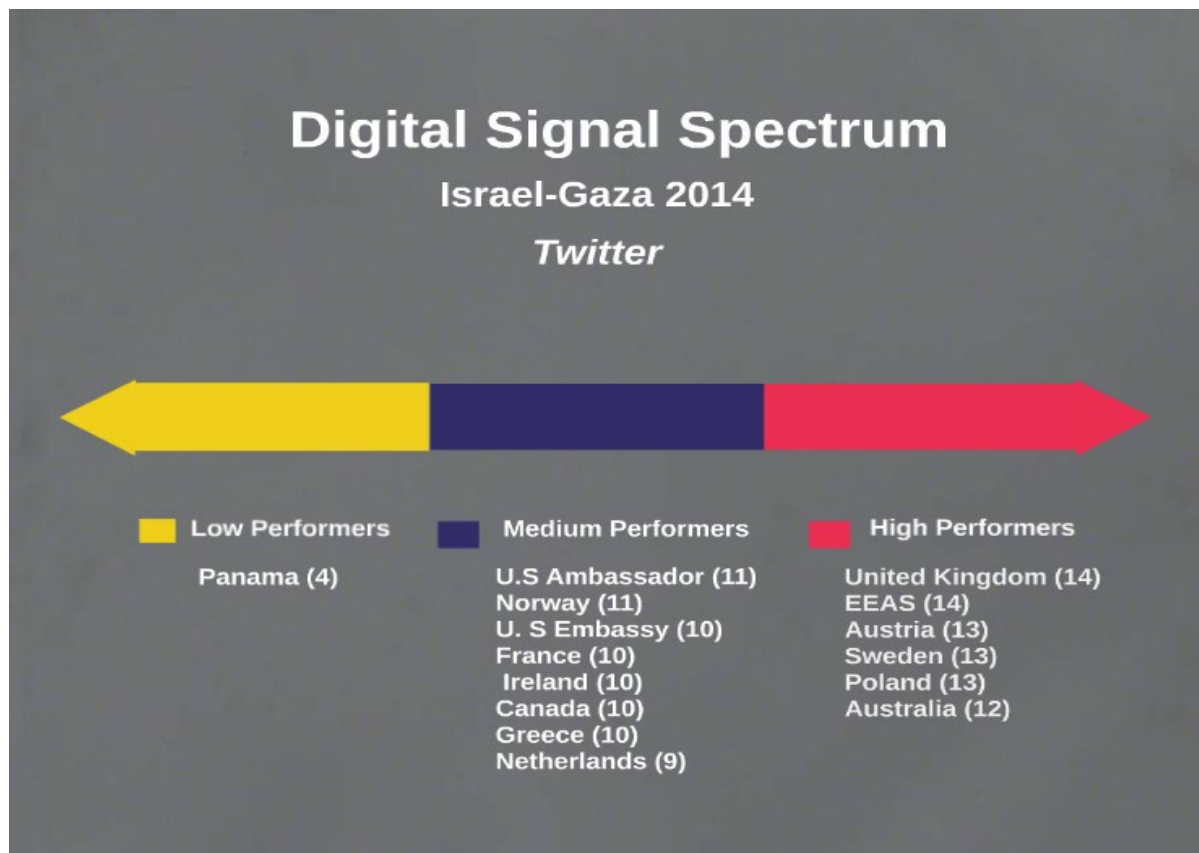
### 5.3.1 Typologies: Twitter

Taking the Twitter platform, we see that out of a possible score for the overall signalling process of 18, the categorisation of all online diplomatic accounts during the crisis was as follows:

Table 5.6 Twitter Performers

High Performers	Medium Performers	Low Performers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>United Kingdom (14)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>EEAS (14)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Austria (13)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Sweden (13)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Poland (13)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Australia (12)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>United States Ambassador (11)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Norway (11)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>United States Embassy (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>France (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Ireland (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Canada (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Greece (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Netherlands (9)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Panama (4)</b></li> </ul>

Figure 5.31 Digital Signal Spectrum, Twitter



### 5.3.2 Typologies: Facebook

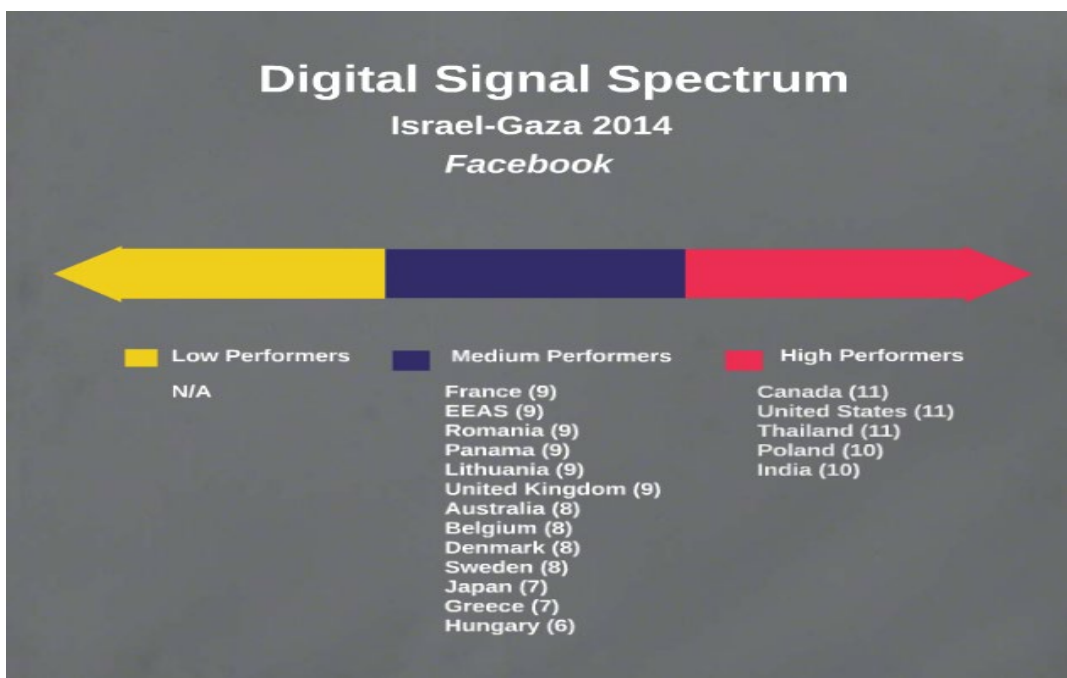
Turning to the Facebook platform, we saw that out of a total score of 15 for the overall signalling process, the categorisation of all online diplomatic accounts during the crisis was as follows:<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> The total typology score on the Facebook platform is 15 (in comparison to 18 on the Twitter platform). This is due to the removal of the online diplomatic network for the analysis on Facebook, and the limitation of the methodological tools to quantify it accurately.

Table 5.7. Facebook Performers

High Performers	Medium Performers	Low Performers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Canada (11)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>United States (11)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Thailand (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Poland (10)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>India (10)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>France (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>EEAS (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>România (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Panama (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Lithuania (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>United Kingdom (9)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Australia (8)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Belgium (8)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Denmark (8)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Sweden (8)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Japan (7)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Greece (7)</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Hungary (6)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>N/A</b></li> </ul>

Figure 5.32 Digital Signal Spectrum, Facebook



### 5.3.3 Overall Key Findings of Digital Signalling Typology

- *Average performance:* The majority of actors analysed were typed as ‘medium’ performers, demonstrating varied use of the signalling mechanisms by online diplomatic accounts.
- *Trend in high performers:* Without exception, the top performers on both platforms came from ‘Western’ states. Due to their global power and digital resources, these performers dominated the online crisis discourse. Through their increased reach of message, they each sculpted a crisis narrative in their favour.
- The trend across top performers could have emerged from a variety of reasons, including greater resources, better digital education, and the existence of a codes of digital practice within a MFA, which helped to guided and direct their communication policies on the ground, during the crisis.
- If viewed in isolation, this trend shows little other than a certain grouping of MFA’s utilising their resources and training to the best of their institutional ability. However, when analysed in a broader context that carries wide reaching implications for the crisis itself, we see that ‘Western nations’ dominated the discourse by using online mechanisms effectively. By doing so, these actors had the power to sculpt the crisis narrative in their favour, and potentially alter international crisis solutions which were in line with their own foreign policy goals and objectives.
- *Are all mechanisms created equal?* An actor's place in the medium performance category was not a result of uniform performance across all mechanisms, but in some instances, resulted from the actor using one mechanism effectively and choosing not to engage with another mechanism at all. This perhaps exposes the question: are all mechanisms created equal? and if not, should one take precedent over another in how we evaluate and assess them within the overall signalling process.
- The overall results of the typology spectrum illustrate that while the signalling mechanisms play a central role in the practice of modern day diplomatic communication,

their use amongst diplomatic actors is not as uniform as one may think. Rather, online diplomatic actors utilised each to varying degrees, and were constrained by a variety of circumstances, namely the continued role and power of the offline political context. We can conclude that social media is perhaps not the great equaliser that it was once thought to be. There are still barriers in place for states wishing to get to the table. Included in these barriers remains a lack of resources, training, and skill. Digital diplomacy is not as simple as being awarded the opportunity to sit at the virtual table. Rather, states must climb over many barriers to get there.

## **Section IV**

### **5.4 Narrative Creation**

Set against the backdrop of the global information space, the process of DDS allowed us to explore the mechanics of diplomatic crisis communication in the digital age. An in-depth look into the crisis communication activity of each online diplomatic actor during the Israel-Gaza war of 2014 enabled us to explore how MFAs and their agents framed and projected their online foreign policy messages during the conflict. That is, we analysed how consistently each actor did so, how their online engagement was structured in reference to both the official and nonofficial actors who followed them, and the type of content they chose to project using their platform. The preceding sections explored the role that these mechanisms played in the formation, projection, and framing of an MFA's foreign policy during the crisis.

This research has already acknowledged and explored the thesis (Chapter Two and Three) that through the calculated use of the DDS process, the diplomatic actor holds the potential to create an OCN of the state itself — a vital power to hold in a world filled with informational overload. The preceding analysis gives us not only a set of unique and individual analytical lenses with which we explored the changing diplomatic communicative strategies and capabilities in the digital age, but also a firm foundation to open up, and begin a discussion, regarding the creation and power of OCN during the conflict itself.

For the purpose of this study, we have chosen to analyse the narratives of those actors who were shown to engage in the online signalling process most effectively, labelled high performers. As noted before, ‘effective’ or ‘effectively’ in this instance refers to use of these capabilities in a manner, which works to enlarge a state's importance online. That each mechanism is used with its best potential in order to enhance a state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create a consistent and appealing message to officials and non-officials alike.<sup>80</sup> The chosen actors for each platform can be seen below:

#### **Twitter platform:**

- UK Embassy Account (14)
- EEAS Embassy Account. (14)

#### **Facebook platform:**

- United States Account (10)
- Canadian Embassy Account (11)

#### *5.4.1 Formation*

Explaining the formation of crisis narratives involves understanding actors’ strategic goals and types of communication. Agenda setting, legitimation, diverting attention, securing acquiescence, enhancing popularity, and mobilisations are all examples of communicative

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<sup>80</sup> Within a crisis period, each mechanism can therefore be used in an effective or ineffective manner. Narratives too, can be used effectively, where states through the process of formation, projection and reception craft online crisis narratives of influences, which are appealing to official and non-official entities alike. Effective narratives then, provide both the opportunity and the means for a state to exert their foreign policy power both online and off, and ultimately contribute towards the achievement of virtual state enlargement on behalf of the MFA. This meaning of effectively or its derivatives, as described here, is the one carried throughout the body of this work.

goals. Crisis narratives may be designed with short-term and/or long-term goals in mind. Alexander George's concept of policy legitimacy suggests that actors must seek to convince others that a policy is achievable and normatively desirable (2006:5).<sup>81</sup> Constructing a narrative is one method to convince others that a policy is achievable and normatively desirable.

Beyond goals, diplomatic actors can use different types of communication in the construction of strategic narratives, including persuasion, argument and representation force. Understanding an actor's communicative aims is a central issue in the study of communicative narratives, and diplomacy more broadly. At the domestic MFA HQ level, diplomatic actors set the terms of debate by deciding how foreign policies are played out at every phase of the policy-making process. If policies can be described as fitting squarely within an accepted narrative (describing problems that should and can be addressed including actions that should be taken and can be achieved), then policy legitimacy can be enhanced. If an actor can focus attention on what is perceived to be hypocrisy – or a mismatch with an accepted narrative – a target may be discouraged from taking particular decisions. This is related to a theory of the understanding of altercating (a method of socialisation) – 'in which the relevant others cast a social actor into a role and provide cues to elicit the corresponding appropriate behaviour' (Thies 2013: 76).

As noted in Chapter Four, our focus on diplomatic actors' formation of OCN involved a careful process of tracing, textual analysis, and elite interviews. These allowed us to understand the process behind how the narratives were formed, and the domestic political pressures present when studying them. These also allowed for an understanding of how national / international narratives constrained how diplomatic actors conceived the realm of the possible. For this analysis, elite interviews of the high performing actors and a textual analysis of the codes of digital practice were the primary methodological tools used (See Chapter Three, section 3.2.3).

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<sup>81</sup> Policy legitimacy he writes 'is tied to the role of political elites and public opinion because these forces play a powerful role in decision-making and may act as a counterweight to leaders and their agendas' (George 2006:5).

## *Analysis*

On the **Twitter platform**, we discovered the UK and EEAS possessed clear communicative strategies stemming from standardised codes of digital practice that were formulated (pre-crisis) by their Central Foreign Ministry. The high performing actors on **Facebook** were shown to hold similar digital codes of practice. The high performing actors on both platforms were shown to possess a directed communicative strategy that guided and sculpted their crisis communicative actions online and offline. In a varied range of detail, all codes outlined how their diplomatic actors ought to deal with 1) offline communications procedures (press interviews, participation in television programs, deliverance of public demarches) and 2) the new world of online communications (including use of social media platforms, live streaming events, and online engagement with other official and non-official online actors).

The online crisis communication guidance provided for actors by these codes of practice remain of most relevance to our study of crisis narratives. Through interviews, and the analysis of each code of practice, we found that each high performing MFA (U.K., U.S.A, EEAS, and Canada) provided their Embassies with a specific set of directions in relation to how they should engage and navigate the online world, while continuously representing their state policies as they did so. For example, the *FCO's* encouraged 'all staff to make full use of the opportunities offered by social media to help deliver FCO objectives' (FCO Social Media Guidance 2016). Specifically, it noted the benefits of social media use for its diplomatic agents, stating that, social media:

- Allows diplomats to monitor events, harvest information, and identify key influencers
- Provides real time channels to deliver our messages directly and influence beyond traditional audiences
- Can assist in the consultation process and the formulation of policy by helping us crowd source ideas
- Improves the delivery of our services through closer engagement with our customers and allow us to better manage a crisis
- Makes us more accountable and transparent through open dialogue

The *EEAS* code specifically outlined the ‘DO’s’ and ‘DON’T’s’ required of their diplomatic agents when engaging online, adding further points of direction including:

*official social media channels should provide relevant, useful information on European External Action Service Activity; promote its policies and relevant partner content in line with EEAS objectives. More specifically official accounts should have a clear purpose and audience and be evaluated against those criteria (EEAS Code of Communication Practice 2014).*

The *Canadian* code of practice specifically stated that:

*By 2017 the Foreign Service – as a whole – is to professionally and efficiently exploit the opportunities offered by social media for listening, communicating and engaging.*

*The Foreign Service is to use its social media accounts to promote Canadian interests and foreign policy views by:*

- *following relevant discussions in Canada, in the geographic area served by the mission and internationally;*
- *communicating with and interacting with target groups in Canada and abroad; and*
- *communicating efficiently in crisis situations.*

*The social media channels of the Foreign Service should reflect the breadth of our responsibilities and our engagement both at home and abroad. The use of social media is to be an integral part of the Foreign Service’s external communication.*

The *US State Department* implementation guidelines were also similar to those of the FCO, yet the voracity in their approaches differed slightly, having thus an impact on the media

and academic attention awarded (Bjola & Holmes 2015; 37). The United States Department of State has been described as the vanguard of digital diplomacy, which it refers to as *21st Century Statecraft*, using these novel technologies to engage a growing, changing set of stakeholders across the globe. It is worth noting, that one of the core statements on digital practice that the State Department projects to its agents is the necessity of its use in the achievement of virtual and tangible foreign policy goals. It writes:

*The twenty-first century statecraft agenda addresses new forces propelling change in international relations that are pervasive, disruptive and difficult to predict. The distinctive features of twenty-first century statecraft point the way toward deeper changes that will gradually permeate all of foreign policy: expanding its scope, substituting new tools, and changing its values. We are adapting our statecraft by reshaping our development and diplomatic agendas to meet old challenges in new ways and by deploying one of America's great assets—innovation. This is twenty-first century statecraft—complementing traditional foreign policy tools with newly innovated and adapted instruments of statecraft that fully leverage the technologies of our interconnected world (U.S. Department of State 2014).<sup>82</sup>*

While the existence of a code of communicative practice may seem like a basic necessity for an MFA and their Embassies to possess in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its existence is much rarer than one might expect. Out of the 25 actors analysed on both platforms, only 14 MFAs possessed codes of communication practice, with each specifically concentrating on how to guide and structure online communication practices. This discovery is of significance to our study, because the impact of not having a code only feeds into the already existing climate of uncertainty and fear that many diplomats experience regarding use of their online platforms. As for many diplomats, the use of social media tools is still very much seen as a novel practice, with many going the majority of their careers without using it. If we acknowledge that the primary characteristic of social media is that it is inherently public, that the activity of its users will be laid out for all to see, and that the user's actions

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<sup>82</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/statecraft/overview/index.htm>.

cannot be easily erased from the public's consciousness, it soon becomes clear why diplomats may feel reluctant to embrace these new digital practices afforded to them. Providing actors with a clear set of instructions and a set of best practices ensures that a diplomat can actively engage with the online world with reduced fears. This is particularly true during a time of crises, when actors must act with little time for deliberation. Knowing how and to what extent one should communicate (offline and off) remains imperative for creating a culture of competence for diplomats regarding their crisis communication strategy.

All interviewees explained that the existence of a code of practice increased their confidence in engaging online during the crisis. Each stated that the code established concrete parameters, basic guidelines and a solid framework in which they could conduct their crises communicative activities without fear of reprimand or that were 'doing it wrong'. According to the actors interviewed, the code, played a strong role in shaping the crisis discourse. All actors acknowledged that although policy on the crisis, and state positions were not swayed or altered in any manner by the existence and adherence to the code, what it did allow for was the creation of an environment in which their existing policies could be highlighted and projected with confidence and purpose. Codes provided clear sets of instructions to be used by actors wishing to effectively engage with each communicative mechanism within the signalling process, thereby enabling consistent and concrete narratives to emerge in comparison to their contemporaries online. Having a set of concrete guidelines and practices that allow for established policies to be projected in a consistent and strategic manner gives a strong communicative advantage for actors during a crisis. This allows for their voice to be heard, and policies to be communicated clearly and consistently. During the crisis in question, those actors whose communication practices were already formed showed an increased ability to create and craft 'louder' and more consistent narrative compared to their contemporaries. As such, these codes contributed toward their state's virtual enlargement during the crisis, providing them with the confidence to sculpt a crisis narrative in their favour.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> With that said, only one high performing actor interviewed, (the United States State Department) had a code of practice, which directly referenced how their actors should engage during a time of crises. This code was distinct from the general code, which outlined how to carry out communication activities during all seasons of diplomatic practice. The code noted that during a crisis the 'Department policy is that main State manages Twitter feeds that come from main State, that the embassies and consulates and their senior leadership manage the content that is on their feeds, and they are expected to use good policy judgment in doing that' (U.S. Department of State 2014).

Speaking to the consciousness of crafting an online crisis narrative, interviewees from the United States and the United Kingdom referred to their existing strategic communication policies as guiding forces in the construction of the types of narratives they wished to convey online during the Israel-Gaza war of 2014. Both stated that their country and those who represent them, are committed to a two-state solution that respects the human rights and liberties of both the Israeli and Palestinian people. For them, the existence and utilisation of these novel online communicative capabilities were seen as simply new ways in which they could form and project their pre-existing narrative during the crises.<sup>84</sup> Both states recognised the increasing and novel power afforded to them by the online world in the projection of their crisis narratives, and acknowledged the new mechanisms at their disposal which they could use to amplify their own narratives amongst the increasing array of competing voices online. As high performing actors, both were shown to take full advantage of these online tools, using them to project and sculpt the narrative in their favour.

#### *5.4.2 Projection*

Without proper attention to the media ecology in which the formation of online crisis narratives take place (that is, the mechanisms and apparatus of each platform and how they work in synergy to create and project these narratives) we are missing a crucial component of the narrative process itself — its projection.

The projection of state narratives in a new media ecology is vital for any analysis of crisis communication activities, as it presents significant opportunities for virtual enlargement

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<sup>84</sup> A country-specific communication strategy refers to a communication strategy, which explicitly references and expands on the relationship between the sending and the receiving state and how the representing diplomatic actors should act regarding it. While time consuming in its creation, it would undoubtedly prove an effective tool for diplomats on the ground during a time of crisis, diplomats who would be bound by the offline political context and existing parameters. Here the existence of basic guidelines and a solid framework would enable diplomats to feel more confident to engage with online practices during a crisis. The FCO was the only Ministry to come close to a country-specific communication strategy, writing that their online accounts should: ‘take into account cultural sensitivities and avoid posting anything that could be considered offensive by anyone who may see the page (including audiences from other countries)’. The point of a country-specific communication strategy is an interesting one to explore and will be taken up further in the Chapter Seven, where we provide a set of policy recommendations for effective crisis communication strategies and management.

and also challenges for diplomatic actors and MFAs at large. As evidenced by our previous discussion within Chapter Three, a plethora of studies in the field of political communication have acknowledged and demonstrated that the type, or tool of media, can affect how messages are constructed and received by an audience once projected (Hoskins & O'Loughlin 2007). By providing a focus on actors within the narrative process, we are also required to acknowledge that some actors will be more adept at communicating through different media outlets than others, as referenced by the existence of concrete and detailed online communication strategies.

As already explored and discussed in detail throughout this work, by enhancing a state's crisis position, effective projection of a state narrative can equate to an outcome of virtual enlargement, or at the very least correlate to it. If one looks at the projection of the message through a) the mechanisms of audience reach, b) levels of online engagement, and c) the content and frequency of the message, the evidence for virtual enlargement shines through. Through effective use of these projection mechanisms, the state narrative has been enlarged, and so has their power to sculpt and dominate the online crisis narrative in their favour. Virtual enlargement is said to occur when these five unique signalling mechanisms are performed at their optimal capacity. To test and analyse the projection of the narrative during this conflict we can then turn to the use of these projection mechanisms amongst the high performing actors.

### *Analysis*

- First, pertains to the *content* of the message itself. Content is formed and sculpted a MFAs OCN overall. On the **Twitter** platform, both the U.K. and the EEAS projected an average of 50% of their online conversation to posts directly related to political commentary of the crisis. The U.K. had 60% of their content as crisis related (47% Political and 13% Consular), while the EEAS showed 42% (41% Political, 1% Consular). On the **Facebook** platform, the U.S. had 70% of their content as crisis related (57% Political and 13% Consular) and Canada with 70% (35% Political and 35% Consular). The consular commentary was shown, overall to be significantly higher on the Facebook platform.

Of note, although Embassies / Ambassadors dedicated low averages to direct crisis discussion, those messages sent that were directly related to the crisis were the most well received by their online audience without exception. That is, the messages that displayed the highest numbers of retweets, favourites, and reshares in comparison to all other posts the account sent during the crisis. In short, the content directly related to the crisis ultimately is that which was projected 'the loudest' amongst the account's direct online audience and beyond. Due to the limitations of analytics, the Twitter platform is the only platform used to support this point.

For the U.K., the messages that were the most retweeted and favoured during the crisis were as follows:

*Most Retweeted:*

1. **3 July 2014:** #UK blames Hamas for IDF's military operation against #Gaza says UK envoy to Israel @Jerusalem\_Post. Read in full [bit.ly/1kbo9B4](http://bit.ly/1kbo9B4) - 6 retweets, 6 favourites
2. **2 July 2014:** FS @WilliamJHague condemns murder of Palestinian teenager. [gov.uk/government/new...](http://gov.uk/government/new...) - 7 retweets, 2 favourites

*Most favorited:*

3. **23 July 2014:** #UK blames Hamas for IDF's military operation against #Gaza says UK envoy to Israel @Jerusalem\_Post. Read in full [bit.ly/1kbo9B4](http://bit.ly/1kbo9B4) - 16 retweets, 6 favourites

For the **EEAS**, the messages which were the most retweeted and favoured during the crisis were as follows:

*Most Retweeted:*

- 1. 30 June 2014:** Just sent condolences to Isr gov on despicable murder of Eyal, Gilad and Naftali with hope that perpetrators are soon arrested. -LFA - 29 retweets, 9 favourites
- 2. 8 July 2014:** EU offers Israel special privileged partnership next best to EU membership, akin to Norway/Switzerland. - 21 retweets, 5 favourites
- 3. 8 July 2014:** Indiscriminate rocket fire on civilians never justified and must stop - 15 retweets, 1 favourites.

*Most favorited:*

- 1. 30 June 2014:** Just sent condolences to Isr gov on despicable murder of Eyal, Gilad and Naftali with hope that perpetrators are soon arrested. -LFA - 29 retweets, 9 favourites
- 2. 8 July 2014:** EU offers Israel special privileged partnership next best to EU membership, akin to Norway/Switzerland - 21 retweets, 5 favourites
- 3. 17 June 2013:** #EU strongly condemns the kidnapping of #EyalGiladNaftali. Calls for their immediate release and safe return [ow.ly/y7Cqa](http://ow.ly/y7Cqa)- 9 retweets, 4 favourites

- The second projection mechanism was the *structure* of the message. As noted, structure matters because how a message is packaged sends a signal regarding the state's position on the crisis and creates an overall narrative regarding how a state wishes to be publicly portrayed, regarding their crisis position both on and offline.

On Twitter, the *U.K.* and the *EEAS* demonstrated a higher than average proportion of direct messages sent when discussing the crisis itself, with the *EEAS* having 52% of their messages as direct, and the *U.K.*, 31%. Facebook showed a similar pattern with the *U.S.*, and *Canada* having 37% and 56% respectively. In a number of these cases (namely the *U.S.*, *U.K.*, and the *EEAS*) an indirect message could still be viewed as a signal of significance, particularly when the online actors married this technique with strategic use of other signalling mechanisms (e.g. high frequency rates and high engagement with their audience). This point once again adds weight to the claim that a holistic analysis of the signalling mechanisms is needed when examining how states created and contributed to a process of virtual state enlargement during a crisis.

- The third projected mechanism related to *frequency levels*. As noted, consistently projecting messages directly related to the crises assisted in expanding the narratives of actors even further, allowing them to stay engaged in the crisis dialogue on a frequent, and in some cases 'real-time' basis. On both platforms, all actors displayed an average of online activity close to the overall average compared of their contemporaries. On Twitter for example, the *U.K.* and the *EEAS* showed an average posting of 1.62 and 1.41 per day respectively (both compared to the 1.83 average). Facebook also backed this trend, with *Canada* and the *United* having a frequency of posting once every five days per day, 0.215 and 0.227 respectively (compared to the average of 0.201).
- Finally, the choice of online *platform* constitutes a unique projection mechanism that expands and enhances the state narrative. This is an interesting point to explore, as we can see how the various actors used both platforms in distinct and diverse manners to project their crisis narratives in a variety of ways. Across all high performing actors, Facebook was used as a forum to provide greater details to their audience regarding the crises at hand by answering Q&A's responding to their online audience's direct questions. Also, by constructing longer posts on the Facebook, which were crisis related and targeted to a wide

variety of official and nonofficial actors.<sup>85</sup> Twitter on the other hand, proved to be the platform used for shorter sound bites of information (due to its 140-character limit), including updated consular information, direct condemnation of events, or retweeting national networks posts to further enhance the MFAs message. This distinction was evident in both platforms, and as a projection mechanism will be revisited in Chapter 7 while discussing a detailed framework for effective crisis communication strategies.

Effectively engaging with these mechanisms to craft crisis narratives mattered for two reasons. First, it not only created an OCN for these actors, but through its creation, increased the influence and impact of the state well beyond the existence of a single narrative. By building a crisis narrative that was comprehensible and appealing to other powers or transnational audiences, MFAs were better able to meet their foreign policy aims (through informing, persuasion, or direct dialogue) where the use of material resources and capabilities failed to do so. Second, high performers used the projection mechanisms (and indeed the formation mechanism as illustrated above), to the optimal degree (or as close to it as possible, and as compared to voices of their online contemporaries), and were rewarded with the possibility of shaping the crisis narrative in their favour.

### *5.4.3 Reception*

Far from being passive recipients, most audiences today hold nuanced understandings of the crisis narratives circulating within their media ecology. Audiences can even engage with the narrative dialogue online, as many are aware of, and take into account, the way in which these narratives are formed, projected and mediated. Consequently, audiences are no longer a blank slate for narratives to be projected onto, and skilful practitioners of OCN creation must take into account the political and media literacies of their audiences if they wish to create credible and convincing narratives online.

Reception occurs in social contexts where narratives may be discussed collectively and ritually, and processed individually, as cultural filters condition degrees of openness or

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<sup>85</sup> For expansion on the point detailing differences in platforms, in particularly the use of Q & A sessions and their effectiveness for policy and consular information dissemination, Section 5.2.1.

dogmatism in responses to new or challenging narratives (Gillespie, 2006). Reception depends on the availability of specific mediums like radio or services like Facebook, where each offers different possibilities for two-way communication (Miskimmon, et al., 2017). Reception takes place within a complex media ecology that shapes, distorts, disrupts but ultimately enables communication of strategic narratives. It allows alternative voices and marginalised actors to challenge dominant narratives, while also providing up opportunity for the powerful to project narratives in new ways (Hoskins and O’Loughlin, 2010).

However, identifying and explaining the reception of online narratives for this research, is perhaps the most difficult aspect of this emerging field of narrative analysis: how narratives are received, interpreted, and how they become meaningful to audiences, be they elites or publics.<sup>86</sup> This research views *reception* according to a number of core parameters: distance of the message, engagement with the message (how audiences recirculate, remediate and remix the narrative content), and engagement with the online diplomatic network specifically. While accurately gauging the reception of a narrative is near next to impossible, we can establish some basic parameters in which to scale it. On the Twitter platform, these measurements came in the form of numerical statistics towards the targeted audience that is the number of tweets retweeted and favourited alongside the number of times the user was mentioned in the conversation of others. Although Facebook was significantly harder to quantify in terms of engagement as direct result of less capable methodological capabilities existing to carry out this analysis (this analysis was conducted in 2015), we nevertheless saw this measurement gauged in terms of ‘likes’ and ‘shares’. That meant we explored how many times an online diplomatic account ‘Liked’ another accounts post, or how many times they ‘shared’ another account post on their individual page during the time period in question. As noted in the methodology discussion, these barometers for engagement were quantified and analysed via Twitonomy for Twitter, and Netvizz for Facebook.

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<sup>86</sup> Identifying the effect or impact of a narrative on audiences, whether they are elites or the public, require – at a minimum – analysis of their attitudes, opinions, and behavior *before* the narrative reached them, and then an analysis of the same parameters *after* the narrative reached them. To explain this effect therefore requires a richer knowledge of *how* those audiences consume news and political information, how they compare sources and attribute credibility, and whether they discuss the narratives received, with their friends, family or colleagues in a nonpolitical spaces. To explain how audiences truly receive and interpret these narratives, therefore requires a thorough understanding of the media ecology those audiences inhabit, the cultural context that causes them to be pulled toward certain narratives and not others, and finally, the political context in which leaders are pushing various narratives towards those audience to receive.

We will now turn to the parameters used to gauge reception of the narrative.

### ***Reception on Twitter***

#### *Overall 'Distance' of Message:*

- *Proportion of the user's tweets retweeted by others.* The higher this number, the more this user is considered a valuable source of information to others. We can also see here the average number of times retweets for this user's tweets have been retweeted by others. Again, the higher this number, the more this user is considered a valuable source of information to others.
- *Proportion of the user's tweets favourited by others.* The higher this number, the more this user is considered a valuable source of information to others. We are also shown the average number of favourites for this user's tweets favourited by others. The higher this number, the more valuable source of information this user is considered to others.

#### *Overall Engagement of User:*

- Percentage of retweets in the total of analysed retweets. The higher this number, the more the user interacts with others.
- Average number of links per tweet. The higher this number, the more likely the user is a source of information to others.
- Average number of mentions per tweet. The higher this number, the more the user interacts with others.
- Percentage of replies in the total of analysed tweets. The higher this number, the more the user interacts with others.

### *Overall Engagement with Online Diplomatic Network:*

- *Betweenness centrality* is a measure based on shortest paths between two nodes of information sending. It quantifies the number of times a node acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other nodes. This measure favours nodes that join communities (dense sub networks), rather than nodes that lie inside a community.
- *Out degree centrality* refers to the actors who have the possibility of exchanging and or dispersing information quickly to other actors online. Actors with high out-degree centrality are often characterised as influential.
- *Indegree centrality* refers to an actor who receives many ties within their own network, i.e. they are characterised as prominent actors within it.

### *Reception on Facebook*

- *Likes*: if a user comments or likes another user's post, a directed link is created through the Netvizz application. This link demonstrates engagement and that an actor's online post was received. Whether this was interpreted in the manner it was intended is again not the marker we can use to measure. However, we can assess whether it was received in the literal sense, and this is the framework we seek to use.
- *Shares/Networks of Interaction*: Through the Netvizz application, it is possible to reconstruct the networks of interaction among users and content. In regard to Facebook pages, Netvizz reconstructs a related 'like' network, which is a network composed of the total pages liked by a given page. In short, this illustrates which page is connected and shared by others, giving an opportunity to explore the possible reach of the message.

One must recognise that the messages sent by these agents have the potential to reach far beyond their directed followers to include millions of active sub communities within the direct audience of the account itself. This potential and opportunity is one of the core

characteristics and draws of social media platforms for those wishing to impact an online discussion. However, as we cannot say for certain within our cases how far the agent's message reached to the fullest degree, using the number of directed followers and analysing the 'first layer' of the agent's message reach is one way in gaining a sense of how their narratives were received by the online audience.

Table 5.8 Twitter Reception: United Kingdom

### United Kingdom @UKinIsrael













<b>Directed Audience</b>	40,392
<b>Overall 'Distance' of Message</b>	 53 tweets retweeted (46.90%), a total of 116 times (3.13 %)  39 tweets favorited (34.51%), a total of 65 times (1.67 %)
<b>Overall Engagement of User</b>	 24 user mentions (0.21%)  0 user replies (0.0%)  42 retweets (37%)  51 links (0.45%)
<b>Online Diplomatic Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indegree: 2.5</li> <li>• Outdegree: 8.475</li> <li>• Betweenness: 0.504</li> </ul>

Table 5.9 Twitter Reception: EEAS

### EEAS @EuInIsrael

Directed Audience	1,023
Overall 'Distance' of Message	 30 tweets retweeted (30.00%), a total of 174 times (5.80 %)  25 tweets favorited (25.00%), a total of 54 times (2.16 %)
Overall Engagement of User	 8 user mentions (0.08%)  4 user replies (4.00%)  48 retweets (48%)  20 links (0.20%)
Online Diplomatic Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indegree: 11.86</li> <li>• Out degree: 11.864</li> <li>• Betweenness: 49</li> </ul>

On the Facebook platform, we also use the numerical statistics for the directed audience, but this time we focus on the percentage of likes and shares the online account an online diplomatic account engaged in towards other accounts during the time period. That is how many times an online diplomatic account 'Liked' another accounts post, or how many times they 'shared' another account post on their individual page.

