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PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE DUTCH MFA: VIEWS & STRATEGIES FOR DOMESTIC AUDIENCES AND DIALOGUE ONLINE

THESIS FOR MSC. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to knowledge on the ways in which public diplomacy, as a concept changing with the growth of digitalization, is viewed and conducted in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Employees of the organization are interviewed and their opinions and views on the best manners to conduct public diplomacy online, as well as the audiences that are reached by public diplomacy online, are discovered. Applying the perspective of the dialogic theory of public relations, it is hypothesized and later verified that online platforms that allow for dialogic communications are most used and invested in by the Dutch MFA. Using constructivism, this thesis finds that interaction about the concept of public diplomacy has shaped it to be widely seen as only including foreign audiences in the academic world. In the practical world, that of the MFA, there is a disagreement with which strategies and which audiences precisely are included in public diplomacy; most descriptions currently still revolve around foreign audiences. This is largely because it seems that consular services (which are applied for a great deal of domestic audiences) are not seen as a part of diplomatic strategies, but with expanding knowledge and changing discourse on the topic this may still change in the foreseeable future.

Key words within this study: Netherlands MFA, public diplomacy, digitalization, domestic, online platforms, constructivism, public relations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
I. INTRODUCTION WITH RESEARCH QUESTION.....	5
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
1. The changing role of citizens.....	7
2. The changing role of states.....	9
3. Social media and dialogue vs monologue.....	10
4. Extending the concept of public diplomacy to domestic audiences.....	12
5. Initial ideas about approaches to the domestic public in the Netherlands.....	13
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK WITH HYPOTHESES.....	16
1. Constructivism.....	16
2. The dialogic theory of public relations.....	19
IV. RESEARCH DESIGN.....	22
1. Methodology.....	22
2. Operationalization of variables.....	23
3. Case selection.....	25
4. Data collection: Interviewing.....	26
5. Advantages and limitations to the research design.....	27
V. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION.....	29
1. Initial information about interviews and interviewees.....	29
2. The MFA and digitalization.....	30
3. Interpretations on the concept of public diplomacy.....	37
4. Views on dialogic communication.....	41
5. Assessing the interviews.....	46
VI. CONCLUSION.....	48
VII. REFERENCES OF SECONDARY & IN PERSON RESEARCH.....	52
VIII. APPENDICES.....	56
1. Interview protocol.....	56
2. Example of the consent form.....	57

I. INTRODUCTION

Consider this statement from the Diplo Foundation, assessing online uses of global MFA's: "Diplomats have long realised that in public diplomacy, they need to be where the audience is" (Diplo, 2016). It's an easy statement to agree with, but do we know enough about *where* it is (that diplomats need to be), *who* it is (that they should aim to reach) and *how* it is that they can go about this? In today's world, it seems that "social media" is an easy answer to any quest to build up new relationships or maintain old contacts of use. The internet is a curious, ever changing and growing tool for all parts of society. Relationships of all different kinds are hard to upkeep without any use of the online media that are available and improving for more and more users daily. As explained by Hocking and Melissen in their report "Diplomacy in a Digital Age": "Digitalization is increasingly important in determining centre-periphery roles and relationships within the integral network of the MFA and its diplomatic missions" (Hocking & Melissen, 2015 p.7). The digitalization process can be seen as the rapid growth and increase in internet use over the past 5 to 10 years. Governments, organizations, and citizens have all experienced changes due to the digitalization process over the past 5 to 10 years, resulting in changed methods of relationship building and public diplomacy. This thesis will explore information about the way in which the MFA has adapted and evolved in its efforts to continue and improve in conducting public diplomacy online. This topic is current and likely to affect much of future international relations or diplomatic practice, hence it is important to partake in research on the subject and contribute to the course of events as they unfold.

In terms of relationship building online, research is done to find information about the way in which the MFA uses digital platforms¹ that allow for different amounts of communication. Former knowledge and theoretical experiments suggest that relationships with the public are best created and maintained if there is dialogic communication or discussion. This leads to the question of whether digital platforms that allow for direct dialogic communication are actually the most used and invested-in platforms by the MFA, and to what extent dialogue and discussions are actually looked for on such platforms. Continuing the subject of changing diplomatic practices, information will be sought on the different audiences that are reached online by the MFA and whether the tactics to go about this are actually labelled as a part of diplomacy. Evan Potter explains that the core of diplomacy is about how states "exchange, seek and target information", but due to developments such as digitalization, he explains: "what

¹ The concept (online/internet) platform refers to collaborations that contribute to information exchange online and can be accessed openly.

governments do, decide, and say abroad is playing back rapidly into public debates at home, and what governments do, decide, and say at home is playing back rapidly into their operations abroad". He then explains that these conditions are "making the public dimension a central element of diplomacy" (Potter, 2002 p.7). Though much research supports Potter's point, most of the existing findings on the "public" dimension of diplomacy regard only foreign audiences. Does this mean domestic audiences are not approached online? If they are, why is research about the domestic audience of public diplomacy so rare? The research question for this thesis comprises both the dialogic and domestic aspects of online public diplomacy, and asks: "How have internal understanding of strategies and identification of audiences online affected the way in which the Dutch MFA pursues public diplomacy?"

Firstly, a literature review will expose existing knowledge on the topic, and explore relevant themes. The need to look into the two aspects of public diplomacy as performed by the MFA throughout a time of constant and increasing digitalization will become apparent. In the theoretical framework, theoretical standpoints will be used to form opinions on possible answers and lead to hypotheses. The dialogic theory of public relations provides a framework for discovering the types of best used platforms for the MFA's online relationship with different audiences, whereas constructivism will be used to look at the conceptualization and identification of diplomatic practices to domestic audiences. Through knowledge from the literature and theories, as well as 3 interviews with employees of the MFA, findings on the topic will be explored. Sub-questions that will be addressed regard more details about actual online efforts of the MFA, and the extent to which public diplomacy as a field should incorporate business/ technology features for its online relations, or whether increased cooperation between actors in these fields can be more useful.

The analysis section, with the help of discourse analysis, will highlight certain statements made by the interviewees that aligned or differed, to find significance in answers or opinions. In addition, their choice of wording as well as their choice of topics to discuss elaborately or rather short, will show the relevancy of themes that may be difficult or underdeveloped for public diplomacy online. In the conclusion it is revealed that public diplomacy is viewed differently in terms of online purposes, but does not include many domestic audiences. However, views seem to be changing with growing knowledge about the concept. It is also revealed that platforms allowing for dialogic communication are in fact most used and valued by the MFA. Future continuation and expansion of research are thus desirable in order to form concrete conclusions on the definition and perception of public diplomacy in a digitalized world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introducing the literature review

In doing research on the topic at hand it is easy to find a lot of general information and speculations. In terms of online public diplomacy, discussions seem to revolve around social media, foreign policy and cybercrimes. This literature review explores themes related to the efforts of the MFA to reach different audiences throughout a time of digitalization, in order to discover the relevance of domestic audiences in the commonly discussed concept of public diplomacy. A broader understanding of existing knowledge on the topic at hand will be gained and the necessity to research the use of dialogic communication as well as the domestic dimension will become apparent.

