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Social Media Use in Public Diplomacy

A case study of the German missions' Facebook use

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Abstract · Summary

Social Media Use in Public Diplomacy

This study explores the discrepancy between the belief in public relations and public diplomacy research and practice that the use of social media will lead to more two-way communication. It takes the form of a case study, examining the public diplomacy efforts of the German missions abroad.

Having established that the social media communication of the German missions is making little use of two-way communication strategies and that it is not as dialogic as the Federal Foreign Office and the missions believe, the analysis identifies the reasons for this discrepancy.

The study identifies the challenges the missions are facing, namely to use an informal channel for the communication of a government institution that is used to very formal communication, the fear of loss of control over content, the lack of resources, and the lack of a mass audience online. It concludes that social media communication is playing a supporting role in the German public diplomacy efforts, and while it cannot stand alone yet, its role will be growing in the future.

Keyword: public diplomacy, nation branding, strategic communication, social media, Federal Foreign Office

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1 Introduction and Definition of the Research Problem

On September 14, 2012, the German Foreign Ministry (Federal Foreign Office, FFO) proudly announced in a press statement that it opened a new "representation in the global village" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2012). The FFO had just opened a Facebook account. According to the statement, the ministry was inviting the "generation social media" to engage in open dialogue with the FFO and to discuss topics of international relations directly with the employees of the ministry. In early 2014 the FFO updated that now 70 missions and representations "are at home in the digital world" and ready to exchange views with digital visitors (Auswärtiges Amt, 2014b).

There is a great enthusiasm for social media in the academic and practitioner world today. Amongst other supposed benefits social media have been praised for facilitating true two-way communication, allowing for real dialogue, and engaging with audiences directly without gatekeepers (Dahlberg, 2011, p. 860; Henderson & Bowley, 2010, pp. 239; 240; Loader & Mercea, 2012, p. 3). The expectations towards the merits of social media are enormous; indeed, social media have been hailed to be "the future of public relations" (Taylor & Kent, 2010, p. 209). As Taylor and Kent (2010) have shown in their study of the journal 'Public Relations Tactics', students of public relations but also practitioners and academics have an overwhelming confidence in social media, and are never taught that there are risks and dangers involved as well. We have to question whether all these promises are true. Do social media really open up the doors for true dialogue with the audience? As academics and practitioners in public relations and related disciplines (e.g. public diplomacy) we have to ask ourselves what role social media can and should play in the communication of an organization. Are the expectations that the academic world is putting on social media too high?

1.1. Background of the study

In the past decades the advance of globalization has led to an increasing competition between nations for political and economic attention (van Ham, 2008, p. 131). Today, more and more countries are making a conscious effort to create a favorable image in the minds of the people abroad in order to increase their influence and prestige. This effort is often referred to as "nation branding" (Anholt, 2005, p. 186). One way to influence the image that is held in another country and to influence policies resulting from this image is traditional diplomacy. This means communication at the governmental level, usually between members of the diplomatic corps (Wang, 2006, p. 93). Another way is to reach out to the citizens of the other country and to get them into contact with the culture and society of the first country, to inform them about policies and the government, and to engage them in dialogue and exchange by using strategic communication. This is called public diplomacy (Cull, 2010, p. 12).

While public diplomacy is a well-established field of research in the United States, it is a relatively new academic concept in Germany, resulting in little research concerning German public diplomacy efforts. In fact the term *public diplomacy* ("öffentliche Diplomatie") is hardly used at all. More common are terms like *foreign-policy public relations* ("außenpolitische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit") or *cultural policy abroad* ("außwärtige Kulturpolitik"), the term that is officially used by the German government (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013, p. 5; Zöllner, 2006, p. 162). Not only the scholarship, also the development of the practice itself has taken place independently from the public diplomacy practice in the United States (Auer & Srugies, 2013, p. 18).

Foreign cultural policy (FCP) started to be coordinated by the FFO in the 1870s after the establishment of the German Empire. However, private organizations remained important supporters of these activities. Since then, throughout the German history, foreign policy, diplomacy, and public diplomacy have included approaches as diverse as culture as a tool for political and territorial expansion, integration into the international society through subtle means like an academic exchange service, straight-out aggressive propaganda, handing over the public diplomacy work to intermediary institutions like for instance the Goethe Institute, the Hallstein doctrine[1], and "peaceful coexistence"

[1] According to the Hallstein doctrine, introduced in 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR) would not establish or maintain diplomatic ties with countries that recognized the German Democratic Republic

(Auer & Srugies, 2013, pp. 19-23). The most recent approach uses private-public partnerships, puts an emphasis on dialogue-based communication, and focuses on the use of social media tools (Auswärtiges Amt, 2011, p. 5; p. 18). The stated aim of the FFO in terms of public diplomacy today is to "increase the attraction of Germany by using attractive cultural and educational programs as well as credible dialogue and information offers." Furthermore, it aims at "bringing people all over the world into contact with Germany, its culture, academia, and society and to win them for dialogue and exchange" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2008, p. 4). There is a clear focus on dialogue and informing, as well as making it possible to 'experience' Germany.

1.2. Problem statement and discussion

Not only commercial organizations, but also more and more governments and their embassies abroad are starting to use social media as tools to reach out to their audiences. As stated above, the merits of social media are easily overrated. It is necessary to approach them with caution and also keep possible dangers like the loss of control over information, the inability to steer the (online-) conversation into the desired direction, and the problem of finding the right audiences for one's messages in mind. Furthermore, unless the communication strategies are updated to be consistent with the new technologies, the use of new tools will not lead to an improvement of the results of communication and public diplomacy efforts.

The problem is that there is a discrepancy between the expectations towards social media and what they can realistically deliver. This discrepancy manifests for instance in government agencies and diplomatic missions trying to engage in modern dialogic online communication with what they assume are the correct or interested publics for their messages, while still being stuck in old top-down structures of information delivery. This results not only in communication efforts that are less effective than they could be, but also shows the challenges and risks to the use of social media for public diplomacy efforts, like a loss of control over content and the challenge to use informal platforms for the communication of missions that are used to formal communication.

(GDR) as a sovereign state. The aim of this policy was to present the FDR as the only legitimate representation of Germany and to force other states into the non-recognition of the GDR (Grant, 2000, p. 221).

1.3. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of social media tools in German public diplomacy. It seeks to investigate issues of dialogue and interaction, as well as challenges, with regards to the use of social media in public diplomacy. It tries to establish if dialogue can be achieved through the use of social media and whether it is at all possible in the context of a hierarchical and bureaucratic organization like a governmental institution. It will do this by analyzing the case of the use of social media as tools for public diplomacy by the FFO.

In order to find out whether the social media communication of the German missions is as symmetrical, two-way, and dialogue based as the FFO wants it to be according to its own mission statement, a first content analysis of the mission's Facebook profiles will be done. Van Ruler's communication grid[2] will be applied to sampled Facebook profiles so as to answer research question 1.

- RQ1: What strategy is primarily used according to van Ruler's communication grid?

Are the missions engaging in dialogue online as they and the ministry claim to do?

After determining the current status of the social media communication, this study will attempt to answer the following research question and sub-questions in order to explain the present situation, using in-depth content analysis and a survey distributed to the missions.

- RQ2: What role does the social media presence of the missions play in the public diplomacy efforts of the FFO?
    - SQ1: What are the concrete expectations and goals the FFO and the missions place on their social media presence?
    - SQ2: What are the challenges of the use of social media in public diplomacy?

1.4. Contribution

Public diplomacy is a very interdisciplinary field. It is closely related to public relations, while also being based on the theories found in international communication, and international relations (Gilboa, 2008, p. 57; Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012, p. 810). Grunig (1993, pp. 141-143) suggests that public diplomacy is using public relations

[2] Van Ruler's communication grid will be introduced and explained in the methods section of this paper.

strategies in the diplomatic communication with foreign publics. By the same token, Signitzer and Coombs argue that "public relations and public diplomacy seek similar objectives and use similar tools" (1992, p. 137). In fact, one of the major theories in public relations, the Excellence Theory by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) has been successfully applied to public diplomacy (Gilboa, 2008; Yun, 2006; 2008), thus, showing that both disciplines are indeed sharing objectives and tools. The conceptual closeness between public diplomacy and public relations (l'Etang, 2009; Yun, 2006) makes public diplomacy an appropriate field of study for the master thesis of a public relations major.

As will be established in the review of the previous research and the existing theoretical framework, research focusing on the use of social media as tools for public diplomacy is scarce. The research on social media that does exist analyzes blogs (e.g. Traynor et al. 2008), focuses heavily on the U.S. context (e.g. Cull, 2009; 2013; Zaharna, 2010), or on social media tools used for other purposes than public diplomacy (e.g. Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Smith, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2012; 2013). For the German case previous research is "still lacking"(Auer & Srugies, 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, there is some quite extensive research on the dialogic principles/dialogue, but these studies take place in fields such as public relations and not in public diplomacy (Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002).

The thesis study at hand will advance theoretical knowledge in the field of public diplomacy, more specifically in the field of online public diplomacy. This paper contributes to the current academic discussion as an exploratory study rooted in qualitative research methods that focuses on identifying and analyzing the role of social media in public diplomacy in a non-U.S. context. It also aimes at identifying the challenges that social media as a tool for public diplomacy pose as well as at pointing out possible solutions to these challenges. This study seeks to incorporate a functionalist perspective from which social media as tool for public diplomacy are scrutinized.

1.5. Delimitation

Because this study is a case study of only one country, one has to take the specific circumstances into account, when transferring the findings from this study to other national contexts.

The researcher is aware of the fact that the phenomenon of social media use in public diplomacy is closely related to other phenomena, like for instance nation branding. In fact, some would argue that it *is* nation branding (e.g. Szondi, 2008, pp. 29; 30). When designing a study, one has to make a decision on what to address and what not to address. If one were to focus this study on the nation branding aspects of the work of the FFO, this would result in a very different theoretical frame than that of the present study. However, the researcher made the conscious choice to focus on the social media use in public diplomacy and not on other phenomena that could have been addressed.

1.6. Terminology

In this study several terms will be used that will be shortly explained here.

1.6.1. German Federal Foreign Office

The German foreign ministry is called "Federal Foreign Office" (FFO) and was founded in 1871 (Auer & Srugies, 2013, p. 19). Its task is to take care of the every day foreign affairs of Germany and to "nurture" the relations with foreign states, publics, and organizations (Auswärtiges Amt, 1990, p. 3).