Table 5.10 Facebook Reception: United States

**United States @U.S.EmbassyTelAvivIsrael**

Directed Audience	40,492
Likes	48%
Shares	31%

Table 5.11 Facebook Reception: Canada

**Canada @CanadainIsrael**

Directed Audience	12,300
Likes	15%
Shares	15%

#### *5.4.4 Conclusion on Online Crisis Narratives: Formation, Projection, and Reception*

The data presented above concludes with two primary findings that support a number of core theses presented throughout this research: 1) that effective use of the overall online signalling process (distinct from individual signalling mechanisms), allowed diplomatic agents to create of an online crisis narrative that was consistent, direct, and responsive to their online audience; and 2) that by creating such a narrative, a state's communicative power was significantly enhanced compared to their contemporaries who did not effectively engage signalling mechanisms and processes afforded to them. By creating a consistent, 'sellable' and well projected narrative, the actor's ability to manage the crisis in an appropriate and responsive manner significantly increased.

After these findings, we can now answer a question posed as early as Chapter 3: what makes one MFA narrative heard and not another? Based on these findings, we can say that the answer is twofold. First, this research has shown that an MFA has the tools - of which DDS and OCN are core components - to work around the disorienting and disruptive effects of crises. That is, the crisis' ability to provoke an array of competing interpretations. Use of these tools will ensure, to various degrees, that their state's crisis narrative is heard, enhanced and recycled online.

The second conclusion is the recognition that forums matter. Without powerful bases from which to project them, powerful narratives have proven less effective than more 'arbitrary, rationalistic and willed' accounts that are pursued consistently through a de facto exercise of power. We saw this happen clearly during this crisis analyses, as larger states (such as those in the P-5 or who have a higher GDP) emerged as the dominant voices projecting their online crisis narratives. Individual narratives are of course shaped by particular theoretical and policy paradigms as well as power plays that limit serious consideration of radical alternatives. While we speak of social media as the great equaliser and the tool that allows all policies and narratives to be heard and interpreted on equal footing, this crisis analysis demonstrates that this is not what we are seeing. Rather, we are seeing that for a powerful narrative to emerge, it needs a powerful base from which to implement it.

We also discovered that high performers provided representations of the crisis events and identities through their online narratives, a communicative tool allowing the agents to give determined meaning to current events through which they achieved political objectives relating to the crisis at play. Examples included the justification of policy objectives or policy responses to the security crisis, active engagement with online diplomatic networks (in particular regional and international alliances), and the rallying of online public opinion through direct engagement and high reception rates as quantified by retweets and reshares. Each actor in this category seemed to also take the preliminary step towards elaborating information as power in a global information space, recognising that processes used to form and project power are intrinsically political resources in their own right. This ties back to the reoccurring concept of the political struggles over ‘whose story wins’ (Nye, in Gardels and Medavoy, 2009: viii), only this time the battle is being played online. As the battle for narratives is played out online, these actors effectively use online signalling mechanisms to establish their own narrative in amongst the competing online voices.

In terms of online crisis management, we have seen it most effective when a combination of online tasks is accomplished. These include, *inter alia*, swiftly detecting an emerging crisis online, MFAs briefing/informing their actors on how to quickly and appropriately react to the crisis through an array of online platforms, and extending authority of decision - making from HQ to Embassy level to ensure a quicker response time. Agents should now seek to have their message received by engaging more frequently with favourites, retweets, likes and shares mechanisms. This allows for their message to be further enhanced and recycled through an array of sub online communities. The high-performance actors in our data set had the capacity to achieve all the aforementioned objectives, thereby increasing their foreign policy reach and presence, while constructing an online crisis narrative. This capacity ultimately contributed to enlarging the power of their state, and increasing their ability to manage the crisis on behalf of the state.

None of these tasks are easy to perform. Information is not always forthcoming and communication may be difficult in times of crisis. However, the top performers demonstrated that it can be done to varying degree. In the ever more densely ‘mediated’ political context of crises management, the capacity to capture public attention is a fundamental political – administrative asset. In a way, this capacity is inherent to political leadership: people expect leaders (in this case the representative of the sending state on the

ground) to provide a believable and authoritative account that promises a way out of the crisis. They are expected to attribute conflicting interpretations of the critical events. To do this, they typically seek to direct or influence the behaviour of citizens that are affected or threatened by the crisis and the beliefs and attitudes of their many constituencies, receiving state officials, international environment, press corps and general public. Through effective use of signalling mechanisms, high performers achieved all the aforementioned objectives, making them distinct from their contemporaries.

Finally, most governments recognise crises for what they can offer: a podium from which to address a large and attentive audience. Most actors in our data set did not take this opportunity afforded to them, save the high performers. Through an effective use of both communicative capabilities, high performers communicated in a way that enhanced their stature and protected their political capital. By evidence of their communication activities, and through interviews with each performer, high performing actors recognised that citizens looked to their leaders to chart pathways out of the crisis. Embassies recognised that the public expected them to avert the threat of the conflict, or at least minimise the damage of the crisis at hand. They sought to explain what went wrong and what was going wrong, using narratives as vital resources to do so. Two interviewees explicitly noted that when MFAs and their agents effectively communicate during a crisis, the damage for institutions and the crisis at large, can be limited. When crisis management fails, the impact of the crisis only increases. As such, these actors actively engaged with consistent, frequent, and direct engagement online. As part of their diplomatic crisis communication strategies, high performers saw communication as a vital component for effectively managing and containing the crisis (or indeed any crisis).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict acted as a powerful lens with which to view the historic process of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation in the digital age. More than this, the conflict served to test and validate our thesis that a) the process of digital diplomatic signalling has significantly evolved in the digital age; b) effective use of the digital signalling mechanisms by online actors crafts and projects consistent and viable foreign

policy crisis narratives in line with MFA objectives; c) consistent and viable foreign policy crisis narratives (in line with the MFA objectives) assist states to virtually enlarge their power by dominating and sculpting the overall crisis communication discourse online; d) high performing actors online are those from states that carry greater political weight offline; and e) the offline political context remains one of the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and with what structure online diplomatic actors engage in the crisis communication dialogue. Grounded in a context that is recent, relevant, and impactful for the practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy, these proposed theses have been validated with data and analysis.

Through the construction of a set of unique typologies, this crisis demonstrated the effective degrees to which actors engaged with the novel online communication resources at their disposal. Although not surprising that a discrepancy existed among the communication procedures of diplomatic actors, 'Western' nations were shown to use the online mechanisms most effectively, in turn enabling their message to be projected, their narrative publicised, and received by the widest audience possible. However, if Western nations use these capabilities most effectively, their voices will be heard over others, and it is they who will continue to sculpt the crisis narrative in their favour, just as they have done for decades. As many of us continue to herald the great equalising power of social media for official and nonofficial actors, this point should not be overestimated or overlooked.

In concurrence with these conclusions, this chapter obtained a number of key overarching findings. First, during the Israel-Gaza conflict, the process of diplomatic signalling was shown to have been undeniably altered by the new role and practice of social media. Second, while this alternation was primarily shown through the changed diplomatic communication medium of real-time platforms (Twitter and Facebook), the conflict also illustrated that these platforms were now enabling digital diplomatic signals to be generated by a set of five online mechanisms unique to each tool. Subsequently, use of these mechanisms assisted in the creation of online narratives for diplomatic agents, through their ability to form, project and receive online messages. Third, while each mechanism was found to vary in terms of its individual online use and communicative strength, and as a by-product of this, the creation of online narratives differed substantially. The crisis clearly illustrated in most instances, that the process of DDS served as a tool that diplomats

could exert to extend their foreign policy reach and presence at home and abroad. This extension of foreign policy enhanced not only the state's crisis narrative online, but also contributed to a process of virtual state enlargement. In this instance, diplomats had the power to engage in a novel practice of diplomatic signalling that saw their signals and narratives having a reach and impact never before experienced by MFAs.

Finally, this chapter found that while these mechanisms played a central role in the practice of contemporary diplomatic communication, their use amongst online diplomatic actors was not uniform. This chapter demonstrated that use of the DDS process during the crisis emerged remarkably different amongst the online diplomatic actors analysed. This discovery allowed us to conclude that while the diplomatic signalling process is now generated online, there continues to emerge no standard approach to how this process is undertaken. Variation of use may seem to also depend on a number of external factors to the signalling process itself, including existence of a coherent digital strategy, online literacy of diplomatic agents and the political context of crisis itself, all worthy areas for further exploration on this topic. Such variance notwithstanding, this chapter did illustrate that DDS offers unexplored potential for analysing the use of unique, and emerging soft power capabilities during times of political crisis. More specifically, its use in relation to the creation of online narratives as an instrument needed for a process of virtual enlargement. We can conclude that when used correctly, the processes of DDS and ON are best understood as modern crisis communication tools that contribute to the creation of an effective crisis communication for diplomats on the ground and Foreign Ministries as a whole.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CASE STUDY TWO:

#### **Digital Diplomatic Signalling and Online Narrative Creation During the 2013/4 Euromaidan Crisis, Ukraine**

##### **Chapter Highlights and Overview**

- Provides justification for case study selection, and an insight into how each online diplomatic actor was selected for discussion and analysis.
  - Explores the generation of digital signals deployed by diplomatic actors during the 2013/4 Euromaidan crisis;
  - Analyses the formation, projection and reception of online crisis narratives by a select number of diplomatic actors;
  - Using both communicative capabilities as unique analytical filters, assesses the overall diplomatic crisis communication performance of online diplomatic actors during the crisis;
  - Evaluates how both communicative processes, served (or did not serve) as instruments for virtual enlargement during the time of conflict.
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### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter will utilise the same analytical tools and methods used in the previous chapter to empirically demonstrate the use of social media platforms by online diplomatic actors during the 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict, to include the outbreak of violence that occurred beginning 21 November 2013. Alongside the Israel - Gaza crisis covered in chapter 5, this particular conflict provides a powerful lens with which to view the changing processes of communicative capabilities in the digital age, and to test and validate our theses that a) the processes of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation have evolved significantly as a direct result of technological advancements; b) effective use of digital signalling mechanisms (standing in line with MFA objectives) assists online actors in crafting and projecting consistent<sup>87</sup> and ‘sellable’ crisis narratives; c) through dominating and sculpting

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<sup>87</sup> Within the two core data chapters, the concept of a ‘consistent’ narrative, or a ‘consistent’ message, refers to the actor’s frequency of engagement online. If for example, an account was labelled as ‘consistent’ in their narrative formation or projection, this means they frequently engaged not only with posts online, but with posts which addressed political or consular themes. It does not mean, that their message was always

the overall crisis discourse, online narratives serve as tools with which states virtually enlarge their power; and d) the offline political context remains one of the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and with what structure diplomatic actors engage with crisis communication dialogue. The proposed set of theses have been validated with empirical evidence and corresponding analysis, which is grounded in a context that is recent, relevant, and impactful for the practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy.

Set within the global information space, this chapter explores digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) and online crisis narrative (OCN) creation during the 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict. While both concepts act as filters in which to holistically analyse diplomatic crisis communication performance, the outcome of this performance is what we can henceforth label ‘virtual enlargement’ (or a lack thereof). As discussed during the conceptual framework, although proving difficult to quantify, at some level we must begin to view virtual enlargement as more than a subjective constant if the concept is to hold any value, or relevance, in the digital age. As such, by exploring the five digital signalling mechanisms and three stages of online narrative creation during the 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict crisis, one can examine the efficacy of this thesis.

As reflected by Chapter Five, this chapter is divided into four distinct, but interlocking sections. First, is a justification for the case studies choosing, and an exploration of how each online diplomatic actor was selected for analysis. Here, each facet of the crisis, from its background to the actors involved and its defence for analysis selection, is deemed a vital component of the methodological exploration and must be extrapolated upon and discussed with precision. Second, is an evaluation and analysis of the DDS process by the selected diplomatic actors. Third is a creation of a set of digital signalling typologies. Fourth is an analysis of the online narratives created by the high performing online diplomatic actors. Finally, the chapter ends with the possible limitations of our data and also future avenues for research topics in this field.

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consistent (as policies and positions regularly change during a crisis, as the crisis enters varying phases), but it does mean, they were actively involved in the online crisis discussion on a frequency basis.

As this chapter utilises the same analytical tools and methodology employed during the previous chapter, and to reduce unnecessary redundancy, please see Chapter Five, section 5.0 for a detailed explanation.

Regarding the findings and contributions of this chapter, we discovered a set of similar trends in how diplomatic crisis communication activities were carried out in comparison to the 2014 Israel - Gaza conflict (see section 5.0). These findings emboldened many of our proposed theses. However, we also discovered some important differences in how online diplomatic agents engaged with the crisis discussion online. Differences which supported the thesis included a) that social media is perhaps not the great equaliser it was once heralded to be, and b) that even if diplomats are today given the opportunity to expand their crisis narratives at a rate and extent never before seen, they do not always take it. In short, powerful states offline are continuing to remain powerful online, individually and comparatively to those actors in their network. The final difference between both crises covered in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 related to how, to what extent and with what structure diplomatic actors discussed the crisis online. The Israel - Gaza conflict showed a reduction in conflict discussion in many areas, displaying a high average of indirect messaging structure when the actors *did* publicly discuss the crisis online. On the other hand, the Euromaidan conflict covered in this chapter showed that online actors on average dedicated a higher proportion of their online discussion to the crisis, and doing so directly. This distinct difference between both crises, in terms of crisis discussion, structure of the message, and online engagement, demonstrates that the offline political context continues to hold an undeniable force over the actor's activities online. This claim is justified as those actors who engaged with *indirect* and infrequent crisis discussion during the Israel-Gaza war of 2014, **were the same actors** who engaged in *direct* and *frequent* crisis discussion during the Euromaidan event. Directly comparing the practices of the same actors in both crises situations allows us to rule out other factors contributing to the differences (e.g. insufficient training, the existence of a code of digital practice, or a general lack of institutional awareness regarding the importance of communicating and engaging online during a crisis). Ruling out these factors allows us to turn to the offline political context and the possible role it played in how diplomatic communication was carried out during both crises.

The key empirical findings of this chapter are similar to the 2014 Israel - Gaza crisis, but also come with some marked differences.

#### *Digital Diplomatic Signalling:*

- The process of diplomatic signalling was shown to have been substantially altered by the new role and practice of social media.
- Use of signalling mechanisms varied significantly in terms of individual actor use, thereby creating varying spectrums of effective crisis communication for online actors within the crisis.
- In comparison to the 2014 Israel Gaza crisis, actors were shown to engage with the online mechanisms more effectively, consistently and directly overall.
- Compared to the Israel - Gaza crisis, online actors were shown to be more willing to directly discuss the crisis online, in terms of the content of their online discussion, and how they packaged and projected their messages.

#### *Typologies:*

- Similar to the Israeli Gaza crisis, the top posts for all actors, in terms of audience engagement, were those which directly discussed and addressed the crisis at play. Similar to the Israel - Gaza crisis, the majority of actors demonstrated a varied use of signalling mechanisms via their online diplomatic accounts, and as such were typed as 'medium' performers.
- Without exception, the top performers on both platforms came from 'Western' states. Due to their global power and digital resources, these performers dominated the online crisis discourse. Through their increased reach of message, high performers carried the crisis narratives in their favour.
- The overall results of the typology spectrum illustrate that while signalling mechanisms played a central role in efforts toward digital diplomatic communication, their use amongst actors is not as uniform as one may think. Rather, these were utilised to

varying degrees and constrained by a variety of circumstances, namely the continued role and power of the offline political context to shape communication practices. As such, we conclude that social media is perhaps not the great equaliser that it was once thought to be.

*Online Crisis Narratives:*

*The findings for the online crisis narrative during the 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict were similar to the findings of the Israel - Gaza crisis, as noted below.*

- The Online narrative findings were also similar to that of the Israel - Gaza crisis, showing that while all actors created a crisis narrative, those who actively and effectively engaged with all of the online signalling mechanisms and viewed the use of mechanisms as a holistic process created narratives that were the most consistent and therefore the most 'sellable' in terms of achieving their policy objectives. They were also the narratives who were heard the 'loudest' amongst the chorus of online voices.
- The formation of the narrative depended highly on the existence of a detailed code of digital practice, which was constructed with the pre-crisis period.
- While all actors created an online crisis narrative, those who viewed the signalling mechanisms as part of a holistic process, crafted the most consistent and the most 'sellable' narratives in terms of achieving their MFA policy objectives.
- By projecting and expanding the reach of their foreign policy narrative, an MFA was shown to meet its foreign policy aims where the use of material resources and capabilities would fail to do so.
- Enhancing a state narrative served to contribute to a process of virtual state enlargement for the high performing actors, primarily through the increased projection and reception of their foreign policy position and objectives.

## Section I

### 6.1 Case Study Justification EuroMaidan 2013/4

To keep consistency within our case selection, the Euromaidan movement, and the crisis it precipitated in the Ukraine, beginning 21 November 2013, was chosen for reasons reflective of its comparative case study. *First*, the close time frame to the Israel-Gaza conflict provided temporal connectivity between the cases, allowing us to then assess how similar diplomatic actors acted in crisis situations online; some representing the same Ministry of Foreign Affairs analysed. This direct comparison allowed for an almost-direct assessment of how and why certain diplomatic actors used digital tools during times of crisis when pursued under varying political contexts. *Second*, and perhaps the most important for this research, was that, just as seen in the Israeli-Gaza conflict, the 2013-2014 period of violence in Ukraine was arguably one of the most publicly and openly discussed crisis periods within the 2013-2014 year, being prominently discussed on Facebook, Twitter and even newly formed applications such as Snapchat (Bohdanova 2014). This discussion was not restricted to non-state actors but was widely debated and deliberated by state actors online, demonstrating one of the first times we saw prolonged periods of crisis which brought about opportunities for states to not only project their foreign policy online but also create crisis narratives as result. Just as was seen in the previous case, the catalyst for such an open and public discussion was arguably the new role of social media within the field of crisis communication, and the extent to which it was used, not just by actors directly involved in the conflict, but also the international community at large as a method to highlight, discuss and analyse the conflict. Such a popularity of discussion and the abundance of data it subsequently created (indeed offline, as well as on), once more made it an interesting case for analysis and discussion.

Regarding the justification of dates, this research stands by the interpretation of the crisis that the Euromaidan was both an instance of mass mobilisation and a wave of activist protest events. The Euromaidan protests lasted three months (November 21, 2013–February 22, 2014) and went through distinct phases and at least four waves of repressions (Onuch 2015). The first phase lasted from November 21 to November 30. The second phase began after the November 30 beating of students and journalists by Berkut militia forces in Kyiv. The third phase began with the announcement of authoritarian anti-protest

laws on January 16 by the Rada (parliament), making it illegal to protest, and lasted until January 19. This phase saw the diffusion of protests—including direct-action campaigns, road blockades, and government building takeovers—to the east and south of the country, as well as the expansion of violent protest repertoires and the use of mass state violence, resulting in four deaths (Onuch and Sasse 2014). The fourth phase and final wave of mass repression began on February 18, when the regime attempted to violently clear the Maidan, and ended only with the fleeing of President Viktor Yanukovich to Russia.

Finally, at the unilateral level, each case deals with a political crisis situation. Both cases also originate within a similar time frame and are largely dealt with under the same diplomatic actors. There also exists trustworthy and detailed primary and secondary sources for both cases.

### *Euromaidan Conflict: Background and Context*

The second case we seek to study is the Euromaidan conflict, which took place within the borders of the sovereign state of Ukraine, beginning 21 November 2013.

Starting as a civil protest in the main square in Kyiv, approximately 200 politicians and civil society activists came together to protest against the government's decision to postpone the signature of the EU Association Agreement. President Yanukovich and the Ukrainian government justified this shift in the state's strategy from integration with the EU to integration with the Russia-led Customs Union by linking it to the strong economic pressure applied by the Russian Federation. However, the protesting Ukrainians did not accept this explanation and continued their small-scale demonstration. One week after Euromaidan began, the world watched -- online and off -- when, on 29 November, a violent crackdown by the *berkut* (riot police) on protesters caused the numbers to swell to a 500,000-strong protest in the capital. From there, after each brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters, Ukrainians replied with ever-larger Euromaidan protests. The movement then grew into a protest which, within a week, included millions of Ukrainians in 46 cities of Ukraine, who were not only voicing their favourable opinion of European integration but also demanding their basic democratic rights. By 25 January 2014, the protests had

continued, fuelled by the perception of widespread government corruption, abuse of power, and violation of human rights in Ukraine.<sup>88</sup>

The protests reached a climax on 18 February after the parliament did not accede to the people's demands that the Constitution of Ukraine be rolled back to its pre-2004 form, which would lessen presidential power within the country. The protests then turned increasingly violent, with numerous civilian casualties (Kyiv Post 20 February 2014; BBC 20 February 2014). In connection with the tragic events of February 18-20, President Yanukovich was forced to make concessions to the opposition to end the bloodshed in Kiev and limit the damage that the political crisis was causing across the nation.<sup>89</sup> These concessions included signing an agreement which provided for a return to the 2004 Constitution -- that is, to a parliamentary-presidential form of government -- the holding of early presidential elections before the end of 2014, and forming a 'government of national trust'. It also provided for the withdrawal of security forces from downtown Kiev and the cessation of violence and surrender of weapons by the opposition. Alongside President Yanukovich, the agreement was signed by Ukrainian Ministers Vitaly Klitschko, Arseny Yatsenyuk, and Oleg Tyagnibok. The signing was also witnessed by the Foreign Ministers of Germany and Poland, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Sikorski and Head of the Department for Continental Europe of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France Eric Fournier. Vladimir Lukin, representing Russia, refused to put his signature under the agreement.

In spite of the agreement, the movement vowed to go into armed conflict if Yanukovich did not resign by 10:00 am on 21 February. The riot police subsequently retreated and Yanukovich and many other high-ranking government officials fled the country. Protesters gained control of the presidential administration and Yanukovich's private estate.<sup>90</sup> The next day, the parliament removed Yanukovich from office and replaced the government with a pro-European one (Yurchak 2014).

The Euromaidan movement had two major consequences on the Ukrainian state. First, it consolidated Ukrainian society, which has fought for three months for European

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<sup>88</sup> According to Kyiv Post some 700 protesters were hospitalised between December and January (Kyiv Post, 30 January 2014).

<sup>89</sup> "Ukraine President Yanukovich sacks army chief amid crisis" (BBC.co.uk, 19 February 2014).

<sup>90</sup> Polityuk, Pavel. "Ukraine parliament ousts Yanukovich, Tymoshenko freed". Reuters - Ukraine Leader Was Defeated Even Before He Was Ousted, New York Times (3 January 2015)

integration, for the dismissal of the corrupt and violent government, and for the right to live in a democratic state (Van Rompuy 2014). In contrast to the Orange Revolution, which was held in the winter of 2004-5 as a protest against fraud in the presidential elections, the Euromaidan movement was a spontaneous apolitical one, marked by its strong ability to organise itself; the resolution of its participants not only to change politicians, but to establish a well-governed state; and by the commitment of the Euromaidan protesters to be active participants in such change. In further contrast to the Orange Revolution, which was a pre-planned event that eventually gained support of the citizens, the month-long Euromaidan movement developed into a subculture built on European values and marked by a high level of solidarity among Ukrainians living in different parts of the country. Second, it allowed Ukrainians to bring about desired political changes in governance, as well as to make changes to the political system by bringing back the 2004 Constitution. The latter allowed most of the powers that were previously in the hands of the president to be returned to the Parliament. Thus, Euromaidan, which developed into a strong movement against the usurpation of powers, became a driver for political change within the nation.

### ***Who are the Key Players?***

#### ***i. Role of Social Media***

Although 2013/4 was to see a vast and varied amount of political crisis emerge across the globe, the role of social media within the Euromaidan movement was the driving force behind choosing this case study for analysis. Indeed, popular accounts of the Euromaidan protests accentuate the role of social media and suggest that the protests themselves were actually started by a Facebook post (BBC Trending 2013; Gumenyuk 2013; Nadiya Kravets 2013; Nayem 2014). Although it is possible to trace several hundred simultaneous posts, text messages, and email chains on November 21, most observers credit one message posted later in the day by journalist Mustafa Nayem (Dagaev et al. 2014; Leshchenko 2014; Ronzhyn 2014). Some reports even go so far as to say that ‘social media fueled’ the Euromaidan, or make claims about how social media were centrally important to the mobilisation of protesters (Bajak 2014; Bohdanova 2014; Chornokondratenko and Orlova 2013; Heintz 2013; Kapliuk 2013; Lokot 2013; Talaga 2014). Moreover, most of these reports credit or imply that ‘tweets’ and ‘posts’ by journalists and activists were key

mechanisms of mobilisation, bringing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians out onto the streets.

Indeed, what makes this case especially interesting to study is that groups in both camps (Pro-Maidan and Anti-Maidan) used social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to catalyse various activities, such as organising protests, sharing real-time information about police and military movements, calling for donations and financial support, and sharing information with group members. Furthermore, it was not just members of these groups who had their eye on social media. Politicians and elected officials in Ukraine also used social media to share timely updates and political statements with the public. Law enforcement agencies monitored social media posts to anticipate where the next rally would occur. Ukrainian dissent and activist journalists used social media to shape the public's perception of Yanukovich's pro-Russian government and ensure accurate reporting of Pro-Maidan demonstrations in Kyiv (Szostek, 2014).

In the case of Euromaidan, Twitter was particularly instrumental in both helping protesters identify and connect with one another and in keeping wider audiences (including international observers) informed about developments on the ground (Barbera' and Metzger 2013). In order to achieve this, activists used hashtags such as #edpovaqlay (Ukrainian), #edpovaqlay (Russian), and #Euromaidan (English). Indeed, the term *Euromaidan* was initially used as a hashtag on Twitter. A Twitter account named Euromaidan was created on the first day of the protests. It soon became popular in the international media. The name is composed of two parts: 'Euro' is short for Europe and 'maidan' refers to Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), the main square of Kiev, where the protests are centred. The number of tweets with these hashtags in the first weeks of the protests gives a good idea of the scale of events. For instance, more than 8,000 tweets per hour were published on 22 November, the second day of the protests, and as many as 4,800 per hour on 30 November, the day of the first violent crackdown by the police (Texty 2013; Lokot 2013). However, according to media scholar Tetyana Lokot (2013), hashtags are only crucial during the first stage of organising, while activists consolidate their efforts online. In the case of Euromaidan, such consolidation was rather quick; within the first week, activists established 'official' protest Twitter accounts - @Euromaidan, @EuroMaydan, and @EuroMaydan\_eng - that rapidly accumulated tens of thousands of followers.

In turn, Euromaidan newly established Facebook page set a record in Ukraine by attracting more than 76,000 followers in just 8 days and by reaching more than 200,000 followers within the first 10 weeks of the protests (Savanevsky 2014). Euromaidan observers also noted a circular relationship between the social media, which helped fuel collective action, and the protests, which, in turn, increased user demand for social media. Thus, the New York University Social Media and Political Participation lab recorded a spike in the creation of new Twitter accounts by Ukrainian users at the onset of Euromaidan (Barbera' and Metzger 2013). Yet, the communication efforts of Euromaidan activists might not have been so successful if Twitter, YouTube, and other social media channels had not been amplified by traditional media outlets. In Ukraine, the key online news site *Ukrainska Pravda* provided updates and analysis on Euromaidan, while Radio Svoboda (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty); an online-based public television project, *Hromadske.TV*; and several other outlets offered ongoing live-streams of the protests (Savanevsky 2013).

Because of its live broadcasts and interaction with viewers via social networks, *Hromadske.TV* was especially instrumental in providing timely updates and performing prompt fact checking to divert misinformation. In addition, some local and national television channels offered more or less balanced coverage of critical Euromaidan developments (although many others experienced censorship or provided skewed reports). As for international coverage, activists used a variety of approaches to attract the attention of foreign media and to reach a foreign audience. These approaches included but were not limited to: crowdsourcing prompt translations of the latest news about Euromaidan circulating viral video appeals to international viewers and organising 'Twitter storms' to bring Ukraine-related hashtags to the top of worldwide Twitter trending topics (Minchenko 2014b; Lokot 2014). Representatives of the Ukrainian diaspora played an important role in helping to increase Euromaidan visibility and promote its message abroad (Bohdanova 2013b).

Furthermore, while Twitter, YouTube and Ustream were used to provide real-time information about the protests, Facebook became the main online platform for organising. Apart from the 'official' Euromaidan Facebook page and several of its regional counterparts, one of the most influential initiatives that used the social network was Euromaidan SOS (*dpovaqlay SOS*). Set up by human rights' defenders and volunteers,

Euromaidan SOS filled the continuous need for legal assistance and accumulated information about victims of government repression. As protests escalated and repression increased, the popularity of the page grew as well, garnering more than 21,000 likes within a week of its creation and climbing to nearly 90,000 by the end of 3 months (Bohdanova 2013a).

Finally, it should be noted that it the use of social media and other ICT tools for crowdsourcing physical and creative resources that could perhaps be argued was one of the most crucial components for sustaining Euromaidan over a long period of time. Thus, activists made use of crowdmapping technology to visualise Euromaidan needs and connect those willing to fill them with protesters on the ground.<sup>3</sup> After one Kyiv-based NGO successfully pioneered collecting donations through the Internet to ‘help keep Euromaidan warm and fed’, activists began actively using online fundraising (Yaroshchuk 2013). However, it is unclear whether all of the activists who used ICT tools to help Euromaidan had had previous organising experience, though their technological skills allowed them to become visible and influential participants of Euromaidan nonetheless. Such was the case of IT Tent (IT yaven), a physical tent originally set up to offer free Internet access and computer equipment to protesters, which later evolved into a space where technology specialists met and collaborated with professional activists on a number of ICT-enabled social projects (Ukrainska Pravda 2013).

Once the protests were in progress, the internet predictably continued to serve as a crucial resource for the anti-government demonstrators in a multitude of ways. The inability of Yanukovich and his circle to effectively stem or control online communications constitutes the second important weakness in their information defences. Social media helped to diffuse basic logistical information about the protests to potential participants. In one survey, 40 percent of respondents said they had learned when and where to go from Facebook messages, although TV was credited by 48 percent (Onuch 2014). When violence was perpetrated against the protesters, social media were utilised to identify the individuals responsible and hold them to account (e.g. Facebook 2013a). Opposition community-building and creativity flourished online (BBC Monitoring 2013c). Dozens of groups supporting the protests were established on Facebook, as well as the Russian social networking sites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki. Some were used to share protest slogans,

placards and stickers.<sup>91</sup> A group of film directors, cameramen and script writers shot dozens of short videos about the protests and uploaded them to YouTube, where they garnered many thousands of views (#Babylon'13 2014). Protest songs also went viral. One of the most popular musical compositions of Euromaidan was 'Vitya Ciao', a 'farewell song' for Viktor (Vitya) Yanukovich, with lyrics denouncing Ukraine's corrupt courts and brutal riot police (Golovetskiy 2013). The video clip was created with the help of a correspondent from Channel 5 TV, showing once again the overlap between journalism and activism.

Overall, the Euromaidan movement demonstrated in all its facets, the unique and emerging role which social media now played in the conduct of political crisis; in particular, the strategic ways in which activists used social media for protest mobilisation, internal and external communication and organising.

#### *ii. Diplomatic Actors Offline*

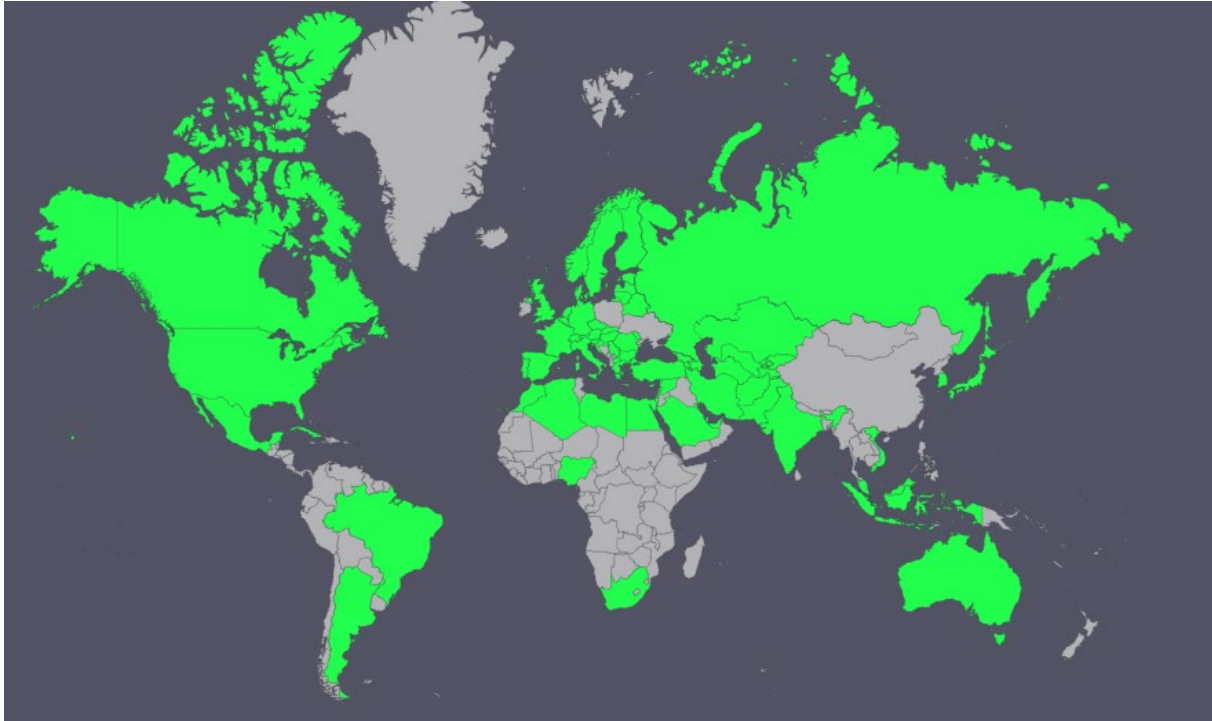
At the time of writing, there were 74 diplomatic missions accredited to the nation of Ukraine. This figure was made up of all Embassies posted on the ground in Kyiv and was not stretched to include those Embassies which were accredited to Ukraine but had their residence in Moscow, Russia. Accreditation to a nation whilst having an Embassy in another region is a common practice in diplomacy, and is used by states which may not have the practical resources to open an Embassy in each country but still wish to create and maintain diplomatic relations within it.

Of these 74 missions accredited to the nation of Ukraine, 25 (33.7%) came from the European Union, 12 (16.2%) from the Arab League, 3 ASEAN (4.05%), and 2 (2.70%) from Mercosur, alongside key international players, including the United States, Canada, Russia, India, Israel, Switzerland, and Norway.