II.1 The changing role of citizens

When starting to look at changing roles of citizens due to the growth of digital platforms and technological knowledge, it is interesting to first consider an idea expressed by John Hemery in the book “The New Public Diplomacy”, edited by Melissen in 2005:

Public diplomacy [...] is as old as governance. All governments have programmes of national self-promotion built on distinct culture, geography, trading opportunities or other niche specializations. All are aware of the power of the media and the internet, and grapple with how best to use them to their advantage (p.196).

Over the past 5 to 10 years, much has changed in the world of communication, public relations and diplomacy. With the growth of technology, globalization and interdependence of different actors for relationships have increased. In the book “Governance, Regulation and Powers on the Internet”, it is stated that digital technology has been important to changes in political and economic regulations “both within nation states and in international relations”, and that it provides conditions for “evolutionary processes by means of new modes of information circulation, of interactions between individuals and of collective organization” (Brousseau et al, 2015 p.3). Due to the heavy increases of the use of digital platforms globally, the ideas of citizens and their roles have evolved.

“Digital citizen” is a common term frequently used to describe different actors that affect, or are affected by, the online stream of communications and information exchange. Digital

citizens are more and more encouraged to “meet and confront views, to coalesce, collude or compete through a number of tools” (Brousseau et al, 2015 p.10). An example of a tool used to increase relationships, or capacity building among online actors given by Brousseau et al is the United Nations Internet Governance Forum. An interesting aspect of citizen involvement in digital spheres is that it is out of the own will and choice of the citizens involved, ensuring motivation and interest in actors communicating online. In addition to this, the growing functions of digital platforms offer “cheaper and easy techniques for networking and building relationships to all public diplomacy agents, both governmental and non-governmental” (Melissen, 2005 p.183). Lastly, the lacking restrictions online as to who can post what messages, and when, greatly affect the roles of citizens and the ways in which states choose to respond. As Brüggemann and Wessler note, this vital aspect causes for a paradoxical effect: “Smaller target groups may be reached more easily than in traditional mass media. Yet, via Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube each information may eventually reach beyond its addressees and cross cultural and national borders” (Brüggemann and Wessler, 2014 p.406).

The aspect of of the growing variety in online actors and changing communication online additionally contributes to the growing possibilities for anyone in a community to become a stakeholder or business partner easily. Additionally, citizens can affect each other through debates and discussions online and can influence their national governments. As is expressed by Aronson, Spetner and Amos, “people typing in the privacy of their online worlds are less hesitant than in a face-to-face group to express their opinions, particularly negative opinions” (Aronson et al, 2007 p.232). The comfort and anonymity that the internet provides can be a contribution to the formation of groups or discussions in unhappy domestic citizens, looking to change the decisions or actions of their governments. With the changing roles of citizens online, it is important to find possibilities and current actions by governing institutions such as the Dutch MFA to communicate with digital citizens in their domestic spheres or abroad, to increase their relationships. Through this, governmental institutions can benefit from the constantly growing online interdependence, rather than being disadvantaged by complaints from digital citizens that feel disconnected and excluded from their own governments.

II.2 The changing role of states

Aino Huxley, in an article looking at “mediatization”² in Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs, notices a lack of information on the view that MFA’s have on the concept and application of digital diplomacy. Many studies reflect the view, or online usage, of the general public itself. Huxley interviewed people at 11 different Ministries for Foreign Affairs from Finland to find that the Finnish MFA’s perceive digitalization as “a normal part of transformation in society, and of mediatization” (Huxley, 2014 p.58). The author describes that a government needs web presence to stay relevant and credible especially for its domestic audiences: “If all citizens and the country’s companies are strongly active online and the country itself is not represented online, it loses some of its legitimacy” (Huxley, 2014 p.46). The need for adaptation, and governmental efforts online to increase presence and public-government relationships are seen as crucial steps. From a study into relevant Korean and American actors, Hyunjin Seo states similarly that “As increasing availability and affordability of computing and communications devices have enabled people to build new types of transnational and decentralized networks, it has become crucial to better understand the characteristics of these transnational online social networks” (Seo, 2010 p.3). Despite efforts and constant interest of many governments to connect with citizens online, there are difficulties in adaptation. Huxley determines the issues for governmental institutions such as MFA’s in adapting to the need for communication with audiences online for positive public relations, whilst keeping the identity of “authority”: “It is this balance of a new identity and old identity of authority, which is at stake and negotiated with the intensifying presence of media” (Huxley, 2014 p.44).

Scholar Beata Ociepka, on the same note, describes that changes in the international environment signalize a “changing role of the state both in international communication and in public diplomacy as its form. The growing participation and significance of non-state actors in international relations (international communication) weaken the position of the state” (Ociepka, 2012 p.27). The role of non-state actors has been increasing on important political aspects over the past years, due to their growing influence on matters of trade, environmental changes, and, of course, technology. To governments it is important not to let the increasingly active citizens, especially within their borders, affect or change decisions in a negative manner. Huxley sees the factor that successful online platforms are often commercial or privately owned

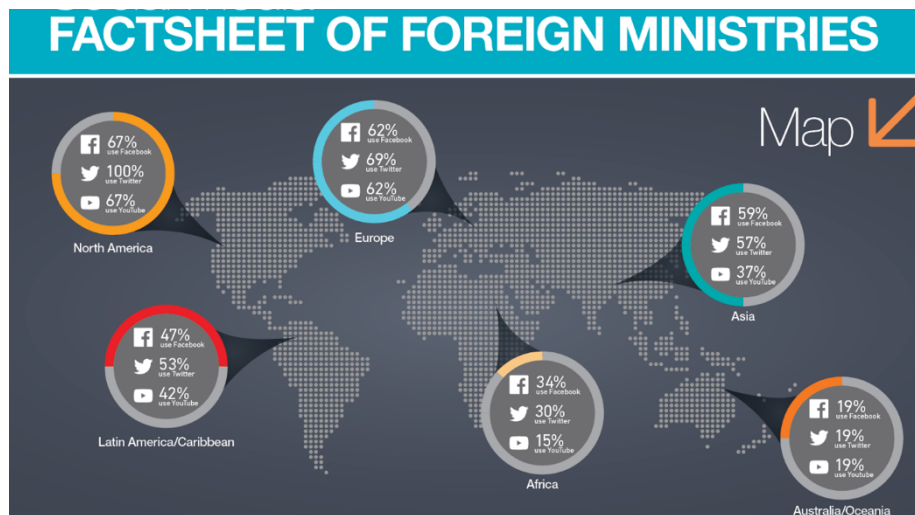
² Defined by Huxley as “an umbrella term for explaining the process of how media becomes more important and intertwined in society” (Huxley, 2014 p.27).

as a major contributor to restrictions in the way governmental institutions can use the internet, and mentions that if institutions such as MFA's want to continue being stable actors in the society, they will have to "adapt and translate some of its functions to fit these new networks" (Huxley, 2014 p.42). Interestingly the author also states "digital platforms also adjust continuously, as the actors using it change" (Huxley, 2014 p.43), which shows the openness for possibilities of governments to influence online platforms if cooperation were to increase. Scholars Kampf, Manor and Segev express the importance in Craig Hayden's statement that "governments are now in need of a 'new' public diplomacy that contends with a global media ecology characterized by a fragmentation of audiences to networks of selective exposure. In this media ecology, the goal of public diplomacy is transformed" (Kampf et al, 2015 p.337). The possible need for cooperation/coordination between state actors and private actors is something that is hinted at in much research but usually not further explained, and hopefully the research in this thesis can begin to find out whether, and in which ways, more cooperation as such is in fact possible to improve the effectiveness of the MFA in its domestic and foreign relationships.