1.6.2. German missions abroad

The FFO has its headquarters in Berlin and in total 230 *Embassies*, *Consulates General*, *Permanent Representation*, and *Honorary Consulates* all over the world. For this paper the words *mission*, *embassy*, and *representation* will we used interchangeably, all referring to the above four as representations of Germany abroad.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework this study is based upon. It is divided into three main parts. The first two parts focus on the concepts and theories concerning nation branding (2.1.) and public diplomacy (2.2.), while the last part introduces a concept central to this study, dialogue (2.3). The concepts and theories in this chapter are discussed from a communications and public relations perspective.

2.1. Nation branding

2.1.1. What is nation branding

The term nation branding was allegedly first used by British scholar and consultant Simon Anholt in 1996 (Kaneva, 2011, p. 117). He defines a nation brand as "the sum of people's perceptions of a country across six areas of national competence" including tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people (Anholt, 2005b, p. 186).

Figure 1: Nation Branding Hexagon (Source: Anholt, 2005a).

As the name nation branding implies, the term is mostly used to refer to the use of branding principles and strategies such as reputation management, persuasion, and

credibility, in order to improve a nation's image in the perception of a certain audience (Kaneva, 2011, p. 118). Much of the academic work that has been published on nation branding falls within one of two dominant categories: (1) articles which praise the practice of nation branding and urge countries and practitioners to develop their own nation branding campaigns, and (2) articles describing different success stories including - often generic – advice on how to implement the methods derived from the successful examples (Kaneva, 2007, p. 14). Within the two categories advocates of nation branding adopt a functionalist perspective, arguing that nation branding is the solution for small or poor countries that are "in need of a competitive advantage in the global marketplace" (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 192).

In more recent years, however, Anholt has expressed his concerns about the use of the term in scholarship. There had been objections to using the word 'brand' in relation to nations in academia (e.g. Klein, 2002, para. 11), with many finding it too superficial to use it to describe the "national idea" (Olins, 2002, p. 241). Therefore, Anholt clarified that according to his understanding nation branding is "not [only] about communication but about policy change" (Anholt, 2008, p. 2). In his opinion nations can and do have national brand images, but it is not possible to re-brand a nation and convince a foreign public to change their present images and perceptions just by using communication. Instead, a better image has to be earned by a combination of strategy, substance (policies), and symbolic actions (including communication) (Anholt, 2008, pp. 3-4). In 2007 Anholt re-branded his own nation brand concept as 'competitive identity', describing a revised model of enhancing the competitiveness of nations by using brand management and public diplomacy (Fan, 2010, p.2). This re-branding is in line with branding consultant Wally Olins' remark that a lot of confusion and discussion could have been avoided if, instead of using 'brand', other words like identity, national image, or national identity had been used since for many commentators not the concept itself, but the name 'brand' posed the problem (van Ham, 2008, p. 132). After all, nations have been branding and re-branding themselves before the term was created, so nation branding is just a new word for image management (Olins, 2002, pp. 241-248; Szondi, 2008, p. 3). In Olins' words "the problem [seems to be] semantics, words and what they seem to mean" (Olins, 2002, p. 247).

2.1.2. Reasons for and against nation branding

Why do many scholars argue that it is necessary for states to engage in nation branding today? The world today is more competitive than ever, in terms of economic and political attention, one of the main forces behind this being globalization (Anholt, 2005b, p. 187, van Ham, 2008, p. 129). The effects of this rising competitiveness can be seen in the need to attract and retain international investors as well as tourists and residents by gaining their respect, trust, and attention (Anholt, 2005b, p. 186; Rein & Shields, 2007, p. 73). Hanna and Rowley agree with these points and add falling costs for international travel and rising consumer spending power, media reporting becoming increasingly international, a growing competition for skilled and professional immigrants, and an increasing consumer demand for access to different cultures created by cheap communication media that operate globally, as reasons for the necessity to engage in nation branding (2008, p. 63). Van Ham (2008, pp. 130; 131) warns that "place branding should not be viewed as a luxury that only wealthy and powerful states can afford". On the opposite, smaller and poorer states cannot afford not to engage in place branding because states without a brand will have a hard time to attract attention for their economic and political needs. After all, why would anyone want to invest in a country, or pay much attention to that country's strategic and political demands if they do not know anything about the country in question (van Ham, 2008, p. 131)? Nation branding is both about power and identity. Externally, it attracts attention for economic and political needs and demands (power) but it also works internally, giving the citizens a "clear self-concept" and a "sense of belonging" (identity) (van Ham, 2008, p. 131).

Naturally, when there is a body of supporting scholarship, there are also scholars who have expressed concerns about the concept of nation branding. Volcic and Andrejvic criticize it as "reductive" and "undemocratic" (2011, p. 600). This view is supported by Varga (2013, p. 827). The reason why nation branding can be perceived as undemocratic is that it is inspired by corporate branding. Thus the approach is very managerial, which means that consistency and control are valued higher than dialogue and flexibility. If nation branding is done through a managerial approach it means that there will be no dialogue during the decision making process about the brand. This leads to a situation in which the few in power will make all the decisions while the others do not get the chance to decide about or influence the national brand. This concern is also picked up by Kaneva (2011, p. 121), who argues that an instrumental approach to nation

branding accepts that elites will manipulate national identities through "social engineering".

2.2. Public diplomacy

2.2.1. Diplomacy and public diplomacy

The aims of traditional diplomacy are to manage international relations through negotiations between accredited representatives of states and to resolve "international difficulties peacefully" (Melissen, 2005 p. 5). While traditional diplomacy is usually directed at the governmental level and the members of the diplomatic corps (Wang 2006, p. 93) and takes place behind closed doors (Gilboa, 2000, p. 275), public diplomacy means the use of communication practices aimed at the inhabitants of a foreign country with the overall goal of building relationships with important stakeholders, informing and influencing the audience and establishing a form of dialogue (Melissen, 2005; Simonin, 2008, p. 24).

2.2.2. Definitions of public diplomacy

The term 'public diplomacy' was coined by Edmund Gullion in the 1960s and then used in the context of the United States Information Agency (Simonin, 2008, p. 24). The understanding of the term has changed and been influenced by international events over time. One can distinguish three phases that have framed concepts and definitions of public diplomacy. The three phases and the primary objectives of public diplomacy during their time can be seen in the following illustration.

Figure 2: Definitions influenced by distinct global paradigms (Source: Auer & Srugies, 2013).

During the cold war, the focus of public diplomacy was on persuasion. At the time, Gullion defined it as "the means by which governments, private groups and individuals

influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions" (Gullion, 1966, para. 3). The use of the term 'influence' implicates persuasion or one-way communication. After the end of the Cold War in 1989 the main objective of public diplomacy became the creation of understanding and to achieve empathy in a foreign public. In 1990 Hans Tuch defined public diplomacy as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies" (1990, p. 3). After the attacks of 9/11 a desire for mutual understanding emerged. An example for a definition in this new era comes from Leonard et al.: "Public diplomacy is about building relationships: understanding the needs of other countries, cultures and peoples; communicating our points of view; correcting misperceptions; looking for areas where we can find common cause" (2002, p. 8). The most recent definition does not mention which actors are involved in the act of public diplomacy. It does put a strong emphasis on relationship building and understanding the other side. This suggests an understanding that public diplomacy is a two-way process of communication and is not necessarily restricted to government actors.

Gilboa on the other hand describes public diplomacy as closely related to propaganda and "as a model of one-sided communication" (2000, p. 290). He sees public diplomacy as a tool used in hostile relationships, used to force foreign governments to change their antagonistic policies and attitudes under the pressure of the public that has been influenced positively by the public diplomacy efforts of the nation engaging in the practice (Gilboa, 2000, p. 291). Others, like Yepsen, argue that public diplomacy practitioners are aware of the fact that they should make use of two-way communication, but that this knowledge is still very rarely applied in practice (2012, p. 9).

The main tasks of practitioners engaging in public diplomacy are "listening", meaning listening to foreign publics and using the learned knowledge for policy formation, "advocacy", explaining the policies or point's of view of one's nation to the foreign publics, "cultural diplomacy", engaging with the foreign publics by helping them getting access to the culture through means like arts or language, "exchange diplomacy", meaning the direct contact between the population of both nations, and "international broadcasting", providing news to the foreign publics (Cull, 2009, p. 10). Although mostly public diplomacy is used to describe the communication of

governments aimed at foreign publics, it can be used with domestic publics as well. One way is the engaging approach; using input from citizens for the formulation of foreign policy, the other is the explaining approach; explaining diplomacy and foreign policy goals to domestic publics (Szondi, 2008, p. 6). According to Melissen (2005, p. 13) it is increasingly complicated to separate public diplomacy (aimed at foreign audiences) from public affairs (aimed at domestic audiences) because communication aimed at the one audience today easily reaches the other one, especially due to new communication technology.

Public diplomacy is gradually becoming part of the day-to-day diplomatic activities and even seen as "a central element" of them (Riordan, 2005, p. 180). This is especially true for regions that are interdependent economically and politically, as well as on the civil society level, like for instance Europe or the USA and Canada (Melissen, 2005, p. 11). Therefore, we cannot study public diplomacy completely independent of the diplomats who are engaging in it or the formal structures like the ministries for which they work.

While a lot of research has been done on public diplomacy programs and activities conducted by U.S. government agencies or actors situated in the United States (e.g. Cull, 2009; 2010; 2013; Fischer & Montez, 2011; Yepsen, 2012; Zaharna, 2010), initiatives outside the US have been largely neglected. This leads to a biased body of knowledge that uses U.S. American perspectives and does not take interests and individual challenges in other parts of the world into account. The same goes for the activities of other international actors like NGOs and civil society groups (Auer & Srugies, 2013, pp. 8; 10; Gilboa, 2008, p. 56). Research on public diplomacy in Europe started only in the early 1990s (e.g. Melissen, 2005; Signitzer, 1993). In Germany, public diplomacy is a new concept and term and not yet established as a field of research (Auer & Srugies, 2013, p. 5). The first comprehensive study about German public diplomacy as a whole, based on empirical principles, has been published only in 2013 by Auer & Srugies, taking into account a wide range of actors in German public diplomacy but paying little attention to the use of social media tools. Furthermore, the use of different modes of communication (e.g. one-way vs. dialogic communication) has to be better understood and new channels of communication, like social media and the internet, have to be researched in more depth (Wang, 2006, p. 94).

2.2.3. Conceptualization of public diplomacy

From a systems-theory point of view public diplomacy can be seen as a "specific communication function within the system of a state's diplomacy, which in turn designates the procedural tasks (tactics) of foreign policy within the realm of international relations" (Signitzer, 1993, p. 230, own translation). The procedural tasks or tactics have a short-term orientation while the function of public diplomacy is strategic with a long-term orientation.