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<sup>91</sup> For examples of these Facebook groups please see: [www.facebook.com/strikeposter](http://www.facebook.com/strikeposter) and [www.facebook.com/hrom.sektor.euromaidan](http://www.facebook.com/hrom.sektor.euromaidan). Last accessed: 7 May 2017.

Figure 6.1 MFAs accredited to the State of Ukraine



### iii. Online Diplomatic Actors

Of the 74 diplomatic missions accounted for, 19 (25.6%) were shown to have a presence online. Broken down further, we can see that 11 out of these 19 actors (57.8% of them) were accredited to the European Union (compare this to the Israel - Gaza case which showed 57.1% of the online diplomatic actors belonging to the Union), while the remaining 8 actors (42.1%) were comprised of key international players, including Azerbaijan, Canada, India, Israel, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russia & United States.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> The high presence of European and Western Missions both online and off can be explained for a number of reasons. First, due to its proximity to the regional bloc, European Foreign Ministries have been historically present within the region, be this through Embassies in Russia or in Ukraine itself. Second, just as was seen in the Israel - Gaza case, Europe is one of the leading regional blocs when it comes to their use of social media for diplomatic purposes, with nearly every nation having a presence online (Burson - Marsteller 2014, 2015, 2016). Europe's strong ties with the Ukraine and already-active digital policy online is something to note when assessing not only who exactly was tweeting or posting during the crisis, but also how this bilateral relationship may have affected both the type and style of message sent during the period.

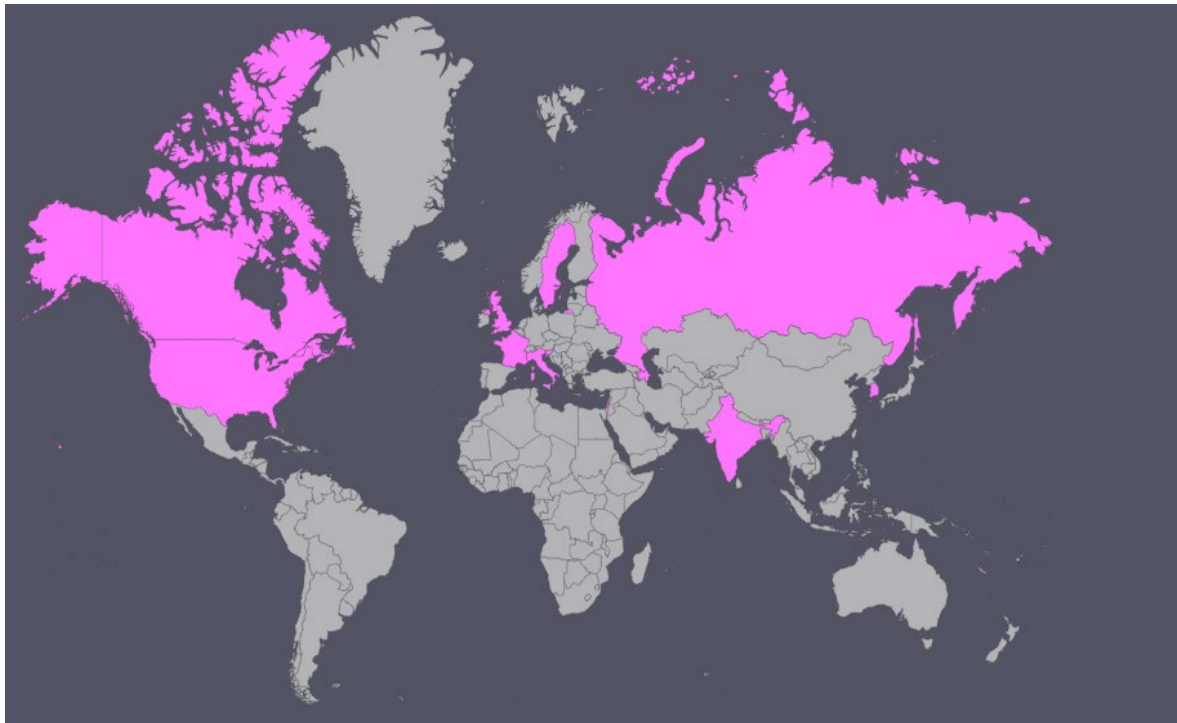
Regarding the actors' choice of online platforms, we saw that of the 19 mission's active online, 7 (36.8%) used a single social media platform – either Twitter or Facebook, with 1 using Twitter as a solo platform, and 6 using Facebook, and 12 actors using both platforms in unison.<sup>93</sup> Finally, although the number of online diplomatic actors continues to expand, for the purpose of this research, we are choosing only to focus on those which were open and active during the crisis itself.

Of these 12 actors who used the Twitter platform, 5 of them (41.6% of all Twitter accounts) came from Europe, with the other 7 hailing from Azerbaijan, Canada, India, Israel, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States. During the time period in question, however, this figure drops from 12 to 11, with France and the United Kingdom Embassy (to note the United Kingdom had both an Embassy and an Ambassadorial account) only creating their accounts in August 2014 and July 2014, respectively.

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<sup>93</sup> Unlike the Israel - Gaza case, some actors were shown to use platforms other than Twitter and Facebook, namely the YouTube application. Azerbaijan, Germany, India, and Russia all had YouTube accounts created and run by their Embassies in Ukraine. However, just as was seen within our previous case study analysis, all actors which operated these dual or triple platform, did not connect them, or highlight their duality in any way. Accounts on different platforms were presented as independent accounts and were not linked to each other.

Figure 6.2 MFAs accredited to the State of Ukraine, with an online representation on Twitter



1. Azerbaijan - @AzEmbUkraine (Embassy)
2. Canada - @CanEmbUkraine (Embassy)
3. France - @FranceenUkraine (Embassy)<sup>94</sup>
4. India - @IndianEmbassyUA (Embassy)
5. Israel; @IsraelinUkraine (Embassy)
6. Italy; @ambasciatore59 (Ambassador)
7. Korea; @kyivkorea (Embassy)
8. Russia; @RusembUkraine (Embassy)
9. Slovenia; @SLOinUKR (Embassy)
10. Sweden; @SwedeninUA (Embassy) & @vBeckerath (Ambassador)
11. United Kingdom; @SimonSmithFCO (Ambassador)
12. Twitter; @GeoffPyatt (Ambassador)<sup>95</sup>

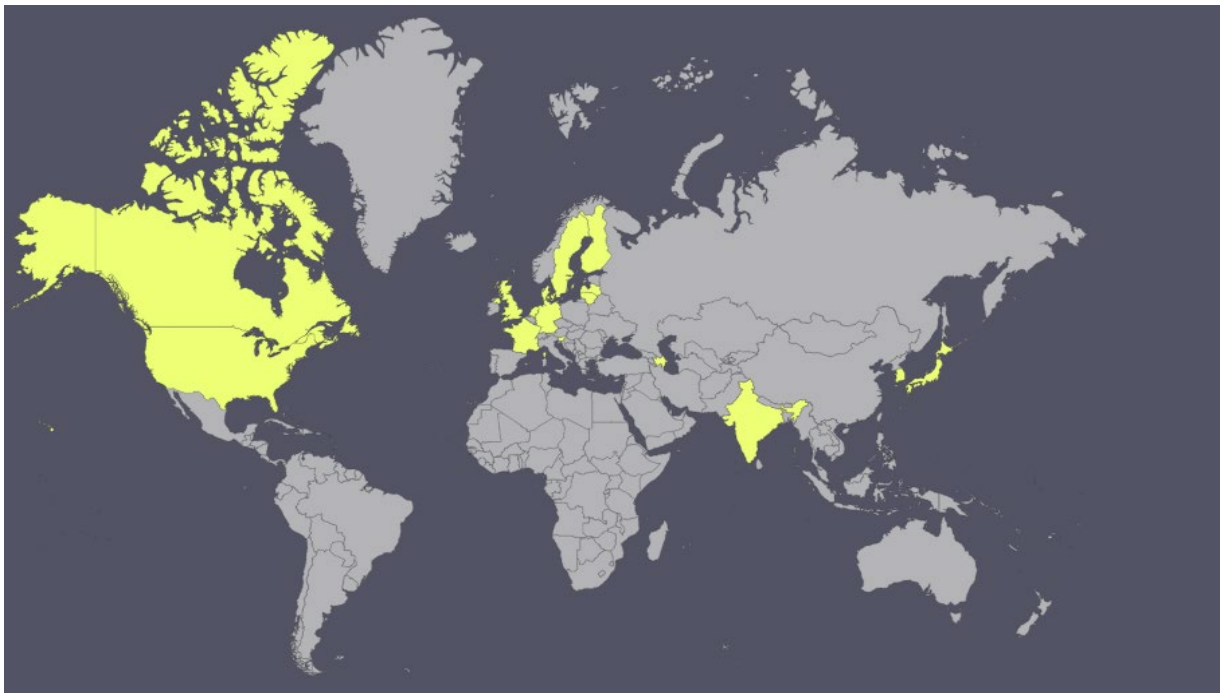
<sup>94</sup> Although the French Embassy account is an active Twitter user, it will not be used for our research analysis, as the online account was only created January 2014.

<sup>95</sup> The U.S. Ambassador account will not be used for our research analysis. Its exclusion is a direct result of the Twitter API limit of 3,200 tweets at maximum. During the crisis, the U.S. Ambassador tweeted on average 20 times a day, which produced 11,300 tweets by the time this research was undertaken. This research was

## Facebook Actors

Of these 17 actors who used the Facebook platform, 10 of them (52.6% of all Facebook accounts) of them came from Europe, with the others coming from Azerbaijan, Canada, India, Israel, Republic of Korea, Japan & the United States. During the time period in question, this figure drops from 17 to 14, with Japan, Latvia and Lithuania only creating their accounts on 6 April, 7 October, and 10 December 2014, respectively. Also, for this study, we will be directing our analysis to 14 accounts, with the United Kingdom being only the actor analysed to have both a combined Embassy and Consular Account.

*Figure 6.3 MFAs accredited to Ukraine, with an online representation on Facebook*



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unable to locate or analyse these tweets generated during the crisis period and was forced to exclude it from this data set.



1. Azerbaijan; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-the-Republic-of-Azerbaijan-in-Ukraine/202811499896829>
2. Canada; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-Canada-in-Ukraine/270529536435244>
3. Denmark; [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-Denmark-in-Ukraine/209464705732896?ref=tn\\_tnmn](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-Denmark-in-Ukraine/209464705732896?ref=tn_tnmn)
4. Finland; <https://www.facebook.com/FinnishEmbassyKyiv>
5. France; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ambassade-de-France-en-Ukraine/406717236106333>
6. Germany; <https://www.facebook.com/deutschebotschaftkiew>
7. India; <https://www.facebook.com/IndiaInUkraine>
8. Israel; <https://www.facebook.com/IsraelinUkraine>
9. Korea; <https://www.facebook.com/mofatukr>
10. Latvia; <https://www.facebook.com/EmbassyOfLatviaInUkraine><sup>96</sup>
11. Lithuania; <https://www.facebook.com/LTEmbassyUA?fref=ts><sup>97</sup>
12. Netherlands; <https://www.facebook.com/DutchEmbassyUkraine?fref=ts>
13. Slovenia; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Embassy-of-the-Republic-of-Slovenia-in-Kyiv/618024744892290?fref=ts>
14. Sweden; <https://www.facebook.com/EmbassyofSwedeninKyiv?fref=ts>
15. United Kingdom; <https://www.facebook.com/ukinukraine>
16. United States; <https://www.facebook.com/usdos.ukraine>

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<sup>96</sup>Although the Latvian Embassy to Ukraine does have a Facebook account, it was only created in February 2014 and will not be used as part of our data set.

<sup>97</sup>As per the Latvian case, Lithuania did not establish its online Facebook presence until January 2014 and will not be used as part of our data set.

## Section II

### 6.2 Creation of Digital Diplomatic Signals

This section investigates the use of online diplomatic signalling mechanisms during the 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict. More specifically, the mechanisms' potential for expanding foreign policy reach and presence during the crisis, increasing diplomatic engagement with official and nonofficial actors, and extending online and offline awareness of an MFA's crisis position and strategy. The investigation also serves as a tool to highlight the changing nature of diplomatic signalling during the digital age. That is, how the process has evolved during the last two decades, and what novel methods actors are currently using to generate diplomatic signals online

It should be noted that during this chapter's discussions on the five digital signalling mechanisms, and the three stages of online crisis narrative creation, **we will not seek to repeat or reiterate** any introductory information related to these mechanisms/stages as already discussed and presented during Chapter Five. As such, we will limit this chapter's discussion to the data generated by this data set, making our analysis and evaluations accordingly. Please turn to Chapter Five, and the comparative analysis conducted on the signalling mechanisms or narrative process if you wish to read this information for further context.

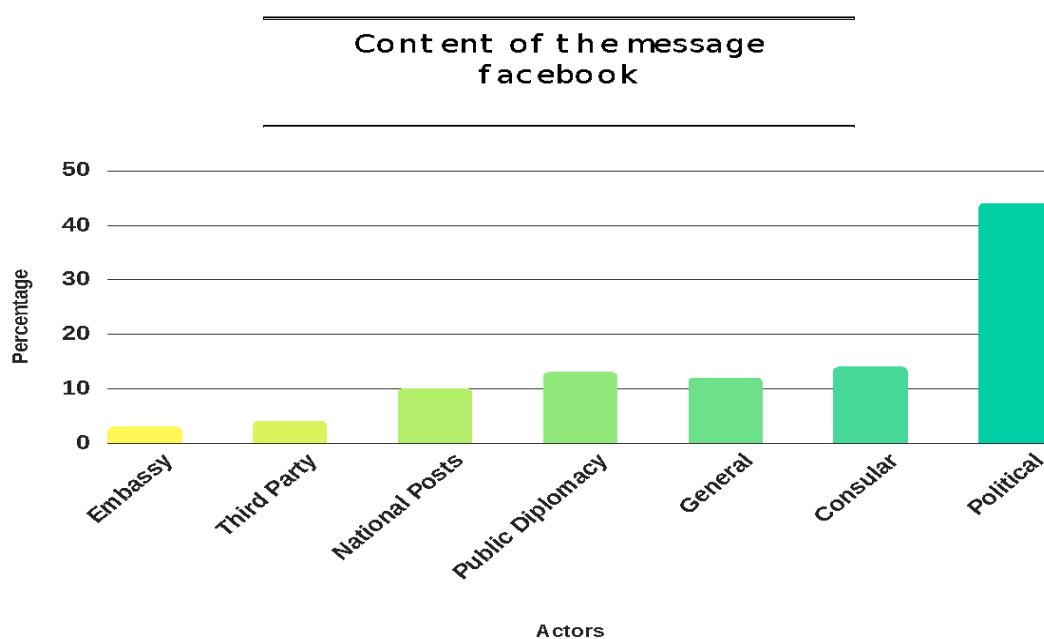
#### *6.2.1. Content and Structure of the Message*

##### *Content*

From 1 November – 21 March 2014, the collective number of posts sent through the Facebook platform, by all analysed diplomatic accounts, totalled 690. This was compared to the Israel - Gaza conflict which totalled only a third of this figure, with 280. The breakdown of the content posts was as follows:

1. Conflict (Political Commentary): 302 (43.7% of the overall conversation online)
2. Conflict (Consular Assistance); 98 (14.2% of the overall conversation online)
3. Embassy Event: 17 (2.4% of the overall conversation online)
4. Third - Party Event: 32 (4.6% of the overall conversation online)
5. Public Diplomacy Strategies: 84 (12.1% of the overall conversation online)
6. National Posts: 67 (9.7% of the overall conversation online)
7. General: 72 (12.6% of the overall conversation online)

Figure 6.4 Content of all Facebook posts sent by online diplomatic agents



Shining a spotlight on these categories, we see that the **political commentary** had the highest percentage of the overall conversation dedicated to it, with 43.9%. This means that nearly a half of all Facebook posts made by diplomatic actors during the time period were related to the crisis itself. More than this, the commentary was political in nature, with posts highlighting the state's position regarding the crisis, projecting their policy aims and

objectives and in some instances, and commenting on the actions of other official crisis actors. While not all of this commentary was direct in its nature, it is nonetheless important to note that, during the crisis period, the conflict was the category that had the highest proportion of online discourse dedicated to it by diplomatic actors. This was in stark comparison to the Israel - Gaza crisis, which showed the **national posts** category having the highest percentage of the overall conversation with only 29.2%.

Figure 6.5 British Embassy to Ukraine, Facebook Political Commentary



Everyone has the right to  
freedom of peaceful  
assembly and  
association.

Article 20



**British Embassy, Kyiv**  
Page Liked · January 17, 2014 · Edited · © ·

"Кожен має право на свободу мирних зібрань і свободу об'єднання з іншими особами".  
Загальна декларація прав людини (ст.20).

Конвенцію про захист прав людини і основоположних свобод, ратифіковану Верховною Радою України 20 років тому, можна прочитати тут: [http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995\\_004](http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_004)  
See Translation

Like Comment Share

43

52 shares

Write a comment...

Looking at the **political commentary** category in greater detail, we see that the *United States* was the top actor with 77% (it can be noted that the United States also came top in this category during the Israel-Gaza conflict with 57%). *Germany* followed with 67%, and the *United Kingdom* with 61%. Of the 14 actors analysed, only 1 did not comment at all on the crisis, in stark comparison to the Israel-Gaza case, which saw 6 out of 18 accounts staying silent. This increased commentary or simple acknowledgment of the crisis by such a high proportion of online accounts allows us to initially presume that (unlike the Israel-Gaza case) there seemed to be an environment of expression during the Euromaidan conflict, where accounts may not have feared online or institutional backlash as much as they did during the previous crisis. This theme of ‘culture of silence’ or lack thereof, allows us once again to assume that the offline political context continues to play a strong role in how communication is projected online. That is, just because MFA’s and their agents are awarded the opportunity to engage more directly, frequently and openly, other factors diminish their ability and or willingness to do so.

Figure 6.6 Content of the political commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Facebook

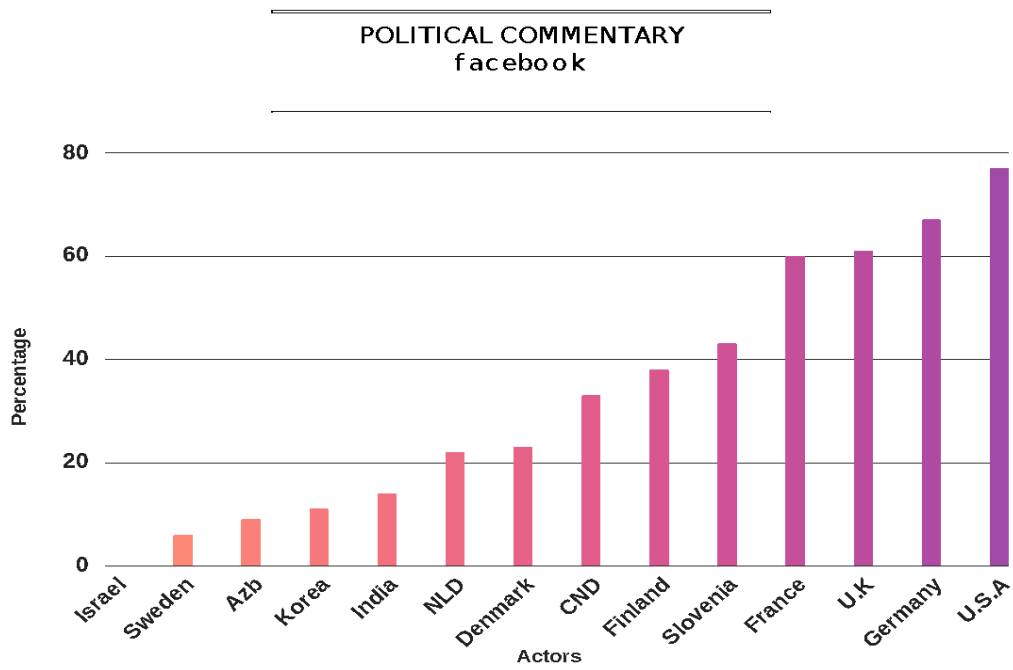
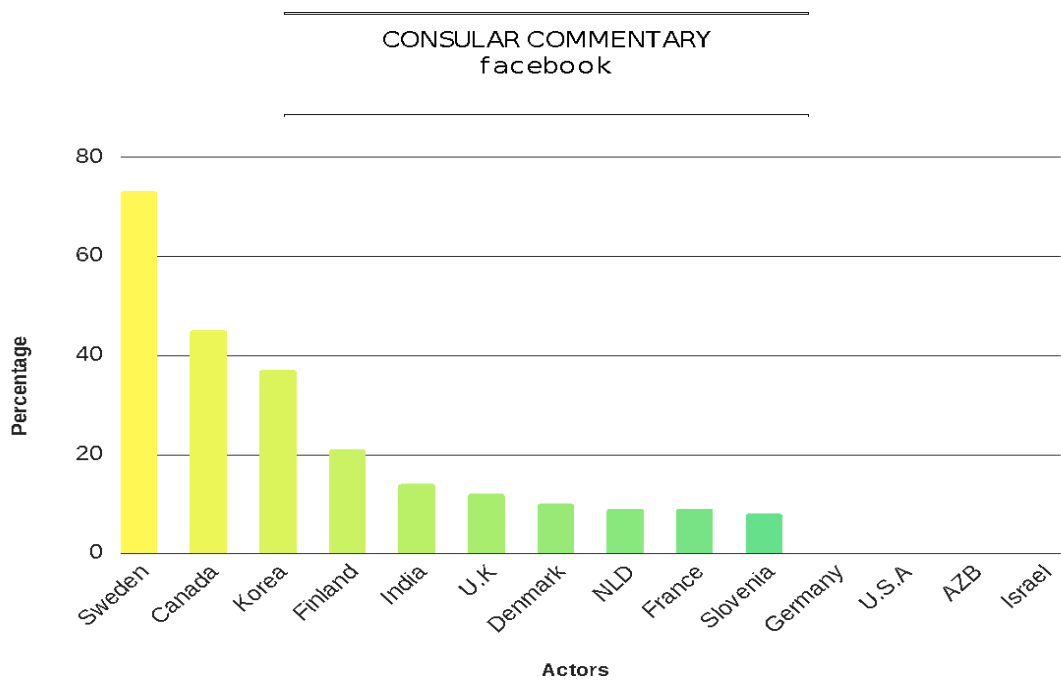


Figure 6.7 Content of the consular commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Facebook



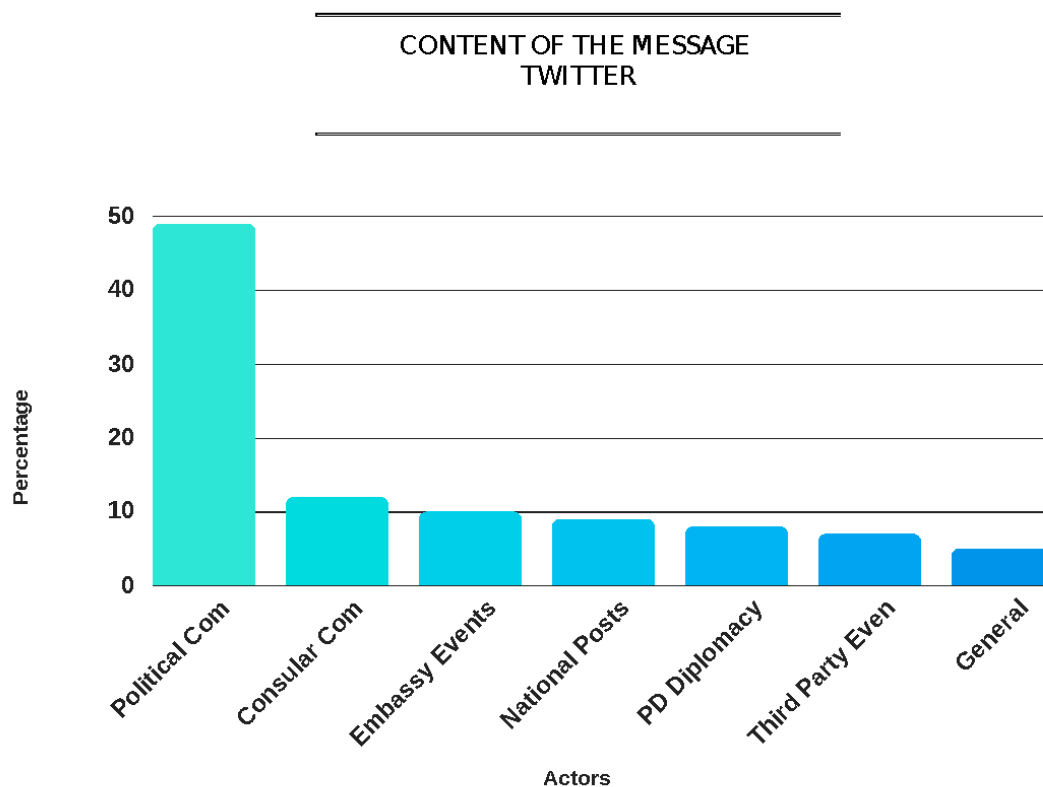
Turning to the **consular commentary** category, we see that on average an account dedicated 14.2% of their conversation to it during the crisis (similar to the Israel-Gaza case with 11.4%). *Sweden* led with 73%, while *Canada* came second with 45% (interestingly, these actors had the identical percentage for the same category in the previous crisis). Out of the 14 accounts analysed, 4 chose to post nothing about consular issues during the period in question. Such a low figure is surprising, as consular issues are deemed less controversial than commentary on the political nature of the crisis. For further expansion on this point see Chapter Five, section 5.1.1.

Turning to the **Twitter** platform and the *overall* conversation generated, we see that **political commentary** was once more the top category. There was a slight increase in the political commentary for all online accounts, with an average of 49.2% each. However, in the *consular assistance* category, what we saw was a slight decrease, with an average of 12%. As shown below, the other categories showed similar figures when compared to the Facebook platform:

#### *Coding the Conversation*

1. Conflict (Political Commentary): 49.2%
2. Conflict (Consular Assistance): 12.2%
3. Embassy Event: 2.4%
4. Third - Party Event: 6%
5. Public Diplomacy Strategies: 12.1%
6. National Posts: 9.7%
7. General: 12.6%

Figure 6.8 Content of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter



Looking at the **political commentary** category in detail, we see the *Swedish Ambassador* as the leader with a score of 84% (substantially higher than the top ‘scorer’ on the Israel-Gaza crisis on Twitter with 58%). The *United Kingdom* and *Italy* came in second with 80% each, and *Russia* in third with 49.8%. What is very interesting to note, is that only one account (*Azerbaijan*) failed to comment on the crisis at all, which is in stark comparison to the Facebook platform where we saw six accounts failing to acknowledge it. *Sweden* was also the top actor with the **consular commentary** category, with 28% of their conversation dedicated, this time with their Embassy account. *Korea* came just behind with 19.5%, and *Russia* followed suit with 11.5%. Only one account engaged with zero consular content during the entire time period in question, (compared to the 3 out of 14 accounts in the Israel-Gaza conflict). From this data, it is clear that Twitter once again emerges as the preferred platform of choice for online diplomatic actors to engage with in terms of their policy and political commentary discussions, compared to its use as medium for projecting consular information.

Figure 6.9 Content of the political commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter

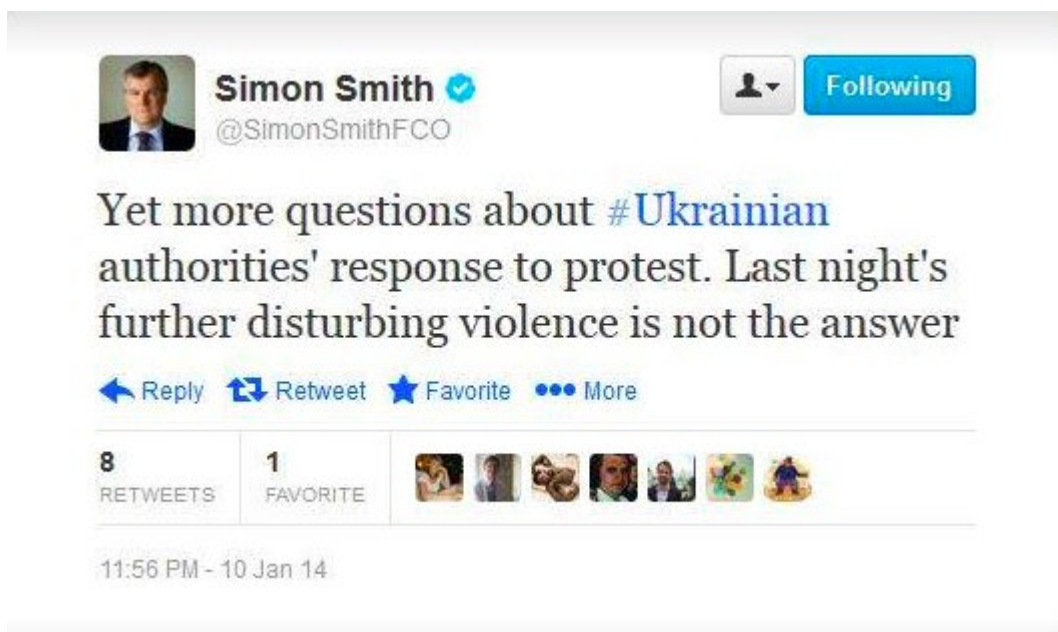
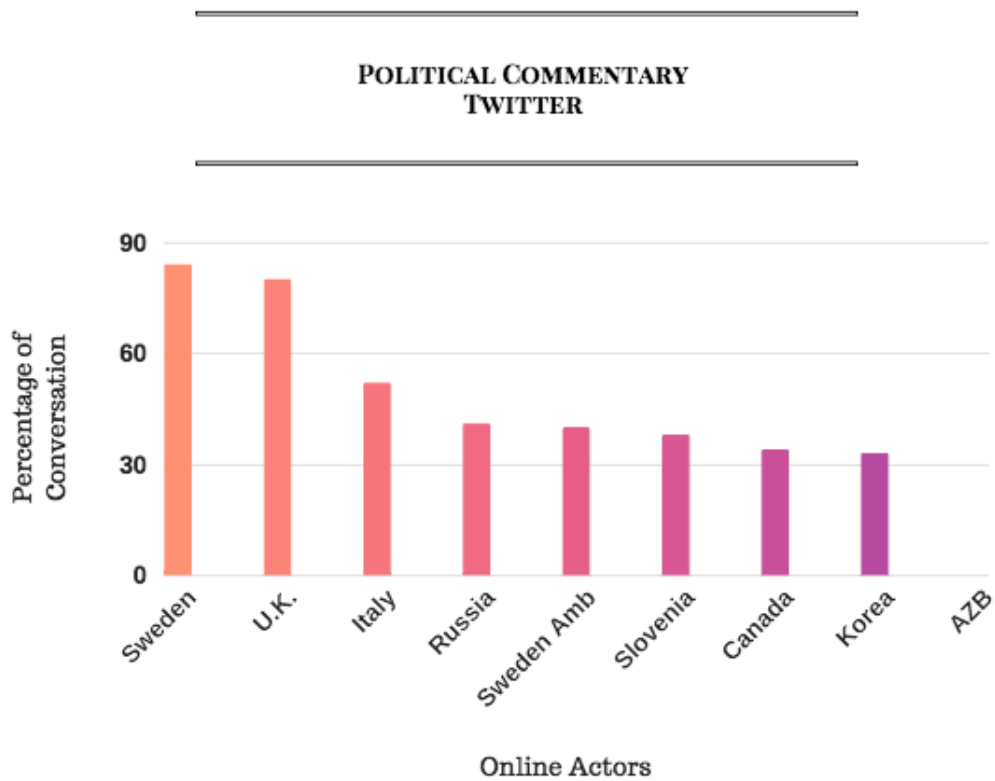
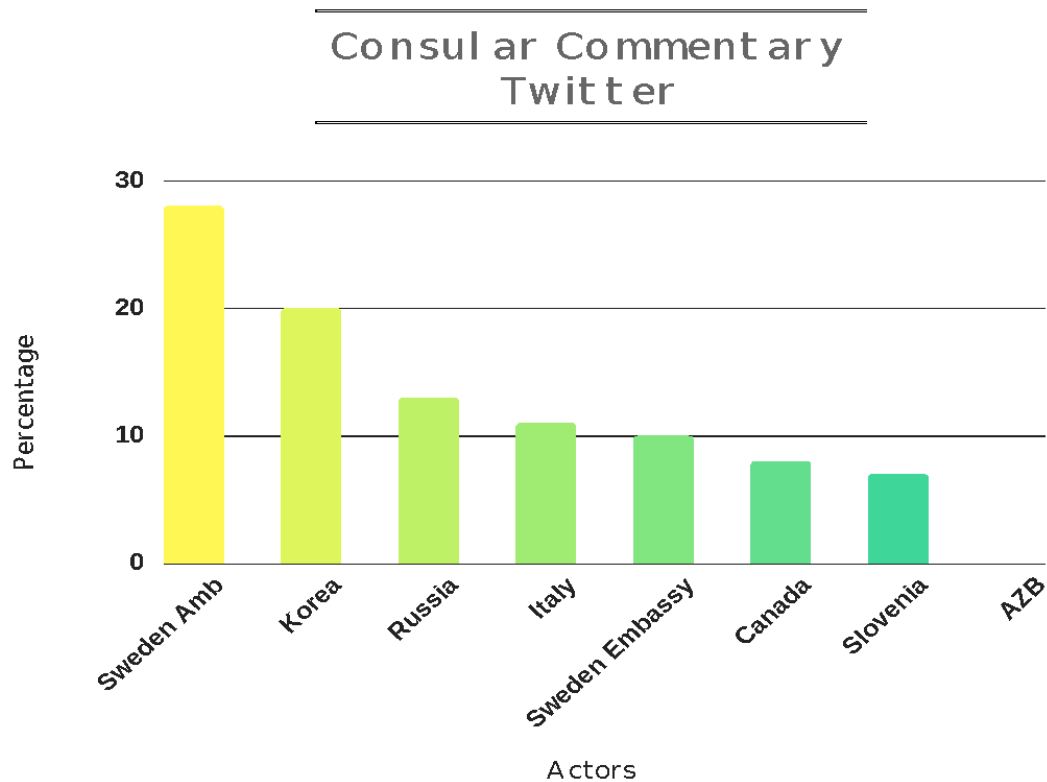


Figure 6.10 Content of the consular commentary sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter



### Discussion

So, what exactly do our findings for the content mechanism illustrate for the use of the online signalling process overall?

From the data presented, it is clear that (unlike the Israel-Gaza conflict) actors were highly engaged in discussions centred on the crisis, particularly in terms of political commentary. We saw similar averages on both platforms regarding the extent to which political commentary was projected, with Twitter and Facebook averaging 49% and 43% respectively. This was in stark comparison to the Israel – Gaza crisis that showed political commentary discussions on Twitter nearly double that of the Facebook platform, with 34%

and 16% respectively. Comparing the differences in content dedicated to political commentary between both crises, once again supports the thesis that the offline political context plays a heightened role in how and to what extent diplomatic actors engage online. This thesis was also supported by a number of elite interviews, with online diplomatic actors expressing that they felt more comfortable and ‘secure’ in discussing a crisis that was already discussed frequently in the global media circuit, or (in addition) was being commented on directly by top diplomatic and political officials on and offline.<sup>98</sup> Although the Israel – Gaza case involved heightened media discussion online for the duration of the crisis period, what it did not have was top diplomatic and political officials commenting on it directly, either on or offline. This lack of direct commentary by top officials offline was a key component regarding the online actor’s reluctance to also do so online.