II.3 Social media and dialogue vs monologue

"Social media" is a difficult term to award with much weight for findings in this thesis. The term comes up frequently in research on public diplomacy and digitalization, but definitions on the term vary slightly per person and purpose. This thesis aims to avoid using "social media" as a category, but rather solely focuses on the amount of dialogue possible on differing digital platforms, whether these are official sites or content-sharing platforms. This allows for the inclusion of less known platforms and future platforms that may deviate from existing terms. As mentioned by Hocking and Melissen, "the use of websites and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and other online platforms for public diplomacy is just the tip of the larger digital iceberg" (Hocking & Melissen, 2015 p.30). However, much of the relevant research on used platforms and strategies include the term and it will therefore not be discarded, it will simply not come to play in the theoretical framework and conclusions drawn from the analysis. On the note of online platforms allowing for communication, the abovementioned page of the Diplo Foundation, with the explanation that diplomats want and need to be where audiences are, includes an infographic (Infographic 1, below) which shows that 50% of global MFA's use Twitter, and 48% use Facebook. YouTube is behind with 37% and only 5% reportedly use

blogs. Many researches have focused on the possibilities offered by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as tools for building and maintaining relationships between different types of actors. This is because these platforms are largely connected to dialogic communication between actors online. As Hyunjin Seo explains, “two-way communication is an important aspect of relationship-based public diplomacy” (Seo, 2010 p.36). Despite this knowledge, there seems to be a lack of information on the development in uses and effects of online platforms for diplomatic actors working on online relationships.



^ Infographic 1, can be found in the bibliography under Diplo, 2016.

On the line of Philip Seib’s statement in his speech at the Chatham House: “diplomacy and media – no strangers to each other – are becoming entwined in new ways” (Seib, 2013), much research has been spent on discovering the ways in which diplomacy can become more effective through media, or vice versa. Huxley describes from her interviews in Finnish Ministries for Foreign Affairs that “digital diplomacy and the MFA’s actions were perceived to be occurring in a broader arena than just social media platforms” (Huxley, 2014 p.51), going on to describe the uses of a diplomatic portal. Diplomatic portals are generally used to provide information for foreign diplomats in the nation of the portal, but could actually be interesting for any (sometimes bilingual) inhabitants that are interested in international relations. Further existing platforms that may offer uses to government initiatives for the general public online include official websites, blogs, YouTube and Wikipedia. An article by Caitlin Byrne and Jane Johnston states that Wikipedia allows for “Multiple perspectives to be aired and resolved in a discursive format that supports diversity of worldviews, rather than through the promotion of conflict or contest” (Byrne & Johnston, 2015 p.417). When opinions of Twitter or Facebook users are diverse, sometimes counterproductive arguments and discussions begin, with a result of

confusion or ignorance. The possibility for discussion on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook is a useful tool for governments to use, but not on every topic. To ensure informed citizens on a topical subject online, official sites and Wikipedia can come to good use. Of course, Wikipedia, due to its ever-changing nature, can only be effective if the written articles are checked regularly for contributions and changes. However, this is not a bad condition because interested citizens using this platform to learn about efforts of the government would always have up-to-date information.

II.4 Extending the concept of public diplomacy to domestic audiences

Having established the global changes in the field of public diplomacy, and the adaptations of governments as well as citizens to a more online-lifestyle, it is now interesting to note the seemingly forgotten aspect of the advancements in online public diplomacy: domestic public diplomacy. Eytan Gilboa expressed that the “core” idea of public diplomacy, as specified by Malone in 1985, is “one of direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments” (Gilboa, 2000 p.290). Gilboa, together with many other scholars, have thought of new definitions for public diplomacy as it is changing with an increasingly digital global society. Using Gilboa, Nye and Cull’s ideas, Hyunjin Seo has constructed another definition for the concept in 2010: “public diplomacy can be understood as noncoercive efforts by governmental or nongovernmental entities to understand, inform, engage, and influence publics in other countries” (Seo, 2010 p.4). In his attempt in 2008, Manuel Castells was on the same line: “Public diplomacy is the diplomacy of the public, that is, the projection in the international arena of the values and ideas of the public” (Castells, 2008 p.91). Despite the original ideas, restated by Potter in the introduction, that the public dimension of diplomacy has to do with the foreign as well as the domestic audiences, there seems to be little interest or knowledge on the digitalization of the relationship between governments/governmental institutions and their domestic citizens. This group can exist of different types of actors that may be relevant for the government in place to succeed. Kathy Fitzpatrick mentions that, due to the increasing lack of homogeneity in domestic societies, approaches to reach domestic audiences should be “segmented and prioritized according to the specific goals and objectives of a given initiative” (Fitzpatrick, 2012 p. 434).

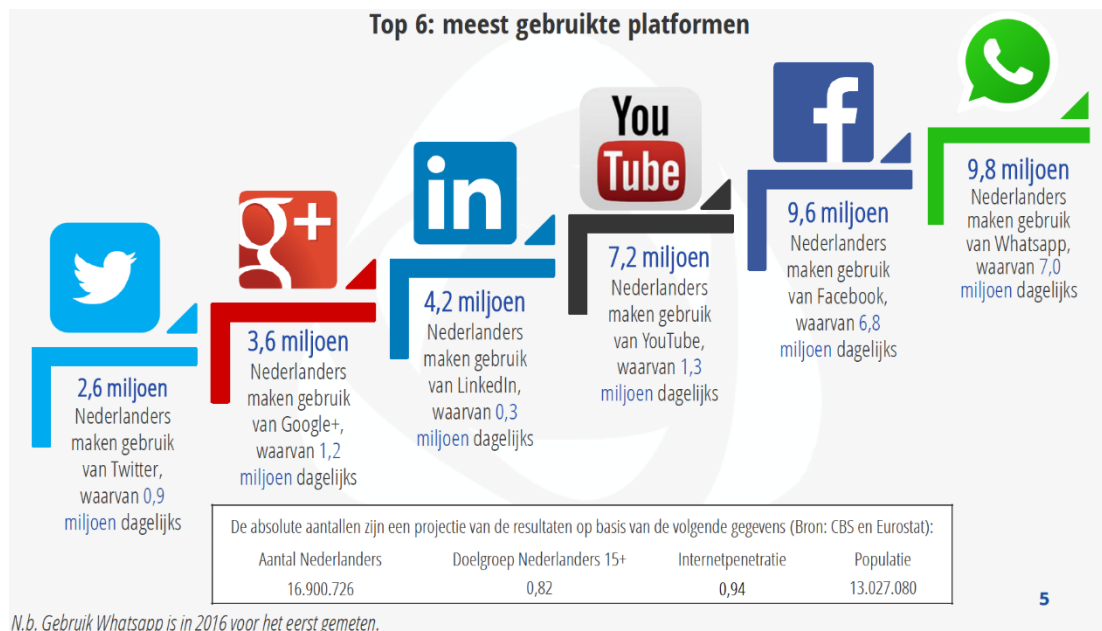
Fitzpatrick finds that the domestic public can affect a nation’s capability to realize public diplomacy goals: “They have the power to influence a government even though their interests