As stated in the introduction to this paper, public diplomacy is an interdisciplinary field and closely related to public relations, international communication and international relations (Gregory, 2008, p. 286). It is also close to nation branding conceptually, as both, public diplomacy and nation branding, combine "internal soft power strategies and objectives" with foreign policy aims (van Ham, 2008, p. 135). Melissen agrees to a certain extent, stating that public diplomacy and nation branding use similar tools and achieve similar results but that nation branding "involve[s] a much greater and coordinated effort than public diplomacy" (2005, p. 19). Szondi (2008) has developed five models of the relationship between public diplomacy and nation branding, which, depending on how much one integrates both fields, range from claiming that both are completely unrelated without any common ground to stating that both concepts are entirely the same. According to this last position, nation branding and public diplomacy are "synonyms for the same concept" (Szondi, 2008, abstract). The author of this study believes that public diplomacy is a means of conducting nation branding, and that nation branding is one of the activities that are part of public diplomacy, but that they are not the same.

Public diplomacy is a tool of "soft power", a concept advocated by political scientist Joseph Nye. According to him the best way to achieve foreign policy aims is the use of attraction instead of so called hard power, including military force or coercion[3]. This form of attraction goes beyond persuasion and influence and is derived from the attractiveness of the culture of a specific country, as well as its political ideals and policies (Nye, 2004, p. 6).

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[3] In some exceptional cases the use of military force can take the form of soft power instead of hard power. Examples of these exceptions are peacekeeping missions or disaster relief through the military (Copeland, 2009, pp. 164; 165).

2.2.4. Public diplomacy 2.0

According to Kent and Taylor "technology itself can neither create nor destroy relationships; rather, it is how the technology is used that influences organization-public relationships" (1998, p. 324). Technological innovations like the internet have given practitioners new ways of reaching out to foreign publics and have had wide reaching effects on international communication and thereby on public diplomacy.

Ideally, social media is used by organizations to create relationships by creating interactions with their publics through steadily flowing in- and outputs that benefit both sides (Smith, 2010, p. 330). With this new co-creational mode of communication (if ideally executed) Grunig and Hunt's fourth model of public relations, the two-way symmetrical model seems to become reality. Similar to public diplomacy, this model is aimed at mutual understanding, with both sides benefiting from the exchange, bringing "about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and strategies of both the organization and its publics" through dialogue and negotiation (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, p. 29).

Classic place- and nation branding campaigns used to be asymmetrical and hierarchical, following a linear model of communication including an active transmitter and a rather passive receiver (Ketter & Avraham, 2012, p. 285). Developments and changes in communication behavior mainly due to the emergence of networked forms of technology influence the work of public diplomacy practitioners immensely. These changes and developments include a greater importance of public opinion, more global and intrusive media, globalization making it more desirable to protect cultural diversity, and increasing global transparency (Potter, 2002-2003, p. 48). This list is completed by a growing importance of none-state actors, public diplomacy now becoming central to foreign policy (Melissen, 2005, p. 11) and an increased interactivity between state and non-state actors, (Gilboa, 2008, p. 58). Easy and low-cost access to information leads to an increase in the number of actors in public diplomacy (not only governments and citizens participate, but also NGOs and private companies) and thus to a diffusion of power (Yepsen, 2012, p. 11).

Before the rise of the internet companies and organizations had control over the information available about them by publishing it via press releases and PR work. Even in early internet days online content could be "created, selected and filtered by organizational or media gatekeepers" (Henderson & Bowley, 2010, p. 240). Today however, social media moves away from the control over content "towards shared arenas where many produce in collaboration" (Luoma-aho, 2010, p. 6). This means that

on the side of the organization there is a loss of control over information. The author believes that this shift of control over content is also a shift in power toward the users, the audiences of communication. Smith (2010, p. 329) agrees that the new communication technologies have led to a shift in control over the communication away from communication professionals towards social media users who might not even be stakeholders of that organization. Thus we can observe a change in the role of stakeholder. The traditional role of the stakeholder was someone who may be affected or may affect an organization, while in social media communication people involved in a discussion often have little tangible stake in the organization discussed (Smith, 2010, p. 333). Fischer (2010), Slaughter (2009), Yepsen (2012), and Zaharna (2005; 2010) have found that in the new information environment a single organization is unlikely to get its message across as a single actor, instead, organizations need to rely on networks. Yepsen concludes "power is no longer defined by control of information, but by the process of communication and relationships within a network" (2012, p. 11).

The modern "new" public diplomacy, or public diplomacy 2.0, is moving away from the old hierarchical structures towards practices that engage with foreign audiences and focus directly on the audiences instead of being centered on the state and the foreign media (Melissen, 2005, p. 13). This focus on the audience is of great importance, as in a world of unlimited information and access to almost all of it, gaining the attention of an audience and convincing them to spend their time on the consumption of certain content is a challenging task. In this "paradox of plenty" (Yepsen, 2012, p. 11) attention, not information is becoming a scarce resource. The traditional role of opinion leaders[4] changes from one of providing information to one of drawing attention to certain issues, thus becoming attention leaders. According to Cull "the worst error it to be irrelevant", the most common way to commit this error being for public diplomacy professionals to "assume that [their] interests match those of the audience" (2013, p. 136). Cull specifically criticizes embassy staff for pouring out information into the cyberspace without the use of filtering or tagging techniques, thus

[4] The notion of opinion leaders in this context is based on the two-step flow communication model first introduced by Paul Lazarsfeld et al. in 1944 and elaborated in subsequent years (e.g. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Katz, 1957; Lowery & DeFleur, 1983). According to the model ideas to not flow from the mass media directly to the general population, but are channeled to the masses by opinion leaders. These opinion leaders pay close attention to the messages of the mass media and pass on their own interpretations as well as the actual media content to the audience.

making is hard to find content, even for an interested audience (*ibid*., p. 136). In order to focus on the audience, listening to what they have to say is important. Building on the Excellence Theory (Grunig et al., 2002), Yepsen distinguishes between tactical and strategic listening. Tactical listening can be found in two-way asymmetrical communication and is used to find ways to communicate more effectively, while strategic listening is part of two-way symmetrical communication and is used to help making decisions in policy formation (Yepsen, 2012, p. 10).

Another aspect that illustrates a possible advantage of social media use in public diplomacy is that social media have created a new kind of collective memory that saves stories and stories about events that would otherwise be forgotten quickly (Luoma-aho, 2010, p. 4). This new collective memory could make online public diplomacy efforts more sustainable, as all the information will be available online even when a project is long terminated.

Although the interest in social media platforms for the use of domestic government communication (e.g. Aparaschivei, 2011) as well as public diplomacy (e.g. Fischer & Montez, 2011) has been growing in recent years, it has not been established which role these tools can and should play or how they can be used in order to live up to the expectations (Yepsen, 2012, p. 5). Furthermore, Yepsen criticizes existing policies and rules for diplomats engaging in online public diplomacy, which may prevent true conversations and dialogue from taking place (*ibid*, p. 5).

2.3. Dialogue in public relations theory: possibilities and risks

As mentioned before, the rise of social media has inspired high hopes that a tool to create real dialogue in the form of public diplomacy 2.0 has been found. These hopes and possibilities but also the pitfalls and risks of the dialogic 2.0 version of public diplomacy have already been addressed in public relations theory.

In its public relations context dialogue is defined by the attempt to reach "as many stakeholders as possible", by treating the participants in the communication as persons, not merely members of a target or interest group, by not only speaking but also listening, and by creating situations in which the participants are encouraged to speak their mind (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 10).

Dialogue can be described as a "communicative orientation" (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 25). According to Kent and Taylor (1998) dialogic communication is "any negotiated

exchange of ideas and opinions" (p. 325). They have identified five principles of dialogic communication that can be used by organizations to facilitate open communication with their publics: ease of interface, conservation of visitors (meaning that users should be kept on the website and not be let astray by links to other pages), generation of return visits, providing useful information to a variety of publics, and maintaining a dialogical loop (Kent & Taylor, 1998, pp. 326-331). They can be divided into two groups or clusters: the technical and design cluster ("ease of use, usefulness of information, and conservation of visitors") and the dialogic one ("dialogical loop and generating return visits" (Kent et al., 2001, p. 277).

Research on organization's use of online communication for the facilitation of dialogic communication with their stakeholders has shown that organization are using technical and design methods to reach their publics but do not use the full dialogic potential of their online tools (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Kent et al., 2003; Park & Reber, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008; Taylor et al., 2001; Traynor et al., 2008). In other words social media channels are still "under-utilized by organizations to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders" (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010, p. 340).

Dialogue has not only the potential to lead to more two-way communication; there is the potential for risk in dialogic communication as well. In their discussion of a dialogue project conducted in New Zealand, Zorn, Roper, and Motion (in Heath et al., 2006, pp. 366, 367), for example, refer to increased risk and vulnerability involved when engaging in dialogue. One major aspect of dialogue is the unpredictability that comes with it. Because of this unpredictability the outcome of the dialogue might not be in the favor of the participants. Furthermore, dialogue does not only bring up similarities but also differences in the positions of the participants. Thus, it may lead to disagreement instead of agreement, thereby harming the organization or the stakeholder (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 11). Leitch and Neilson (2001) agree and say that real dialogue has the potential to "produce unpredictable and dangerous outcomes" and that in order to "reduce both uncertainty and the potential for damage, […] organizations may attempt to determine in advance the terms of any public debate in which they engage (p. 135). Because of the dangers that genuine dialogue poses, organizations might be less likely to engage in it (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 11). For individuals there are risks in dialogue: they have to open up and share intimate details about themselves. For organizations the risks are similar; real dialogue can reveal the true

identity of an organization and destroy the image it has built towards the outside and towards stakeholders. Organizations that have carefully built their public image may not participate in dialogue because they fear "exposure and loss of control over their image and reputation" (Theunissen & Noordin, 2012, p. 11).

A further risk when engaging in dialogue with one group of stakeholders is that it might alienate another group. Taylor (in Heath et al., 2006, p. 357) gives an example of this process in citing a case in which the national police force upgraded their internal communications system. After first support the project failed five years later; while a group within the police force improved its internal communication, other groups and individuals became antagonistic and the relationships between the groups fell apart.

3 Research Design and Methodology

This paper takes a functionalist perspective. When conducting functionalist research one "aims to improve existing circumstances" (Henderson & Bowley, 2010, p. 238). The study concentrates on identifying how current methods and practices used in the German missions may be changed in order to improve the communication process in the ongoing public diplomacy efforts. It analyzes the challenges and opportunities for the missions and the FFO, which arise with their growing use of social media and new technologies, and the resulting implications for public diplomacy as well as public relations theory.