The use of this mechanism during this crisis also defended the proposed hypothesis that those who used the content signalling mechanism to the greatest degree through increased political and consular commentary — that is, those who dominated the crisis discussion through heightened crisis related content — were all from ‘Western’ nations (or nations who were shown to possess greater power offline either through GDP, membership of the P5, etc.). On both platforms, the leaders of these categories were shown to be the same: *Sweden, U.K., U.S.A., Germany and France*. Increased conflict conversation allowed these actors to heighten their conflict discussion online, project their foreign policies, expand their reach, and increase their engagement with a wide variety of actors. As a result, these accounts had the ability to create a more consistent and stronger crisis discourse on behalf of their state.

Once again, commentary on consular issues showed a decrease in content on both platforms, in comparison to the political discussion projected, with an average of 14.2% on Facebook and 12.2% on Twitter. This was similar to what was seen in the previous case study, with 13.5% on Facebook and 9.7% on Twitter, including a number of actors choosing not to engage in consular issues at all. This was once again, a surprising discovery, as one of the fundamental responsibilities of a diplomatic agent on the ground is to protect their national citizens and to provide timely, accurate and appropriate consular

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<sup>98</sup> For elite interviews, see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.

advice when they need it. For further discussion on the possible reasons behind this limited consular discussion see Chapter Five, section 5.2.1.

### *Structure*

To look at how the content of the discourse was packaged, we turn to the structure of the message. Exploring first the Facebook platform, we see that of the 14 online accounts analysed, 7 had over 50% of their overall messages structured as *direct* postings. Sweden displayed the highest proportion of *direct* posts, with an 87%. India followed closely with 79%, and Korea with 68%. The lowest percentage of messages structured as indirect was Azerbaijan's 20%.

Turning to the messages directly related to the conflict, of the 14 Facebook accounts analysed, only 4 fell into the grouping having 50% of its postings (or more) as *direct* posts: Israel (100), Korea (85), Sweden (85), and Canada (62). However, we must not take the leaders of this category at face value, noting the relationship between frequency and message structure. For example, Israel displayed the highest proportion of direct tweets on the conflict with 100%, but their conflict commentary equated to only 24% of their overall conversation during this period, and thus this account may not be seen as truly representative of how a diplomatic actor engaged with the crisis discussion online.

Figure 6.11 Structure of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Facebook

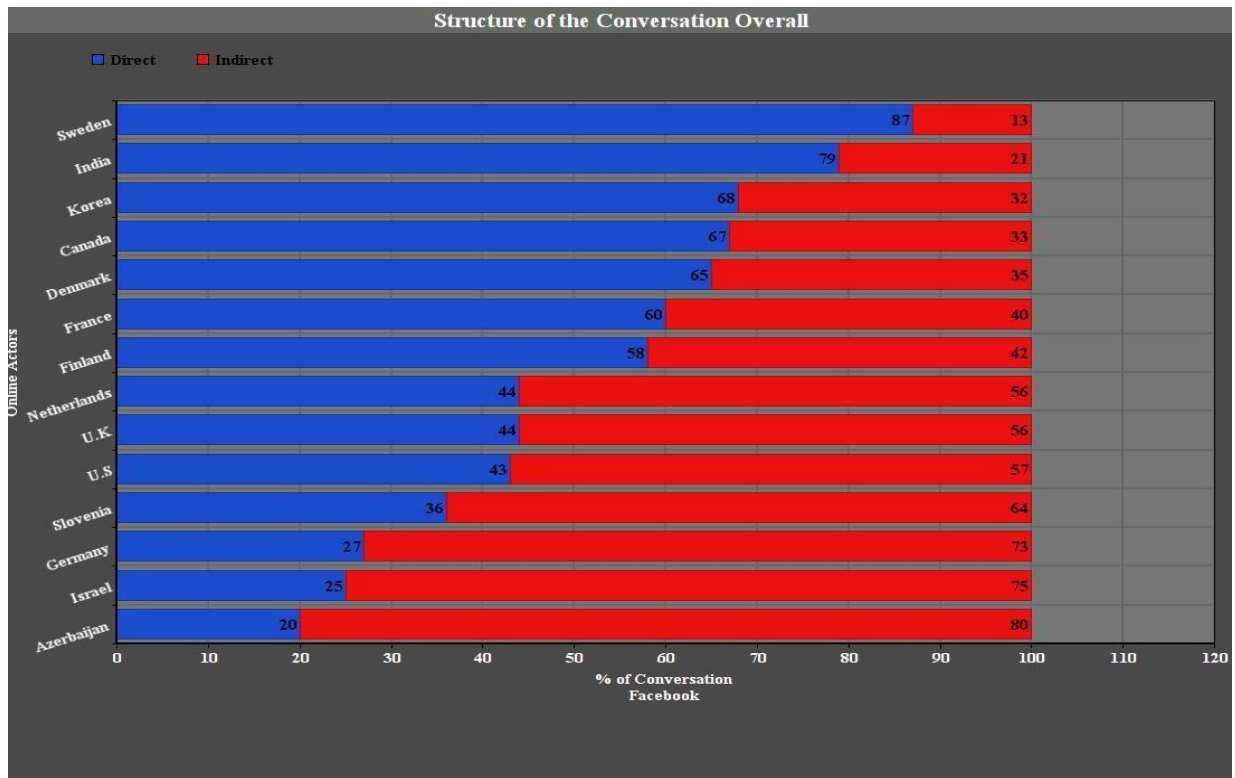
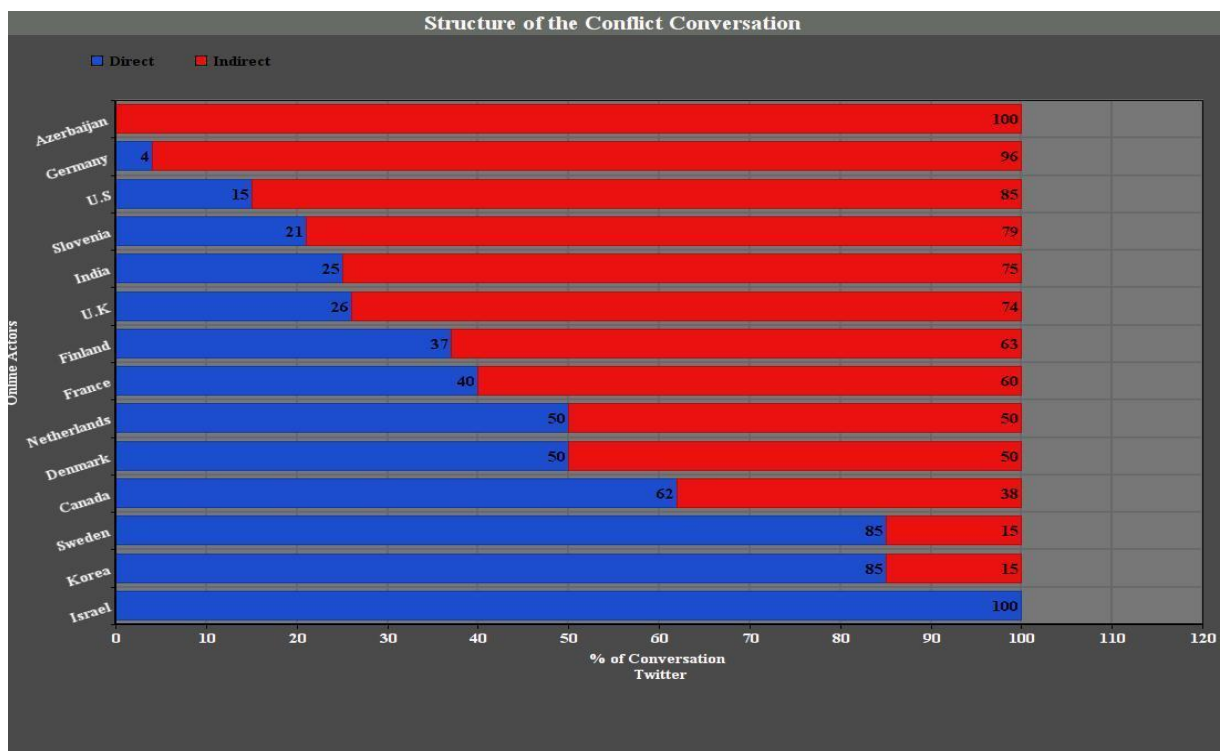


Figure 6.12 Structure of all messages relating to the conflict sent, by online diplomatic actors on Facebook



Of the 9 **Twitter** accounts analysed, 7 showed 50% or more of their overall conversation during the crisis structured as *direct* messages, with four accounts having an average over 90%; Russia (100%), Azerbaijan (99%), Korea (97%) and Slovenia (92%). Conversely, we saw 3 accounts fall into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as *indirect* posts, with Poland, Greece and the United States Ambassador turning out 76%, 71%, and 63%, respectively. When focusing on the messages that were solely conflict related, however, we saw this high average of direct messages quickly change. Only 2 online accounts fell into the grouping of having 50% (or more) of its postings as *direct* messages on the conflict: Austria 73% and EEAS 55%.

Of the 9 **Twitter** accounts analysed, 7 accounts showed 50% or more of their overall conversation during the crisis structured as *direct* messages, with a range as high as 90% with 4 accounts, Russia (100%), Azerbaijan (99%), Korea (97%) and Slovenia (92%). This is arguably a high average of direct structured messages and stands in stark contrast to the average structure of messages which were directly conflicted related. Conversely, we saw, 3 accounts fall into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as indirect posts; Sweden (Ambassador) and Canada with 34%, and 30% indirect messages respectively.

Turning to the messages that were *directly* related to the conflict, only 4 out of the 14 Facebook accounts analysed fell into the grouping of having 50% of its postings (or more) as *direct* posts; India (100), Thailand (93), Canada (56), and Denmark (50). While these were high percentages for any account to display when discussing the crisis directly, the lack of actors doing so showed there was a strong trend amongst some accounts to not comment on or disseminate any direct messages regarding the conflict. We saw this trend emerge on Facebook too, with many accounts choosing not to comment on, or disseminate any direct messages regarding the conflict. This again reiterates the claim the online diplomatic actors expressed in their interviews; that they felt more comfortable and 'secure' in expressing and projecting political commentary on a crisis, that was a) being frequently discussed in the global media circuit and b) was being commented on in a direct manner by top diplomatic and political officials offline.

Figure 6.13 Structure of the overall messages sent by online diplomatic actors on Twitter

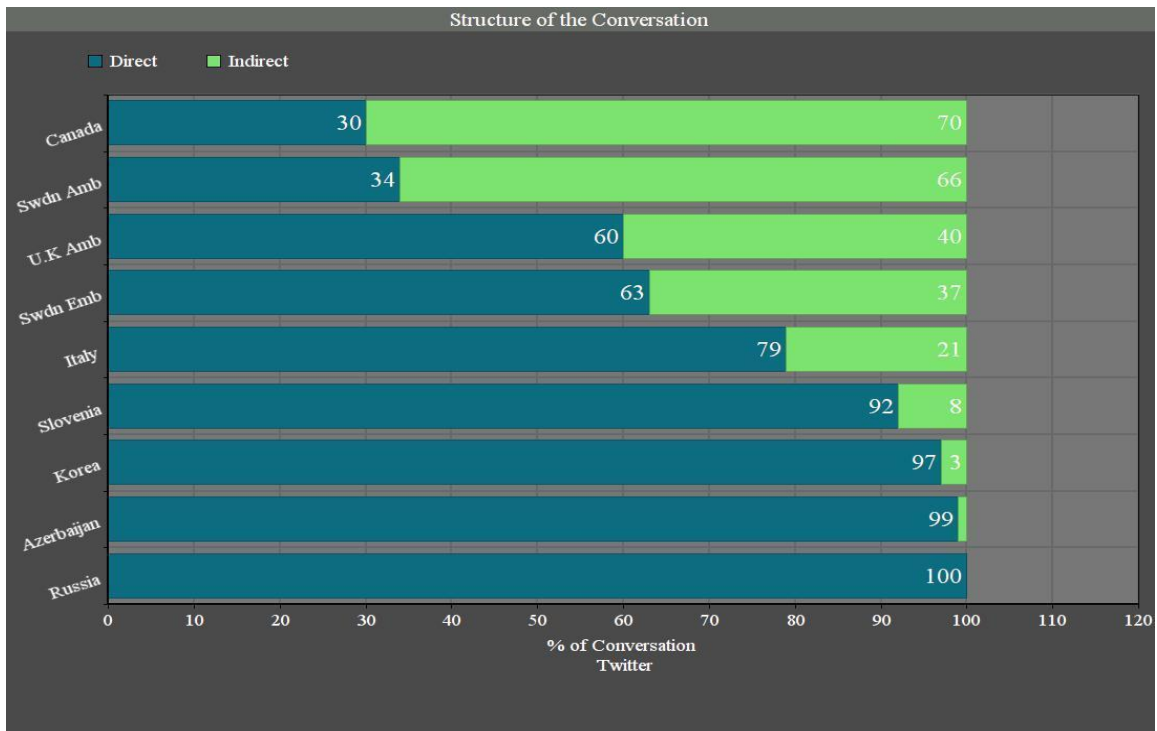
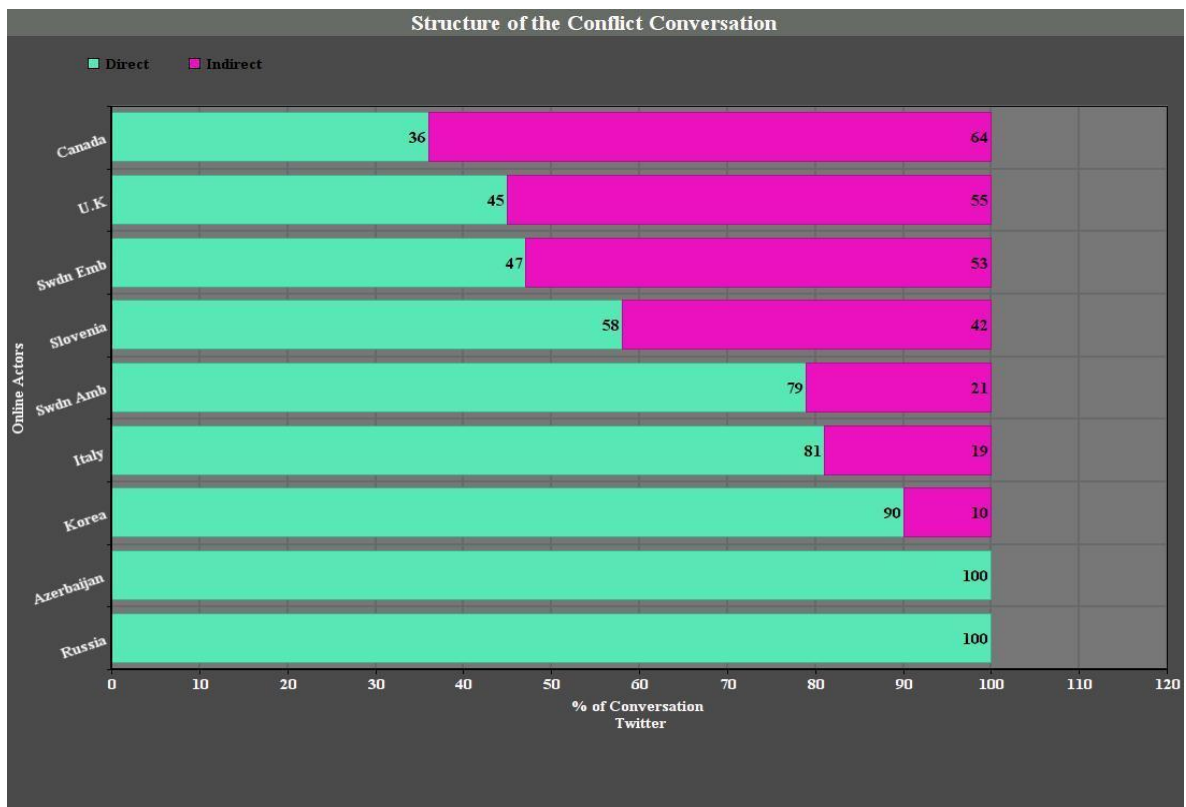


Figure 6.14 Structure of all messages relating to the conflict sent, by online diplomatic actors on Twitter



## *Discussion*

From the data presented, a clear trend emerged in how this mechanism was used on both platforms, and by nearly all agents. Looking at the online crises conversation specifically, nearly all actors displayed a distinct preference regarding how they wished to structure their messages when engaging with the crisis dialogue. As seen during the Israel – Gaza conflict, this preference came in the form of *indirect* postings. In this crisis, the majority of online accounts used forms of indirect messaging to speak about the crisis, with 10 actors on the Facebook platform for example, showing indirect engagement as 50% above. This proved in sharp contrast to how the actors engaged with non-crisis related discussion, showing itself as overwhelmingly *direct* in its structure. With that said, there still emerges a difference of significance between both crises, with the Euromaidan actors projecting their crisis message in a more *direct* manner, emboldening the thesis that the power of the offline political context, and the environment which it subsequently created, was a core factor in how and why these actors engaged with diplomatic crisis communication practices the way they did. For a more in-depth discussion on the reasoning behind why agents packaged and structured their message the way they did, see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.1.

However, in a number of these cases namely the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden, an *indirect* message could still be viewed as a signal of significance, particularly when the online actors married this technique with strategic use of other mechanisms such as high frequency rates, and high engagement with their audience, thereby constructing a consistent discourse on their account online. As noted in Chapter Five, many official diplomatic accounts used the phrase ‘retweet does not equal endorsement (RT ≠ endorsement)’ on their account as an expanded disclaimer to illustrate that their messages sent were indeed indirect, and also as a method in preventing possible claims of diplomatic interference. Even if an account made such a disclaimer, it is arguable to state that if 100% of the accounts messages retweeted sent the same message, and backed the same foreign policy position, it may be assumed that a RT did in fact equal endorsement. Crafting a consistent and coherent discourse on your account, even if it is done solely through the mechanism of indirect messages, generates a signal on the crisis for anyone who chooses to engage with it online. For a more in-depth discussion on this point see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.1.

### **6.2.2 Reach of the Message (Audience)**

The second mechanism turns its focus to who may receive the message online. At its core, this mechanism relates to the audience of the online diplomatic account, or the possible reach of the message, and how this impacts the online signalling process during a time of crisis. What the reach of the message consists of, and how it refers to this research specifically is explained in detail in Chapter 3, 4 and 5. The Euromaidan conflict highlighted how this mechanism was used to generate and strengthen diplomatic messages and signals sent online during this time of crisis, and how it compared to its use within the Israel – Gaza crisis.<sup>99</sup>

#### *Numerical*

Taking the first mechanism of numerical audience membership, we saw that on the **Twitter** platform, there was an average of 6,120 followers per online diplomatic account (substantially higher than the average Twitter followers in the Israel – Gaza crisis with 1,017). This ranged from 275 with the Slovenian Embassy, to 53,535 with the United States. Although little variation was seen between all accounts analysed, the United States did stand out for their substantially higher audience count. If we chose to exclude this outlier from our analysis, we would find an average of 1,378 followers — a figure which is arguably more reflective of the audience count, for the data set in question.

On the **Facebook** platform, we saw direct audience numbers increase substantially for nearly all diplomatic accounts, when compared to the Twitter platform. The range of followers spanned from 547 with the Korean Embassy, to 52,958 from the United States Ambassador. The average number of followers was 6,373 an average which was once again significantly altered due the United States Ambassador's outlier status. If we once more exclude the United States from this data set, we find 3,045<sup>100</sup> followers — remarkably

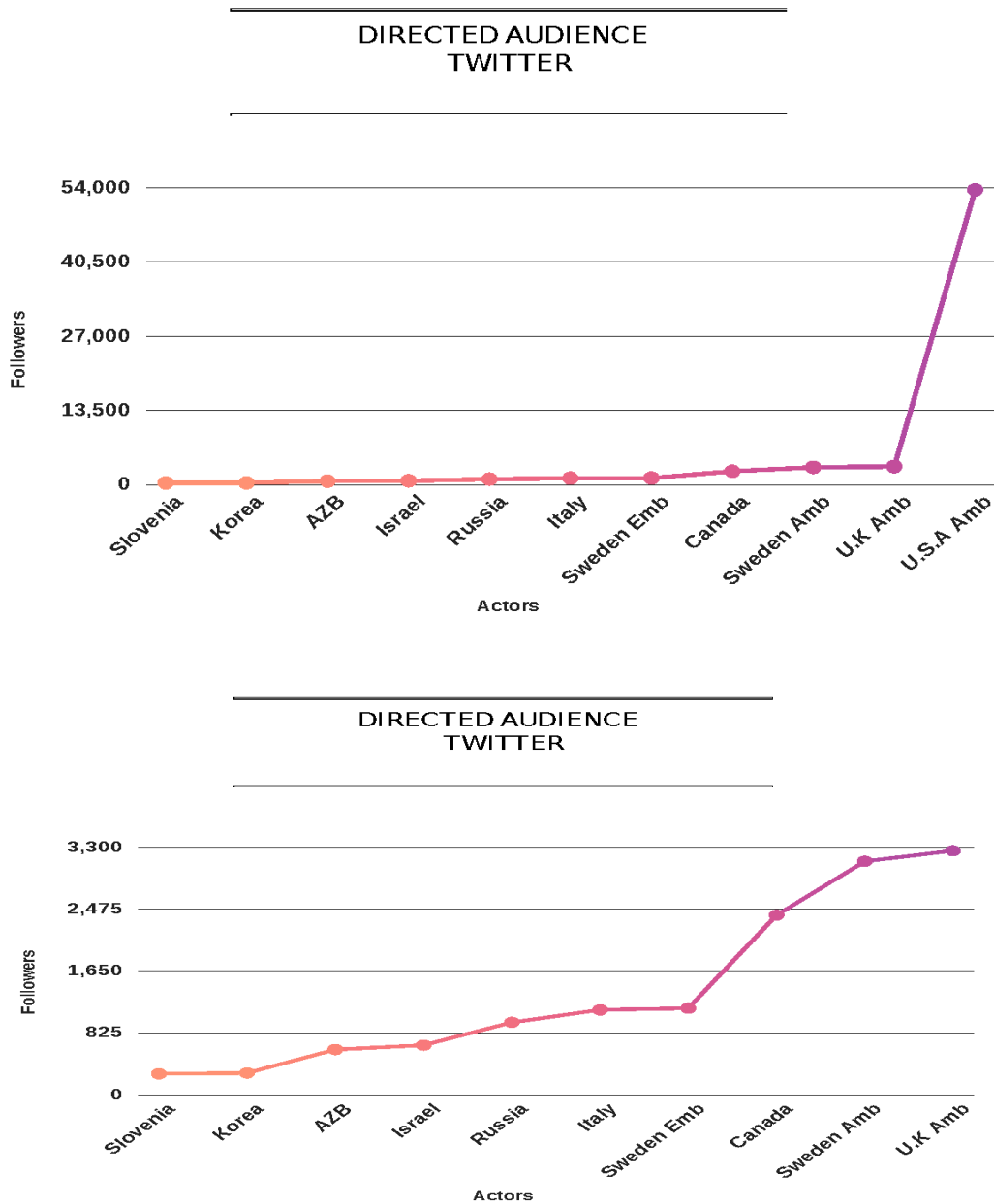
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<sup>99</sup> For further explanation on the role of the audience, see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2 and Chapter Five, section 5.2.2.

<sup>100</sup> Total number of Likes/Followers for all accounts is 39,586. The mean of these 3,045.

similar to the mean of the Israeli cases also without the U.S. outlier, (3,737 followers) — a figure that is perhaps more reflective of the average actor.<sup>101 102</sup>

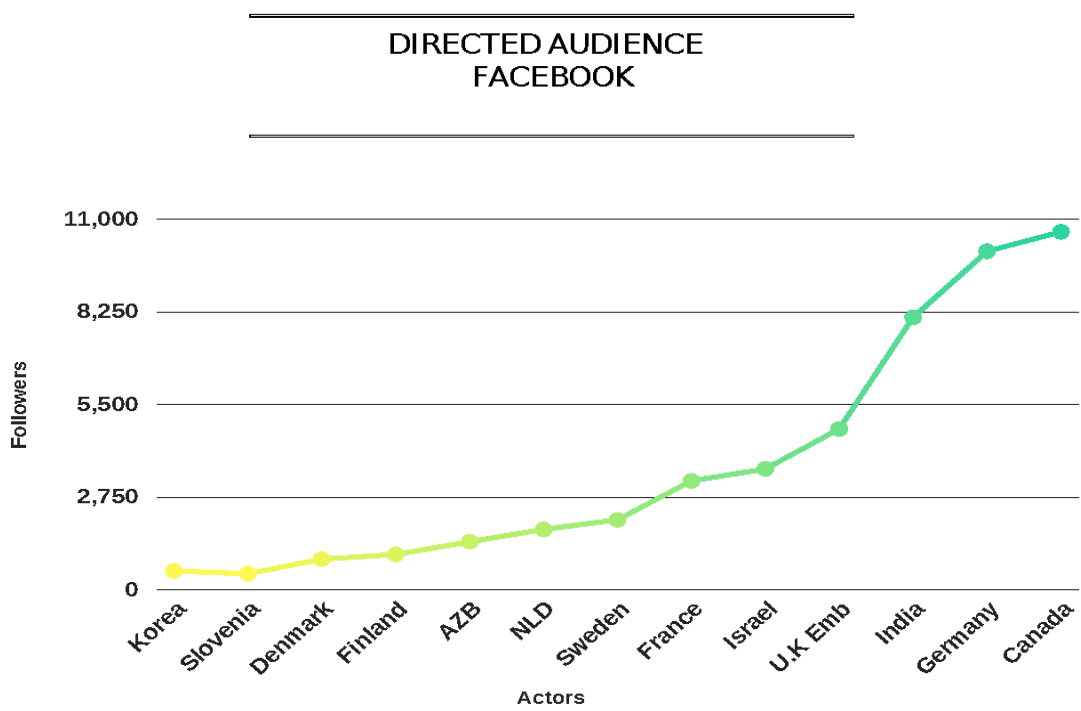
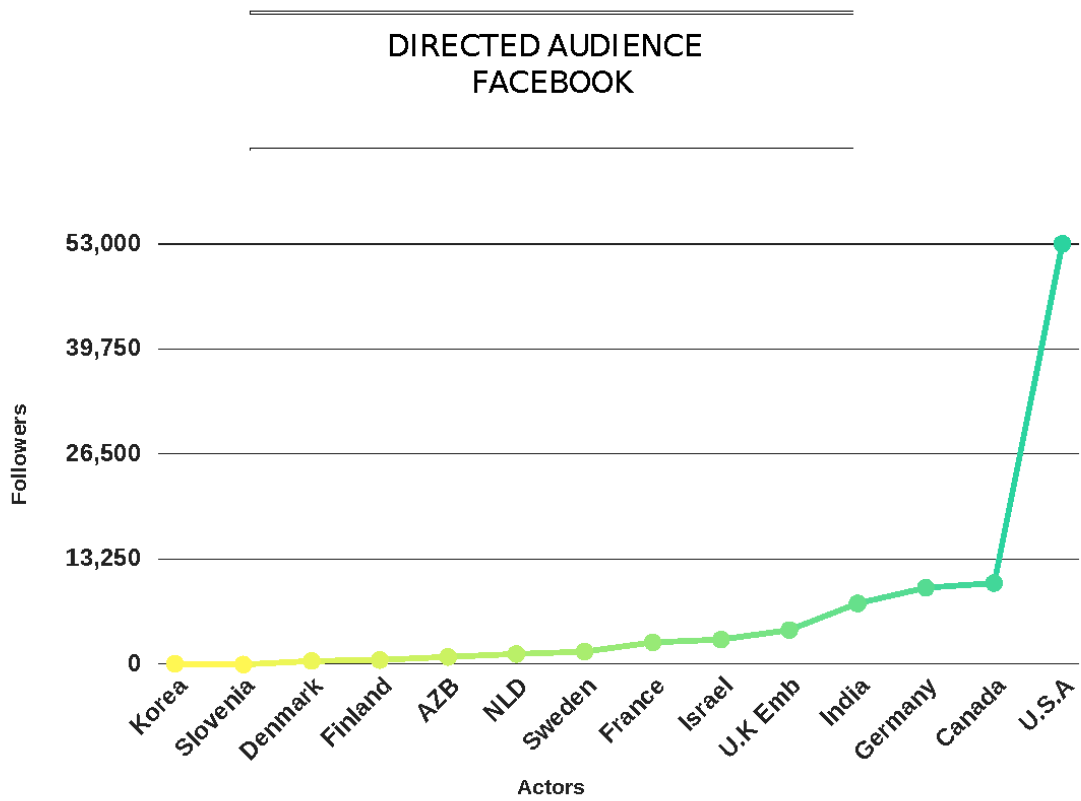
Figure 6.15 Followers of online diplomatic actors on Twitter



<sup>101</sup> Total number of Likes/Followers for all accounts is 80611. The mean of these 4,478.

<sup>102</sup> The variation of figures within the audience membership category can be explained by a number of core reasons: frequency of use, date of creation and the presence of an existing digital strategy. See Appendix for further explanation on this subject.

Figure 6.16 Followers of online diplomatic actors on Facebook



## *Engagement and Interaction*

Moving from a purely numerical analysis of this mechanism, we turn to another mechanism that helps illustrate how the role of the audience has been altered in the digital age through the practice of online audience engagement.<sup>103</sup>

Turning to the **Twitter** platform, we see that (somewhat surprisingly) there emerged low levels of engagement overall during the crisis, with online actors only engaging on average, 35.2% of the time. This was even lower than the Israel-Gaza crisis on the same platform, with 46%. That means for the duration of their time spent online, other actor's followers engaged with the diplomatic account through retweets and favourites 35.2% of the time. The United Kingdom Embassy account proved to be the most active within our data set once again, having on average 50.2% of their online posts either retweeted or favorited. India and Israel once again were shown as the actors who engaged least with their audience, in the case of both actors choosing not to engage at all. Comparatively, engagement on the **Facebook** platform, proved harder to quantify, but through an analysis conducted using the platform Netvizz, we can see that the average engagement online for a diplomatic account was 41%, with the United States coming out on top with 61%. As agents face a growing pressure to create online accounts that aid them in their foreign policy aims, and work towards creating a strong and effective diplomatic discourse on behalf of the MFA, this aspect of the audience mechanism has emerged as an important tool in which to do, and must not be overlooked.

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<sup>103</sup> As noted in Chapter Five's previous discussion on engagement, engagement in this instance, is seen as a unique practice to 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic communication, and in the case of this research, refers to how, and to what extent, the actual online Embassy or Ambassadorial account engaged (through retweets and favourites on Twitter, and reshares and likes on Facebook), with their online audience. Figures 6.17 & 6.18 for example, illustrates and visualises how each diplomatic actor engaged with the platforms online audience through the two mechanisms of 'retweets', and 'favourites'. For the Facebook platform, engagement was quantified by how many 'likes' or 'shares' an online diplomatic account engaged in towards other accounts during the time period. As noted in the methodology discussion, these barometers for engagement were quantified and analysed via Twitonomy for Twitter, and Netvizz for Facebook. Although confining engagement to these conditions is limited to some degree, they are conditions which are replicable and testable within our chosen methodological toolkit.

Figure 6.17 Overall engagement of online diplomatic actors on Twitter

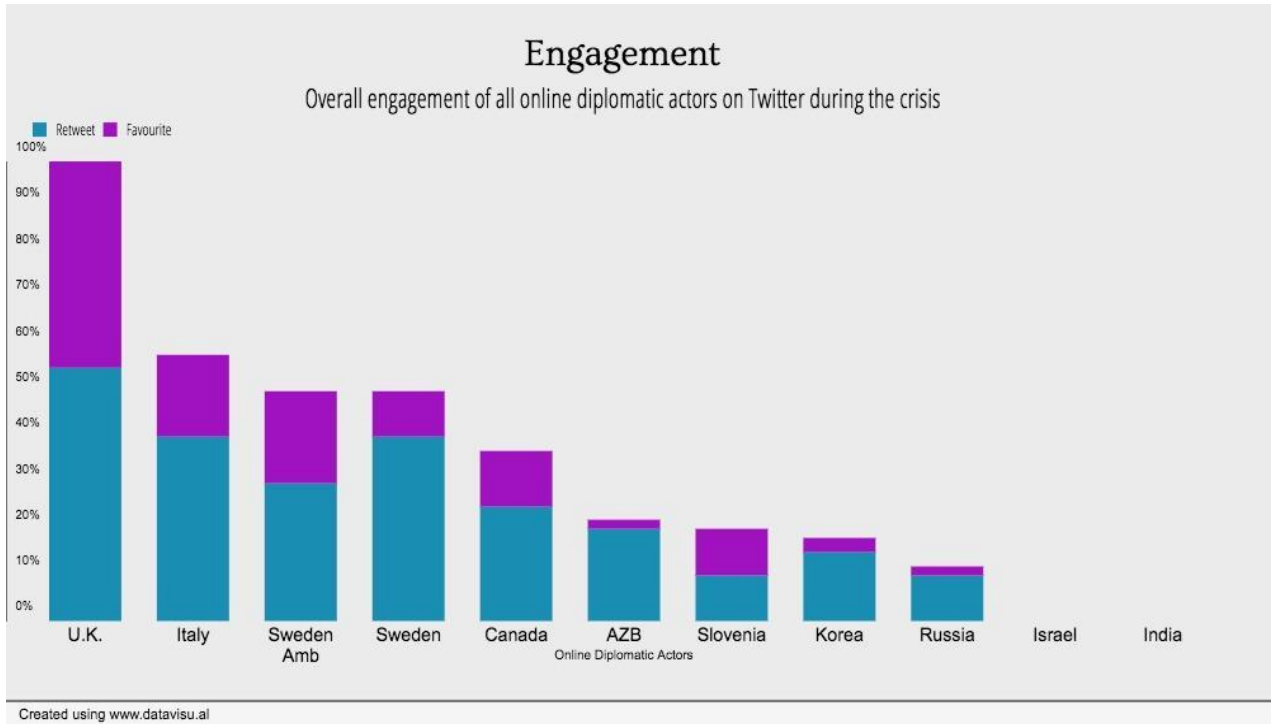
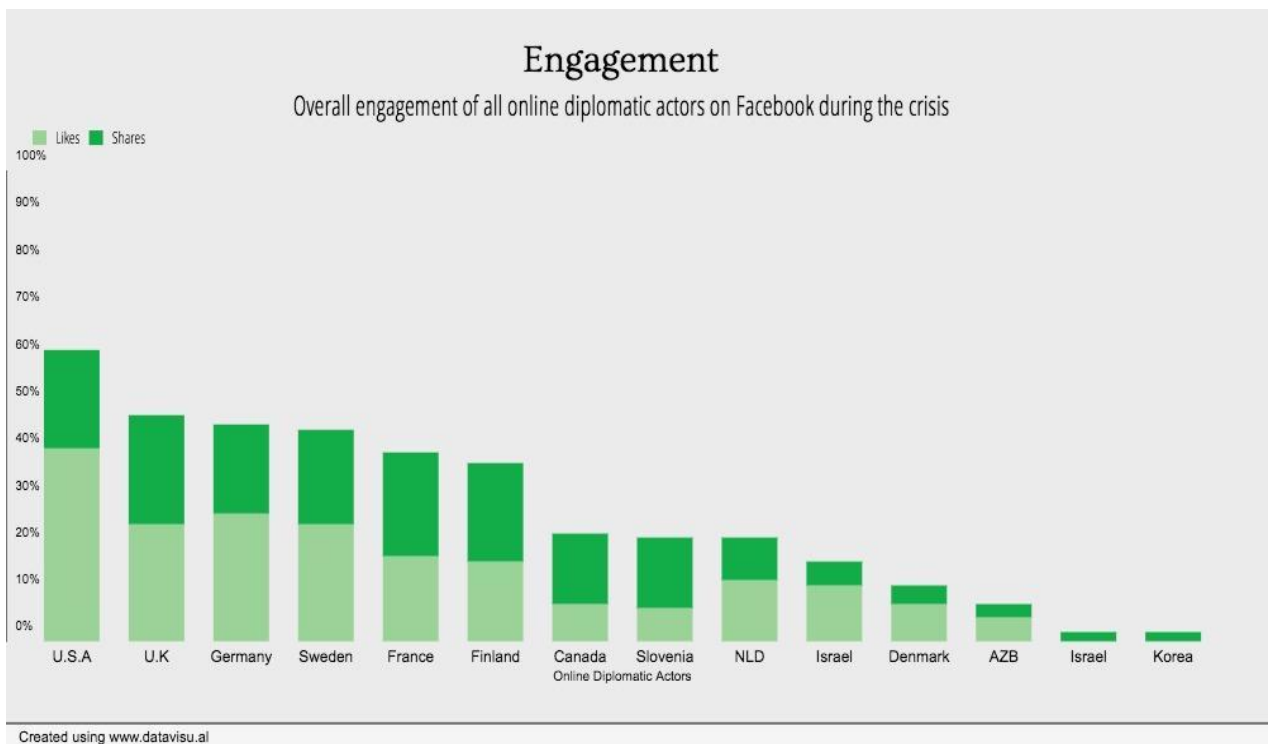


Figure 6.18 Overall engagement of online diplomatic actors on Facebook



## *Discussion*

‘Western’ states again emerged as leaders in the field. On Facebook, these were the U.S., Canadian, and German accounts and on Twitter, the U.S., U.K., Sweden, and Canada. Although an account having a large following count did not send a signal in itself, it did allow for the creation of a more public space, where the MFA’s crisis message could be amplified amongst the increasing plethora of voices online.<sup>104</sup>

We saw levels of online engagement vary significantly between actors and platforms. Specifically, Twitter once more emerged as the platform with the most engagement between its actors and audience, with 50% of the accounts analysed engaging over 50% of the time. With that said, those actors who engaged most frequently on Twitter were also shown to do so on Facebook. For the United States, United Kingdom, EEAS and Australian actors, engagement proved an important aspect for their crisis communication strategies across the board. This was further backed by our series of elite interviews (in which the United States, United Kingdom, and EEAS took part), with the participants from each MFA stating that engagement with their online followers was actively encouraged within their MFA’s digital code of practice.<sup>105</sup> Within the digital signalling process itself, increased engagement by these agents arguably presented a strong signal in terms of highlighting how they and their respective Ministry viewed the crisis; that was they deemed it important, worthy of discussion, and wished to highlight this by directly engaging with their audience at large.