and concerns related to public diplomacy may not always be considered pertinent” (Fitzpatrick, 2012p.432). Examples she gives of domestic audiences that are important to a governments’ success in public diplomacy include: “policymakers, diaspora communities, expatriate communities, non-governmental organizations, businesses, educational institutions, media, activists and citizens’ groups” (Fitzpatrick, 2012 p.434). The awareness of the importance of domestic audiences has not always been noticed, in fact Fitzpatrick mentions that “domestic publics have generally been viewed as either nonpublics or inactive publics with low levels of knowledge about, and/or interest in, public diplomacy” (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p.432). Still today, there are many discussions about the two terms and the necessity of their distinction on a broader scale: some do not see a use for distinguishing between domestic and foreign audiences at all. Huijgh mentions Naren Chitty’s view that “in a world of dispersed populations, alternate views of public diplomacy must acknowledge that domestic and foreign audiences can no longer be separated and that both must be addressed” (Huijgh, 2011 p.68-69). Brian Hocking, seemingly on the same page, expresses that advancements in the past years have made it harder to “Insulate ‘publics’ in separate international and domestic environments, with the result that communications with organizations overseas leak back into the domestic environment” (Hocking, 2008 p.71). Though it may be difficult to distinguish between audiences, the domestic audiences overshadowed by the foreign ones are equally important and should be addressed.

II.5 Initial ideas on approaches to the domestic public in The Netherlands

After defining and discovering the domestic dimension of public digital diplomacy, how is the domestic dimension approached? According to Huijgh, MFA’s do develop public outreach activities towards their domestic groups, but they do not always specify these acts as separate from general or foreign public diplomacy. She says that MFA’s have learned from own experiences that “domestic public support for a government’s international policy choices and positions is crucial to the MFA’s legitimacy at home and abroad” (Huijgh, 2011 p.64). Upon explaining the many efforts of the Dutch government to connect with their public online, beginning with a project that was implemented in 1996, van Deursen, van Dijk, and Ebbers wrote: “The development of electronic public services in the Netherlands is rather ambitious” (Wimmer et al, 2006 p.272). Particularly for relatively open and free governments such as the Netherlands, the idea that any internet user can post any information of their choosing online

means that it is important to have an active presence online “so that they can control the information they are releasing and publics have a place to seek information. This accessibility is especially important for local governments, which would be a logical source of information in a community crisis” (Johnson Avery & Wooten Graham, 2013 p.277).



^ Infographic 2, in the bibliography under van der Veer et al, 2016.

On the website of the Dutch government, an article was published on how the Netherlands' online government services were rated the second-best in the world in 2012: “The Netherlands achieved its high score due to the secure manner with which its citizens can communicate digitally with government” (Government of The Netherlands, 2012). Finding out more about the reasons for successful relationships online between the Dutch general public and its government, despite the little acknowledgement for the domestic dimension in the public diplomacy efforts of the government, is one of the findings this thesis hopes to explore. Online approaches to general audiences has occurred especially over Twitter and Facebook, according to the social media guide of the MFA's website. The guide, just like other information the MFA publishes online regarding public diplomacy, does not distinguish between their efforts to reach the domestic and the foreign audiences. However, judging from the results displayed in research by Newcom Research & Consultancy by van der Veer, Sival and van der Meer (Infographic 2), it is likely that a substantial amount of the domestic public in The Netherlands is reached by the MFA's efforts on these platforms. The research states that both Facebook and Twitter are in the top 6 most used social media platforms by the Dutch general public³. In order for the

³ Based on questionnaires with 10.484 people living in The Netherlands in January 2016.

MFA to strategically grow in public digital diplomacy in the country as well as abroad, it is important to discover more about the significance in the results of the type of messages that reach the Dutch domestic public, because as Huijgh states, “the support of the citizenry, those they ought to be representing abroad, is the bread and butter of their credibility overseas and thus the government’s strategic interests” (Huijgh, 2011 p.64).

In summary

The abovementioned literature proves the significance of research into the two aspects probed in the research question: the importance of dialogic communication for online relationships and the identification of necessary public diplomacy efforts for the domestic audiences of the MFA. Not enough academic knowledge has been formed on these aspects and the literature that does exist hints at possibilities for improvements of the MFA’s strategies and relationships if more focus and factual information were to become available on the two aspects. The role of states as well as citizens has been changing due to the growth of digital knowledge and globalization, and the Netherlands is definitely a leading player in the field of online tactics that can be regarded as public diplomacy; both towards its domestic and to its foreign targeted audiences. Despite the clarifications in this literature review, information on the extent to which platforms allowing for direct dialogic communications are of help to the MFA as opposed to platforms that do not, as well as an understanding of the lacking acknowledgement or interest in the online efforts -that could fall under public diplomacy- of the MFA towards its domestic public, still needs to be discovered. The following chapters will explore these aspects.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introducing the theoretical framework

To structure and analyse findings on the questions regarding the relationship between the MFA and the general public in the Netherlands, constructivism provides a useful basis. The theory applies because the digitalization of diplomacy is a very abstract occurrence, and it constantly changes according to the environment in which it is used. This theoretical outlook will help establish a focus on the definition and identification of concepts that are used in much of my research, as well as question the formation and adaption of platforms in the uses of diplomacy. However, using only political or international relations related theories will not be enough to assess questions about the effectiveness of online communication between the MFA and the general public in the Netherlands. As an attempt to gain a broader understanding, this paper will apply ideas from the theoretical framework of public relations. As was mentioned by Heewon Cha, Sunha Yeo and Binnari Kim: “there is a common conceptual ground between public relations and public diplomacy” (Cha et al, 2015 p.297). In fact, public relations and public diplomacy intertwine at several aspects and should be considered together in discovering the efforts of the MFA to reach out to its differing audiences.

III.1 Constructivism

The international relations theory of constructivism is one of great relevance to the topic at hand. Karen Mingst and Ivan Arreguín-Toft, in their book “Essentials of International Relations” describe central aspects of the constructivist perspective: “Neither individual, state, nor international community interests are predetermined or fixed, but are socially constructed through constant interaction” (Mingst & Arreguín-Toft, 2011 p.84). From a constructivist standpoint, the changes in the roles of states and governmental institutions such as MFA’s are occurring due to the way in which societies have taken on the internet and globalization. In more economically developed and technically advances nations such as the Netherlands, especially many citizens have turned to the internet and it is thus logical that institutions such as the MFA are noting a growing importance in digital knowledge. Over the last 5 to 10 years, buzz terms such as “interdependence”, “global governance” and “citizen responsibility” have increasingly been used. With a global growth of internet users and possibilities, interaction about different issues has often moved online. Due to the possibility for constant discussion or

interaction between different people in different time zones and cultures, information and knowledge has been exchanged and norms have become adapted. The internet's contribution to political and international development has been immense, as is commented on by Brousseau, Marzouki and Méadel in their abovementioned book from 2015:

This situation allows innovation, but it also raises a security issue: the non-stability and “fuzziness” of norms continually challenge investments and status [...] Digital technologies play a key role here, since they provide tools not only to facilitate but also to guarantee ongoing negotiations, to enforce and check compliance with the procedures and to dynamically implement norms. They also contribute to guarantees as to the fairness and “neutrality” of these processes, hence generating trust, both by automating procedures and by keeping track of all actions (p.35).

Using a constructivist standpoint in analysing the digitalization of communications and relationships allows us to consider the background and developments of concepts of relevance, and find possibilities in differing understandings of terms.