Mason (2002) encourages the integration of different research methods and sources of data, claiming that an integration of approaches and data sources can lead to better results if planned thoroughly. Following Mason's argument, the reason for integration of methods in this study is to explore the phenomenon of social media use in public diplomacy from different angles in order to achieve greater depth of analysis (Mason, 2002, p. 8; p. 33; p. 60). The research methods used in this case study are qualitative methods like content analysis and open-ended survey questions (giving the employees of the missions a voice, allowing them to contribute their own experiences to the study). These qualitative research methods were chosen, because they are most the appropriate ones for the purpose of this study.

3.1. Qualitative research

In qualitative research researchers commit to a naturalistic perspective and an interpretative understanding of human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 10). Strengths of the qualitative approach are that it views phenomena holistically (Creswell, 2009, p. 209) and that researchers respect the complexities of the social world (Hammersley, 2008a, p. 39). Another strength is that it can sometimes generate data that researchers did not previously knew existed. For example, focus groups may take unexpected turns and discussions may yield statements that the scholar had not thought to include in a further step of his research, for instance in a questionnaire. Qualitative

studies can uncover unfamiliar perspectives and unknown information that are immensely valuable to the investigation. The data obtained from qualitative research is very "rich", it provides insightful accounts and complex details, and can show the full extent of the subject's experiences because researchers see though other people's eyes and interpret events from their point of view (Bryman, 1988, p. 72; p. 103)

It has occasionally been argued that qualitative research is a "soft science" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 10) and the work of qualitative researchers is sometimes termed as unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective. Hammersley (2008b, p. 25) argues that qualitative researchers can be selective in which details they are directing their attention to. Agreeing with this opinion Creswell adds that qualitative research is "fundamentally interpretive" (2009, p. 209). What he means is that the researcher stands between the data and the results of the study, she is the one defining the categories according to which data is analyzed, interpreting the data and drawing conclusions in the end, thereby filtering "the data through a personal lens" (2009, p. 209). Connected to this is the danger of "going native", which means that a researcher can lose the awareness of being a researcher and adopt the perspective of the object of study (Bryman, 1988, p. 188). Furthermore, many qualitative research and data collection methods have a high likelihood for reactivity between researcher and participants in the study; either can be influenced by characteristics of their vis-à-vis (like age, gender, sex, etc.) (Bryman, 1988, p. 112). Additionally, qualitative studies have been blamed to miss to document measurable differences, to be unable to rule out alternative explanations, and to be unable to produce findings that are replicable and generalisable (Gregory, 2012, p. 3). However, it is also argued that these critiques simply misunderstand the nature of social science (Hammersley 2008b, p. 32). Qualitative studies concentrate on discussing social realities using case examples and through the systematic orientation of their data collection and analysis make a claim about being scientific (Alasuutari, 2010, p. 145).

Even though some researchers argue that the question which research method is the best is an epistemological one (Curtin, 2012, pp. 41-42), in practice it is a question of the relative suitability of a method for a specific research topic. Because paradigms serve as filters for scholars, the paradigm that is used restricts what they 'see' and what they do not 'see' (Coombs, 1993, p. 115). The decision, which research method (qualitative or quantitative) to use is fundamentally a technical one (Bryman, 1988, p. 109), and always depends on the object of study (Tuchman, 1991, p. 79).

3.1.1. Case study

This research takes the form of a case study. A case study is research that "entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case" (Bryman, 2004, p. 537). The research for case studies includes the investigation of phenomena in their real life contexts, making use of multiple data collection methods and data sources (Yin, 2009, p. 13).

The advantage of a case study is that it enables the researcher to focus on just one individual case, which allows for deep immersion into the topic of research and gives her the possibility to really understand the complexities and subtleties of the phenomenon. Because the research takes place on a rather small scale it is possible for one single researcher to make a concentrated effort and still handle all the data appropriately. Furthermore, the use of various data sources and research methods allows for triangulation.

Disadvantages on the other hand can be that one has to be very careful with the conclusions that will be drawn at the end of the study (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 21). This means that one has to consider whether the conclusions are true for only the particular organization that was studied or whether the conclusions might be valid for other organizations of the same kind as well. A further disadvantage can be a lack of selectivity or the dilemma of which data to include or exclude in the final paper. This can be caused by deep immersion of the researchers, leading them to find everything interesting enough to be included in the final paper (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 23).

3.1.2. Content analysis

In order to explore the research questions this study is using qualitative content analysis of the Facebook profiles of the German missions and for the qualitative data from the open questions in the questionnaire[5]. The unstructured nature of the content analysis yields a deep understanding of a unique case (social media use in the public diplomacy efforts of the German missions abroad), as well as a profound understanding of the underlying processes. This understanding allows for an inductive reasoning from the analyzed case to a broader theory, which can be used to research other related phenomena (e.g. the struggle between the expectations towards new public diplomacy

[5] The coding schemes for the analysis of the questionnaires and the content analysis can be found in appendices 5 and 6.

created by the literature and the reality) (Lindlof, 1995, p. 28). Using a qualitative approach can be especially useful when one aims at explaining social interaction and uses inductive reasoning to generalize from the social reality found in the study to more broad theories (Tuchman, 1991, p. 79).

3.1.3. Survey

An advantage of survey research is that there is no reactivity between the researcher and the participants as the researcher is not present while the participant completes the survey (Fowler, 2009, p. 121). The identity of the participant is protected, which is why surveys are especially useful when dealing with sensitive topics (Fowler, 2009, p. 133). Additionally many questions can be included in the questionnaire at a very low cost (Fowler, 2009, pp. 126; 136). Furthermore especially internet-based surveys are easy to administer, the results will arrive immediately, and they will be ready for analysis in digital format (Fowler, 2009, pp. 128; 129).

Possible disadvantages of survey research can be misunderstandings due to cultural or language differences. Individual participants might understand the questions differently and they do not have the chance to explain their choice of answer (Sheatsley, 1983, p. 197). Making a good questionnaire and making sure that the questions are universally understandable through testing takes a lot of time (Fowler, 2009, p. 133). Another concern brought forward often is the issue of representation in internet based survey research. Critics argue that the use of the internet as a data collection method will restrict the sample severely, as not everyone has internet access and is "literate" online (Fowler, 2009, p. 136). This would generally lead to very biased samples. In the case of this study this is not a problem, however, as the object of the study are precisely those German missions that are actively using the internet for their public diplomacy efforts.

3.2. Research design

The research design of this case study consists of two different content analyses of the Facebook profiles of the missions and a survey sent out to the missions. The reason for including two different content analyses in the research design is that the research process has two steps and the two analyses focus on different aspects of the missions' communication. The first attempts to identify the specific communication strategies

used while the second aims at gaining a broad picture and rich information about the communication activities of the missions.

This case study focuses on the 69 missions that are using Facebook for their public diplomacy communication (as of January 3, 2014 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2014a))[6]. There are other types of German representation besides the mission abroad that are using Facebook such as German Information Centers, but these are not included in the case study, as the study is focusing exclusively on the German missions abroad.

3.2.1. Content analysis 1

In order for the researcher to familiarize herself with the Facebook communication of the missions and to establish, what communication strategies are prevalent on the mission's Facebook profiles as first content analysis of seletced profiles was done. The analysis made use of van Ruler's communication grid as a coding sheet and framework for analysis.

The communication grid is a public relations strategy toolkit developed by Betteke van Ruler in 2004. She claims that, although many practitioners declare that they are engaging in two-way communication, in reality they mostly use one-way strategies (van Ruler, 2004, p. 140). The grid is composed of four communication strategies, which should be chosen according to the communication problem the practitioner is facing (van Ruler, 2004, pp. 123; 139). It can serve as a starting point to analyze an organization's communication and develop a strategy to achieve the kind of communication the organization in question is truly aiming at.

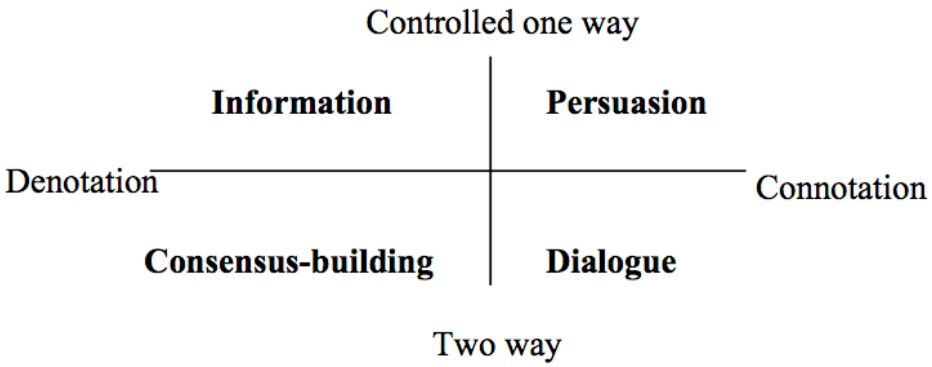

Figure 3: The communication grid (Source: van Ruler, 2004).

[6] New mission Facebook profiles have been created since January 3, 2014, but these will not be taken into account for this study.

The purpose of the *information strategy* is to inform the audience about something in order to help them to form an opinion and make a decision. The strategy often uses press releases and other prepared public relations materials. The *persuasion strategy* serves as basis for propaganda and advertising, and aims to affect the knowledge, attitude, and behavior of the audience. The strategy requires persuasive messages and a latent public. The *consensus building strategy* is used to build bridges between the organization and its publics and to solve conflicts of interest between parties as well as to achieve mutual agreement between them. The strategy requires an active public that is willing to participate in the consensus building process and room for the development of a consensus. The fourth strategy, *dialogue*, is used to explore specify issues and problems, to facilitate interaction and consultation between parties. (van Ruler, 2004, pp. 139; 140).

In total there are 69 missions that currently use Facebook. Missions that posted only in languages that the researcher does not speak fluently (she speaks German, English, French, Swedish) were excluded from analysis[7; 8]. This leads to a total of 32 missions. From these 32 missions half (16) were randomly selected. 16 numbers were drawn randomly from the 32, one at a time, independent of each other, and without replacement. Once a mission was selected it had no chance of being selected a second time (Fowler, 2009, p. 48).

The first analysis was conducted on April 7, 2014, and the time frame for the analysis was March 31 through April 6, 2014. The content of the sampled Facebook profiles was analyzed and categorized into van Ruler's four categories. Posts by the missions themselves but also re-posts and shares were analyzed, as sharing is a major feature of communication in social networks. If the same post was made in several languages it was counted as only one unit of analysis, as the content was the same.