Regarding levels of engagement, and the impact this has on how a state's policy and message may be received and enhanced, we saw them vary significantly between actors and platforms. Specifically, we saw in contrast to the previous crisis, Facebook was the platform, which exhibited the most online engagement with 41%, and Twitter with 35.2%. Both figures of engagement were lower than the Israel-Gaza conflict, which is perhaps not surprising considering our examination of the pressure and role of the offline political

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<sup>104</sup> As noted within Chapter Five, both platforms provide the online actor with an audience far greater than the direct audience numbers collected here. Facebook offered its accounts, an audience potential of 1.52bn users in the third quarter of 2014 (752m of whom were active) and Twitter offered its accounts, an audience potential of 288m active users in the same quarter.

<sup>105</sup> As actors interviewed were the same for both cases, the reasoning and motivations behind these cases were similar. Please see Chapter 5, Section 5.1.2 for further detail.

context and the response that the interviewees expressed regarding their confidence in engaging with the crisis conversation online. With that said, those actors who engaged most frequently on Twitter were also shown to do so on Facebook. Thus, for the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada specifically, engagement proved an important aspect within their crisis communication strategies across the board. This was further backed by our series of elite interviews (in which the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada were apart of), with the participants from each MFA stating that engagement with their online followers was actively encouraged within their MFA's digital code of practice. As also seen within these institutions during the Israel - Gaza crisis, both the U.K. and the U.S. stated that the use of direct online engagement was seen as way to ensure their policies and crisis strategies was represented and interpreted fairly online and off. This meant correcting those who sometimes misquoted their Embassy or MFA, or speaking with others who may not have understood their crisis position and by doing so, trying to inform them on their correct policies. Within the digital signalling process itself, increased engagement by these agents arguably presented a strong signal in terms of highlighting how they and their respective Ministry viewed the crisis; that was they deemed it important, worthy of discussion, and wished to highlight this by directly engaging with their audience at large.

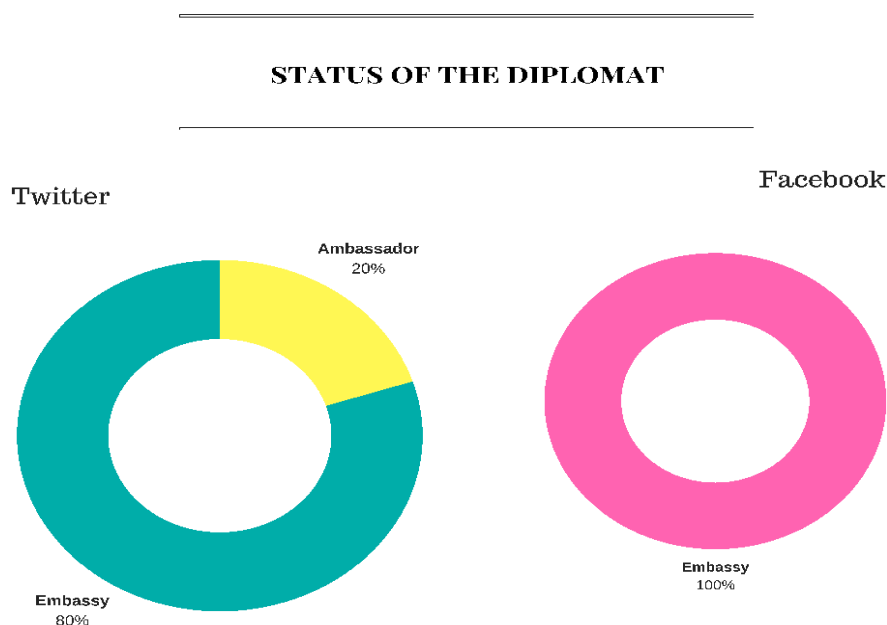
While engagement with followers continues to remain difficult to accurately quantify, it is arguably one aspect of these online signalling mechanisms that a diplomatic actor should not choose to ignore. This case, alongside its comparative study, reveal that this mechanism was used to generate signals during a crisis, but at a substantially varied rate between actors online. Such a variation impacts how each MFA's citizens stayed informed on the crisis, and also whose message and narrative may get heard, projected, and enhanced, by not only their own network, but the sub networks that their followers possess. It also allows those listening and engaging with diplomats online to have the opportunity to understand their policies better through questions and direct engagement and to create a rapport of varying degrees with the Embassy or Ambassador online. All these outcomes of engagement contribute then to the overall outcome of virtual enlargement. As noted within Chapter 5, although engagement may be seen as one piece of the larger puzzle that is virtual enlargement, but it is nonetheless an extremely important one to consider and act on when carrying out crisis communication activities.

### 6.2.3 Status of the Online Diplomat

The next mechanism turns its analysis on the status of the sender.<sup>106</sup> During this crisis, we found that on both platforms, the most common status was an Embassy account in contrast to an Ambassadorial one. On **Twitter**, Embassy accounts made up 81.1%, of all accounts analysed (compared to 73.3% within the Israel - Gaza crisis), with the remaining 19.8% of accounts being **Ambassadorial** accounts (*Italy and the United Kingdom*). On **Facebook**, we saw the Embassy accounts increased to 100% for all accounts analysed and active during the crises (compared to 94.7% during the Israel - Gaza crisis).

Just as was seen in the Israeli Ambassador accounts, these accounts may have the Ambassador name as the creator and curator, but there seems little evidence from the account itself to suggest that the Ambassador runs this account on their own.

Figure 6.19 Status of the sender of online diplomatic actors on Twitter and Facebook



<sup>106</sup> For further explanation on the status mechanism, its evolution in the digital era, and its possibility for impact, see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2 and Chapter Five, 5.2.3.

## *Discussion*

So how does the status of sender affect the online signalling processes overall, and what does the data discovered illustrate in this case? Well for both online platforms, what we discovered was a relatively similar use of this mechanism during the crisis, with the majority of online accounts being Embassy accounts, but with Facebook having a 100% majority of accounts. Twitter was once again seen to house an increased number of Ambassadorial accounts, and the platform that carried the potential for accounts to create a stronger discourse on the crisis.

To justify this latter point, we take a closer at how the Ambassadorial accounts were run. [To note, this discussion is not relevant to the Facebook platforms as they did not possess an Ambassadorial account.] We can see that on Twitter, Ambassadorial accounts (although few in number) created an arguably stronger discourse through the use of *first person framing* of their rhetoric. As noted also with its use during the previous crisis, the mechanism use created a more direct and informal tone when discussing the crisis online. As such, this practice arguably crafted more relatable dialogue for audiences to engage with, with all Ambassadorial accounts in this instance having a higher than average level of engagement with their online audience. Couple this with the precedent, that during a crisis, Ambassadors have historically taken on the role of the public voice and face of the crisis and are listened to as strong representative voices on behalf of the MFA and state they represent.

Although Italy possessed an active Ambassadorial account (with the account having the Ambassador's name and title as the creator and curator), there seems little evidence to suggest that the Ambassador actually ran the account himself.<sup>107</sup> Unlike the United States on Twitter during the Israeli-Gaza conflict, for example, Italy did not run a concurrent Embassy account. As such, Italy probably did not use the Ambassadorial account interchangeably for the purpose of projecting general Embassy related messages and consular information, interlinked with viewpoints from the Ambassador himself. There is a negative consequence (or at least a missed opportunity) in this regard, as an Ambassador should engage with their citizens to provide a first-hand account to what is happening

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<sup>107</sup> For examples of this practice, see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.3.

during a crisis situation, and to represent the sending state during the crisis. This ties into issues of diplomatic branding and engagement that all have been shown to play a vital role in how an MFA presents itself to the public during the crisis, and the impact that this presentation has on allowing for a Ministries crisis message and narrative to have the opportunity and potential to be projected and enhanced in comparison to their online contemporaries.

The most effective use of this mechanism (in terms of projecting policy whilst also crafting a sense of diplomatic branding) coupled with a first-hand account came from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sweden ran both an Ambassadorial and Embassy account, and used them in a distinct and varied manner whilst continually projecting a consistent policy message and national position on the crisis at play. Both accounts displayed similar levels in terms of frequency of use, proportion of online discussion related to the crisis, and engagement with online diplomatic networks specifically. However, both displayed distinguishing characteristics between them; namely the use of pronouns with their crisis communication dialogue, engagement with actors and use of online diplomatic actors. The presence of two online diplomatic accounts belonging to the same Foreign Ministry not only created an expanded reach for the Ministry's crisis communication message (simply through a directly increased audience base as seen in the audience reach), but through the effective practice of the frequency mechanism, content discussion, and online network engagement on both accounts curated a stronger public discourse on the crisis and projected a set of online signals through various communicative means. We will draw once again on this example and its essential incorporation with a crisis communication strategy within Chapter 7, *'A note to Policy Makers'*.

#### **6.2.4 Frequency**

The Euromaidan conflict highlighted the role of frequency within diplomatic crisis communication strategies and provided a clear context in which to analyse it.<sup>108</sup>

Taking the **Twitter** platform, we see that on average, an online diplomatic actor posted 2.10 times per day. The most frequent poster being the Swedish Ambassador with an average of 6.39 times per day, and the least being the Russian Embassy who remained completely inactive during the entire crisis. It should be noted that this average was skewed with the outlier of Swedish Ambassador who had an average frequency of 6.39 times per day, which when excluded from the analysis creates an average of 1.46. There was also little variation between accounts with a range from 0 to 7 posts per day (once again excluding the outlier) with only three actors engaging less than once a day; Slovenia, Korea and Russia. With that said, the **Facebook** platform showed a very different frequency story. We saw that on average, that an online diplomatic actor posted once every two days (0.438), a substantially lower figure when compared to the use of the Twitter platform (still double that of the Israel - Gaza conflict with showed an average of once every 5 days (0.202 per day)). Unlike the use of the Twitter platform, little variation between accounts was seen, with a frequency range of once every 10 days with the Indian Embassy to nearly twice a day with the United States Embassy (1.64), with the majority of accounts centring on the average of once every 5 days (0.202 per day).

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<sup>108</sup> For further explanation on the frequency mechanism, its evolution in the digital era, and its possibility for impact, see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2 and Chapter Five, section 5.2.4.

Figure 6.20 Overall frequency of activity for diplomatic actors on Twitter

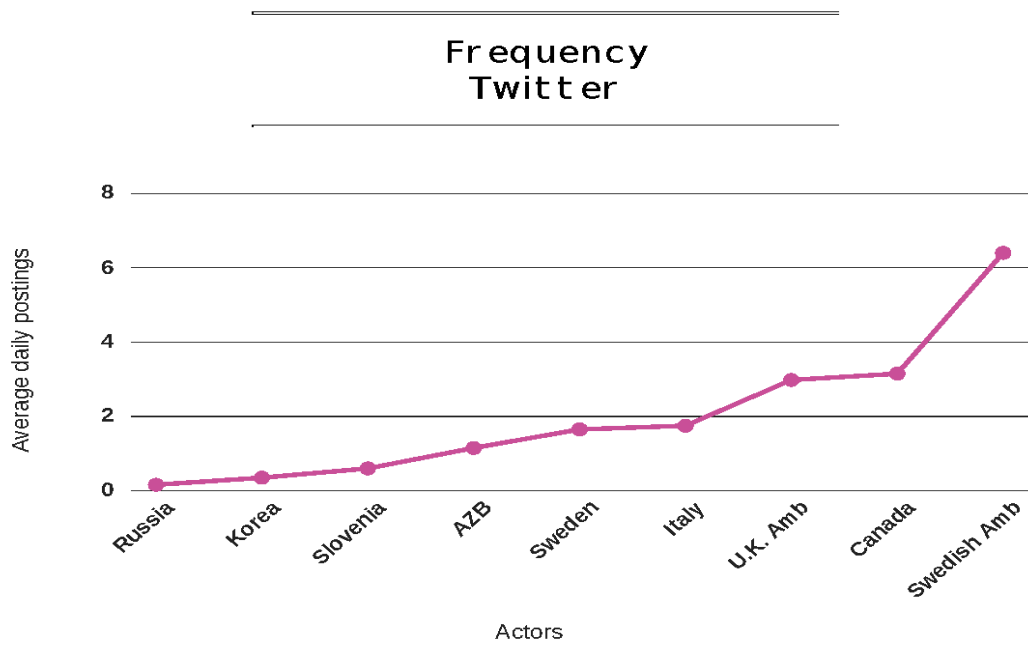
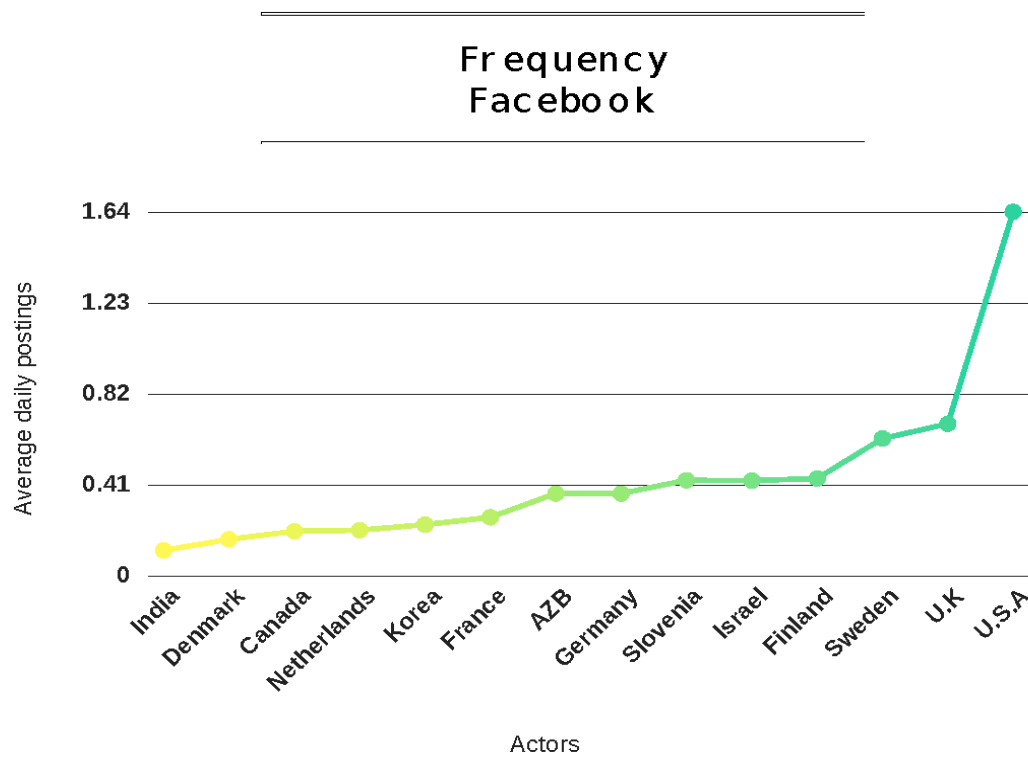


Figure 6.20 Overall frequency of activity for online diplomatic actors on Facebook



As expanded upon in Chapter Five, Section 5.1.4, an important aspect of this mechanism to note, is that frequency and its use should not be viewed in isolation. When making claims on how frequency generates and enhances signals we must also look at *how* exactly this frequency was used by the account.

From the graphs below we can see that on both platforms, there was little variation between frequency levels on both platforms, but a sharp contrast between the amounts of time each actor dedicated to discussing the crisis online. The Canadian Embassy for example, posted on average 3 times a day, but only dedicated 42% of this conversation to the crisis. Compare this to the Italian Ambassadorial account which posted on average 1 times per day, but dedicated over 90% of their conversation to the crisis, possibly generating a stronger signal than posting more frequently than 8 times a day. Even if an account posts over 20 times a day, their ability to sculpt the crisis narrative in their favour arguably goes unused if these posts do not engage in the crisis dialogue and discussion. Posting frequently, but without actually engaging in the crisis dialogue, creates a similar effect as that of an account choosing to post infrequently. While all accounts analysed during this crisis demonstrated a substantially higher average of crisis discussion in relation to their frequency of activity, it is still a worthy point to consider when making further judgments on how a Ministry should incorporate and deal with the issue of frequency within their crisis communication strategies.

Figure 6.21 Correlation between frequency and conflict conversation activity for online diplomatic actors on Twitter during the Ukraine, EuroMaidan 21 November 2013 – 31 March 2013.

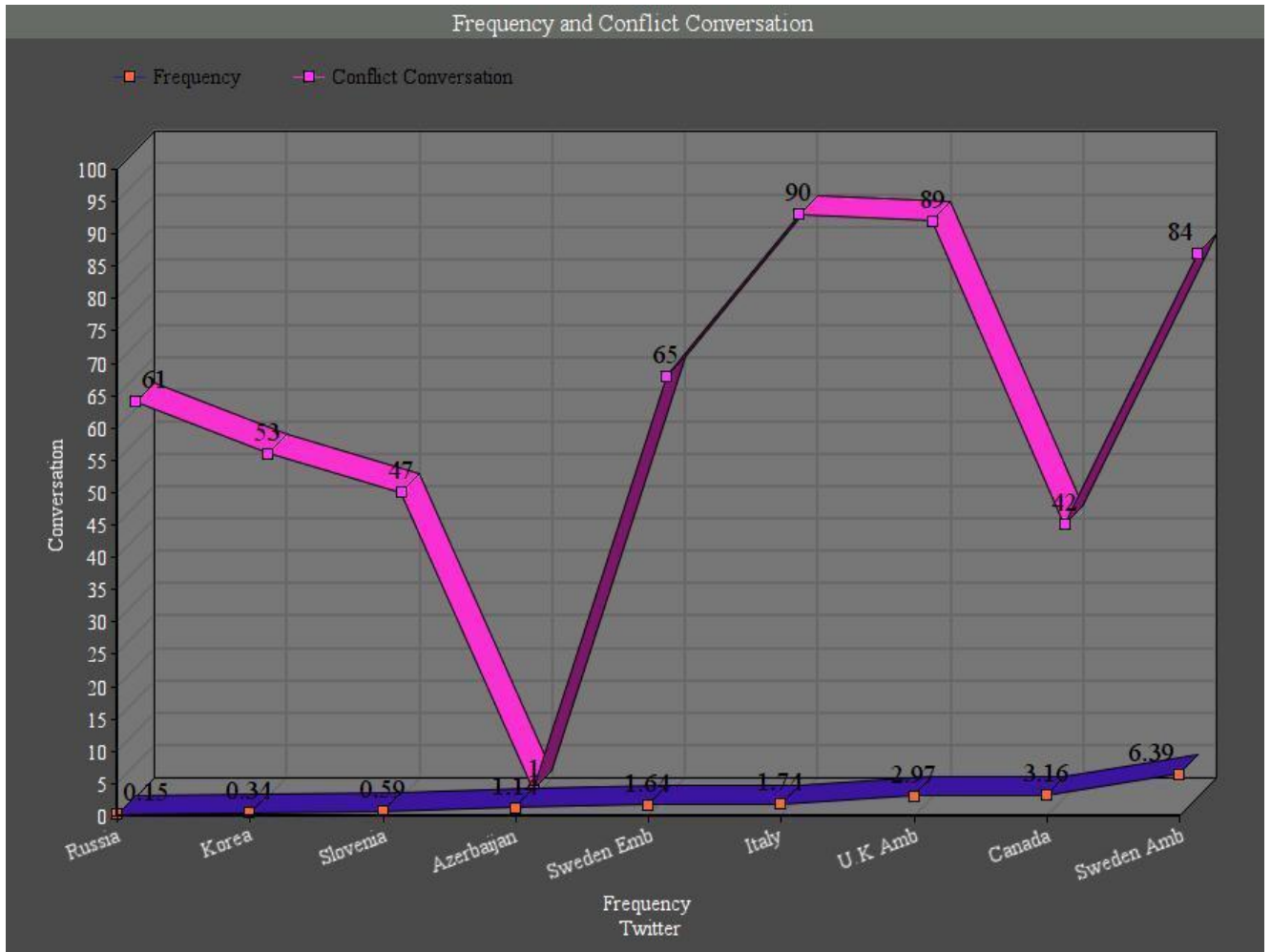
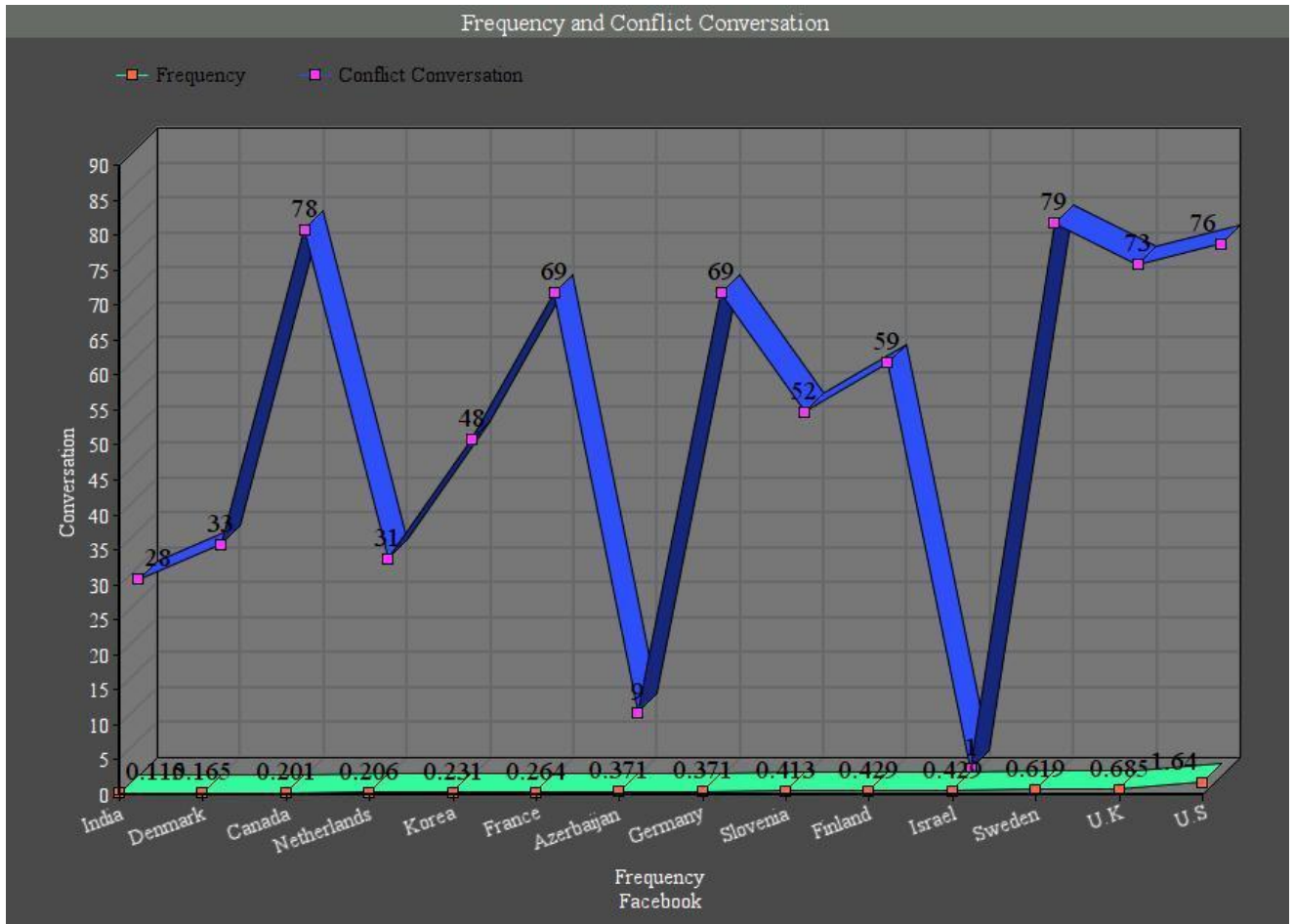


Figure 6.20 Correlation between frequency and conflict conversation activity for online diplomatic actors on Facebook during Ukraine, EuroMaidan 21 November 2013 – 31 March 2014 crisis.



### Discussion

So, what exactly do our findings regarding the use of the frequency mechanism illustrate for the online signalling process overall during the time of crisis?

From the data presented, we saw Twitter once again, and the agents who engaged with it, play a more active role in shaping the online crisis discourse than Facebook did during the same period. As explained previously, Twitter had an average frequency posting of 2.10 post per day, (this was nearly double what was discovered in Israel – Gaza case which saw

1.3 post per day) compared to Facebook with an average of .438 (again nearly double what we saw in the previous case with 0.234). According to the online diplomatic actors interviewed, there were a number of reasons why Twitter emerged as the preferred online site of activity for Embassies and Ambassadors during the crisis, all which are expanded and analysed in detail in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.4.<sup>109</sup> In brief, these included the power of the hashtag, high levels of press and media outlets active on the platform and the ease of connection and engagement afforded with and to actors.

It should also be noted, however, that there are possible and real limitations for an online diplomatic actor if they overuse this frequency mechanism, as can be seen in this case of the United States Ambassadorial account on Twitter, which was posting on average 20 times a day. The limitations here include creating and projecting so much online data that a) the policy message or indeed consular information gets lost amongst the sea of data and b) the online audience simply gets overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data projected at them that they lose interest in the account, or do not take the time to engage mindfully with the message the account is projecting. In the case of the United States account, the data generated was so vast that (based on the 3,200 tweet collection limit placed by Twitter) not all the content could be retrieved for analysis.<sup>110</sup> It therefore may be justified to categorise the Ambassador's frequency engagement in the category of 'information overload' and subsequently question whether or not the online audience actually read all these tweets, and the links to information it sought to provide. This is an interesting avenue of further research worth pursuing, and queries whether or not there is such a thing as too much information when it comes to diplomatic crisis communication projection specifically. We must remember that MFA's and the online accounts that represent them are distinct from journalistic outlets, where frequent and 'information overload' is welcomed and at times encouraged. Diplomatic accounts, particularly during a crisis, represent their nation and present coherent, valid, and reliable information regarding the crisis at play if they are to be effective at creating a crisis narrative that will be heard and digested by a range of actors.

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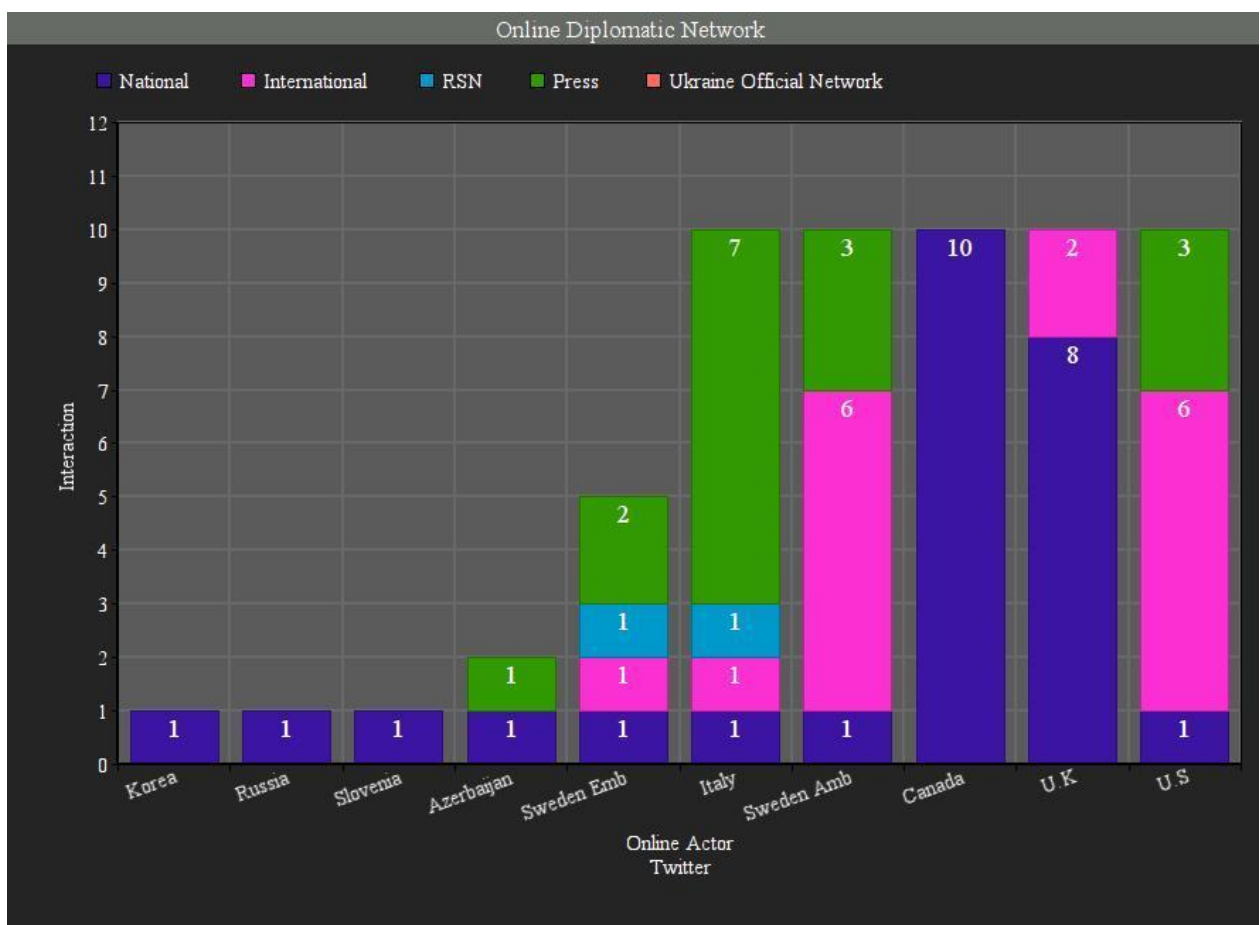
<sup>109</sup> As the majority of actors interviewed were shown to be active in both crisis case studies, the reasoning behind their choices for engagement on Twitter V Facebook remained the same, as backed by the interviews conducted.

<sup>110</sup> The U.S. Ambassador account will not be used for our research analysis. Its exclusion is a direct result of the limitation was that the twitter API can only grab 3,200 tweets at maximum. During the crisis, the U.S. Ambassador tweeted on average 20 times a day, which produced 11,300 tweets by the time this research was undertaken. This research was therefore unable to locate or analyse these tweets generated during the crisis period, and was forced to exclude it from this data set.

### 6.2.5 Online Diplomatic Network

The final mechanism analyses how online diplomatic actors interacted with each other and how they used their own online social networks to highlight their foreign policy message during the crisis itself.<sup>111</sup>

Figure 6.23 Use of online networks for diplomatic actors on Twitter



<sup>111</sup> For further explanation on the online diplomatic network mechanism, its evolution in the digital era, and its possibility for impact, see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2 and Chapter Five, section 5.2.5.

## *National*

As seen with the Israel-Gaza conflict, interaction with national online networks was by far the most extensive for all actors analysed. That is the interaction of the primary node (account analysed) with other online diplomatic actors accredited to their respective Foreign Ministry or National Parliament.<sup>112</sup> For all accounts analysed, the top 3 actors that the account interacted with belonged to their national network. 4 out of the 14 actors displayed national network interaction as their only engagement amongst their top 5 most interacted actors. The Canadian account had the highest concentration of national network interaction (shown below) engaging with 10 actors, all of whom belonged to the national networks.

## *International*

As seen in Figure 6.21, a diplomatic actor's engagement with their online international network was substantially lower than use of their national network. We discovered that for all accounts analysed, engagement with an international network actor was only present within the top 3-category network engagement for four accounts: Swedish Ambassador (engaging 6 times), the Swedish Embassy, Italy and the United States (all engaging only once). For a detailed explanation and exploration regarding why this distinct lack of engagement with the international network came to emerge, see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2.

However, it should still be noted that when used effectively, international diplomatic network power amplifies messages of collective strength and creates international legitimacy for certain policies or positions. One national actor retweeting and re-sharing information from another international player can demonstrate an alliance and coherence on the crisis position, just as was seen with the case of the Swedish Ambassador.

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<sup>112</sup> As explained in Chapter Five, this includes primarily; the Central Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister or President, the National Parliament and their affiliations, and any online account, which is a subset of the Central Foreign Ministry.