As is explained in the literature review, in discussing and developing definitions of public diplomacy as a growing field, scholars such as Castells, Seo and Gilboa mention foreign audiences as a main target goal of MFA's to reach out to. A potential explanation for the emphasis on foreign audiences in the evolvement of public diplomacy is that prior to the growth of the internet, it was more difficult for MFA's to reach foreign audiences than domestic audiences. The domestic audience is generally not mentioned in discussing public diplomacy, and when researching about the domestic dimension it became clear that a ministry's efforts to reach out to the domestic public is generally found important but not described as public diplomacy. Though each ministry or government attempts to reach out to audiences in different ways, social interaction among English speaking nations and scholars may have contributed to the growth of “public” diplomacy as a global, border-crossing, concept. Though it is clear that domestic audiences in these nations, as well as other nations that are well-developed online such as the Netherlands, are also being targeted online for certain projects or strategies, these efforts may have been labelled under different concepts.

Scholar Ellen Huijgh explains that over the years of development for public diplomacy and the digitalization of relationships, there have been two terms associated with the domestic dimension of public diplomacy: “public affairs and domestic outreach” (Huijgh, 2011 p.66). Huijgh explains the concept of public affairs as a one-way type of communication and “a

specialized form of corporate communication dedicated to informing targeted domestic publics about foreign policy goals, positions and activities” (Huijgh, 2011 p.66). The term domestic outreach, according to Huijgh, goes beyond public affairs and stresses the “increasingly (inter)active role of domestic citizens in public diplomacy [...] and the interplay of public diplomacy’s features at home and abroad” (Huijgh, 2011 p.66). These concepts are relevant, but the methods of online posting and strategic communications seem similar or the same as what has so far been described in public diplomacy despite the different content within the posts for different audiences.

Some scholars, due to the little research and information on the domestic dimension of public diplomacy efforts online, have argued that the domestic dimension is not regarded or addressed by MFA’s in their acts of online public diplomacy. However, using a constructivist standpoint allows for the possibility that the MFA does conduct strategies and efforts that can fall under public diplomacy towards domestic audiences online, but identifies and conceptualizes these efforts differently. Huijgh mentions a more comprehensive approach to these ideas and concepts, including encouragement for public diplomacy scholars to think “beyond the old and new”, though she mentions this would require “the sacrifice of some sacred cows”, since the conviction that diplomacy is “solely directed towards the outside” would need to be transcended. “Overcoming this single entrenched idea is perhaps the most challenging aspect of moving beyond categorical thinking in diplomacy” (Huijgh, 2011 p.71). Although redefining the concept seems like a difficult and slow process, constructivism reveals how repeated interactions improve and assign new meanings and values to concepts. The constant redefinition of concepts possibly explains that the newly adjusting term of online public diplomacy has been largely affected by the former definitions on public diplomacy and may continue to develop to include other relevant audiences. As Huijgh mentions the following: “literature on multi-stakeholder and new diplomacy describes the ascent of new actors, even to the detriment of the role of traditional diplomatic actors, and initiated the birth of the new public diplomacy” (Huijgh, 2012 p.361).

Despite the knowledge that domestic public support is necessary for the legitimacy of a government at home and abroad, the conceptualization of the term public diplomacy has led to an idea of separate fields for online strategies of relationships with domestic and foreign audiences. Over the past 5 to 10 years, more attention has been spent on creating and discussing concepts of the internet as a tool for communication for “foreign” audiences than as a new tool of communication with “domestic” audiences or simply “audiences”, whereas the domestic

dimension has been seen in different terms and approachability. This thesis therefore hypothesizes on the grounds of constructivism that H1: *The MFA does reach the domestic public in the Netherlands online, but this work is not seen as a part of public diplomacy due to the conceptualization of public diplomacy as being a concept linked to foreign audiences.*

III.2 The dialogic theory of public relations

The most important theory contributing to determining the ways in which the MFA works on its online relationship with the audiences then, is the dialogic theory of public relations, as offered by Kent and Taylor. Scholars Johnson Avery and Wooten Graham, in using this theory for their own research, explain: “Public relations is positioned under the umbrella of strategic communications, and the emergence of the Internet [...] has had great impact on the theory and practice of this discipline” (Johnson Avery & Wooten Graham, 2013 p.274). Michael Kent and Maureen Taylor saw a need for research into uses of dialogue for public relations when governments, during the development of technologies over the past decade, began using more and more one-way communication methods such as “websites, RSS feeds, blogs, and wikis” (Johnson Avery & Wooten Graham, 2013 p.277). Michael Kent and Maureen Taylor noticed a shift in public relations to “interpersonal channels of communication” (Kent & Taylor, 2002 p.23) due to the fragmentation of mass media, and the increase in usable platforms. Fitzpatrick agrees: “Relational approaches to public diplomacy based on dialogue and engagement between and among state and non-state actors have replaced more traditional messaging approaches” (Fitzpatrick, 2012 p.436). Kent and Taylor went on to think of a theoretical approach to analyse the nature and quality of interaction between governments/organizations and the general public through different channels, and this theory developed over the past decades.

Research into 46 studies using the dialogic theory of public relations by Kent and Taylor shows that “there is a consistent emphasis on the role of websites and social media as facilitators of dialogic communication and as useful tools for managing organizational-public relationships” but also that there is “a relatively low degree of consistency across the studies in how dialogic communication was measured” (Cha et al, 2015 p.299). To help overcome such issues, this thesis will distinguish between “dialogue” and “dialogic” in its analysis and categorization, and overlook the possibility in contributions of platforms that allow for different amounts of dialogic communication. The concept of “dialogue” is described as “the orientation to fruitful and ethical communication that develops from enacting dialogic principles”, whereas

“dialogic” is “the procedural steps involved in creating an ethical communicative environment” (Kent & Taylor, 2014 p.390). The dialogic methods thus lead to dialogue between actors online. The distinction between these two terms is useful and necessary because, despite the common assumption that “social media” cause for dialogue, this is not always true. The term “social media” is very loaded and in looking for the significance of dialogue or dialogic possibilities, it is more useful to look at all digital platforms and divide these into categories according to the amount of dialogue they actually allow for. For example, one can place comments on YouTube postings, but this rarely occurs or leads to fruitful discussions, as opposed to Twitter postings where often questions and comments are posted in order to begin communications.

“Although “dialogue” cannot guarantee ethical public relations outcomes, a dialogic communication orientation does increase the likelihood that audiences and organizations will better understand each other and have ground rules for communication” (Kent & Taylor, 2002 p.33). Ellen Huijgh makes the additional point that “Regular, institutionalized, and informed public dialogue ought to build greater public understanding of foreign policy and international issues or governmental priorities”, explaining that these can occur in the form of “policy consultations or organization of conferences and workshops within and across the country”, but also through online policy discussions with citizens (Huijgh, 2011 p.66). As stated by Cha, Yeo and Kim, “To realize an ideal organization–public relationship in diplomacy, many scholars assert that the dialogic strategy has to change from a one-way communication to a two-way communication” (Cha et al, 2015 p.299); this may not necessarily be the case depending on the type of relationship the government may want to achieve, or which goals it has in reaching the general public.