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[7] One might raise concerns that this exclusion will create a biased sample. Under different circumstances the researcher would agree to these concerns (because different languages might be connected to different cultural contexts), but as it will still be German employees of the missions doing the posts in this context, the language should not impact the results much.

[8] A list of all missions' accounts and the languages they use can be found in appendix 1.

3.2.2. Content analysis 2

Since the object of study in this research is the social media communication taking place on the mission's Facebook profiles, it was necessary to analyze the profiles in depth. Content analysis allows us to reach an in-depth understanding of the communication on the Facebook profiles of the missions. Additionally, it was important to establish what the FFO expects to achieve through the social media communication by the missions. Therefore, information material on the FFO's public diplomacy strategies was analyzed with the aim to find out about the aims and strategies used to reach those aims.

Social media are a rapidly changing environment, which is why a very recent time period for analysis of the Facebook profiles was selected. The week from April 7 through April 13, 2014, was chosen. Because the content analysis was conducted after the whole week was over it was decided that it was not necessary to inform the Facebook teams of the missions of the analysis, as posts could not have been affected retrospectively. The information material analyzed is available publicly on the FFO's homepage.

The coding schemes for the content analysis, as well as for the later discussed survey, were derived through analysis of the profiles and the survey results respectively, as well as induction from the results of the first content analysis and the survey and deduction from the literature.

3.2.3. Survey

This research is interested in the point of view of the German diplomats in the missions. The most intuitive way to collect the required data from the German missions abroad would have been to do an interview with an employee of each mission. Due to the spread locations of the missions it was not possible to do interviews in person. The alternative way, doing interviews via Skype was ruled out because of the number of missions and limited time to complete this research project. Also, the employees of the missions are very busy, so asking them to take the time for an interview would have decreased the response rate considerably. Therefore, in terms of cost and time, the best way to collect the required data was to ask the missions to complete a short online survey.

Normally, a survey is used to collect information from a part of the population, the sample (Fowler, 2009, p. 31). However, because of the small size of the population no

sampling was done and the questionnaire was sent out to the entire population, consisting of the 69 missions that are currently using Facebook for their public diplomacy communication.

The questions in the survey were derived from the theoretical framework and the literature, from official ministry documents, from the first content analysis, and through inductive reasoning. The process of taking information from the results of the first analysis for the creation of the questionnaire is very typical for qualitative research. According to Tesch (1990, p. 95) data analysis "begins as soon as a first set of data is gathered" and runs parallel or even becomes integrated with data collection. The questionnaire consists of 58 questions[9] and was pretested for grammatical and logical understanding as well as ease of use by two independent testers. The language of the survey was English; therefore, it was not necessary to translate the answers of the missions.

The questionnaire consisted of a combination of open and closed questions. In the analysis of the survey only the open questions will be accounted for, because a low response rate renders statistical analysis of the closed questions impossible. The data retrieved from the open questions will be treated as interview data, with the difference from a qualitative interview being that the data is more structured and less rich.

Open (ended) questions ask the respondent to answer in his own words; the researcher does not suggest possible answers. The advantage of this kind of questions is that participants can answer in own "frames of references" (Sheatsley, 1983, p. 206), revealing what is most important to them at the time of their completion of the questionnaire. Thus, the researcher does not limit or influence the results by suggesting possible answers (Fowler, 2009, p. 161). Disadvantages to open questions are that respondents might misunderstand the questions or not answer in a way understandable to the researcher. Furthermore, with open questions there is the risk that the respondents will not answer at all, because they see it as too much of an effort to come up with their own answer. Fowler even suggests that because of these disadvantages, if one does a self-administered survey one should refrain from using open questions altogether (2009, pp. 119; 134). The researcher disagrees with this view, arguing that open questions will bring more rich results for this case study.

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[9] The complete questionnaire can be found in appendix 3.

For the creation and distribution of the survey the online tool esurv.org was used. After the creation of the questionnaire, a link was created. This link was then, together with a cover letter and the appeal for participation, sent to all missions via the contact form on their respective websites, as well as via private message to their Facebook profiles on April 9, 2014. There were six exceptions to this procedure; on the profiles of the missions in Buenos Aires, Cairo, Caracas, New York, Pristina, and Washington is was not possible to leave a private message, therefore, these missions were only contacted through their contact form. It was planned that the questionnaire would be open for two weeks, from April 9 to April 23, 2014. However, several missions contacted the researcher informing her that because of the Easter holidays they would not be able to complete the survey before the initial closing date. Therefore the decision was made to keep the survey open until May 7, 2014.

4 Findings and Analysis

4.1. Findings and analysis: content analysis 1

In its mission statement for its public diplomacy efforts the FFO emphasizes a focus on dialogic communication, exchange, and mutual understanding (Auswärtiges Amt 2013, p. 7). The results of the first content analysis do not support this focus.

In total 67 Facebook posts were analyzed[10]. These were not divided evenly between the missions, in two missions (Jeddah and Karachi) there had been no post in the chosen week (March 31 through April 6, 2014), while for instance the mission with the highest amount of posts, Ankara, alone published 19 posts in that same time span.

The results of this analysis clearly show that just because a tool for dialogue is available this does not necessarily mean that dialogue will take place (Kent and Taylor, 1998, p. 324). It was found that the missions hardly use the dialogue strategy according to van Ruler's communication grid. The most prevalent strategy is the information strategy, followed by the persuasion and consensus-building strategies. These findings support van Ruler's argument that practitioners tend to think they are doing two-way communication, while their actual work mostly follows one-way strategies.

According to the criteria of the communication grid only three posts were rated as dialogue, five as consensus building, and six as persuasion, while the majority of 56 posts were rated as information strategy.

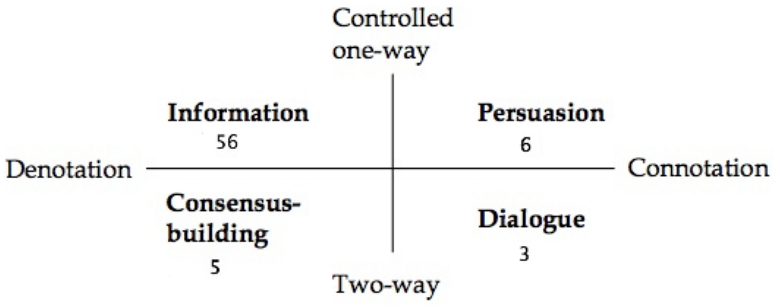

Figure 4: Results of the first content analysis (own, based on van Ruler, 2004).

[10] The Facebook profiles that were analyzed belonged to the missions in Ankara, Bangalore, Brussels, Chicago, Dar es Salam, Jeddah, Karachi, Ljubljana, Los Angeles, Mumbai, Pretoria, Stockholm, Tbilisi, Toronto, Vienna, and Windhoek.

In general, a lot of the posts were like mini press releases in social media format, just spreading the information the respective mission wanted to disseminate without making an effort to start a conversation.

During the period analyzed three of the missions tried to start a dialogue with their "friends" or "followers" but only one of them got a reply. On April 1st the employees of the Consulate General in Los Angeles told their story about how the Consul General had tricked them into believing that Leonardo DiCaprio would be visiting the Consulate that day and asked whether any of their "followers" had been tricked that day. There was one reply that was not a comment on how funny that story was and even the author of this comment did not answer the question.

Figure 5: Screenshot from Facebook profile of the Consulate General in Los Angeles.

There were very few public citizen inquiries and the few, which were there, were mostly directly related to events that were advertized by the mission. Although in a way "dialogue" took place in terms of one person asking a question and the other answering it, these exchanges were so focused on the transmission of information that they were dealt with as information strategy. The mission in Dar es Salam for instance published a post advertising a movie night at the Goethe Institute. Two of the comments asked for specific directions and the mission employees provided the required information.

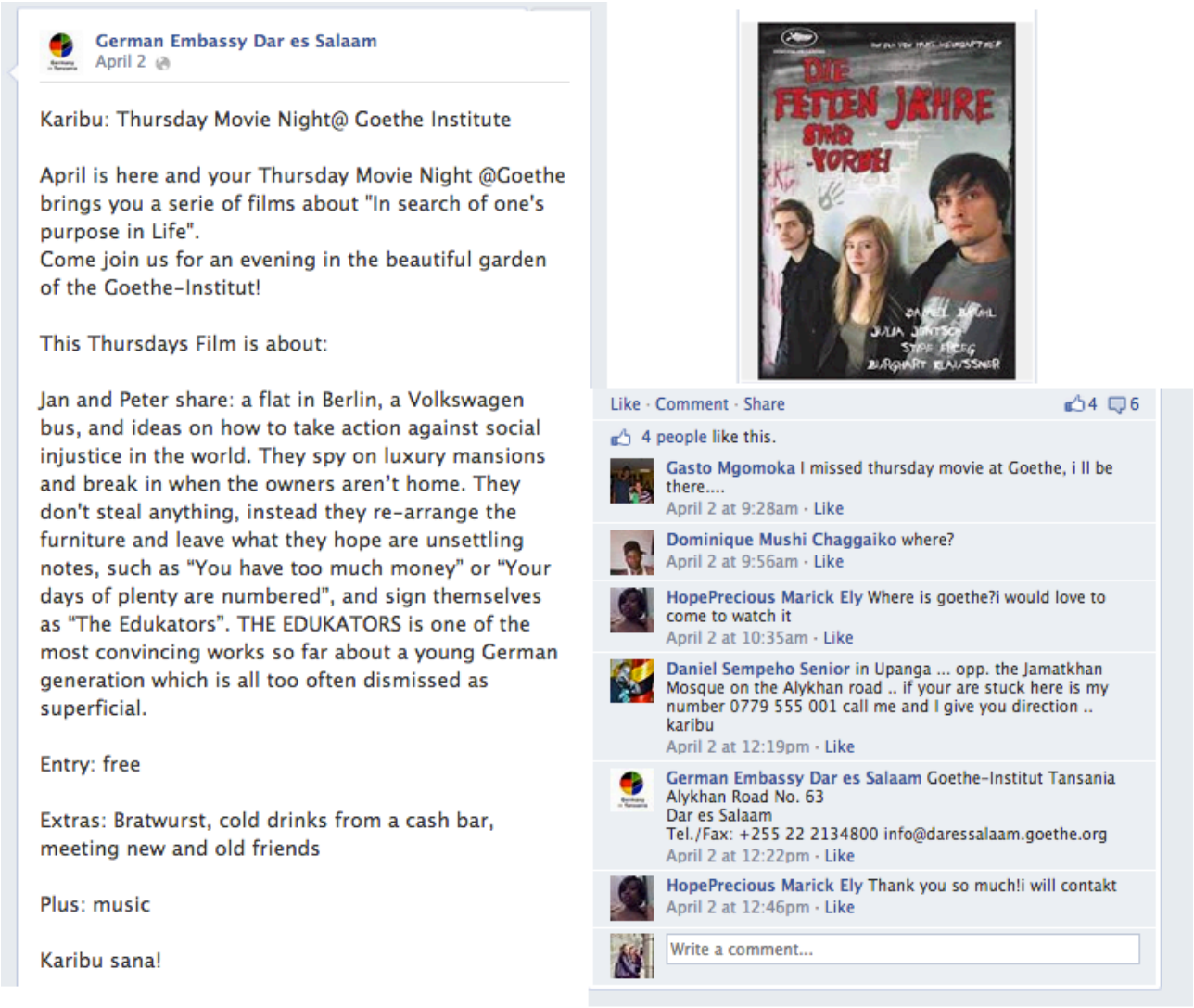

Figure 6: Screenshot from the Facebook profile of the mission in Dar es Salam.