## *Receiving State*

The last online network layer we turn to is the *receiving state diplomatic network*. As noted, this network is built around all diplomatic actors who were and are accredited (offline) to the receiving state in which the crisis was operating. These were also shown to have had an active presence online during the conflict. As previously noted, this network was centred on all diplomatic actors who were accredited to the receiving state in which the crisis was operating, and were also shown to have had an active presence online during the conflict. For more on the capacity of the receiving state to project the crisis message and expand the power of the state, see Chapter Five, Section 5.1.5. Furthermore, by gaining a place of prominence within the receiving state network, such as the U.K. as shown below, the actors could ensure their message and narrative was heard amongst the importance influencers of the diplomatic community. Gaining this place of prominence within the network, just as the U.K. did, undoubtedly contributed to the process of virtual enlargement, and should certainly be seen as a central goal within any diplomatic crisis communication strategy today. The online receiving state network can therefore be seen as a strategic tool, if the actor is positioned correctly within in.<sup>113</sup>

## *Indegree*

At the broadest level, degree centrality refers to the number of ties a node has to other nodes. Within the Euromaidan conflict we saw the following for indegree centrality; the U.K. account having the highest degree an in-degree centrality with an absolute value of 14 (meaning that there are 14 other nodes/online actors connected to this actor's nodes). This means that both online actors retain the highest possibility and power to have their message heard, and to have it heard on a consistent basis. With the group, the normalised value is 100, with the average indegree is 8.57 (which means that each node is on average, followed by 6.49 other actors). At least three nodes – Russia, Korea, and Israel have an absolute value of 0, showing there that they have no followers within the receiving state network following them, something which distinctly dilutes their legitimacy as a working communication online platform. Therefore, with the benefits accrued to the U.K. due to

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<sup>113</sup> For an in-depth discussion of this network use see Chapter Five, Section 5.2.5.

their high in-degree centrality, nations like Russia, Korea, and Israel should seek to work towards increasing their in-degree score by increasing their follower base (methods on how to increase your follower base can be noted in the target audience mechanisms analysis above).

*Table 6.1 Indegree Centrality*

	Indegree
U.K.	14.062
U.S.A.	10.938
Swedish Ambassador	10.938
Slovenia	10.938
Italy	10.938
U.K. Ambassador	7.812
France	7.812
Canada	6.25
Sweden	3.125
Azerbaijan	1.562
Russia	0
Korea	0
Israel	0

### *Out-degree*

Out-degree centrality refers to the actors who have the possibility of exchanging and or dispersing information quickly to other actors online. Actors with high out-degree centrality are often characterised as influential. Here the U.S. Ambassador, U.K., Swedish Ambassador, and Canada, nodes have an out-degree centrality absolute value of 12.5 (there are both these nodes connect with a possible 12 other nodes/online actors within the network). The normalised value is 100, with the average out-degree found within the receiving state was 5.52 (which means that each node is on average, follows 5 other actors, out of a possible 13). Russia, Korea, and Israel were again found to have an absolute value of 0, showing that they followed no other actors within the receiving state network.

However, it should be noted that having the highest out-degree centrality does not ensure that your message will be listened to by others, and therefore plays an arguably small role within the conceptual framing of the online signalling process. Additionally, having a high out-degree centrality compared to your in-degree centrality is also symbolic, in that you may be perceived by others on the surface as someone who is not as powerful or highly regarded online due to the fact that you follow many, but they do not all follow you back, a symbol itself.

*Table 6.2 Out-degree Centrality*

	Out-Degree
U.S.A Ambassador	12.5
U.K.	12.5
Swedish Ambassador	12.5
Canada	12.5
France	9.375
U.K. Ambassador	7.812
Sweden	7.812
Italy	7.812
Slovenia	3.125
Azerbaijan	1.562
Russia	0
Korea	0
Israel	0

*Betweenness Centrality*

**Betweenness** is a measure of the extent to which a node is connected to other nodes that are not connected to each other. Within the receiving state network, we discovered the following; the U.K Embassy were once again the leader in this field, having a betweenness centrality absolute value of 16, which is almost double that of the U.K Ambassador who came second in this category with an absolute value of 9. This means that the U.K Embassy

is the node with the most power to connect all other nodes within the network, and with that the ability to influence others.

*Table 6.3. Betweenness Centrality*

	Betweenness
U.K.	16.144
U.K. Amb	9.788
Canada	7.556
U.S.A Amb	7.448
Sweden Amb	5.911
Italy	2.089
Sweden	0.9
France	0.667
Russia	0
Korea	0
Israel	0
Slovenia	0
Azerbaijan	0

However, aside from the U.K (both Embassy and the Ambassador), this online network demonstrated an extremely low average for betweenness centrality amongst this network as whole, with the average coming in at 3.88, although this figure was also substantially altered by the outlier presence of the U.K Embassy. If we remove the U.K Embassy from the average analysis, we see a betweenness centrality of 2.6, an arguably low numerical value for betweenness centrality within the network. This means that the actors such as Russia, Korea, Israel, Slovenia and Azerbaijan on the lowest end of this scale would wish to increase their betweenness score and have the potential to become greater connectors of networks and nodes to share information, they must seek to join more communities or sub networks online. This can be done by increasing not only their out-degree centrality, and also by ensuring that they follow a varied group of actors within the overall online networks, from press to national networks, to members of the Israeli state, etc. This would allow them to use this online diplomatic network more effectively, and position themselves as a more influential actor within it.

## Section III

### 6.3 Digital Signalling Typologies

As expanded upon in the previous chapter and in the conceptual framework, we have created three distinct typologies: *High Performers*, *Medium Performers* and *Low Performers*.<sup>114</sup>

#### 6.3.1 Typologies: Twitter

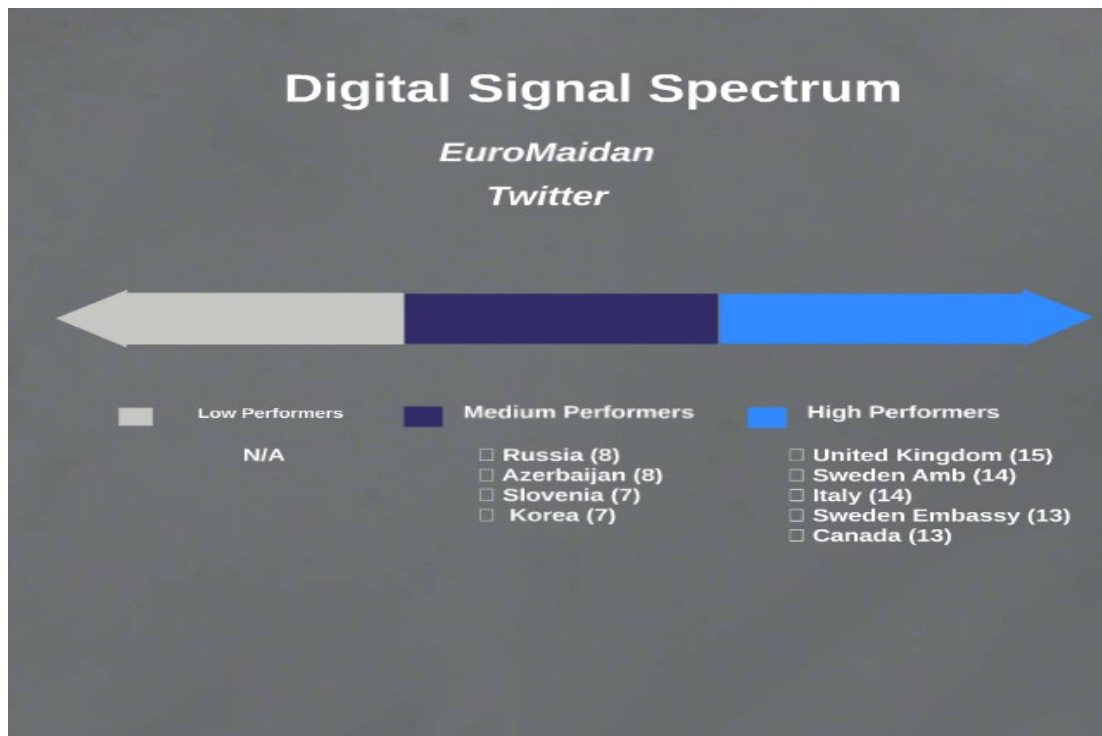
Taking the Twitter platform first, we can see that out of a total score of 18 for the overall signalling process, the categorisation of all online diplomatic accounts during the crisis are as follows:

Table 6.4. Twitter Typologies

High Performers	Medium Performers	Low Performers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>United Kingdom (15)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Sweden Amb (14)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Italy (14)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Sweden Embassy (13)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Canada (13)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Russia (8)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Azerbaijan (8)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Slovenia (7)</b></li><li>➤ <b>Korea (7)</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>N/A</b></li></ul>

<sup>114</sup> For a detailed discussion on the digital signalling typologies see Chapter Three, section 3.4 and Chapter Five, section 5.3

Figure 6.24 Digital Signal Spectrum, Twitter



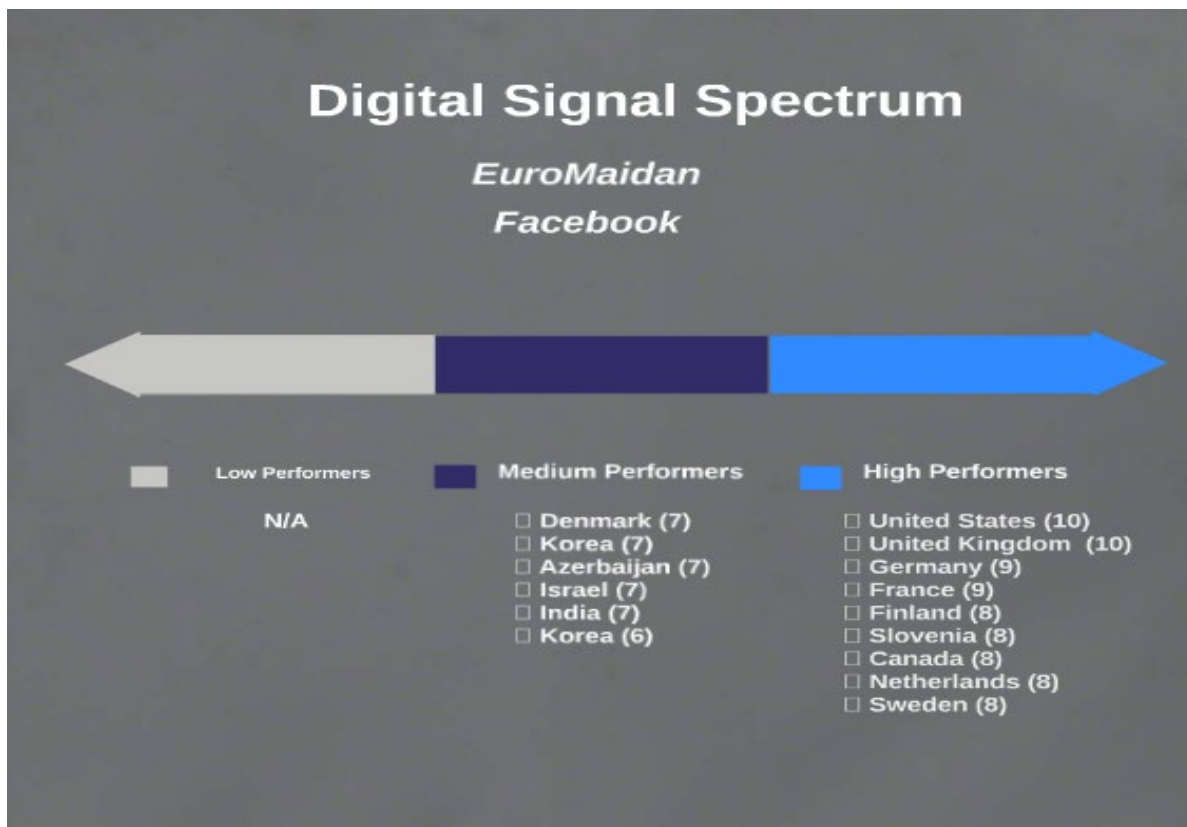
### 6.3.2 Typologies: Facebook

Turning to the Facebook platform, we saw that out of a total score of 15 for the overall signalling process, the categorisation of all online diplomatic accounts during the crisis are as follows:

Table 6.5. Facebook Typologies

High Performers	Medium Performers	Low Performers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ United States (10)</li> <li>➤ United Kingdom (10)</li> <li>➤ Germany (9)</li> <li>➤ France (9)</li> <li>➤ Finland (8)</li> <li>➤ Slovenia (8)</li> <li>➤ Canada (8)</li> <li>➤ Netherlands (8)</li> <li>➤ Sweden (8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Denmark (7)</li> <li>➤ Korea (7)</li> <li>➤ Azerbaijan (7)</li> <li>➤ Israel (7)</li> <li>➤ India (7)</li> <li>➤ Korea (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ N/A</li> </ul>

Figure 6.25 Digital Signal Spectrum, Facebook



### 6.3.3 Overall Key Findings:

- *Comparison of Crisis:* Remarkably similar results emerged on the digital signal spectrum for both crises, in terms of the numerical categorisation between performers and also the online actors who emerged as high performers. There was a significant crossover between the high performing actors during both crises, namely the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, and Canada.
- *Average performance:* The majority of actors analysed were categorised into the 'medium' performer category, demonstrating a mixed performance of their crisis communication activities. While it is effective to some degree to categorise the performance of these actors, particularly for visualisation and comparative purposes, we must not take this outcome solely at face value, but as noted, in conjunction with the in-depth individual analysis of all mechanisms involved.
- *Are all mechanisms are created equal?* Just as seen within the Israel - Gaza crisis, an actor's place in the medium performance category was not a result of uniform performance across all mechanisms, but in some instances, resulted from actors using one mechanism highly effectively and choosing not to engage with another mechanism on any level.
- *Trend in high performers:* Without exception, we are seeing a similar trend in this category and indeed the leaders within each individual mechanism. That is that the top performers on both platforms came from 'Western' states. Therefore, what we find is that the same voices are still dominating the crisis discourse and with that sculpting the crisis narratives in their favour.
- The overall results of the *typology spectrum* illustrate while the signalling mechanisms play a central role within the practice of modern day diplomatic communication, their use amongst diplomatic actors is not as uniform as one may think, shown to be utilised to varying degrees, and constrained by a variety of circumstances. Namely, the continued role and power of the offline political context. With that, we may conclude that social media is perhaps not the great equaliser that it was once thought to be.

## Section IV

### 6.4 Narrative Creation<sup>115</sup>

As comparative with Chapter Five, for the purpose of this study, we analyse the narrative of those actors who were shown to engage in the signalling process in the most calculated and effective manner. Once again, we selected actors that were categorised as ‘high performers’ in their respective online platform. Although expanded on detail in Chapter Five, the same still trend applies in this case, and that is that high performers emerged solely from states of substantial power ranking globally (popularly categorised as ‘Western’ states). The reasoning and possible impact for only these states creating narratives of consequence upon the overall crisis discourse is discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.3. From the visual outline of the categorised accounts of typologies, we see the following actors:

#### **Twitter platform:**

- UK Embassy Account (15)
- Swedish Ambassador (14)

#### **Facebook platform:**

- United States Embassy Account (10)
- UK Embassy Account (10)

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<sup>115</sup> For a detailed discussion on narrative creation in the digital age see Chapter Three, section 3.2.3 and Chapter Five, section 5.4.2.

### 6.4.1 Formation<sup>116</sup>

#### *Analysis*

On the **Twitter platform**, we discovered that both the U.K. and Sweden possessed clear overall communicative strategies that were formulated by their Central Foreign Ministry, pre-crisis. This strategy came in the form of a communication code of practice. On the **Facebook platform**, we discovered that U.K. and the U.S. held similar digital codes. On both platforms, each online account was shown to possess a directed strategy that guided and sculpted their crisis communicative actions both online and off. In a varied range of detail, all codes outlined how their diplomatic actors ought to deal with 1) offline communications procedures (press interviews, participation in television programs, deliverance of public demarches) and 2) the new world of online communications (including use of social media platforms, live streaming events, and online engagement with other official and non-official online actors).

As noted in the previous case study, what is of most relevance to our study of crisis narratives is the guidance that this code of practice provided to the actors regarding their online crisis communication activity. The extent to which their narrative was strategically formed, by its existence. Through interviews, and analysis of each code of practice, we discovered that each Central Ministry (U.K., U.S. and Sweden) provided their Embassies with specific direction on how to engage and navigate the online world while representing their state policies. In both case studies, the interviewees for the FCO and State Department confirmed they relied on their MFA code of practice for their actions online, and in the formation of their crisis communication strategies on both platforms. As the FCO and State Department codes of digital practice have been expanded upon in detail in Chapter 5, they will not be discussed again here in this context.

This leaves us with the Swedish Ministry and the environment their code of digital practice created, in which to provide their Embassy and the Ambassadorial accounts with the confidence and tools to effectively create their online crisis narratives. Those interviewed

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<sup>116</sup> For a detailed discussion on the formation of the OCN see Chapter Three, section 3.2.3 and Chapter Five, section 5.4.1.

from the Ministry noted that in recent years, Sweden's MFA has increased its efforts in the field of digital diplomacy, as part of a wider push to achieve their public diplomacy objectives and strategies. Backed by a detailed digital code of practice, Sweden's civil servants have been encouraged to make use of social media to find new ways of interacting with the public through co-creation and collaboration. As Jon Pelling notes in his chapter '*When doing becomes the message: the case of the Swedish digital diplomacy*' 'apart from improving the organisation's speed in gathering, analysing and sharing information, this initiative has allowed the ministry to engage with non-traditional stakeholders, and to better reach out with Swedish positions and perspectives' (ed. Bjola and Holmes 2015; 167). Interviewees also commented that such an approach has enabled Sweden's online Embassies to amplify their foreign policy conversations, particularly those which was called for during a crisis, in terms of explaining the crisis to their citizens, putting forth the state's position within it, and providing consular assistance and advice. Through digital learning, the interviewees noted that the Swedish MFA has become more responsive and adaptive to change, making it better prepared for diplomatic engagement and relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both the Ambassadorial and Embassy accounts performance during this crisis is testament to these claims.

As expanded upon in Chapter Five, while the existence of a code of communicative practice may seem like a basic guidance for a MFA and their Embassies to possess in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is indeed much rarer than one might expect. Out of the 19 actors analysed on both platforms, only 10 MFA's possessed codes of communication practice, which specifically concentrated on how to guide and structure online communication practices. Only one actor, the United States, had a code of practice that directly referenced how their actors should engage during a time of crises. This is explored in detail in Chapter Five, section 5.4.1. [The U.S. code of practice was distinct from the general code of practice which outlined how the MFA should carry out communication activities during all seasons of diplomatic practice.] It therefore established during a crisis, a set of concrete guidelines and practices which allowed for the MFAs established policies to be projected in a manner which was consistent and strategic, ultimately creating a strong communicative advantage for actors during a crisis, and virtually enlarge their role within the crisis and sculpt the narrative in their favour.

## 6.4.2 Projection<sup>117</sup>

### *Analysis*

As expanded upon in Chapter Five, section 5.4.2, we now test the projection of the narrative during the conflict

- First, we turn to the *content* of the message itself. Content, which formed and sculpted the MFA's online crisis narrative overall. On the **Twitter** platform, both the U.K. Embassy and the Sweden Ambassador accounts projected an average of 84% of their online conversation to posts that were directly related to political commentary of the crisis. [Compare this to the Israel – Gaza conflict, where we saw the top actors, the U.K. Embassy and the EEAS have an average of 50%.] The U.K. projected 88% of their content as crisis related (80% Political and 8% Consular), while the Swedish Ambassador account projected 100% of crisis related content (84% Political, 28% Consular). On the **Facebook** platform, we saw similar figures, with both the U.S. and U.K. Embassy accounts holding a higher than average percentage of their conversation dedicated to the crises – the United States projecting 77% (77% Political and 0% Consular) and U.K. projecting 76% (61% Political and 15% Consular).

The high percentage of conversation dedicated to the crisis is not surprising in one sense, due to the argument that has been repeatedly noted throughout this thesis — that if a crisis is happening outside an Embassy's doorstep, it is expected (and one could go so far as to say it is the duty) of the Embassy to engage with the crisis conversation online, be this through political or consular commentary. [Compare these projection figures with the Israel-Gaza crisis that saw on average its high performers dedicate 50% (at most) of their online conversation to the crisis conversation.] This once more ties in the power of the online political context, particularly as the high performing actors in both crisis (the U.K.,

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<sup>117</sup> For a detailed discussion on the projection of the OCN see Chapter 3, section 3.2.4, and Chapter 5, section 5.3.2.

U.S. and Canada) were from the same MFA's, who carried the same codes of practices, and according to the interviewees, received the same digital training pre-crisis.

One arena in which both crises did converge without exception, however, remain those messages pertaining to each crisis that were most well received by their online audience. By well received, we refer to those that displayed the highest number of retweets and favourites in comparison to all other posts that the account sent during the crisis. In short, its content is directly related to the crisis and ultimately projected 'the loudest' amongst the account's direct online audience and beyond. Due to the limitations of analytics, the Twitter platform is the only platform used to support this point.

For the **Swedish Ambassador**, the messages which were the most retweeted and favoured during the crisis were as follows:

*Tweets most Retweeted:*

- 1. 14 March 2014;** Don't think you need to speak Russian to understand some of the billboards we saw in Sevastopol yesterday. <http://t.co/ByYvuxf8uS> – 157 retweets, 42 favourites
- 2. 12 December 2013;** Cogent statement Ashton, summarized in one sentence "I believe that the people of this great country deserve better " [eeas.europa.eu/delegations/uk...](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/uk...) – 93 retweets, 27 favourites
- 3. 9 December 2014;** Impossible not be impressed by the people on the cold streets of Kiev showing their support for a European future for Ukraine. #Євромайдан 93 retweets, 40 favourites

*Tweets most favorited;*

- 1. 14 March 2014;** Don't think you need to speak Russian to understand some of the billboards we saw in Sevastopol yesterday. <http://t.co/ByYvuxf8uS> – 157 retweets, 42 favourites
- 2. 9 December 2014;** Impossible not be impressed by the people on the cold streets of Kiev showing their support for a European future for Ukraine. #Євромайдан 93 retweets, 40 favourites
- 3. 2 March 2014;** Hard not to be impressed by prudent response by Ukrainian leadership to Russian provocations. 79 retweets, 35 favourites

For the **United Kingdom Ambassador**, the messages which were the most retweeted and favourited during the crisis were as follows:

*Tweets most Retweeted:*

- 1. 15 March 2014;** Why the #Crimea referendum is illegal, illegitimate and will not be recognised by the international community #Ukraine <http://t.co/0SScIpzTsJ> – 513 retweets, 172 favourites
- 2. 17 March 2014;** Why referendum in Crimea is illegal, illegitimate and will not be recognized by the international community # Ukraine <http://t.co/zWZu9tPiK4> – 402 retweets, 141 favourites
- 3. 17 March 2014;** Referendum, announced 10 days ago, without proper agitation, in the presence of foreign troops - a mockery of democracy - 138 retweets, 54 favourites

*Tweets most favorited:*

**1. 15 March 2014;** Why the #Crimea referendum is illegal, illegitimate and will not be recognised by the international community #Ukraine <http://t.co/0SScIpzTsJ> – 513 retweets, 172 favourites

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**3. 17 March 2014;** Referendum, announced 10 days ago, without proper agitation, in the presence of foreign troops - a mockery of democracy - 138 retweets, 54 favourites

- The second projection mechanism was the *structure* of the message. As noted, structure matters because how a message is packaged, be this through a direct or indirect messages, sends a signal regarding the state's position on the crisis, and creates an overall narrative on how a state may wish to be publicly portrayed regarding their crisis position.
- On Twitter, both the U.K. and Sweden held a higher than average proportion of direct messages sent when discussing the crisis itself, with the U.K. having 45% of their messages as *direct*, and Sweden 47% Facebook showed a similar pattern with the U.K., and the U.S. projecting 26% and 15% of their message as *direct*, respectively. With that said, just as was seen in the Israel - Gaza crisis, in a number of these cases namely the United States, United Kingdom, and Sweden, an *indirect* message could still be viewed as a signal of significance, particularly when the online actors married this technique with strategic use of other mechanisms such as high frequency rates, and high engagement with their audience (which all high performing actors were shown to do), thereby constructing a consistent narrative discourse on their account online. This point once again added weight to the claim that a holistic analysis of the signalling mechanisms is needed when seeking to examine how states created and contributed to a process of virtual state enlargement during a crisis.

- The third projected mechanism, related to *frequency* levels. As noted, consistently projecting messages which were shown as directly related to the crises, assisted in expanding the narratives of these actors even further, and allowed them to stay engaged in the crisis dialogue on a frequent, in some cases ‘real-time basis’. Here all actors, on both platforms, displayed a higher than average online activity compared to their contemporaries. For example, on Twitter, the U.K. showed an average posting of 3.1 per day (compare again to the U.K. high performer in the Israel-Gaza conflict has half of this frequency level at 1.49). Sweden was significantly higher with a posting of 6.3 per day. Also, to note, the U.K. and Sweden dedicated 89% and 84% of their activity online to crisis related discussion, serving only to signal an engagement and interest in the crisis through activity online, but also building a consistent and regular conversation on the crisis itself. Facebook also displayed this trend, with the U.K. having a frequency of 0.685 per day (dedicating 73% their activity online to crisis related content). While the U.S. engaged 1.64 per day (dedicating 76% their activity online to crisis related content the highest for any Facebook actor during both crisis).
  
- Finally, the *platform* itself that was used to project and enhance the state narrative. Both platforms during this crisis were used in distinct and diverse manners to project their crisis narratives. Just as was seen in the Israel – Gaza crisis, Facebook was used by actors more as a forum to provide greater details to their audience on the narrative of the crises, to answer Q&A’s and responding to their online audience’s direct questions, whilst constructing longer posts on the crisis which were targeted to a wide variety of actors. Twitter again proved to be the platform which was used to project shorter sound bites of information (by default due to the 140-character limit), including updated consular information, direct condemnation of events, or retweeting national networks posts to further enhance their message. This distinction was evident in both crisis, and will be examined and revisited in the upcoming chapter on effective crisis communication strategies.

### 6.4.3 Reception<sup>118</sup>

As noted, identifying and explaining the reception of the online narrative for this research, is perhaps the most difficult aspect of this emerging field of narrative analysis: how narratives are received, interpreted, and how they become meaningful to audiences, be they elites or publics. This research views *reception* according to a number of core parameters: distance of the message, engagement with the message (how audiences recirculate, remediate and remix the narrative content), and engagement with the online diplomatic network specifically. Although to accurately gauge the reception of a narrative is near next to impossible, we can establish some basic parameters in which to scale it. On the Twitter platform, these measurements came in the form of numerical statistics towards the targeted audience, and the number of tweets retweeted and favourited, alongside the number of times the user was mentioned in the conversation of others. On Facebook, we saw this measurement gauged in terms of likes and shares. We will now turn to the parameters used to gauge reception of the narrative.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> For a detailed discussion on the reception of the OCN see Chapter Three, 3.2.5 and Chapter Five, section 5.4.3.

<sup>119</sup> See Section 5.4.3 for further explanation on the parameters.

Table 6.6 Twitter Reception: United Kingdom

**United Kingdom U.K: @UKinUkraine**













Directed Audience	3,245
Overall 'Distance' of Message	<p> 191 tweets retweeted (55.04%), a total of 4,331 times (22.68%)</p> <p> 158 tweets favorite (45.53%), a total of 1,323 times (8.37 %)</p>
Overall Engagement of User	<p> 53 user mentions (0.15%)</p> <p> 21 user replies (6.00%)</p> <p> 138 retweets (40.00%)</p> <p> 87 links (0.25%)</p>
Online Diplomatic Network	<p>Indegree: 2.5</p> <p>Betweenness: 0.504</p> <p>Out degree: 8.475</p>

Table 6.7 Twitter Reception: Swedish Ambassador

Sweden: @vBeckerath

Directed Audience	3,104
Overall 'Distance' of Message	<p> 230 tweets retweeted (29.75%), a total of 2,739 times (11.91%)</p> <p> 170 tweets favorite (21.99%), a total of 861 times (5.06 %)</p>
Overall Engagement of User	<p> 169 user mentions (0.22%)</p> <p> 75 user replies (10.00%)</p> <p> 509 retweets (66.00%)</p> <p> 101 links (0.13%)</p>
Online Diplomatic Network	<p>Indegree: 11.864</p> <p>Outdegree: 11.864</p> <p>Outdegree: 11.864</p>

On the Facebook platform, we can also use the numerical statistics for the targeted audience, but this time we focus on the percentage of likes and shared an online post received.

*Table 6.8. Facebook Reception: United States*

**U.S: @Usdos.Ukraine**

<b>Directed Audience</b>	52,958
<b>Likes</b>	39%
<b>Shares</b>	21%

*Table 6.9 Facebook Reception: United Kingdom*

**U.K: @UKinUkraine**

<b>Directed Audience</b>	4,762L
<b>Likes</b>	25%
<b>Shares</b>	20%

## *Discussion*

The data presented above supported two primary findings relating to the core thesis; 1) that effective use of the online signalling process (distinct from individual signalling mechanisms), allowed diplomatic agents to create of an online crisis narrative which was consistent, direct, and responsive, amongst their online audience, 2) that by creating such a narrative, a state's communicative power was significantly enhanced compared to their contemporaries. Therefore, their ability to manage the crisis in an appropriate and responsive manner also significantly increased as a result. Here the narratives of the U.K., U.S.A., and Sweden came to be heard most within the crowded online crisis space, a space where actors competed and contested for their voices and policies to be heard (some more effectively than others). By highlighting and exploring the use of each stage of the narrative processes by these high performers, we gained a direct insight into effective communication strategies during times of political crisis, which only served to further foreign policy awareness of the respective MFA and agents, increase engagement amongst actors and contribute to building a pre-informed, consistent, frequent, and well received crisis narrative. Although when compared to the Israel-Gaza crisis, the high performers of the Euromaidan crisis varied in terms of increased frequency activity, the amount of online conversation in which each online actor dedicated to the crisis when compared to their frequency rate, and the heightened level engagement with their audience, the conclusions and overall findings of the narrative process of the high performers proved remarkably similar. A brief overview of the findings will be highlighted below, with the detailed discussion reflecting that explored and expressed in Section 5.4.3.

- The performance of these actors illustrates that there are indeed a distinct set of mechanisms that if used effectively and holistically will ensure an MFA voice and indeed crisis narrative is heard, enhanced, and recycled. At the very least, if used correctly, the MFA's voice will ring the loudest in comparison to its contemporaries all seeking the same.
- Second, forums continue to matter. Powerful narratives without powerful bases from which to implement them are less effective than more 'arbitrary, rationalistic

and willed' accounts that are pursued consistently by the powerful through a de facto exercise of power. We have seen this happen clearly within this crisis, and on the online community, where larger states such as those in the P-5, or who have a higher GDP emerge as the dominant voices within the online crisis narratives.

- These individual narratives projected by these actors were shaped by particular theoretical and policy paradigms as well as power plays that limit serious consideration of radical alternatives. Thus, while we speak of social media as the great equaliser and the tool which allows all policies and narratives to be heard and interpreted on an equal footing, this is not what we are seeing. Rather, we are seeing that for a powerful narrative to emerge it needs a powerful base in which to implement it.
- These performers were also shown to use the formation, projection, and reception mechanisms to the optimal degree (or as close to it as possible, and as compared to voices of their online contemporaries), and were therefore rewarded with the possibility of shaping the crisis narrative in their favour. Examples here included the justification of policy objectives or policy responses to the security crises, active engagement with online diplomatic networks, in particular regional and international alliances, and the rallying of online public opinion through direct engagement and high reception rates as quantified by retweets, and reshares. Or at the very least, having their narrative projected, enhanced and recycled at a greatest pace and with a greater reach, than other official actors around them who were not shown to use the signalling mechanisms effectively.
- As the battle for narratives is played out online, these actors through their effective use of the online signalling mechanisms, have ordered to some extent the online noise and establish their own narrative in amongst the competing online voices.
- In terms of online crisis management, we have seen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, crisis management is effective when a combination of online tasks are accomplished: an emerging crisis is swiftly detected, agents are briefed/informed on how to react to the crisis online (this can done through the formation of an extensive code of digital

practice, specific to times of conflict), critical decisions are made by the right people, efforts by agents communicating online are orchestrated by the MFA and the serving Ambassador at speed, and finally all agents on the ground and off, communicate with their citizens, inform them of the appropriate consular information, and if necessary at the time, their state position on the crisis. Finally, the agents must seek to have their message received by promoting favourites, retweets, likes and shares. This allows for their message to be further enhanced and recycled through countless sub online communities. None of these tasks are easy to perform, but top performers during this crisis demonstrated that it can be done, or at least very close to it.

- Through effective use of the signalling mechanisms, high performers had the capacity to achieve some of the aforementioned objective, and it is this which what made them distinct from their contemporaries.
- Finally, each actor recognised that crises offer a podium from which to address a large and attentive audience. Knowing this they sought to push their line of argument and communicate in a way that enhanced their stature and protected their political capital. By evidence of their communication activities, and interviews with each performer, the actors acknowledged that in times of crisis, citizens also look to their leaders, expect them to explain what went and is going wrong and narratives are vital resources in doing so. High performer interviewees acknowledged that crisis play out against a backdrop of public expectations (influenced in part by leaders themselves) that can be very challenging to meet, and that is why when MFA's, their governments and their agents communicative effectively within a crisis, the damage can be limited, and this is why consistent, active, and direct engagement with online diplomatic crisis communication activities is vital if a crisis is to be effectively managed and contained.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict acted as a powerful lens in which to view not only the historic process of diplomatic signalling and narrative creation, but also to test and validate our thesis that a) the process of digital diplomatic has significantly evolved in the digital age; b) effective use of the digital signalling mechanisms by online actors crafts and projects consistent and viable foreign policy crisis narratives which are in line with the MFA objectives; c) consistent and viable foreign policy crisis narratives, narratives which are in line with MFA objectives, assist states in virtually enlarging their power; d) high performing actors online are those from states with carry greater political weight offline; and e) the offline political context continues to amongst the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and which what structure online diplomatic actors engage in the crisis communication dialogue. These proposed set of theses have been validated with data and analysis which is grounded a context which is recent, relevant, and impactful for the practice of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy.