Cha, Yeo and Kim analysed the online behaviour of different embassies in Korea for dialogic behaviour and found that even though institutions recognize “the power of the internet and admit it to be an ideal two-way communication tool, it has been revealed that translating this idea into reality is met with many problems such as manpower shortage and financial constraints” (Cha et al, 2015 p.306). This limitation to the application of dialogic communication links back to the possible necessity of cooperation between actors of different fields: “Dialogic engagement will only be possible when organizations empower skilled dialogic communicators” (Kent & Taylor, 2014 p.395). Further limitations to the theory include that commitment, and an acceptance that relationship building with the public is important, are necessary yet do not easily occur. Kampf et al furthermore state that despite these challenges, and “the evolution in online tools for fostering dialogue, Kent and Taylor’s framework remains

relevant” (Kampf et al, 2015 p.334), giving examples of several studies that used the dialogic theory of public relations as a framework to discover the use of online tools for organizational/governmental relationships with audiences.

The difficulties in the application of dialogic communication, as well as the results shown by applied dialogic communication through conversations online, will be looked for in the diplomatic efforts to promote the Dutch MFA online, to make generalizations on more specific setbacks applicable for the Netherlands. In order to find the extent to which dialogic communication is actually necessary for the MFA to apply in public diplomacy strategies for reaching audiences, an adapted version of the dialogic theory of public relations comes to use. Inspired by the theory, the platforms of relevant use to the MFA for reaching out to the public are split up into categories based on how open for dialogic communication they are. The category of platforms allowing for direct dialogic communication, where users seek out the opinions or knowledge of others, such as Facebook and Twitter, is called the “discuss” category. The category of platforms that allow for dialogic communication but on which generally little discussion is present, such as on blogs and YouTube, is called the “comment” category, and the category of platforms which generally do not ask for feedback or dialogic communication, such as official sites and Wikipedia, is called the “listen” category. Applying the idea of public relations being most effective through dialogic communication, it can be hypothesized that H2: *Regarding their online relationship with the general public in the Netherlands, the MFA sees most value in, and devotes most effort to, online platforms that allow for dialogic communication and discussions (platforms that could be included in the “discuss” category).*

In summary

In summary, this theoretical framework develops standpoints that will be important in the research and its analysis. Using perspectives and ideas provided by theories, hypotheses that begin the pursuit for answers to the research questions were made. Constructivism is used to discover whether the domestic public is truly a forgotten or ignored dimension to public diplomacy, or whether the domestic public is reached through public diplomacy-like methods under different terms and concepts. The dialogic theory of public relations is used to understand whether online platforms that allow for dialogic communication are in fact the most invested or valued ones for public diplomacy by the MFA.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

Introducing the research design

This section explains the process of research and analysis conducted to find answers for questions regarding the importance of distinction for the domestic population in public digital diplomacy and the need for dialogue in relationships with the general public for the MFA of the Netherlands. The methods section explains the choice to do a qualitative single-case study of practises in the Dutch MFA through interviewing, and leads into the operationalization of the variables that can be selected from the research question. The case selection specifies the choice for an analysis on the Netherlands and its MFA in particular, after which the data collection goes into the specifics on tactics chosen to apply in the interviews. Lastly, the advantages and limitations of the research design will be highlighted to gain a broader perspective to the extent in which this thesis can contribute to existing knowledge.

IV.1 Methodology

The research in this thesis will be on the grounds of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are useful for this topic because discussing the formulation and importance of the domestic dimension of public diplomacy is difficult to measure accurately in numbers, and so are the different ideas and influences that can be offered by strategies of online platforms for engagement between actors. To find answers to the research question and the hypotheses, which are relatively specific to one case, the study in this thesis will be based upon a single case, or an “idiographic approach”, as Bryman explains in his book “Social Research Methods”: “What distinguishes a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case” (Bryman, 2012 p.69). As explained above, it is not possible to make generalizations from the findings of this research for other nations or ministries; though the generalizations for the Dutch MFA can be used as example for other interested scholars. Bryman explains the ideas of various scholars that “the crucial question is not whether the findings can be generalized to a wider universe but how well the researcher generates theory out of the findings” (Bryman, 2012 p.71). Rather than looking to create theory, this study uses theories and findings from literature to develop hypotheses and find occurrences in aspects of online public diplomacy. This means that the analysis is deductive rather than inductive. To gain full understanding of the MFA’s perspective and goals in public diplomacy online, more

than secondary research is necessary. For the purpose of this thesis, three interviews will be conducted, with three different employees at the MFA. The sampling of the interviews to some extent occurred in what Bryman defines as a “snowball” sampling process, because the initial contact of one person triggered referral and contact with further relevant employees.

For the analysis of the interviews, discourse analysis will be used. Discourse analysis is especially relevant when finding the meaning of concepts and phrases and this method therefore allows for a structural break down of the answers provided in the interviews. As explained by Wetherell, Taylor and Yates: “The principal tenet of discourse analysis is that function involves construction of versions, and is demonstrated by language variation” (Wetherell et al, 2002 p.199). To find significance and meaning in ideas or events explained by the interviewees, their answers will be broken down and compared. Looking at specific parts of an argument, such as chosen conceptualization of a relevant term, can clarify and give weight to meanings of concepts and strategies of relevance. The themes that will be searched for in the interviews are overall knowledge on digitalization in the MFA, interpretations on public diplomacy, and views on dialogic communication. These themes will be used to structure and guide the analysis. Descriptions or certain uses of the concepts “public diplomacy”, “dialogue” and concepts describing the use of online platforms, will be looked at in particular to find importance. In my interviews, I will not bring up “public diplomacy” or “dialogue” before the interviewees do, to find out what context the interviewees see the concept as belonging to. The terms come up in my final questions of the protocol, so if neither concept is mentioned throughout the interview, they will come up at the end. At this point I can ask about the choice not to mention these words, and still discover other ideas the interviewees have in relation to these concepts. If other concepts are brought up frequently and may seem relevant or important to the topic, these will be discussed as well.

IV.2 Operationalization of variables

For the main research question of this thesis being “How have internal understanding of strategies and identification of audiences online affected the way in which the Dutch MFA pursues public diplomacy?”, the dependent variable is the way in which the MFA pursues its public diplomacy. The independent variables are the internal understanding of strategies to use online and the identification of audiences online.

Dependent variable: MFA's pursuance of public diplomacy

The way in which the MFA pursues public diplomacy online will be found through efforts and strategies to reach different audiences mentioned in interview answers. Interviewees will be asked to determine how they see the relationship with their audiences and how they work on this. Seeing as the opinion of the public cannot be measured in this thesis, the general success of the relationship between the MFA and its public is not explored, but rather the amount of positivity used in description of the benefits certain methods online bring along for the MFA, and the amount of time and money invested into certain platforms or strategies awarded to reaching the public.

Independent variable 1: understanding of strategies online

The first independent variable affecting the MFA's pursuance in their relationship with audiences is the understanding of strategies online. According to the dialogic theory of public relations, platforms that allow for dialogic communication should provide the best means to work on relationships between an organization and its audiences. Platforms in this category, as explained in the theoretical framework, will be given more attention in the interview questions than those that do not, but all will be discussed. There will not be a pre-selection of specific platforms to look for, because any online platform that can be used for online public diplomacy will be looked for in the research, and the usage of platforms allowing dialogic communication can be determined by asking which platform is the most frequent used for communication with the public, and how frequent different platforms are used for different goals. It can, however, be expected that Facebook and Twitter will be mentioned by the interviewees due to the many listed accounts on these platforms that are presented by the MFA.