Six posts (published by the missions in Ankara and Toronto) were categorized as persuasion. These dealt mostly with research, work, and education being done in Germany or by German companies. The persuasion strategy requires persuasive messages and a latent public (van Ruler, 2004, p. 140). The research and education posts were aimed at people who had already some interest in these topics and they were designed to influence the picture of Germany towards an image of a modern Germany with lots of work and research opportunities in accordance to the mission statement for public diplomacy by the German government (Auswärtiges Amt 2013, p. 7).

Figure 7: Screenshot from the Facebook profile of the mission in Ankara.

At the time of the analysis Twitter and Youtube were blocked in Turkey. The German mission in Ankara was running a timer counting the days and weeks since the platforms had been blocked, including hashtags that were used around the world to raise awareness about the situation in Turkey. These posts were rated as consensus building. With the posts the mission is signaling that it is supporting freedom of speech in Turkey and thereby trying to build a bridge between the German government and the Turkish people.

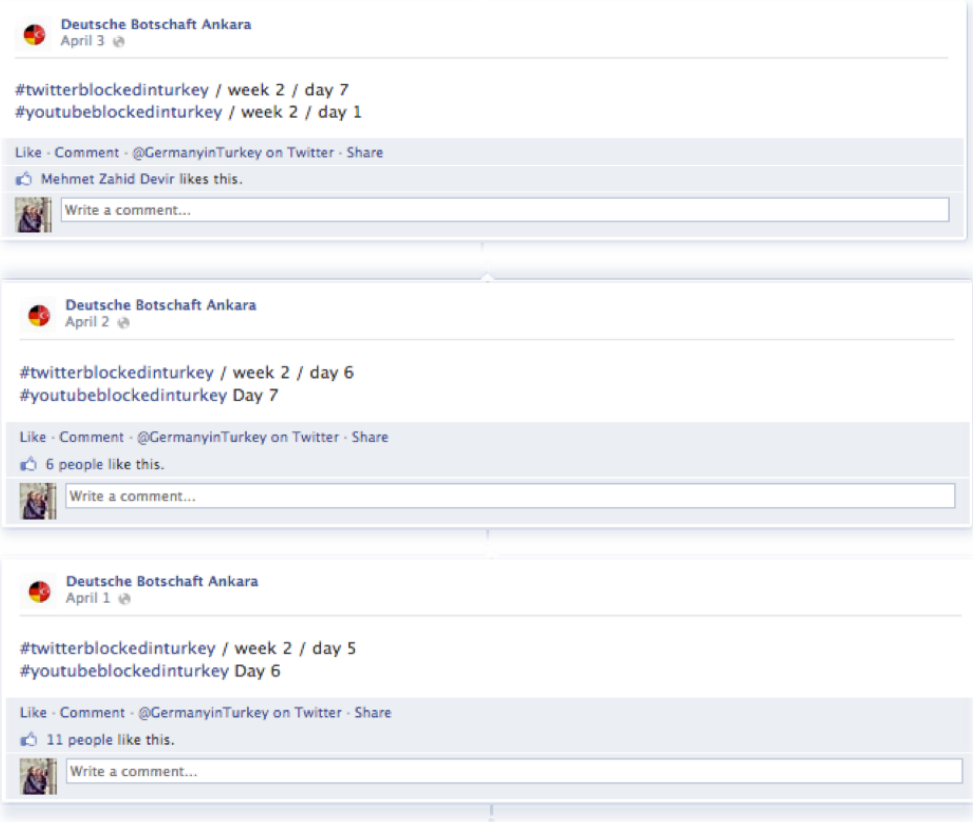

Figure 8: Screenshots from the Facebook profile of the mission in Ankara.

Amongst the missions selected for the first content analysis the mission in Ankara is the one that adapted their communication best to the social media medium. The profile seems very natural compared to most other profiles that had a more stiff and official attitude. Ankara uses a lot of hashtags (#), posts several times a day also about non-political content like German soccer, and uses URL-shortening services for the links that are inserted into the posts (something that is a normal thing to do nowadays but that most missions do not do).

The communication of the missions does not always fit into the communication grid. Even the rare instances in which some form of dialogue, persuasion or consensus-building took place could have easily been placed in the information strategy, because it is so broad and all these posts did convey some information as well. Rather the grid should be used as a contingency model or a continuum on which the communication can be placed. The model cannot be taken as rigid, but needs to allow for some overlap between the different strategies. Already Grunig (2001, p. 25) stated that his two-way symmetrical model should be seen as a "contingency model" including both symmetrical and asymmetrical aspects.

The results of the first content analysis show that the social media communication of the missions is not dialogic or two-way as the mission statement of the FFO makes us believe. The findings are in line with van Ruler (2004, p. 136) and van Ham (2003, p. 433), who both say that actors often believe that they are doing two-way communication when in reality they are engaging in one-way communication.

What are the reasons for this lack of dialogue and relative "stiffness" of most Facebook profiles run by the German missions? On the basis of the first analysis and previous literature we can set up some preliminary assumptions. Firstly, the reason could be that the missions Facebook profiles are part of the official communication of the FFO. Therefore the employees of the missions are not free to post whatever they would like to post, they must always be aware that they are representing Germany online and there might be strict guidelines by the ministry (Yepsen, 2012, p. 5). Also the people taking care of the profiles are mostly diplomats and not public relations practitioners, so they do not have professional knowledge about how to create good posts that create an incentive for dialogue. A second reason, closely related to the first, might be fear of a loss of control over the information shared (Smith, 2010, p. 329). This might work as an unconscious censoring mechanism that stops the employees from posting things that might be seen as critical when taken out of context or stop them from

using irony and jokes, which would make the profiles more "lively" and authentic. These first two possible explanations will be further discussed in the analysis of the second content analysis and survey results. Lastly there is another point that might explain why close to no dialogue is taking place. The Facebook users might simply not be interested in participating in a dialogue with the missions. Befriending a profile or liking it takes one simple click, which is often done without real interest or consideration. Therefore, likes or the number of friends should not be taken as any kind of measure for successful online public diplomacy (Delahaye Paine, 2011, p. 80). Even if the topics posted by the missions are worth discussing, the users might not want to discuss them on the public page of the mission where also users they are not friends with could see what they have to say. They might share the information posted by the mission and start a discussion with their own friends, but this could not be researched in this study, as it would go beyond the scope of this project.

4.2. Findings and analysis: content analysis 2 and survey

The 32 missions published a total of 111 Facebook posts within the period of analysis. The posts were not distributed equally between the missions; five missions did not publish any posts during the period (Bangalore, Edinburgh, Jeddah, Karachi, and Pretoria), while the highest number of posts was published by the mission in New Delhi (10 posts in total).

The survey was completed by 15 German missions abroad[11]. Additionally, nine missions informed the researcher that they could or would not participate. Several missions asked to receive the questionnaire via official FFO channels because they did not feel comfortable answering it coming from an unknown source (e.g. Chisinau). These requests as well as the low response-rate prove Fowler's point that "when survey requests come from less known or unknown sources […] sometimes, virtually no one responds" (2009, p. 103). The researcher contacted several appropriate departments within the FFO but these efforts were not met with success. According to Annette Walz, who works in the department for the Training of International Diplomats in the FFO,

[11] The missions who completed the questionnaire were Brussels, Canberra, Dhaka, Hanoi, Istanbul, Kiev, Mexico City, Ottawa, Rio de Janeiro, Sofia, Stockholm, Tbilisi, Warsaw, and Windhoek. One mission completed the questionnaire but did not fill in the mission's name.

every electronic document that is sent out via an FFO email address has to be approved internally first. In a personal conversation on April 8, 2014 she said that there is a certain "paranoia when it comes to sending out documents that are not originating from within the FFO" (A. Walz, personal communication, April 8, 2014). This proves Hocking's point that while public diplomacy is adapting to pressures for change, there still tend to be a lot of "top-down processes" with the foreign ministries and the diplomatic services taking the function of "gatekeepers" (2005, p. 36).

4.2.1. Expectations and goals

The FFO as well as the missions expect from their social media presence to have a more direct and personal access to people who are interested in Germany as well as getting into contact with target groups that might not have been interested before. These audiences are to be presented with a positive (but always realistic) image of Germany.

Germany's digital public diplomacy efforts are centered around political updates from Germany as well as cultural aspects. This is reflected in nation branding theory by Anholt (2005) who says that "money and effort expended in cultural relations is never wasted" (p. 187). According to him positive perceptions of cultural wealth can create positive associations with the nation, which can support inward investments, exports, and to a certain degree international relations (2005, p. 187).

According to the survey results, the main expectation towards social media use in public diplomacy perceived by the missions is the ability to have a dialogue with their publics. In fact, when asked why they are using Facebook the answer from each mission included a reference to dialogue. For instance Stockholm wants to "establish and maintain communication with the public". All missions have the comment function enabled, meaning users can comment on the posts the mission published. The missions see this as a possibility to start a dialogue or a discussion with users and to receive feedback for their work. The mission in Sofia explains that in Bulgaria the threshold of getting in touch with state institutions is generally quite high and that they want to make a difference. They "do not want to project the image of being "unapproachable"". The mission in Windhoek gives the textbook answer: "two-way communication is important in social media". However, the missions have made the experience that dialogue does not happen simply because the possibility is there (Kent and Taylor, 1998, p. 324). For instance the mission in Dhaka reports that "we want to engage in discussions with users,

but it [the comment function] is not frequently used by users" (2014). Dialogue is not seen as only positive however, the missions are aware of dangers and difficulties connected to public dialogue online. As the mission in Brussels reflects: "the advantage of being able to have a dialogue with the public can sometimes turn into a disadvantage when the response is questionable or in bad taste". The issue of uncontrollable responses will be discussed later in relation to problems that appear in social media use for public diplomacy.