A number of core conclusion are reflective of our previous case study: 1) while these mechanisms were deemed to play a central role within the practice of modern day diplomatic communication, their use amongst online diplomatic actors was not as uniform as one may think; 2) variation of use may seem to also depend on a number of external factors to the signalling process itself; existence of a coherent digital strategy, online literacy of diplomatic agents and the political context of crisis itself, all of which are worthy areas for further exploration on this topic; 3) the strong trend of high performing actors emerging from Western nation, who carried greater digital resources and were exposed to more digital training; 4) these actors created narratives were heard the loudest within the crisis dialogue, and with that carried with the potential to sculpt it overall. For a more detailed discussion on these core conclusions see Chapter Five, section 5.5.<sup>120</sup>

However, one conclusion, which the comparison of both crisis highlighted well, was the continuing power of the offline political context. We saw this with that despite the power and possibility that social media brings to the diplomatic realm, one could conclude that

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<sup>120</sup> In concurrence with these conclusions, this chapter obtained a number of key overarching findings, which are reflective of Chapter Five, section 5.5.

not all Ministries during these crises jumped on board, eager to adapt their traditional tactics to the new ways of the crisis (particularly in the case of Israel - Gaza crisis). As has been demonstrated throughout the body of this research, shifts in communication strategies have now created a visible and measurable digital divide amongst MFAs regarding not only the functional use of digital tools (online presence) but also regarding their strategic use (that is the question of whether or not these tools are being used to put out strategy related content). As demonstrated in the both these case, a digital divide has emerged between the 'high performers' and 'low performers'. That is, those actors who use digital communicative capabilities effectively and strategically to create impact on their foreign policy related goals by doing so, compared to those actors who quite simply did not. Thus, linked to reasons surrounding a 'loss of communicative opportunity' sits firm one of the core hypotheses of this research: the notion that the offline political context continues to play one of the greatest roles in how crisis communication is played out online; with the Euromaidan actors engaging more frequently, directly and creating higher levels of engagement with their audience, in comparison to their Israeli-Gaza counterparts. Both case studies examined lay testament to this claim, and while not a policy recommendation per se, MFAs should acknowledge from the outset when engaging in digital crisis communication strategies, that a) it is more likely that high performing online actors are those from states that carry greater political weight offline; and b) the offline political context continues to be amongst the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and with what structure online diplomatic actors engage in the crisis communication dialogue.

Finally, in conjunction with Chapter Five, this chapter illustrated in depth, that the concept of digital diplomatic signalling offers unexplored potential for analysing the use of unique, and emerging soft power capabilities during times of political crisis. It also demonstrated offline political context shapes the limits of online communication. Based on the discussions and justifications of Chapter Three, this chapter also explore the DDS use in relation to creation of online crisis narratives and as instruments needed for a process of virtual enlargement. We can conclude that when used correctly, the processes of DDS and ON can now be best understood as modern crisis communication tools that contribute to the overall creation of effective crisis communication for diplomats on the ground and Foreign Ministries as a whole.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A Note to MFA Policy Makers: Crafting Strategic Communication Policies during Times of Political Crisis

#### Chapter Highlights and Overview

- Building on the results of the high performing online diplomatic accounts, this chapter provides a set of policy recommendations on how MFAs may best achieve effective crisis communication strategies and work towards creating consistent and workable crisis communication practices for both their central HQ and embassies.
  - Recommendations focus on the formation of the crisis narrative, government to peer (G-2-P), government to government (G-2-G), frequency of communication: presence V content, forums for narrative projection, and the optimal combination of mechanisms for effective engagement with the DDS and OCN processes.
  - Contributes to the increasing policy literature on crisis communication and works towards professionalising digital diplomacy crisis communication among diplomats and their institution at large.
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#### 7.0 Introduction

From the power of the political hashtag, to the use of social media to announce Russia's expulsion from the G8, the technological revolution has had a substantial impact on the practice of crisis communication. Through their extensive reach capabilities and the instant power of connection, popular online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and all those residing in between are demonstrating, to their users and observers, that the age of the digital — in particular the age of social media — has substantially altered how we now practice and perceive the role (and power) of communication during times of political crisis (Cassidy and Manor 2016).

While the almost complete restructuring of crisis communication in the digital age — in both its practice and power — has proved itself a *force motrice* of change for nearly all agencies engaged in this arena (both state and nonstate), MFAs and the diplomats who

serve them have been one of the institutions and the cultures which has been affected most.<sup>121</sup> Primarily because the art or practice of diplomacy is one that is known for its historical convention and its allegiance to the same. On the context of the rise in power of civil society (Causey & Howard, 2013), the globalisation of public opinion and the unprecedented increase in new means of communication (Hayden, 2012), the digital age has forced MFAs to reassess, repackage, and ultimately transform their crisis communication strategies. Within this new ecosystem, MFA crisis communication can no longer be confined to interacting with elite policy makers and journalists, but instead carried out through digital forums (a large proportion of which are public) crafted by agents of all standing and directed towards an audience group which is rapidly increasing in its size, delineation and ability to directly react to MFA statements. Social media based communication is no longer perceived by MFAs as solely a press issue, but as a major strand of foreign policy through which ministries promote their values and positions on issues and events (Bjola & Jiang, 2015; Hallams, 2010; Natarajan, 2014). Digital diplomats must seek to absorb and master this very reality if they wish to represent, negotiate, and inform themselves effectively and efficiently during times of political crisis.

However, despite the power and possibility that social media brings to the diplomatic realm, one could conclude that not all Ministries have jumped on board, eager to adapt their traditional tactics. As has been demonstrated throughout the body of this research, shifts in communication strategies have now created a visible and measurable digital divide amongst MFAs regarding not only the functional use of digital tools (online presence) but also regarding their strategic use (that is the question of whether or not these tools are being used to put out strategy related content). As demonstrated in the previous chapters, a further digital divide emerges between the ‘high performers’ and ‘low performers’. That is, those actors who use digital communicative capabilities strategically and effectively to create impact and effect on their foreign policy related goals by doing so, compared to those actors who quite simply did not. Linked to reasons surrounding a ‘loss of communicative opportunity’ sits firm one of the core hypotheses of this research: the notion that the offline political context continues to play one of the greatest roles in how crisis communication is played out online. Both case studies examined lay testament to this claim, and while not a

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<sup>121</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the MFA as an institution, its core competencies, and its structure, see Chapter Two, Section 2.3 Exploring Digital Diplomacy: Emergence, Actors, Definitions and Practice.

policy recommendation per se, MFAs should acknowledge from the outset when engaging in digital crisis communication strategies, that a) it is more likely that high performing online actors are those from states that carry greater political weight offline; and b) the offline political context continues to be amongst the greatest factors in how, to what extent, and with what structure online diplomatic actors engage in the crisis communication dialogue.

Not all high performers share digital communication performances. In short, high performers are variations on a theme. When viewed in isolation, however, they have shown themselves as a group to effectively use online communicative capabilities in achieving communicative success through their engagement with digital diplomatic signalling mechanisms toward the construction of online crisis narratives projected on behalf of the state. As a consequence, to this effective online engagement, these actors gain a considerable advantage over their counterparts in achieving or at the very least, contributing to a process of virtual enlargement. Using these high performers as a framework for analysis, this chapter seeks to draw policy recommendations based on their actions, whilst simultaneously illustrating the complexity and variations of diplomatic crisis communication in the digital age.

The majority of the conversation and practice surrounding online crisis communication strategies primarily focuses on presence rather than strategy; meaning that MFAs are more concerned with whether or not they are being seen to use their online accounts as opposed to whether or not they are actually using them to attain diplomatic goals (Cassidy and Manor 2016). Riordan (2016) argues that strategic digital diplomacy aims to achieve pre-defined and measurable goals. Pamment (2016) also notes that strategic narratives build on the notion that storytelling in the national context can be planned in support of international political goals. Pamment goes beyond Benedict Anderson's nationalistic narratives in terms of identity and community building, opting rather for a *raison d'état* aimed at the international environment (Anderson, 1993 see also Kaldor et al., 2008). Pamment furthermore notes that strategic narratives aim to codify not just a nation's identity, but also its preferred understanding of international orders: "it is through the use of strategic

narratives that emerging and great powers can project their values and interests in order to extend their influence” (Antoniades et al., 2010)”.<sup>122</sup>

Stemming from the acknowledgment that representations of international affairs can influence the conduct of those affairs, this chapter provides a number of key policy recommendations on how MFAs utilise these modern communicative capabilities to create an effective and measurable crisis communication strategy. Building upon the vast amount of data gathered and analysis undertaken, the final product of this research provides MFA policy makers and practitioners a roadmap for strategic crisis communication success in the digital age.

To achieve this aim, this chapter takes the form of two distinct parts. As the changing nature of diplomatic communication during times of political crisis has already been discussed in great depth throughout this research in terms of the changing methods of communication tools, the speed of communication itself and the altered and increased levels of engagement MFAs now experience online, this chapter goes directly to the policy recommendations proposed for effective crisis communication strategies for MFAs. First, we discuss 4 policy recommendations in particular; *Formation of the Narrative, Government To Peer (G-2-P), Government to Government (G-2-G), and Online Diplomatic Network (ODN) engagement, Frequency of Communication: Presence V Content Frequency/Content, Forums for Narrative Projection, On and Offline Political Context and Best Combination of Mechanisms*. Second, using the empirical case studies, and in particular those online diplomatic accounts which emerged as high performers, we provide remedies

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<sup>122</sup> As noted previously, a major problem that emerges from this approach relates to some of the fundamentals of the kind of knowledge it is possible to possess about narratives. Who legitimately contributes to the narrative, and what status do the differing interests of those contributing to the narrative hold in relation to the supposed whole? In short, what is the object of knowledge and for whom can this object be said to exist? (Antoniades et al., 2010; Dittmer, 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2009; Wall, 2005; Bogost, 2006; Baym & Jones, 2012). A means of resolving these theoretical issues is to orient the narrative within the broader concept of discourse. While strategic narratives are an important factor in national storytelling, it is also important to investigate how they are *practiced*. The focus then shifts from the narrative as a thing-in-itself to its position within a context of production and consumption; in short, the relations among strategic narratives, the practice of diplomacy, to those who receive it, in this case online recipients. Drawing on the premise that representations of international affairs can influence the conduct of those affairs, we can then position strategic narratives within a mature body of theory on cultural geography, globalisation, media and communication, and power relations. This has already been discussed in detail in Chapter Two, and Three, but it a point worth reiterating.

on how MFAs may best achieve effective crisis communication strategies towards creating consistent and workable communication practices for their central HQ and embassies. Practices, which will ultimately work towards the creation of a crisis narrative that will provide a) an explanation of a nation's behaviour, goals, and beliefs during the crisis, and project this explanation *en masse* online and b) through the effective use of novel communicative tools such as DDS and ON, demonstrate to MFAs and their representatives how to effectively use them towards the virtual enlargement of the state. This chapter contributes to the increasing policy literature on crisis communication and work towards professionalising digital diplomacy crisis communication among diplomats and their institutions. It concludes with suggesting avenues for further exploration and possible limitations of this research.

## **7.1 Policy Recommendations**

We now present four policy recommendations for effective crisis communication for diplomatic agents during times of political crisis. Each guideline will focus on a particular stage of the crisis communication strategy while also providing policy recommendations regarding it.

### ***1. Formation of the Narrative***

The first recommendation deals with the formation of the crisis narrative, and is directed towards actors involved in creating and forming the narrative, even pre - crisis. The recommendation also turns its focus to the relationship between HQ and the sending state actors on the ground during the crises, and the acknowledgement that consistent and open communication is required between both if a state's online crisis narrative is to be formed with precision and heard amongst the increasing plethora of voices online. In short, the formation of the narrative, in all its forms, is a vital part of an MFAs pre (and during) crisis

communication management. As such, narrative formation should be addressed during any discussion of crisis communication strategies in the digital age.

As previously discussed and illustrated throughout this research, states articulate their identity and foreign policy interests in the international system to influence the perceptions of others and to create an environment in which their goals and efficacy as an actor are viewed as legitimate. In doing so, the discourse of a nation's foreign policy is as much about consolidating and reiterating its self-perception of identity as it is about projecting its interests. Foreign policy has frequently involved the political construction of international frontiers and orders of space in the form of narratives. As Pamment notes, political leaders (in our case MFAs, Ambassador and Embassy ground during a crisis) have sought to create narratives explaining their understanding of international space as an *instrument* of foreign policy itself. The construction of these narratives has therefore performed a crucial role historically in explaining and underpinning foreign policy actions of states for citizens and policymakers, and this research has demonstrated that the digital age has proven itself no different (ibid).

However, despite the acknowledgement by MFAs of the power of the narrative to promote their foreign actions, and to do so publicly, the new media environment has created an altered space in which these agents now have to operate. Real - time diplomacy, and the pressure it creates, has resulted in many diplomats actually stepping back from digital platforms for fear of 'saying the wrong thing' due to a lack of time for proper consultation on what they should say, to whom and when. This is particularly pertinent during a crisis, and as explained in great depth throughout this work, the pressure of 'real-time diplomacy' has only heightened such a fear. Forming a crisis narrative quickly, and having the proper channels in place in which to do so, sits within a larger set of practices that form an integral part of diplomacy itself: to communicate foreign policy goals and decisions, construct a strategic narrative of a state's foreign policy and counter narratives inimical to their interests.

To ensure the formation of a crisis narrative which is consistent with foreign policy aims and interests, and coherent and adaptive to a number of different crisis scenarios, this research sets forth a number of recommendations.

➤ ***Creating and Implementing a Code of Digital Practice:*** The existence of central codes of digital practice remain one of the core reasons for the effective or calculated use of signalling mechanisms and narrative construction by the high performing actors in both case studies. Codes helped guide and direct the Embassy and Ambassadorial accounts communication policies on the ground and establish a sense of security amongst the actors regarding what they should or should not do. All codes analysed from the high performing MFAs outlined, in a varied range of detail, offline communications procedures (press interviews, participation in television programs, to delivering public demarches) and online communications (including use of social media platforms, live streaming events, and online engagement with other official and non-official online actors). These codes provided the actors with direction and confidence regarding their online crisis communication activity, encouraging all staff to make full use of the opportunities offered by social media to help deliver MFA objectives. According to the interviewees of the high performing states, the codes also removed the culture of fear which many diplomats experienced when using social media platforms due to the potential backlash they could face if used in the wrong manner. With the code specifically highlighting the breadth of responsibilities and engagement a Ministry has to its citizens during a crisis or otherwise at home and abroad, however, diplomats stated they felt more at ease in posting and engaging online.

Finally, all interviewees acknowledged that although crisis policy and state positions were not swayed or altered in any manner by the existence and adherence to the code, what it did allow for was the creation of an environment in which existing policies could be highlighted and projected with confidence and strategy. This environment allowed for consistent and concrete narratives to emerge through the effective use of the signalling mechanisms, and for these actor's policies and position to be heard in comparison to their contemporaries online. This research strongly recommends the creation of a detailed, but flexible code of digital practice that highlights the breadth of responsibilities and practices for digital diplomats toward a culture wherein agents can use social media confidently in the active promotion and advancement of MFA interests.

- **Training:** Linking to the creation of a code of digital practice is the recommendation on digital training. This research recommends that adequate training in digital communicative practices should be provided and classed as mandatory to all diplomats within the Ministry: from entry level, to Ambassador, to Director General of the Ministry.

This research recommends that training for all levels is a necessity, as too often the digital communication workload falls to the work of a junior diplomat due to the perception of younger generation diplomats as ‘digital natives’. Although changing, social media tasks are still considered menial (even during a crisis), and so usually fall on the desk of junior attaches. What our research shows, however, is that assigning digital communications to junior officials comes with distinct limitations, particularly during a crisis. The primary limitation being that junior officials possess neither the power to directly comment on policy related issues without prior sanctioning from the channels of upper hierarchies (a direct limitation when it comes to the pressure of ‘real-time’ diplomacy) nor the knowledge or experience of a senior diplomat to always make the most appropriate decision at the appropriate time.<sup>123</sup>

While training can work to overcome many of the issues junior diplomats currently face when engaging crisis communication strategies, ensuring that *all* officials are adequately trained to play the most effective role they can within the Embassy’s crisis communication strategies can go far towards addressing some of the pressures Embassies face in the era of ‘real-time diplomacy’. Training also reduces the possibility of errors online. If, however, a junior diplomat is given the task of social media communications, we recommend that that they are provided with direct and immediate access to other high-ranking diplomats at the embassy who may be called upon to authorise or aid the diplomat in formulating digital

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<sup>123</sup> As just as in academia, diplomacy is to some extent, a profession which lends itself (to some extent) to ‘learning on the go’. Indeed, just like one is not born an academic, one is neither born a diplomat. One may possess innate skills and personality traits akin to these careers, but they must certainly must go through a period of growth and learning before they truly can master the craft. If one can ever master the craft at all. Thus, the point we are getting at here is that junior diplomats are more open to committing mistakes, and going against protocol, consciously or not. Both of these options are not something a Ministry wants nor needs during a crisis, where citizens want and require instantaneous information. Furthermore, these citizens need this information to be correct, from a reliable source and projected with caution and care. Thus, there is increasingly validity and strength to the argument that we should not simply view the opportunity to engage in rapid communication purely as a positive development for diplomatic practice, but also acknowledge its negative traits and the pressure it places on all those who serve the Ministry.

diplomacy content. This can be achieved by simply connecting goal oriented groups on real time response messaging apps such as WhatsApp, for example.

- ***The Centrality of Headquarters:*** From Embassies on the ground to central Ministries back home, the essence of communicative uniformity has long been heralded as a core belief within MFA organisations and strongly reinforced throughout practices of diplomatic communication. During a time of crisis, nothing is seen as more damaging than having different representatives stating contradictory positions, particularly for organisations whose sole purpose is to present a uniformed presence on national and foreign policies. While worthy in itself, the fear of contradictory opinions has arguably contributed to the creation of a ‘culture of communication hesitation’ amongst Embassies on the ground during times of crisis – meaning that Embassies may not wish to speak until their central Ministry has been seen to do so publicly, as examined with those Embassies who did not have a code of digital practice. Or in some more extreme cases, the fear of contradictory opinions has created a complete culture of silence amongst Embassies on the ground, with serving diplomats choosing consciously or not, to give over their power of communication to the MFA itself. The prevailing belief or modus operandi that Headquarters should have total real-time communicative control over all digital platforms, even whilst events are happening in real-time on the ground, should be strongly reconsidered.

If social media platforms are to be used strategically during times of political crisis, and with the best effect, the relationship between the Embassy and its Headquarters must be restructured in a manner that is more relevant for the digital age. While Headquarters should continue to remain the primary site of *intelligence gathering* and policy analysis, Embassies on the ground should take primary control of *disseminating* the MFAs crisis messages online. This emerges from the argument that MFA social media accounts attract diverse audiences including the domestic population, foreign populations and other diplomatic institutions. As such, these channels target a wider audience, with a focus on numerous global issues. But it is Embassies on the ground that hold the coveted market of the local population in which the crisis is being played out including the local press and local policy makers. Embassies have the ability to tailor social media with regard to their follower’s local culture, history, language, and norms as well as their desires and preferences. In times of crisis, embassies may leverage social media to narrate their

nation's policies and actions in a manner that resonates with local audiences and gains their support (Olsson, 2013). Although each actor will continue to play an important role within the crisis communication process, their functions will be altered, or at least more defined.

## ***2. Government to Peer (G-2-P), Government to Government (G-2-G), and Online Diplomatic Network (ODN) Engagement***

Policy recommendation number two looks at the potential that social media platforms have created, namely the increasingly open and direct dialogue between a) official agents and their publics during times of political crisis and b) online diplomatic networks. In this instance, we acknowledge the 'powers' and ability of the online diplomatic network surrounding social media, and increased agency of Embassies within the receiving state structure to now engage with those outside their national diplomatic network.

The core belief held here is that social media has brought with it the power for diplomatic agents to speak directly to their national citizens and their wider international audience, and to respond to their questions and address their concerns (Hayden, 2012; Metzgar 2012; Kampf, Manor & Segev, 2015). As academics and practitioners, we are constantly hearing about the power of online platforms to allow for direct and open communication between all those who hold, and engage with the digital device. However, it is important to note that digital environments are now heavily contested networks in which numerous actors offer their interpretations of events and bid over audience attention. One MFA's narrative may immediately be contrasted by another MFA active on the same network. Conversely, one MFA may choose to support and strengthen another's narrative through shares and retweets. Such use of network power is particularly useful for MFAs during times of political crises, where one of the primary aims of a Ministry is to have their positions heard amongst an array of competing and complementary voices, and to be shown to do so publicly. Many MFAs speak about this power, heralding it as a way in which digital diplomacy has substantially altered diplomatic crisis communication.

What we are witnessing in practice, however, is a different reality. Embassies are not shown to be engaging in G-2-P online dialogue. Meaning, they are not harnessing the full potential of the online platforms they use (Cassidy and Manor 2016). Manor (2016)

specifically found that some MFAs still regard online audiences as volatile and unpredictable and fear online attacks and loss of control over the communication process itself. However, we argue that it is exactly during times of political crises that two-way exchanges of information between diplomats and online publics are at their most crucial and carry the greatest strategic values. This stems from the realisation that online publics are well informed, opinionated and clamouring to be heard (Haynal, 2011; Hayden, 2012) and that during times of crisis, such publics constitute a vocal sphere in which issues are debated, framed and understood. Such debates may also impact the manner in which crises are interpreted by the press, as journalists routinely canvass the “tweetosphere” to understand public sentiment (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Given their strategic goal of shaping the public’s understanding of events, and narrating their nations’ actions and policies, today’s MFAs cannot afford to be absent from online conversations. Two way exchanges of information during times of crises may also demonstrate a country’s confidence in its policies and actions, given that a willingness to openly exchange views with volatile online publics as well as signalling their country’s commitment to diplomacy.

One variable that may limit online Embassy engagement during a crisis is the recurring issue of fear of backlash from social media users. However, in this case, the fear does not come from the diplomat doing anything ‘wrong’ per se, but from garnering negative attention. During times of uncertainty, online publics tend to become vocal and opinionated and increasingly use social media to attack countries and their policies (Cassidy and Manor 2016). However, this research argues that there is an important distinction between comments posted by social media users and questions. Unlike statements of opinion, questions may be seen as the starting point for an exchange of opinions. Previous studies have demonstrated that when social media users ask questions online, they are opening channels of dialogue and signalling a willingness to openly evaluate the answers they receive (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Efron & Winget, 2010; Morris, Teevan, Panovich, 2010; Theunissen & Noordin 2012). As such, this research recommends that online questions should be regarded by diplomats as opportunities for two-way interaction and influence as opposed to statements of opinion, which are one sided and therefore do not demand an answer.

To demonstrate the importance of two-way exchanges of information during crises we take the case evaluated by Cassidy and Manor (2016) relating to a Twitter Q&A with Israel’s

Ambassador during the 2014 Israel Gaza War. Ambassador Ron Dermer took to Twitter to answer questions regarding Israel's military operation in the Gaza strip. What soon followed was a *mélange* of harsh statements of opinion criticising Israel and its policies alongside the open exchange of opinions (Manor, 2014). While some social media users utilised the Q&A as an opportunity to refer to Israeli leaders as war criminals, blame the Israeli army of killing innocent civilians, and to publish images of wounded Palestinians, other users asked the Ambassador about Israel's alleged bombing of hospitals in the Gaza strip, its attempts to warn the civilian population of impending aerial attacks, Hamas' violation of ceasefires and question Israel's lack of regard for Palestinian suffering.

Each of these issues was addressed by the Ambassador thus enabling him to narrate his country's policies and actions, illustrate a roadmap for the crisis' resolution and articulate the Israeli government's objectives. While not all users who monitored the Q&A session were convinced by the Ambassador's answers, it is possible that those posing questions did listen to the answers offered by the Ambassador, or at least had the opportunity to do so. Notably, studies suggest that Q&A sessions may also have an impact on lurkers; social media users who monitor online conversation without partaking in them (Khatib, Dutton & Thelwall, 2012.)

Two-way exchanges of information may also have exponential impact as social media users 'like', 'share' and 're-tweet' diplomat statements to their own social networks. As such, Q&A sessions during crises should be viewed as strategic tool enabling diplomats to influence the worldview of large and diverse audiences, while managing their national image.

One main limitation of such Q&A sessions is that the media may focus on any negative attention received, in this case the verbal attacks against diplomats and MFAs. For instance, Russia Today branded Dermer's Twitter Q&A as an epic failure, while Business Insider referred to it as a complete disaster citing many of the graphic images hurled at the Israeli diplomat. We maintain that such negative coverage may actually be worthwhile, as two-way exchanges of information could enable diplomats to partake and shape the online discourse during a crisis whilst also laying the foundations for the creation of relationships with foreign populations.

### ***3. Frequency of Communication: Presence versus Content***

The third recommendation this chapter make relates to a) the frequency of use in each platform, and b) how this frequency is used in a manner that strategically furthers the foreign policy aims and objectives of the state.

As noted within the conceptual framework, the frequency mechanism is an interesting one to explore in the construction of crisis communication strategies and one that is overlooked by many within today's analysis of digital diplomacy and crisis communication practice in particular. Frequency here refers directly to the proportion of time a diplomatic agent spends online during a time of crisis. But it is not only the numerical frequency of activity that is of importance here. Rather, *how* this numerical activity is used in relation to how the diplomat discusses the crisis determines its impact.

As noted within the online signalling and narrative construction process, this mechanism matters because how important the diplomatic agent is perceived to deem the crisis, matters. This perception can be created through active and frequency discussion which is crisis related. Specifically, if a diplomat chooses to post frequently during a crisis, this frequency projects a signal to their online audience that the diplomat deems the crisis worthy of discussion; that they wish to be viewed as an active actor within this discussion, and to do so publicly. What is believed to be the conscious choice of online actors — that is the choice to actively engage in the crisis communication dialogue as a whole, and on terms which are consistent and frequent – creates signals that are better able to contribute towards a process of virtual enlargement regarding how the Ministry and their agents on the ground view the crisis. If the online actor is not alone in their frequency of activity and backed online by other diplomatic agents with their own active online discussions (as advocated through our previous policy recommendation with the engagement with G-2-G and ODN), then such a chorus of activity provides further legitimacy and projects a unified approach through official actors. Not only does the diplomat view the crisis worthy of discussion, but so do others participating in the conversation around them. Put quite simply, people do not discuss things online that they do not deem in some way important or relevant to their active life. Those representing the craft of diplomacy arguably prove no different. This research strongly recommends that the MFA, and the diplomatic agents on the ground

representing them where the crisis is taking place, should engage frequently on their online platforms of choice.<sup>124</sup>

When discussing the use of frequency in a crisis communication strategy format, however, we must remember that this mechanism should not be viewed in isolation, but in the context of how it was used to visually enlarge the crisis narrative. Crafting and reviewing their crisis communication strategy requires an Embassy to ask of themselves a series of direct questions: 1) did the account post frequently during the crisis? 2) if so, what was the content of this online activity? was it related to the crisis or not? 3) did the level of human resources required to frequently update the Embassies online account directly contribute to projecting and crafting a consistent and relatable narrative to meet the MFAs foreign policy objectives and aims?

As seen from both crisis case studies, there was little variation between frequency levels on both platforms (actors engaged on average on a more frequent basis on Twitter than Facebook, but variation between actors within platforms was not significant). During the Israel - Gaza crisis, for example, we saw the United States Ambassador post an average of 8 times a day, while only dedicating 50% of this conversation to the crisis itself. Compare this to the Canadian Embassy account during the same crisis, who posted on average 2 times a day, while dedicating over 98% of their conversation to crisis related discussion. Both accounts emerged as high performers within this crisis analysis, due to their ability to effectively combine use of all signalling mechanisms in constructing a narrative. Nevertheless, we still recommend to MFAs that posting online, without engaging with the crisis conversation happening around them, holds little value in terms of crafting an effective online crisis narrative, or managing the crisis in a strategic manner. An MFA should recognise this point, and consider it when engaging with this mechanism and making judgments on how a Ministry should incorporate it within their crisis

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<sup>124</sup> As previously noted, in contrast to active engagement and high frequency levels, if the diplomatic agent (and their counterparts) actively chooses to stay silent or post irregularly within the crisis – this too sends a signal, albeit a different one; that the diplomatic agent does not deem the crisis worthy of discussion, and is one they do not wish to engage with for a variety of reasons. Indeed, according to Bell, in diplomatic communication, ambiguity even in the form of silence, may be considered constructive and creative, as politics want to conceal vital information from each other or simply see silence as deliberate means to retain flexibility and make signals disclaimable (Bell, 1971: 74). Either way, it continues to act as a signal and a tool for diplomatic communication.

communication strategy. In short, frequent online activity without engaging with the crisis itself, affects the ability of the MFA to sculpt the crises narrative in their favour.

#### ***4. Forums for Narrative Projection***

The penultimate recommendation of this chapter relates to the type of platform used during diplomatic crisis communication. While all platforms may serve (or have the potential to serve) the same goal of promoting and projecting a state's crisis narrative, each plays a unique role in achieving this goal as each target a different audience, projects the message through different packaging, and engages different sets of actors, official or nonofficial.

This research recognises that there is a vast array of social networks from which government communicators can choose. While some governments and foreign ministries still ponder the pros and cons of social media engagement at any level, others have rightly left this conversation behind and taken on the challenge of using Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to promote their policies and reach their target audiences. Some of these even embrace emerging platforms such as Snapchat, WhatsApp and Telegram where communications are under the radar and almost impossible to track. Reflective of this increasing trend of forum diversity, Burson-Marsteller's 2016 *Twiplomacy* study has been expanded to include more niche digital diplomacy platforms such as Snapchat, LinkedIn, Google+, and Periscope and how they are being used to achieve MFA objectives in distinct manners.

As evident by our cases studies, however, Facebook and Twitter continue to remain the spine of social media outreach during times of crisis, and with that we recommend continuing the use of both platforms as the core basis for the communication strategy. Commenting on the continued prevalence of these accounts amongst MFAs, interviewees of this study noted that due to the increasing number of users that both platforms possess, they continue to prove the optimal medium to reach their diaspora and those travelling,

both with regarding to projecting foreign policy narratives and also routine information regarding consular services particularly in times of crisis.<sup>125</sup>

Secondly, while not a recommendation per se, if an MFA wishes to craft an effective crisis communication strategy, it must be acknowledged that the offline power of the state continues to remain a vital component in relation to which narratives are heard and which are not amongst the increasing plethora of voices online. From our extensive data collection and analysis, we have seen that narratives without powerful bases from which to implement them prove less effective or dominant within the online crisis discourse than more ‘arbitrary, rationalistic and willed’ accounts that are pursued consistently by the powerful through a de facto exercise of power. This acknowledgment also debunks the myth of social media as the great equaliser, and has proved a worthy way in which to explain why some international institutions and national states have consistently emerged as ‘more important’ or better respected in terms of how their messages are engaged with, retweeted, and shared compared to some of their contemporaries. We have seen this argument play out within our chosen case studies, where higher performing actors (whose narratives emerge as the dominant voices within the online crisis discourse) were consistently those who came from P-5 states or who possessed a higher GDP (compared to the online diplomatic accounts).

The individual narratives of these higher performing actors were of course shaped by particular theoretical and policy paradigms, as well as power plays that limit serious consideration of radical alternatives. What our research has shown us is a growing digital divide between MF’s that are active on social media, who possess dedicated teams to run their online engagement and have vast resources in which to do so, and those MFAs that

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<sup>125</sup> A number of interviewees (U.S., the U.K., Canada and Sweden) actually noted the increasing use of the Facebook Safety Check, seeing it as a worthy addition to their own crisis communication strategies and stated that it has proven very helpful within emergency situations. With the increased power of social media to engage in consular functions irrespective of MFA and Embassy coordination, we then posed the question to all interviewees: has the role of the MFA and Embassies become considerably reduced during a crisis? We received an overwhelming ‘no’. All interviewees emphasised the huge information role that MFAs play, and continue to play during a crisis, and built the argument that they see social media more as a tool for them to use, rather than it using them. Through social media channels, MFAs are able to communicate to a larger audience in real time regarding emergency responses, safety measures and transportation. Both the U.S., Sweden and Canada also noted in their interviews that during a crisis, they saw higher numbers in engagement and reach than usually and our Embassy gained a considerable number of followers. They found that on Facebook in particular, people were actually coming directly to them, to receive official information on what was happening in the crisis and what they should do. The Embassy therefore played a direct role in crisis communication engagement. It was also an opportunity for these Embassies and Ambassadors to present their policies to the public on the crisis, and both talk and listen to their citizens concerns regarding them.

continue to see digital engagement as an afterthought, or simply do not have the resources to invest in its practice to the same extent.<sup>126</sup> While we speak of social media as the great equaliser and the tool which allows all policies and narratives to be heard and interpreted on an equal footing, this is not what our research has shown. Rather, we are seeing that for a powerful narrative to emerge it needs a powerful base in which to implement it. While accepting this reality, smaller states with less offline political power, will have to put in substantially more effort when it comes to digital training, crafting codes of digital practice, investing in digital resources, increasing their online engagement and frequency of crisis related content if they are to competitively engage with ‘higher performing’ states who continue to dominate and sculpt the narrative in their favour.

### ***5. Optimal Combination of Mechanisms***

Our final recommendation turns to the best combination of digital signalling mechanisms a MFA should use to construct an effective online crisis narrative towards virtual state enlargement. We build on the high performer typology that illustrates how a diplomatic actor may use the proposed online mechanisms in an effective manner in the achievement of these goals.<sup>127</sup> Though the previous policy recommendations and discussions all touch on each aspect of digital signalling mechanisms individually, the discussions on the formation of the narrative, G-2-P & G-2-G engagement, frequency of communication: presence v content frequency/content, and forums for narrative projection - this research recommends that MFAs need to view and engage with the signalling mechanisms holistically to bring about the possibility of ensuring a) the creation of an online crisis narrative and b) virtual state enlargement. In short, the centre of this recommendation involves a respect for the power of each mechanism, and the role it plays within the overall crisis communication strategy. The cumulative use of each mechanism serves to create a substantial impact for the MFA in terms of narrative creation and foreign policy projection

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<sup>126</sup> There is still a small number of government leaders who refuse to embrace the new digital world and, for these few, their community managers struggle to bring their organisations into the digital century.

<sup>127</sup> Effectively - as previously noted - refers in this instance to the use of these capabilities in a manner, which works to enlarge a state's importance online. That each mechanism is used with the potential to best enhance a state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create an appealing message, and one of high frequency, to officials and non-officials alike.

and expansion, ultimately building a path towards more effective crisis communication strategies and management for both the Embassies on the ground, and MFAs back home. Such a recognition of the power of using the mechanisms holistically is vital for crisis communication success.

The scope conditions for this effective use of the signalling mechanisms are illustrated below;

<b>H<sub>a</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	$X \geq$ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Heightened Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Head of Mission
<b>Target Audience:</b>	High Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Direct
<b>Network Power:</b>	Increased use of National/Regional Diplomatic Networks Online.

## 7.2 Conclusion

The digital revolution has altered the practice of crisis communication. While state and non-state actors have been affected by the digital (re) evolution, perhaps no other organisation and its culture has been so more than MFAs and the agents who serve them. Some have argued that MFAs are in the midst of a culture clash given their institutional affinity to information guarding as opposed to the Web's culture of information sharing (Copeland, 2013; Wichowski, 2015). We have seen evidence of this clash in our case studies, with vast variation between online actors in terms of their crisis communication practices and pre - formed communication strategies. We have also seen that within the increasing literature and conferences on the subject of digital diplomacy, many MFAs have unsurprisingly become swept up in the hyperbolic discourse surrounding the "power of the digital" and have failed to translate this hype into effective communicative practice. What has emerged is an increasing disparity between what MFAs currently believe to be a

workable crisis communication strategy during times of political crisis versus what they are actually committing to in practice.