Independent variable 2: identification of audiences online

The second independent variable is the identification of audiences online. Secondary research shows that the domestic audiences are often not regarded by MFA's in public diplomacy strategies; to discover the extent of this in the Dutch MFA, questions regarding different audiences that the organization is trying to reach will be asked. A general idea of both the awareness and the specific tasks employees at the MFA have regarding the domestic public as oppose to the foreign, can then be made. Having the perspective of an employee working mostly

with foreign stakeholders as well as one working especially with Dutch persons will thus be very useful to see if there are differences in the way the MFA defines and targets its audiences, and how this has developed over the past years.

IV.3 Case selection

The Dutch MFA was selected as the case study for this project for several reasons. The Netherlands is an important player in the globally changing arena of public diplomacy, and its MFA has been very active online in comparison with some other MFA's. In addition, being a Dutch citizen is helpful for me in looking for contact with employees and conducting research. Compared to most nations, the country is very well developed and active online. The Dutch governmental services online can be found through the efforts of different institutions within the country, but the MFA is the one most actively working on public diplomacy. In addition to this, the most significant findings on the changes in public diplomacy can be found through the MFA, as its employees work in different sectors aiming at foreign relations as well as domestic relations, with different mandates. Brian Hocking specifies this interesting feature of internal and external diplomacy of MFA's in "Diplomacy in a Globalizing World": "Together with the network of overseas diplomatic representation, the MFA forms a subsystem in the national diplomatic system" (Kerr and Wiseman, 2013 p.127). Primary research, which will be composed of interviews with relevant employees at the MFA, will be conducted to find responses to methods or strategies as defined in the theoretical framework. This can contribute to the understanding of wants and needs of (part of) the general public as well as actors reaching out to the public online in The Netherlands.

Discovering the effects of the growth of digitalization for this institution can be important for the essence of the research question in this thesis and can contribute to generalizations on Dutch public diplomacy. In addition, research in the literature review shows that much information on digital public diplomacy in other nations, such as Canada and Finland, comes from MFA's as well, due to the MFA's general responsibility to converse with foreign audiences but also the domestic. Conducting interviews with employees at this MFA can contribute to useful conclusions regarding the Dutch uses of online platforms for not only the Dutch, but it can also be recommended further for foreign diplomats looking for different uses and strategies online. Eventually more varied research into public diplomacy online in different countries could contribute to a determination of how capabilities and approaches differ.

IV.4 Data collection: Interviewing

The interviews held for the purpose of this thesis are with three employees of the MFA in differing functions, all related to public diplomacy, communications or digital technologies. Though the interviewees chose to stay anonymous, some specifics about their functions will be elaborated on in the analysis. Having employees from these relevant but differing positions allows for a careful and valid construction of the types of platforms that are seen as most useful for the MFA's relationships with audiences, and the way in which the MFA sees and pursues its relationship with the domestic audience online. An example of the consent forms from the interviews as well as a copy of the interview protocol can be found in the appendices. The signed consent forms are not included for the protection of the interviewees' privacy. According to Bryman, the interview style chosen for this research can be called semi-structured, because there will be a list of questions and topics to discuss but the interviewee "has a great deal of leeway in how to reply" (Bryman, 2012 p.471). To ensure that the interview will stay on topic and both the domestic dimension as well as the amount of dialogue online will be discussed, a semi-structured interview is more applicable than an unstructured one. The interview protocol, or the list of questions and topics to address in the interviews, has been constructed, and can be found in the appendices, according to instructions given by Rebekah Tromble in her lecture "Interviewing" for Leiden University from 2015. In this lecture, Tromble explains that "Good interviewing is ultimately a mixture of art and science" (Tromble, 2015), meaning that it is just as important to carefully construct the questions of an interview and systematically set up the scenario so that valuable information can come to light, as it is to intuitively go along with the conversation and adapt to changes or differences in answers or findings. The semi-structured interview, based on the protocol with 13 questions and prompts, is thus a good framework. The list of questions in the protocol contribute to a focus, yet I am not planning to go by the list question-by question to allow for a natural flow in the conversation and to allow the interviewees to bring up relevant topics I may not have thought to ask.

The interview protocol includes prompts, which are hints to the interviewer in-between topics and questions to help "allow the conversation to flow naturally" (Tromble, 2015). For the chosen style of interviewing in this thesis, a spontaneous and unique flow to each separate interview is expected, as Wengraf explains: "With an 'active follow-up strategy', questions, prompts, probes, statements and other interventions by you will be pretty constantly improvised and invented by you during the interview" (Wengraf, 2001 p.159). The author points to an example of a student who prepared for a semi-structured, 30-minute-long interview, not unlike

the ones held for this thesis, by making 43 questions when fewer, more open-ended questions “might have been more appropriate” (Wengraf, 2001 p.160). Most questions in the interview protocol are open ended, in order to explore the interviewee’s ideas and knowledge, and to ensure validity in answers because the interviewee was able to construct own answers that successfully describe the information sought for, instead of being limited to prescribed possibilities for answers.

Some closed questions were included because, as gathered from Tromble’s lecture, closed ended questions tend to ensure reliability as the answers an interviewee gives to a closed ended question tends to be the same even if repeated, whereas open ended questions can be answered in a variety of ways. For the successful analysis of hypotheses, thus, the mix of closed and open ended questions increases likelihood of valuable answers with both validity and reliability. The interviewees will be asked many “example” and “grand tour” questions. Tromble explains grand tour questions as questions where an interviewee is asked to walk the interviewer through a routine, for example a working day or a specific strategic task. Example questions are similar, but may require less long answers. These types of questions allow the interviewees to think of aspects to the question they want to mention and thus provide the interviewer with a good idea of what aspects to the topic are really important. In addition, these questions get the respondent “thinking in concrete terms and help(s) produce more reliable results” (Tromble, 2015).

IV.5 Advantages and limitations of research design

As can be noticed from the explanations and references in the research design so far, using qualitative research to attain findings is an applicable choice for this study. This is because, as was gathered from explanations by Tromble, Bryman and Wengraf, relationships, strategies and perception of meanings of terms or mandates are hard to measure in a numerical way, and would actually show less validity if put in numbers. Conducting interviews to find out more about communication strategies and conceptualization of useful terms is a valuable method, because in-depth analysis of specific aspects is possible. Especially semi-structured interviewing, as elaborated by Beth Leech, is seen as a useful method to find reliable data from perceptions of specific interviewees. Leech describes this method as a middle ground between unstructured interviewing, which can result in irrelevant and ungeneralizable answers, and on the other hand structured interviews, which can be too restrictive to gain valid conclusions. Leech explains that semi structured interviews can “provide detail, depth and an insider’s

perspective, while at the same time allowing hypothesis testing” (Leech, 2002 p.665). The amount of detail the interviews will provide is more than can be found in secondary literature, because questions are completely adjusted to what is being researched in this particular thesis. Schostak beautifully describes that, “as unfolding relation between conscious beings who are not necessarily fully aware of their affects on each other, the emergent form of the interview can be surprising and stimulating” (Schostak, 2006 p.50). Other research methods would not allow findings as detailed as can be obtained through interviewing. Getting feedback from relevant employees is helpful because they can point out factors of relevance that have not been discovered in theoretical secondary findings, but only occur in the practical world of conducting public digital diplomacy.