The second expectation identified is an increased reach for the mission's messages. The main target groups of the missions are the public of the host country and Germans living or traveling in the host country. Within those two groups the audience is mostly young and urban. One of the main functions of Facebook is advertising the events that the missions or partners of the FFO (like for instance the Goethe Institute) organize. Since the FFO emphasizes the orientation towards audiences by tailoring projects and offers to specific audiences, a lot of the events are focused on education and scholarships, thereby targeting potential students and educated young people specifically. The use of Facebook gives the missions access to young people who are interested in education offers and who would not be reached through more traditional media. "We reach a younger public that would otherwise not be interested in the embassy's work (Warsaw, 2014). Connecting with the young people through education and thus developing networks is one of the major pillars of the FFO's public diplomacy strategy.

In the analysis of the posts and well as in the results of the survey three communication goals could be identified; *informing*, *advertising*, and *attempting to start a dialogue*.

Supporting the finding of the first content analysis most posts could be categorized as *informing* the visitors. The missions are mainly informing about German culture and research and education but also about current news for instance in politics. This is very much in line with the FFO's aim of strengthening of Germany as a base for education and scientific activities as well as creating a positive and modern image of Germany and attaining sympathy abroad (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013, p. 7). The mission in Canberra for instance tries to show that "Germans are not dead serious" by having a lot of funny posts about German traditions and giving insights into the mission by regularly posting "behind the scenes" information like baking and cooking recipes collected from the staff. Posts about the host country are concentrated on reports and pictures from past events, administrative issues (such as job postings) as well as the host country's culture

and current news. However, some missions also try to shape the public opinion about issues in their host country that will not be discussed in the local mainstream media; "We use social media to boost key issues like human rights, that will not be picked up by the local media in Vietnam" (Hanoi, 2014). This illustrates that online public diplomacy is not only used to develop an understanding and respect for the German culture, but also to promote values like freedom and human rights (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013, p. 7).

What is striking is that, especially among the posts identified as informing, a lot of the missions had posts that were identical content wise. This might indicate that they accessed the same sources of information. In the case of the following example the video that was shared was prepared by the cooperation partner DAAD.

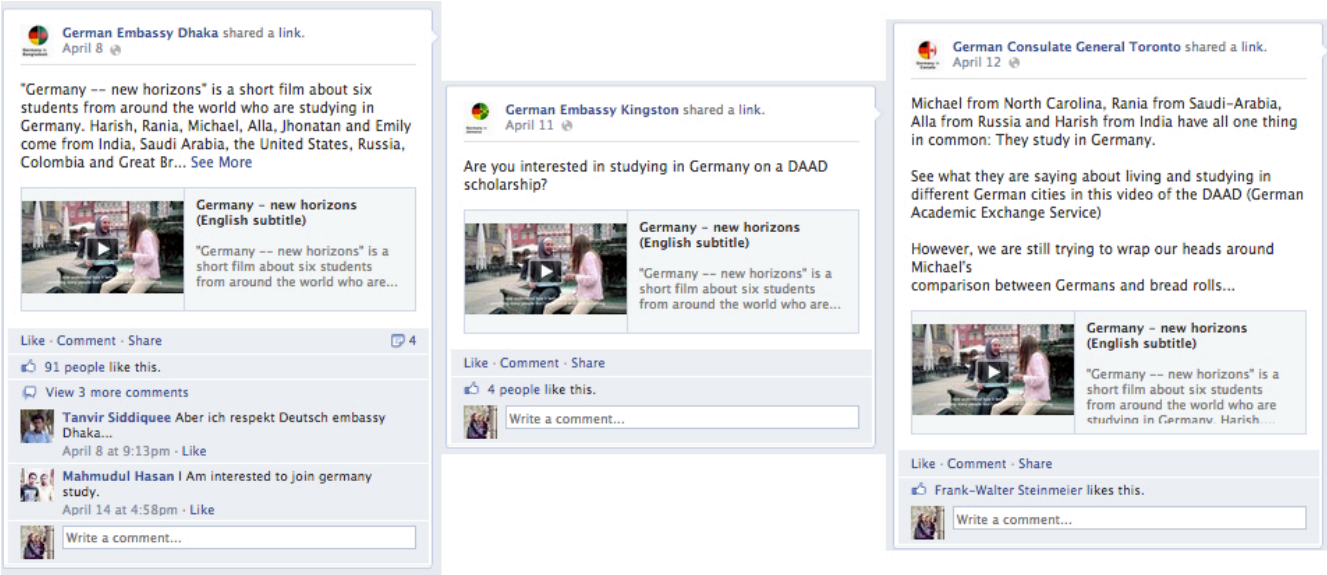

Figure 8: Screenshots showing identical posts (profiles of the missions in Dhaka, Kingston, and Toronto).

The second largest amount of posts was connected to the *advertising* of events organized by the missions or by their partners like Goethe Institute or the German Information Centers. Here the missions are implementing two further aims of the FFO, namely the promotion of the German language abroad through public-private partnerships, like the close cooperation with the Goethe Institute, and the creation of a cultural exchange and presentation of German art and culture abroad (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013, p. 7). The mission in Sofia reports: "We use Facebook to advertise our events, e.g. the "Bildungsbörse" (education fair). Facebook gives us access to a specific target group, young people who are interested in German education offers. Through Facebook

we achieved more visitors to our events." An important role of the advertising function is to create a synergy with other German organizations. "We use social media to inform about events by German organizations in Mexico such as DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), Goethe Institute, or GIC (German Information Center)" (Mexico City, 2014). Using synergies to strengthen one's own message has been proven to be effective by various research (e.g. Fischer, 2010; Slaughter, 2009; Zaharna, 2005; 2010).

Although the missions state in the survey that their main concern online is to engage in a dialogue with the audience, very few posts were coded as *attempting to start a dialogue*. In these cases the mission posted a piece of information or an insight into the work of the mission and asked the users for an opinion or to share from their own experience. There were posts that did not receive any answers (e.g. New Delhi) but also one example that got some replies (e.g. Ljubljana).

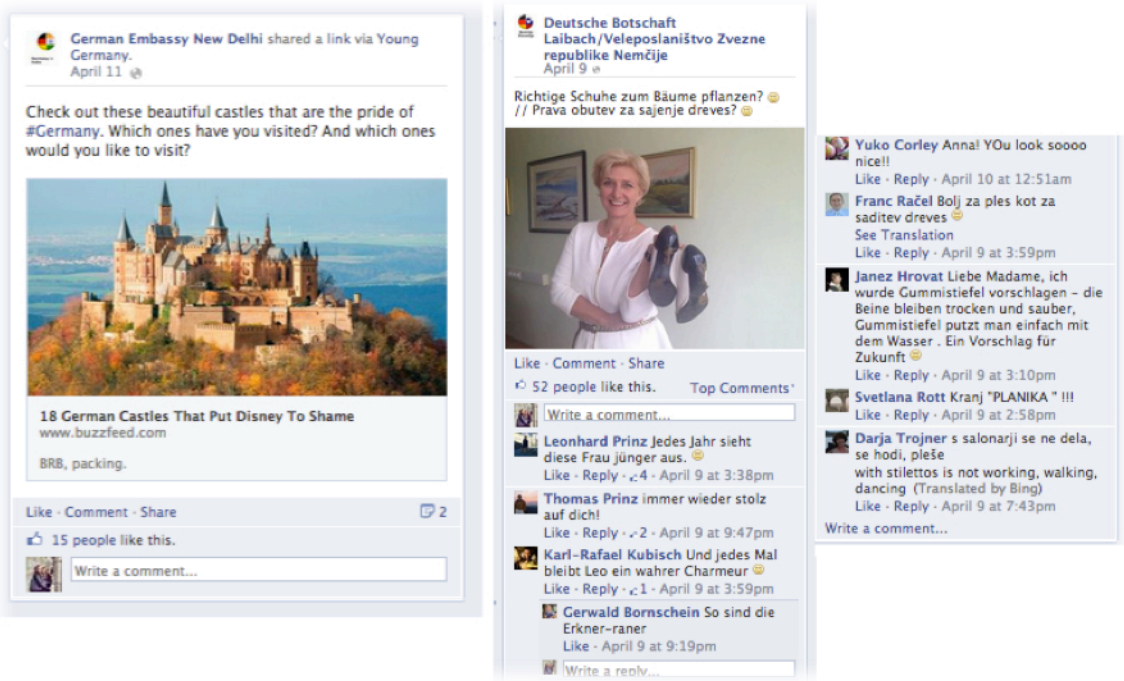

Figure 9: Screenshots showing the attempt to start a dialogue with Facebook users (profiles of the missions in New Delhi and Ljubljana).

Both, the FFO and the missions, state clearly that they expect to engage in a dialogue with their audience through the use of social media. The missions value that their Facebook profiles are accessible for many people who would not have the opportunity to visit the mission or their events physically, and that Facebook is easy to use and requires little training for the employees. Also, social media are seen as a cost-effective way to disseminate information. Furthermore, missions clearly understand dialogic

potential of social media like the possibility for two-way communication, receiving feedback, and the possibility to answer fast to questions but they are not able to implement this knowledge into dialogue. Many missions wish they were able to engage in more dialogue (e.g. Istanbul, Mexico City, and Stockholm, 2014).

The inability to engage in or create dialogue cannot be explained by earlier assumed strict guidelines by the ministry. In fact, there are basic guidelines for the use of social media provided by the ministry but regarding the content the missions have ”ample room for maneuver” (Sofia, 2014) and the “enjoy working in great independence” (Mexico City, 2014). The guidelines are mostly formal or technical but sometimes the ministry gives suggestions for content (Rio de Janeiro, 2014) which should not decrease the possibility for dialogue, however.

4.2.2. Challenges and problems

The main challenge in using social media for public diplomacy is the use of an informal channel like Facebook for the communication of public institutions like the German missions abroad. The language commonly used on Facebook is very colloquial and informal, whereas the traditional communication of the missions through press releases and their websites is rather formal and stiff. The line between informal posts and posts that are not acceptable for a public institution is fine. It is seen as ”difficult for a public institution to adopt a more informal language for broader audiences” (Rio de Janeiro, 2014), because there are large differences in style and writing between the normal official embassy communication and the (still official) Facebook communication. The missions are aware of the positive sides of social media communication but also see the problems that come with it as this comment by the mission in Kiev illustrates: “I see the informal character of Facebook as a limitation on what it can do to facilitate our specific kind of communication. It is useful in providing a sense of accessibility and community, like when a cultural event is announced but it is not useful in the formalized processes for providing government services to the public. I would also doubt the usefulness and possibility in engaging in longer political dialogue with individual members of the public” (2014). Furthermore, colloquial language and jokes that would make the posts less stiff are lost through feedback loops and screening of posts by the heads of the press departments. The same is true for real-time communication; in Hanoi for instance the content for each single post has to be screened individually by the head of the press section before it can be posted online, making fast replies impossible.