By zoning in on some of the most pertinent aspects of the construction of online crisis narratives created through the use of the signalling mechanisms, this chapter has provided a number of pertinent recommendations that will enable MFAs to improve their strategic crisis communication activities. These include the formation of a clearly defined set of digital practices and training before any crisis has taken place, the increased use of online engagement with both official and nonofficial actors to effectively narrate government action, and the recognition of the unique use of different social media platforms to reach diverse social media users and to use these platforms accordingly. Finally, the acknowledgement of the continued power of the offline world. Particularly in terms of the offline status of the actors determining whether their crisis communication strategy may be effective or not, or whether their state's crisis narrative is heard amongst the increasing plethora of voices online. This acknowledgement or indeed acceptance, remains a vital component to successfully navigating crisis communication activities in the modern day. This acknowledgment is even more necessary in smaller states with limited resources, who must seek to use these recommendations religiously and seek to create within their Ministry a strong 'digital will' in which to carry them out. Each of these recommendations aims to enable MFAs to transition conceptually and operationally from online presence to impact. This chapter serves as a roadmap for diplomats seeking to realise the full potential of crisis communication during the digital age.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Concluding Remarks and Discussion

*“We can fear we can’t control it and ignore the space, or we can recognise we can control it, and seek to influence it”*

- Eric Cohen, speaking on digital diplomatic practice

#### 8.0 Introduction

This research set out to unpack the changing nature of diplomatic crisis communicative capabilities during the digital age. It deconstructed the historic communication processes of diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives, and explored the evolution of each, as a direct result of the technological advancements and the global information space. While examining the mechanisms and individual makeup of each process, this research moved beyond these communicative capabilities as singular tools for analysis, uncovering their unexplored potential as tools for foreign policy power projection and expansion, and also a means by which MFAs could contribute to the process of virtual state enlargement.

By developing a unique conceptual and methodological framework in which to discover and analyse the processes of digital diplomatic signalling (DDS) and online crisis narratives (OSN), this research demonstrated that both communicative capabilities have become essential components of an MFA’s communicative toolbox, and should be regarded as such. They should be seen by national and international diplomatic institutions alike as worthy instruments to exert and extend their diplomatic influence both at home and abroad. Using DDS and OCN as conceptual lenses, this research explored how the inherent power within digital mediums has evolved to become a communicative advantage during a crisis and how, if used effectively (by an MFA or its officials), this can act as an

instrument to achieve their foreign policy goals and objectives. A recent crop of studies addressing the emergence of communicative power under the labels ‘foreign policy in global information space’ has added substantial weight to these claims, supplying new ways of extrapolating the power projections of digital diplomatic actors online. Through the exploration of two distinct, but interlocking case studies – the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, and 2013/4 Euromaidan crisis – this research tapped into the unexplored potential of DDS, its outcomes of OCN creation, and the overall impact of both processes on foreign policy projection and influence during times of political crisis.

The central thesis, which views digital diplomatic communicative capabilities as tools that states can use to project and expand their power during times of political crisis, has been argued throughout all preceding chapters. These tools are borne out of the necessities of maintaining and achieving foreign policy objectives in an unfamiliar environment characterised by globalisation, intensified information flow and the existence of the nation-state. It has been argued that this unfamiliar environment can now be regarded as a globally enlarged space, which is at the mercy at the power of information flows, and has dramatically altered the realm in which foreign policy is formed and projected along with the communication tools now at the disposal of the diplomat. All of the foreign policy experiences highlighted within this thesis suggest that, in global information space, foreign policy will have to be permanently vigilant in articulating community. It is also less inhibited by power and status inequalities in asserting actomess. These experiences challenge the foreign policy-maker to learn adaptability from permeable frontiers and the increasing ability of non-state actors in declaiming their voice through global networks of connectedness. Finally, it was demonstrated that this space is now both polycentric and public in character, and a common site for struggles of definitions of order, community and identity. The evolving of commonality of order, community and identity is analysable in terms of the power of information, which in a strict sense is the creation of meaning in signals and narrative. This power is also a Foucauldian formation of a ‘regime of truth’, whereby power is synonymous with the subjective genesis of ideas and with the linkages between them (Foucault 1975).

In this final chapter, the main results of the analysis will be summarised and the specific contributions of this research to diplomatic studies and crisis communication will be discussed in detail. The relevant findings for each theme will be explored and presented individually, beginning with the evidence provided in relation to each of the core research questions posed, followed by additional findings which emerged from the analysis of each theme. The purpose of this chapter is to therefore connect the various issues and arenas of study covered throughout the body of this work, and to provide comments regarding the meaning of the work as a whole. These discussions will then be followed by an exploration of the implications of the research for diplomatic studies and policymakers, which draws on an assessment of the strengths and liabilities of the methodological approaches used in this study. Although the implications and contributions for the practitioner have been expanded upon in detail within Chapter Seven, with the provision of a set of core policy recommendations for MFAs and their agents during a crisis, this chapter will finally identify further theoretical and policy implications of this research with respect to the overall arena of study, and provide direction and areas for future work.

## **8.1 Research Questions and Findings**

Through a discussion of this research's four sub-questions, this section will summarise and synthesise the key findings of this work. Each question will present the study's key findings, and will be linked to the overall research question, which is presented in brief below.

### ***Overall Research Question:***

*What role does digital diplomatic signalling play in the creation of online crisis narratives and to what extent can it serve as a communicative tool for virtual enlargement during times of political crisis?*

This question cut straight to the core of one of diplomacy's age-old practices, diplomatic signalling, and allowed us to explore how, and where, it fits within contemporary diplomacy. The question was posed with the acknowledgement that social media is now the primary mode of public communication for diplomats during a crisis (as discussed in Chapter Two), but that existing knowledge on its use is fragmented, dealing only with limited facets of digital diplomatic interaction (Chapter Two). By exploring and providing answers to this central question, this research contributed to fill this lacuna by providing a clearer insight into this transformative process for diplomatic crises communication in the modern age, and paving the way for future research within it.

This question was weaved throughout the entire body of the work, with each chapter building on the last. It flowed through Chapter Two, which highlighted the centrality of communication to the practice of diplomacy both historically and now in the global information age, the forces of globalisation which are now sculpting and altering this relationship of essence. Providing then for the reader a strong historical tract leading to the current evolutionary standpoint regarding communication relationship and impact on diplomacy, with a discussion and analysis on the relatively new practice of digital diplomacy itself, and how this practice has been shown to affect certain communicative capabilities. In the case of our research: diplomatic signalling and crisis narratives.

Firmly situated within Chapter Two's discussions on the themes of the global information age, and diplomacy's historic relationship with communication, Chapter Three (re) conceptualised the processes of diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives within the digital age. The reconceptualisation of both these two practices was not only a core aim of this research, but was paramount to answer the overall research question posed: we needed to understand how both practices were formed and projected during the digital age. Through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological framework, this chapter also conceptualised how, when used consistently, and effectively, these processes carried the potential to contribute and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement.

The conceptualisation of these two communicative capabilities in the digital age, both in terms of both their individual makeup, and their potential for virtual state enlargement, is then tested in Chapter Five and Six through data generated by the 2014 Israel-Gaza crisis and 2013/4 Euromaidan conflict. Through uniquely curated data, both chapters tested how digital platforms were used by diplomatic agents during the crisis. Using both communicative capabilities as analytical filters, the chapters assessed overall diplomatic crisis communication performance by the sending state's diplomatic actors within the receiving state (specifically Embassies stationed in Tel Aviv and Kiev) during the crisis, and evaluated how both communicative processes served (or did not serve) as instruments for virtual enlargement during the time of conflict. These chapters also examined our hypothesis that the digital signalling and narrative creation processes now have the potential to act as effective tools for diplomatic communication and crisis management.

Drawing on the overall findings of this research, Chapter Seven acted a lynchpin to our work, providing a set of policy recommendations on how MFAs may best achieve effective crisis communication strategies and work towards creating consistent and workable communication practices for both their central HQ and embassies alike. While the chapter is the product of our findings, it is also a standalone set of tangible policies which MFAs and their agents may use from the outset during times of crisis.

*(1) how has the process of diplomatic signalling evolved during the digital age, and through what mechanisms are diplomatic signals now generated online?*

This research opened with the premise that diplomatic signalling is not a novel practice to diplomacy, but that *digital* diplomatic signalling is. Through wide-ranging examples – from the Amarna period, to the Iranian hostage crisis, to the Northern Irish Peace Process – Chapter Two illustrated that the process of diplomatic signalling has historically always played a key and heightened role, in diplomatic affairs during times of political crises. Diplomats, for example, were shown to incorporate this practice as a core component within their crisis communication strategies, sending signals through Collective

Representations, Demarches, Minister State visits or in the most recent past, pre-recorded news broadcasts. Here, tone was usually formal in structure and language, with a diplomat of high standing delivering it. They allowed diplomats a deliberate means in which to retain flexibility and make the positions disclaimable, allowing the sender to later argue, ‘I never said that’, or ‘this is not what I meant’, if the situation called for it. This technique was shown to prove particularly efficient during a crisis, when diplomats wished to fly a ‘trial balloon’ – that is they did not have the time to present a clear position of where they may have stood, or the situation was rapidly changing leaving them to be wary of presenting publicly a strong position. Thus, by using a process of signalling, diplomats in many instances avoided embarrassment and disassociated themselves from the message if it received a particularly negative response. This historical account created a solid foundation from which to explore how diplomatic signalling is used in the modern day, and with what impact.

Thus, set against the backdrop of the global information space, Chapter Three expanded upon the significant changes within the practice and analysis of crisis communication capabilities as a whole. It was shown that although changes in the field of crisis communication have been fast and swift, it has shown itself to be anything but linear, being used in a variety of ways by a range of diplomatic actors. In terms of *diplomatic signalling* specifically, we saw that the once formal, well-crafted and somewhat secretive practice has (partially) lost its relevance for those who practice and study it, being substituted instead with a communication process which sees signals sent through public forums, created by agents of all standing and directed towards an audience group which is high in number, reactive and delineated.

By reconceptualising the practice of diplomatic signalling in the digital age, Chapter Three coined the definition of digital diplomatic signalling, stating that it was

*a message or process carried out through a digital medium, by state officials or entities of one state, and acts – whether intended or not – as a symbolic representation of the state’s position on the issue at play.*

Expanded on further, it stated that the process is,

*created and enhanced through a number of distinct, but interlocking online mechanisms; which are illustrated through five core categories; message content and structure, status of the sender, audience reception, frequency, and network power, with each serving both individual and cumulative functions for the creation of diplomatic signals online. Through the formation, projection and reception of online messaging, the process can therefore serve to craft online crisis narratives, thereby acting as powerful instruments for 'virtual state enlargement'; a manner where states can exert and extend their foreign policy reach and presence through digital means.*

Diplomatic signals were therefore found to be generated by *five online mechanisms: content making, status of the sender, audience reception, frequency and online network power*. Stemming from an in-depth analysis of the current literature and data available, these five mechanisms were created and formed from the latter's conclusion, as it is believed they best encapsulate each stage of the signalling process – from who sends the signal, to how consistently they send it, how it is structured, and who may pick it up, with each mechanism serving a unique purpose. When analysed individually during our case studies (Chapter Five and Six), each mechanism acted as analytic spotlight in which to view how diplomatic signalling has evolved as a direct result of social media use, whilst also serving as a valuable comparative tool in assessing how online actors now use social media platforms during times of crisis. When analysed cumulatively, the mechanisms and their practice were used as a method to create a standardisation tool reflecting what style of diplomatic signalling was seen to have the greatest capability for an MFA projecting and having their crisis message received by official and unofficial entities in the digital age.

The key findings in terms of how their messages were used, were as follows:

- I. Use of signalling mechanisms varied significantly in terms of individual actor use, thereby creating varying spectrums of effective crisis communication for online actors within the crisis.
- II. Regarding the *content* of the message, the majority of online actors were shown to dedicate no more than 50% of their online discussion within the crisis period, to the political commentary of the conflict itself. This was true for both crises.
- III. There emerged a significant variation regarding the extent of crisis discussion between both crises; the Euromaidan crisis showing an average of 46% across both platforms, and the Israel-Gaza conflict 25%. Taking factors such as digital resources, training, codes of practices and the MFAs themselves, the offline political context was shown to play the greatest role in why such a significant variation of occurred. When interviewed, the actors present within both crises also backed this reasoning.
- IV. The majority of online actors were also shown to be reluctant to discuss the crisis directly online, in terms of how they chose to *structure* and project their messages. Across both platforms, and within both crises, all actors preferred to discuss the crisis through indirect packaging, such as retweets and reshares. This was compared to how they engaged with discussions which were not related to the conflict, where they primarily projected as direct messages.
- V. Although the actors were reluctant to engage in direct crisis discussion, the top posts in terms of audience engagement for all actors and within both crises, were those which directly discussed and addressed the crisis, and did so in a direct structure. This leads us to theorise that despite the actor's reluctance to discuss the crisis and to do so directly, this was what their online audience most wanted to read about and engage with.
- VI. Within both crises, Twitter emerged as the platform of the choice for actors to engage with, projecting frequency levels of 3.9 and 2.10 per day for the Israel-Gaza crisis and Euromaidan, respectively. Facebook projected significantly lower averages with .202 (Israel-Gaza) and .435 (Euromaidan) per day. The actors interviewed explained this preference as result of Twitter's perceived higher real-time function, use of the hashtag for information gathering and analysis, greater presence of journalistic and news outlets and higher engagement between online actors through retweets and favourites.
- VII. Across both platforms, Embassy accounts were the preferred account from which to

project their message. Apart from the Swedish Ambassador's account, no Ambassadorial account was shown to be curated solely by the Ambassador, with their discourse instead being framed in third person rhetoric.

- VIII. Despite the opportunities awarded to actors to engage with international networks, interaction with national online networks was by far the most extensive network engaged with for all accounts analysed. That is, the interaction between the Embassy on the ground and their Central Foreign Ministry and their National Parliament. Despite these opportunities, the lack of engagement with this international network was explained by the actors as result of, unlike national networks, the voice of the international community was not always supported during a time of crisis, and therefore the online diplomat account did not feel compelled or pressured to retweet, favourite or share their information. However, the national network did, by default, support the policies and positions of the account, and therefore could be engaged with confidence and frequency.

At the broadest level, this question explored how technological advancements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have altered one of diplomacy's most historic diplomatic communicative practices during times of crisis or otherwise. It demonstrated how information technologies, in particular how social media platforms, are increasingly being incorporated into the daily practice of diplomatic communication, how this change has transformed diplomatic activities in general, and how diplomats now communicate with each other online and with their citizens at large.

*(2) how can the overall process of digital diplomatic signalling contribute to the creation of online crisis narratives?*

The relationship between the digital diplomatic signalling process and the creation of online crisis narratives was one aspect of this research which proved difficult to make explicit. Through our reconceptualisation of both processes we found that, when used effectively, the online signalling practice now carries with it the increasing potential to act as a tool through which diplomats can form, project and have received their own *online*

*crisis narratives* – narratives which have always proven a valuable communicative asset for MFAs and their agents during periods of intense conflict. At first, if only analysed as a standalone process in itself, the process of digital diplomatic signalling was shown to create for the MFA, *inter alia*, increased foreign policy projection, a heightened presence of their crisis positions online, and (through a series of retweets and reshares) the multiplication of the state's crises message within and amongst the online diplomatic networks. However, when viewed as a process which carries with it the potential to be linked to other communicative ones, we saw that the outcome for using the digital signalling process effectively was the sculpting, and creation of a strong and 'reliable' online crisis narrative on behalf of the state. Narratives in this instance should include an explanation for their online audience of what has happened within the crisis, what consequences can be expected, how the crisis is expected to be resolved, and where the state stood in relation to their policy position. Narrative also became a key currency of crisis management.

- While all actors created a crisis narrative within both crises, it was those who actively and effectively engaged with all of the online signalling mechanisms, and viewed the use of mechanisms as a holistic process, who created narratives which were the most consistent and therefore the most 'sellable' in terms of achieving their policy objectives. They were also the narratives who were heard the 'loudest' amongst the increasing plethora of online voices.
- Without exception, those who created these most effective narratives came from 'Western' states. Within both crises, it was found that the voices which dominated the crisis discourse offline, due to their global power and resources in which to do so, were also the voices dominating the discourse online, where they sculpted the crisis narratives in their favour.
- Within both crises, formation of the narrative depended highly on the existence of a detailed code of digital practice, which was constructed pre-crisis.
- By projecting and expanding the reach of their foreign policy during a crisis and by building a crisis narrative upon it, a narrative that was comprehensible and appealing to other powers or transnational audiences, an MFA was shown to meet its foreign policy aims where the use of material resources and capabilities would fail to do so.
- Enhancing a state narrative served to contribute to a process of virtual state enlargement for the high performing actors, namely through the increased projection and reception of their state crisis narrative.

*(3) during times of political crisis, how can the processes of digital diplomatic signalling and online crisis narratives contribute and work towards the creation of virtual state enlargement?*

Based on the findings of Chapters Five and Six and the policy recommendations of Chapter Seven, this research proposed a number of feasible methods which states can use to exert their influence and presence in the global information age, contributing to a process of 'virtual state enlargement'. These strategies – in which DDS and OCN are vital components – must now be considered alongside material resources as a determinant of whether emerging great powers are able to shape a new systemic alignment. Thus, it is through the use of these virtual strategies that emerging and great powers can now attempt to project their values and interests in order to extend their influence, manage expectations and change the discursive environment in which they operate.

In proposing these strategies, this research has shown that while both communicative capabilities – DDS and OCN – can be viewed as worthy tools in their own right (both in terms of their role and impact within an MFA's crisis communication strategy), it is when both communicative capabilities were effectively combined that they bring with them the possibility for MFAs to achieve something more: virtual state enlargement. The reconceptualisation of both of these practices was not only a core aim of this research, but was paramount in answering the overall research question posed – as, in order to do so, we first needed to understand how both practices were formed and carried out during the digital age. Through the construction of a unique conceptual and methodological framework, this research also conceptualised how, when used consistently and effectively, these processes can contribute and work towards a process of virtual state enlargement; a means where the state can exert their foreign policy power both on and offline. As such, we can say that the outcome of digital diplomatic signalling was online crisis narrative creation, but the effect was virtual state enlargement.

When analysing how a state can best achieve or contribute to this process of virtual state enlargement, this research assessed the combinations of mechanisms which contributed most effectively to this process. This was seen in high performance typology. Within this typology each mechanism was used to its greatest potential to enhance the state's foreign policy message, extend its reach, and create a consistent and appealing message to officials

and non-officials alike. The possible scope conditions (below) for an account to fall within this type were proposed, tested and validated within the examination of each crisis.

<b>H<sub>a</sub>: Frequency of Posting:</b>	$X \geq$ Once a Day
<b>Content of the Message:</b>	Heightened Online Discussion of Conflict
<b>Status of Diplomat:</b>	Head of Mission
<b>Target Audience:</b>	High Numerical
<b>Structure of Message:</b>	Direct
<b>Network Power:</b>	Increased use of National/Regional Networks

The testing and validation of these scope conditions for the creation of virtual state enlargement, allowed us to conclude that while each mechanism is valid in its own right, it is the inter relationship and overall interaction between all five that ultimately allows for a rounded interpretation of the signalling and narrative process online, as seen during a time of crisis. It is thought that this standardisation tool will aid in creating a replicable method in which both communicative capabilities can subsequently be evaluated and explored.

## 8.2 Conclusions and Perspectives for Further Research

This research has focused on a very specific empirical realm – digital diplomatic communication during times of political crisis – and therefore its conclusions can be generalised beyond this dataset only at a hypothetical level. The choice of such a specific theme was influenced more by changing current trends in diplomatic practice as a whole, than by any strong assumption on the specificity of diplomatic communication capabilities within the digital age. Furthermore, our data set was narrow in terms of the number of case studies it analysed. The limits placed on the number of cases studies was due to the vast amount of data generated *within* each crisis, data which was necessary in its breadth and depth in order to explore and test our proposed hypothesis.

A relevant direction for further research would therefore be to repeat our analysis with reference to a wider dataset, obtained by relaxing some of the conditions set in Chapter Four for the selection of conflicts or episodes of negotiation. It would be particularly interesting to expand the dataset to include a larger portion of modern political crises (for example the 2016 attempted coup in Turkey, or the increasing political conflict emerging online between the United States and North Korea) and / or to compare the results obtained in this research with reference to other variations of crises – humanitarian, economic or environmental. While we expect that most of the core findings to emerge from this research would still hold by relaxing these conditions and significantly increasing the diversity of the dataset, it would also be reasonable to expect (for instance) that as our analysis of the crises inched closer to the modern day, MFAs would be shown to have gained a greater grasp on these novel communicative capabilities (and indeed the practice of digital diplomatic signalling more generally) and with that become more confident in how they strategically use them during a crisis. We would arguably see this specifically in practices relating to the content and structure of the message structure, where crisis-related discussion would be increased, and direct structures regarding these messages would not be shied away from due to fear of misuse or lack of training. Any such changes in the composition of the dataset, however, would also make it more difficult to explore each crisis in the level of depth, but it would create a case where we could make justified and defensible claims on how these capabilities were used during the crisis at play. With that said, the reconceptualisation of these practices and the creation of a standardised and replicable framework in which to study them has already been achieved within this study, thereby allowing a researcher from this moment forward to build on it, and dedicate their analysis solely to the case studies and their analysis.

In Chapter Four, this research also noted that in its analysis of processes of diplomatic crisis communication strategies it consciously excluded certain online accounts actors which in many (if not all) instances are amongst the core actors within the diplomatic institution. These accounts included Headquarter level accounts, Foreign Ministers, their deputies and other Embassy or Ambassadorial accounts. The interaction and online engagement of these accounts with the diplomatic accounts analysed was not restricted within this research, but their individual narratives and how they communicated through the proposed digital signalling mechanisms was not a central aspect of this work, or the viewpoint in which our theses were tested. That was reserved for those online diplomatic

accounts operating under the sending state and being physically represented within the country of conflict. Again, this exclusion was primarily undertaken as a direct consequence of the extent of data generated from the chosen data set, and the subsequent limitations of time and scope that existed for this project. We once more expect that by relaxing these conditions and significantly increasing the diversity of the dataset, our core findings would remain intact and only served to be fortified in their claims.

The final direction for future research would be for the expansion of greater empirical testing regarding the reception of the narrative, and by consequence the final stage in the process of virtual state enlargement. Indeed, one of the limitations of this study comes from seeking to quantify the impact or influence of the signalling and narrative process as a whole. Thus, it is important to note that this research does not or perhaps cannot determine whether or not social media platforms may prevent or mitigate a crisis purely through communication process. This research is not therefore a discussion of how digital platforms may or may not have transformed a crisis *outcome* overall. Instead, this thesis acknowledges from the start that testing and evaluating the overall impact of digital communication on any international events is a difficult task, with digital analytical tools simply not having the power to isolate communication processes in order to test their direct impact on the events in question. Indeed, even in instances of successful isolation, making bold claims regarding the true effectiveness of communication is tenuous at best, due to the host of other factors surrounding a crisis situation. However, providing stronger claims to satisfy the questions such as ‘how far did the message travel both online or off?’, ‘did official actors receiving the message alter their state's policies and objectives concerning the crisis?’ and ‘can we *directly* say the reception of an accounts online signals and narratives altered the crisis to some/any degree’ could only serve to strengthen this work. While these questions are all-encompassing, and extremely difficult to gauge and quantify with the current available methodological tools and resources, the future development of tools to explore this stage of the narrative process in more detail may represent an interesting context in which the theories developed in this thesis can be tested.

## Appendix A

### *Factors affecting numerical membership (the case of Israel - Gaza conflict)*

Now if Ministries wish to harness the power of this mechanism within their crisis communication strategies, and create a platform where their policies and narratives can be heard by many, the possible reasoning behind the numerical variations between accounts must be explored. Once these reasoning's are explored, we can then make judgments and recommendations on how an online diplomatic actor and their Ministry can best use this mechanism to expand their message reach, and strengthen their online position and policies during a crisis. The Israel - Gaza crisis, and the data generated within it, has revealed some reasons which may explain the variation of figures within the audience membership category: frequency of use, date of creation and the presence of an existing digital strategy.

First is the *frequency* of use. Based upon the current data found with the field of social media analytics, this motivation begins with the assumption that the more frequently an account chooses to post, the more likely it is to possess a higher number of followers. This is because increased posting, has been shown to increase an accounts presence and engagement amongst its followers, and as a consequence, increase its follower count overall (Burston – Marshall 2015, 2016). The Israel – Gaza crisis has shown this hypothesis to be true. For example, on Twitter the average number of times an account posted was 3.99 times a day, with the account with the greatest numbers of followers, the United Kingdom (10,314), being significantly above this average, posting 5.50 a day. Compare this to the Panama Embassy account, which did not post at all during the crisis, and was also shown to have the least number of followers (58). Furthermore, both France (84) and Canada (107), who had the second and third lowest follower count respectively, also demonstrated a frequency activity level which was significantly below the average, posting 1.35 and 1.73 times per day respectively. Facebook numerics also backed this claim, with the account with the greatest numbers of followers, the United States (40,492), having a significantly higher posting average of 0.22 posts per day (compared to 0.172 day per average for all accounts). The account which had the lowest amounts of followers Belarus (132), was shown to be inactive during the entire crisis period, further backing the assumption that frequency directly affects audience counts.

With that said, on both online platforms, two accounts went against this claim. On Twitter, this was the United Kingdom account (12,278) and the EEAS (9,954), who despite having significantly higher followers than the average, also showed a frequency level which was significantly lower. On Facebook, it was the EEAS (1023) and Sweden (805) who also challenged this trend. These distinct deviations from the assumption, that increased frequency of activity leads to increased audience count could therefore be explained by another set of factors, of which, the date of the accounts creation is one.

Within the Euromaidan Conflict, frequency of activity was also shown to have a correlation to the audience count. On Twitter, for example, we discovered the average number of times an account posted was 2.01 times a day, with the account with the United States Ambassador (53,535 followers), being significantly above this average, posting 20 times a day on average. This was compared to the Korean Embassy account, that was shown to have an average of 0.34, and was also shown to have the least number of followers (286). Both Slovenia (275) and Israel (656), who had the second and third lowest follower counts, also displayed a frequency activity level well below the average, posting 0.59 and 0 times per day, respectively. Facebook numerics also backed this claim, with the United States (52,958 followers) having a significantly higher posting average of 1.64 a day, (compared to 0.438 posts – day per average for all accounts). Finally, just as seen in the previous crisis, the Facebook platform had a much lower frequency average, compared to the Twitter platform.

With that said, on both online platforms, two accounts went against this claim. On Facebook, this was Canada (10,620 followers) and Germany (10,041 followers), who despite having significantly higher followers than the average, also showed a frequency level which was significantly lower. The trend did not follow through for all accounts on Twitter. These distinct deviations from relationship between frequency and audience across both platforms could possibly be explained by another set of factors, of which, the date of the account's creation remains one.

Regarding the accounts *date of creation* and its relationship of its number of followers, we put forth the assumption that the longer an account has been active, the more followers it has had the potential of accruing. Within both cases, we see that this assumption holds true, where on Twitter, the United Kingdom had the highest direct audience figures, whilst also

being the first account within our data set to be created: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2009. If we exclude Panama from the set (as they remained inactive during the entire crisis), the account who had the second lowest target audience (French Embassy), was also the account which was created last: 9 December 2014.

Although this assumption was challenged slightly by the data generated within this crisis, it remained a strong trend upon on the Facebook platform. Here, the United States Embassy account which had the highest target audience numbers of 40,492, was also the second account out from our data set to be created (12 November 2010), second only to the United Kingdom (created 23 May 2010), and coming just behind the United States within the audience figures of 12,278. Furthermore, although the account with the least number of followers - Denmark (609) - was not the last to be created, all other accounts which fell at the bottom of account creation scale on the Facebook platform - Hungary, Romania, Australia and Sweden – also fell below the average of an accounts audience count. However, the exceptions to this rule once again emerged from the states who were, known for their active and detailed digital strategies: The United States, European Union and Sweden. These three online accounts defy the above assumption that date creation correlates to follower counts, and force us once again, to explore other avenues of correlation, namely the presence of a strong digital strategy.

Figure 1.1 Date of Creation Timeline of all online diplomatic actors on Twitter

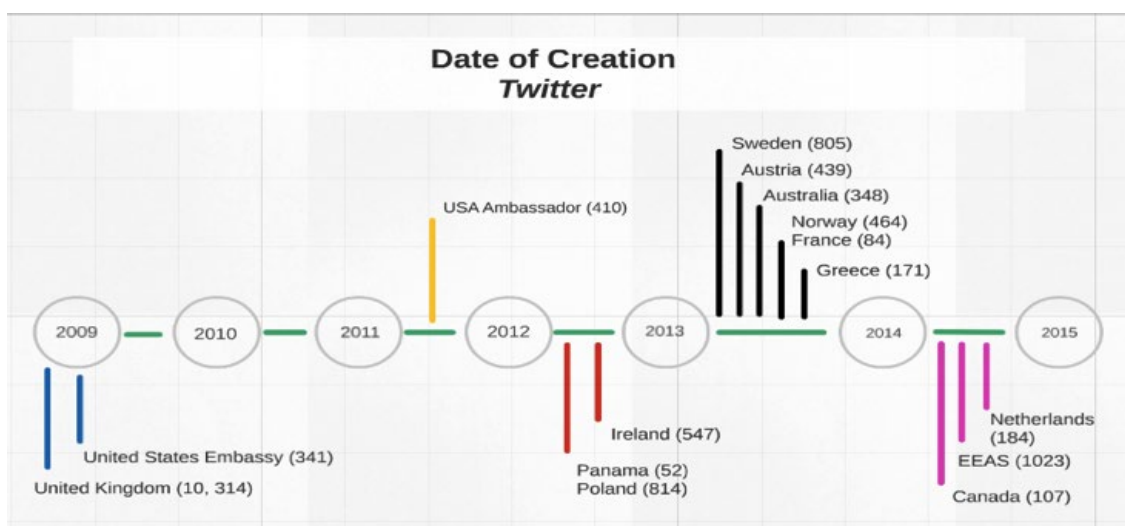
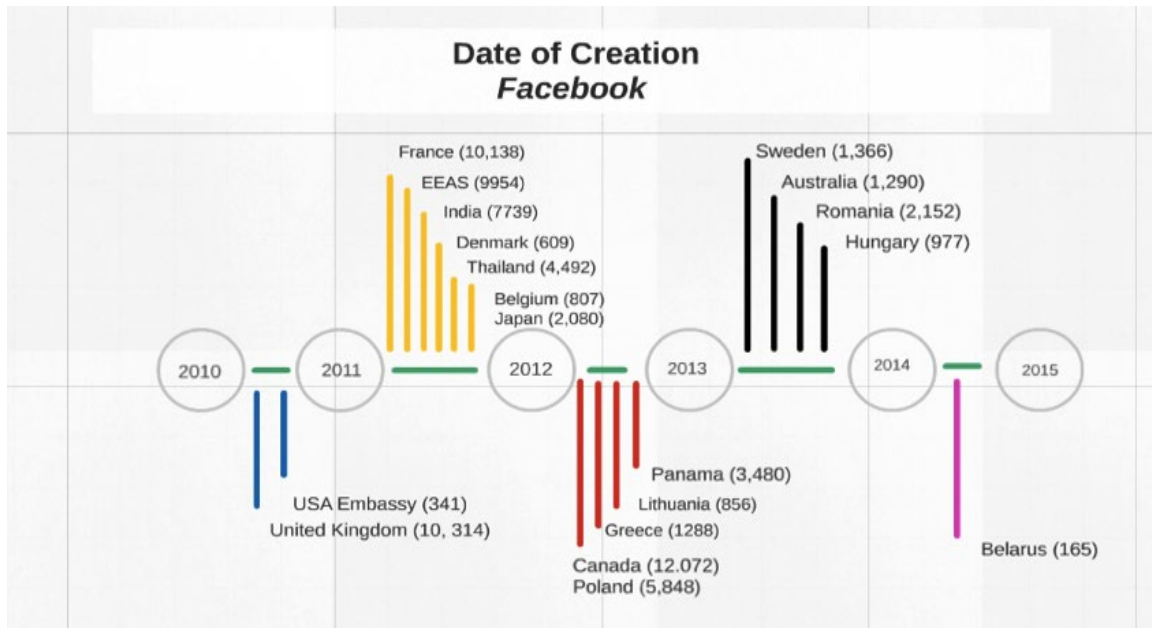


Figure 1.2 Date of Creation Timeline of all online diplomatic actors on Facebook



Regarding the account's *date of creation* and its relationship of its number of followers, within the Euromaidan conflict, we see that within the Twitter sphere this assumption holds true, with United States having the highest target audience figures, whilst also being the first account of our data set to be created: 3rd February 2010. Although this assumption was challenged slightly by the data generated, it remained a strong trend upon on the Facebook platform as well. Again, the United States Embassy account had the highest target audience numbers (53,535) whilst also being the first account of our data set to be created: 27th January 2009. While this assumption carries true for most other accounts analysed, there always continues to emerge accounts that challenge it, leading us to question other assumptions regarding audience reach capability. For example, Korea's Facebook profile had the lowest follower account, but was created mere months after the United States on October 10, 2010. Korea also fell significantly behind on follower account on Twitter, being the third account created on February 14, 2011, but having the second lowest follower account with 286, just behind Slovenia with 275. Our exceptions to this rule once again emerge (just as was seen in the Israel - Gaza conflict) from the state's best known for their active and detailed digital strategies; United Kingdom, Canada, and

Sweden. Across both platforms, these three online accounts were created significantly after most others analysed, but still had higher than average followers. These three online accounts defy the above assumption that date creation correlates to follower counts, and force us to again explore other avenues of correlation, namely the presence of a strong digital strategy.

The last factor to play a role in the audience levels of an online diplomatic account, was the presence of an existing *digital strategy* which is explicit to diplomatic communication as a whole, and crises communication engagement more specifically. This is because a digital strategy constructed by the MFA can be found to provide detailed instruction on how an account should be used, both in terms of its frequency, level of engagement, structure of its message and sanctioned content.

Within the Israel – Gaza crisis, both online platforms saw this hypothesis hold true with the top 2 actors within the target audience, crafting and maintaining a detailed *digital strategy*. This was the United Kingdom and EEAS on Twitter, and the United Kingdom and United States Embassy on Facebook. On both platforms, the bottom 2 actors (Panama and Belarus) were discovered to hold no digital strategy. Now although the majority of accounts analysed were seen to possess digital strategies of some kind, the majority of these strategies were not shown to have a separate crisis communication strategy within it (apart from the United States). Therefore, the distinct lack of strategy and detailed instruction on how to use these platforms during the crises may therefore shed some light on how to explain the hesitation shown by some accounts regarding the use of the online mechanisms and opportunities now afforded to them.

During the Euromaidan crisis, both online platforms saw this hypothesis hold true as the top 2 actors in the target audience confirmed the presence of a detailed *digital strategy*: United Kingdom Ambassador and United States Ambassador on Twitter, and United States Embassy and Canada on Facebook. The lowest two performing actors in the audience account (this was Korea, and Slovenia on both platforms) were also discovered to have had either no specific digital strategy during the crisis (general or crises related). The distinct lack of strategy and detailed instruction on how to use these platforms during the crises may therefore shed some light on how to explain the hesitation seen by some accounts on using these mechanisms and the communicative opportunities now afforded to them online.

Finally, what these three variables (frequency of activity, date of creation and digital strategies) ultimately show us, is that no one reason exists to directly explain the follower count of an online diplomatic account. The data generated in this instance, has shown us that a diverse range of factors affect the accounts numerical membership, and if an account wishes to grow a following which it can use to increase its foreign policy projection, all of these variables must be taken into account.

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