Of course the German missions want to display a positive image of Germany abroad, but in order to engage the audience in a discussion, controversial topics would have to be discussed in public. However, the information about Germany presented on the profiles is exclusively positive. As assumed earlier, the results of the survey and content analysis show that the fear of loss of control over the content published on public profiles is present in all missions. It includes the difficulty of moderating discussions and the risk of giving critical or inappropriate commentators a stage, which is why critical topics are avoided. The missions are aware that their posts can develop a dynamic that is hard to control and that the unpredictability of users and their reactions pose a risk to the mission's communication. According to the representation in Mexico City, they have to consider this "calculated risk every single time" they post information on an official Facebook page (2014). A further concern related to the loss of control are language barriers. The employees of the missions are not always fluent in the language of their host country, while the population of the host country is often not speaking German at all. Therefore a lot of the profiles are kept in German and the local language, in English, or only the local language (in that case the Facebook profile is updated by a local employee). This makes reacting to comments quickly and engaging in a dialogue complicated. Also, critical or inappropriate comments might not be identified as such because of language barriers. The last point connected to the loss of control is the relative anonymity of users that comes with the internet. Sometimes users make inappropriate remarks (including e.g. racism or anti-Semitism) that can publicly be seen by other users of the missions' pages. "Very rarely people feel they need to let off steam by airing some questionable political views in their comments even though there was no connection with the original post" (Brussels, 2014). This means that constant monitoring of the own Facebook profile is necessary to avoid giving users who will harm the work of the mission a public stage. One strategy to cope with offensive posts is to delete them. However, the missions are hesitant to simply delete posts, as it leads to intransparency. Therefore, only "very inappropriate comments get deleted. We prefer to offer the opportunity for free speech as long as the comments are compatible with our core values" (Hanoi, 2014). The preferred options are to search a dialogue in private to sort out misunderstandings or to try to engage the person who posted the inappropriate or critical remark in a public discussion. "In case of criticism we acknowledge it and present our own views" (Rio de Janeiro, 2014). "If there is a misunderstanding we try to clear this up and explain what was understood wrongly" (Brussels, 2014). Amongst the

different coping mechanisms the strategy to search for a public discussion is certainly the best. It increases the transparency of the communication, while also giving the missions another platform to spread their messages while containing the harm being done by the critical remark.

A third challenge in the use of social media is a lack or shortage of resources. While the work and the time afforded for the maintenance of social media is acknowledged most missions' work distribution plans, many also see a lack of and need for more resources allocated to social media work in order to keep up the present performance or to expand the work to either more engagement on Facebook or to incorporate other platforms like for instance Twitter into the online communication. Most missions remark that they would like to spend more time on their online activities but that they do not have the resources to do so, like the mission in Sofia: "On Facebook you have to be present constantly, but we don't get additional resources for this presence. In the future we will try to keep up the work we are doing now but it will be hard to intensify our engagement or add platforms such as twitter due to manpower constraints." There is a constant need for attention and updates, which makes social media a very time-intensive tool. Also time has to be afforded in order to "stay abreast of developments" in terms of development of technology and new means of disseminating content (Istanbul, 2014).

Finally, social media do not yet provide the missions with a mass audience, which is seen as a disadvantage by many representations. The mission in Kiev remarks "social media does not yet have mass audiences, so the traditional media are far from obsolete" (2014). For targeting the young social media is a good tool, but the missions also have to reach the older parts of the population and for this social media is not effective at the moment. Indeed, most missions see social media as an additional tool in the toolbox of public diplomacy tools that reaches a small (but growing) audience that was not reached before.

A challenge that the researcher anticipated, namely restrictions through the host country, was not found in the results of this study. This might be explained by the fact that only the missions who are using Facebook were studied, which is why countries in which Facebook is not accessible like China were not included in the study.

4.2.3. The role of the missions' social media presence in public diplomacy

The main role the social media presence of the missions plays in the public diplomacy efforts of the FFO is a supporting one. Social media are mostly seen as a tool to increase the reach and to reach audiences that would not be reached through traditional media and channels. "We use social media to support our other work. It is another tool in our daily toolbox for public diplomacy and can cost-effectively boost the reach of our (traditional) messages" (Hanoi, 2014). The missions are aware that the mere use of social media without the already established channels of communication would limit their audience considerably. "Social media is complementing the more traditional ways of our press work" (Windhoek, 2014). Also, they are aware that a lot of necessary information for instance about visa application processes and the like cannot be made accessible though the short posts on Facebook. Still, the missions see the importance of social media as growing in the future.

The main functions of the Facebook profiles are to establish a positive image of Germany and to advertise events organized by the missions or the partner organizations. The communication is aimed at the citizens of the host country but also at Germans who are living or traveling in the respective country. Many messages are specifically tailored to the main audience on Facebook, which are young and urban individuals. According to the mission statement of the FFO one of the main pillars of the public diplomacy of Germany is education (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013, p. 7). Therefore, a lot of the activities and events are related to education, such as education fairs, language classes, movie screenings in German, and information about scholarships for studying in Germany.

Riordan advises that public diplomacy should make use of non-state actors, employing the civil society of the sending country and by making use of local networks. (2005, pp. 190; 191). The German public diplomacy is conducted in accordance with this advice; the missions' social media presence is used to increase the reach of the messages of the German partner organizations like Goethe Institute or DAAD. This shows one of the other pillars of public diplomacy in Germany, private-public partnerships, the cooperation with third party organizations.

We must not forget that the social media profiles of the missions are only one of the means of communication the missions use to communicate with their publics. A lot of the communication within the host country is based on events where the employees of the missions and the partner organizations meet the audience face-to-face and where direct dialogue can take place.

According to Melissen (2005) "The new [online] public diplomacy moves away from – to put it crudely – peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences" (p. 13). This development can be confirmed with this study. However, the German FFO is still very much at the beginning of the development towards more engagement. At the moment the majority of the posts are still one-way communication of giving positive information about Germany to the foreign public, even reminding of mini-press releases. Still, the FFO is on the right way to more two-way communication.

During this study the number of missions using social media (Facebook as well as Twitter) has increased. This indicates that social media is playing a growing role in the public diplomacy efforts of the FFO.

5 Discussion of Practical Implications/Applications

This study has proven that not only academics but also practitioners are aware of the possible merits of social media and that they should be using two-way communication strategies in their work, but that this still is very rarely applied in practice (van Ruler, 2004, p. 136; van Ham, 2003, p. 433; Yepsen, 2012, pp. 8; 9).

As has been established in this study one of the main problems for the missions and one that they identified as the reason why they cannot engage more in their social media channels is a lack of resources. Although the time afforded to update the missions' profiles is respected in the work distribution schemes within the majority of the missions, more time is needed. At the moment it is often a press or communications officer who also has other tasks who is managing the social media work. The missions would need someone in the press department like a social media communications officers, who would do only social media and nothing else.

This study could not identify a central social media strategy coordinated by the FFO and followed by the missions. Currently, the social media communication is very tactical and not strategic. The missions have different backgrounds of why or how they started to use social media, the structures within the missions and their way of creating content differ much, and they do not have common evaluation criteria. Many missions count the followers they have and the likes they get per post. This does neither measure whether the messages that were sent out have arrived nor does it measure any kind of engagement with the content (Delahaye Paine, 2011, p. 81). Therefore, better evaluation criteria should be devised, to understand where the missions could improve their communication. Of course the aim should not be to create more rules and to thereby make the communication even stiffer, in fact this would be extremely counter productive. However, a long-term strategy that really engages the audience and that allows to find the right audiences for the messages the FFO wants to spread (not only the education messages, for those the right audiences are already found) should be developed.

It has been suggested in this study that the users who visit the Facebook profiles of the German missions might simply not be interested in discussion and dialogue. However, currently the missions are also not offering a lot of opportunities to engage with them. As Rybalko and Seltzer have found, dialogue has to be sought actively and appropriate arenas for it to take place have to be presented (2010, p. 340). The missions should "communicate with the people not at them" (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 187). The missions could do this by asking more questions to the audience and concentrating on the essence of social media: participating, interacting, and sharing. In order for content to be shared online it has to be attractive or interesting enough that the potential sharer becomes an actual sharer.

6 Conclusions and Implications

The trend of opening a Facebook account and assuming that dialogue and exchange will happen just because one is "online" is a very common phenomenon today. Social media are being celebrated for being the solution to communication problems, because of their ability to create dialogue, because vast audiences can be reached with just one click, and because messages will reach these audiences at the blink of an eye. But how much of this is reality? This study has shown that social media does not create dialogue, it provides a platform to have a dialogue, but someone has to be engaged in the dialogue. This includes not only the organization wanting to send out a message but also the required audience. Today many organizations, including the German FFO use social media as some form of "instant mini press release service". They still have to realize that in order to have a dialogue they have to send a message that is of actual interest to their audience and that they have to find the right audience for their messages. Just because it is easier today to reach a lot of people does not mean that these people will be listening to what one has to say.

6.1. Main findings

This study found that the role of social media in the German public diplomacy is mainly a supporting one. The missions still depend on traditional media for their work because social media does not reach all their target groups yet, but they see the role of social media as growing in the future. The main function of the Facebook profiles of the missions is to create a positive image of Germany and to attract visitors to the events organized by the missions and their partner organizations. The public-private partnerships between the FFO and organizations like the Goethe Institute is central to the public diplomacy efforts of the German missions and this importance also manifests on the missions' Facebook profiles.

Furthermore, the study concludes that the social media communication of the missions is not as dialogic as they state themselves and as the FFO would like it to be according to the mission statement. This is due to issues like shortages of resources and

the challenge to use and informal channel like social media for the official communication of government institutions as well as the fear of a loss of control over content published by the missions.

6.2. Limitations of this study and future research

As mentioned before, this study is a case study of only one country, thus, one has to take the specific circumstances into account, when transferring the finding from this study to other national contexts.

Since this case study focused exclusively on the German missions, it would be useful to conduct a similar study with other countries, in order to see whether there are differences between countries (e.g. Norway and Canada have been praised for their innovative style of doing public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005, p. 13), so they must be doing something differently).

Another line of research that has already been shortly touched upon in chapter four might be, to investigate whether the input the missions are giving to their follower does spark dialogue in other arenas than the missions Facebook profiles, like on personal profiles or offline.

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