A limitation to this research design is that online platforms are constantly expanding and changing: it is impossible to include new adaptations made to the platforms of analysis (e.g. Twitter recently created the possibility for polls) that occur at the end of the data collection phase or even after. However, the interviewees can provide speculations in the case of advancements online through efforts of the MFA, which could show the knowledge and preparation for changes in the institution. A Limitation to using qualitative methods is pointed out by Graham Gibbs in his book on qualitative methods: “there can be no simple, true and accurate reporting of respondents’ views. Our analyses are themselves interpretations and thus constructions of the world” (Gibbs, 2007 p.7). A limitation to the method of interviewing, more specifically, is that it is a very time costly method, and creates dependence on others. Despite this, it was possible to conduct three interviews of enough detail and discussion with relevant employees. More interviews would have been preferable for a larger overview or a more in-depth project, but the three interviewees that contributed to this study, due to their positions at, and knowledge of the MFA, can provide a good overview to conclude upon the MFA’s advancements in public diplomacy strategies online.

Summarizing

This research design laid out the important aspects to the research done and the analysis that will follow. The choice to conduct personal interviews for a qualitative in-depth study of the strategies of the MFA to reach out to different audiences online has a likelihood of producing highly relevant and informative results, despite the fact that the scope for the thesis is limited to a small amount of time.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introducing the analysis & discussion

In this section, findings and information gained from the conducted interviews will be discussed and analysed. The first and last sections will cover practical aspects of the interviewing process that affected the procedure and results, and the body discusses answers of relevance to the research question and its hypotheses. Seeing as specific topics and opinions established in the literature review and the theoretical framework are looked for in the interviews, the discussion of the data transcribed has been separated into these pre-existing themes: the MFA's digitalization, the discussion on what audiences and strategies the evolving concept of "public diplomacy" includes throughout this time of digitalization, and the various contexts used to describe the importance of dialogue online. The structural choice to set up the analysis this way regardless of the sequence in which the topics came up in the actual interviews, contributes to the clarity of the findings.

V.1 Initial information about the interviews and the interviewees

Two interviews were held on the 22nd April 2016, and another one on the 25th April. The interviewees all invited me to the MFA and agreed to be recorded, and quoted. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes each and all covered the same topic. All three interviewees were given a quick introduction into my general research and field of interest before the interviews were started. The interviews were recorded with a voice recording application, and transcribed. Seeing as the interviewees did not want me to mention their names and specific functions at the MFA, they will be referred to as "Participant". Some useful information that the participants were willing to share will be provided to allow for distinction in possible reasons for, or conclusions on, some answers that they gave me. Participant 1's background is in the field of politics/foreign relations and was the first person I interviewed. This person's function at the MFA has to do with seeking out and advising stakeholders or audiences in foreign countries through posts and embassies abroad. My second interview was with Participant 2, who works as an advisor on a variety of fields within communications, reaching out to both domestic and foreign audiences. Participant 3, my last interviewee, has a background in business and works in a more technical as well as practical field of communications, but is also involved in reaching online audiences of different types. The same interview protocol was

used for all interviews, but in all three interviews the conversation had a natural flow and the order of the questions was not adhered to. Despite the research and the interview protocol being in English, all interviewees chose to speak to me in Dutch. This means that any quotations used below are translated, and despite my efforts to conduct precise translations, the answers should be interpreted on what ideas and opinions are brought across rather than in terms of exact wording; though some concepts were described using English words originally due to lacking Dutch vocabulary.

V.2 The MFA and digitalization

V.2.1 Discourse used to describe the MFA's digitalization generally

In order to go into the analysis of theoretically relevant themes, it is important to look at the discourse used to describe the efforts of digitalization in the MFA generally. In doing so it is possible to discover the initial opinions on audiences and platforms of relevance to the MFA before forming conclusions or opinions on the truth to the concepts or perspectives of the hypotheses. In describing the efforts, or lack thereof, of the MFA to adjust to digitalization, all three interviewees noted that it is clear the MFA is taking concrete steps and wants to increase its use of online services to keep up with other nations, but also other influential organizations targeting similar audiences. It is clear that the MFA has been adjusting and investing much to increase its usage of the internet, and that the leading figures in the organization find it see this as a central goal. It seems that this is a vital aspect to the legitimization of the MFA's efforts to digitalize: "what's important is that the decision makers of this organization are behind it all and think it's important too. It's a hierarchical organization, so if a Directorate General thinks it's all nonsense, it's a step back" (Participant 3).

All three interviewees brought up the newly opened "contact centre" and "newsroom", which are parts of what participant 3 described as important aspects of the MFA's "initiative of modernization and diplomacy". New technology was bought and more employees were hired in order to track trending topics online and evaluate the importance of topics or platforms over the course of time. In addition, the interviewees mentioned the creation of more and more accounts or channels of the MFA on online platforms. In terms of targets in digitalization interviewees expressed their view that the MFA has been digitalising to more easily target or cooperate with possible partners, to show actors in other nations how advanced and digital the

country is becoming, and to show nationals that the MFA is not just “that stiff department where civil servants are busy improving the world but also that it’s a hands-on ministry where people work that can help you when you’re in trouble or have questions abroad”(Participant 2).

In terms of speed and efficiency in the MFA’s efforts to become more digital, employee’s descriptions and opinions differed more. Overall, participants 1 and 2 used more positive language to describe the speed and successes in digitalization efforts by the MFA over the past years than participant 3. Participant 1 used the opening of the “newsroom” and “contact centre”, as proof of how quickly the MFA is adjusting. The participant explained that the contact centre was opened in January 2016 and the newsroom was created around 1,5 years ago, though the MFA has been working towards it for about 2,5 years: “you can see that is growing and improving quickly and its becoming more and more important” (Participant 1). Participant 3 was more careful in praising the digitalization that has been reached so far, and explained that:

The movement we are going through is practical, [...] but what’s behind it is more strategic and [there is] a cultural change to explaining more, being more open and being more transparent. Because it’s such a large cultural change everything is going step by step, and sometimes we take little steps back.

All participants described their view that the intensity and effectiveness of the MFA’s digitalization are still in need of development and is likely to continue growing over the coming years. Participant 3 explained that the MFA is still investing much in traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television: “If you were to ask what the status quo is now, then this organization is still really aiming towards those traditional [forms of] media” (Participant 3). Directly following this statement, however, the participant explains that there are efforts to transform these efforts into a new way of thinking, basing the decision which type of medium or platform to use on the audience that is aimed for and the message that is being sent. Participant 1 also noted the important process that these traditional media are becoming more and more present online; with newspapers developing applications and television shows being aired online, meaning that traditional and newer types of media are slowly merging and the MFA is adapting to these changes: “I think that we are still at the beginning” (Participant 1).

V.2.2 Descriptions of the audiences online

From the interviews it became apparent that the MFA targets a variety of audiences. There are clear distinctions and sections of work per audience. Participant 1's job was only aimed at advising about and seeking out foreign audiences that could be cooperated with for policy goals. This audience was referred to as "stakeholders" throughout the interview, seeing as the people with whom connections are eventually established could become business partners. However, due to the wide range of the internet and differing aims or policy goals the MFA may have, it seems that any person with knowledge in a certain field and capabilities to connect is a potential stakeholder. Participant 1 explained:

The stakeholders can be NGO's or journalists or people in the private sector; CEO's, bloggers, people who are really active on social media. It can be any kind of person of whom we think they have a specific position of influence in society. If we can influence them, we can make sure that we, as the Netherlands, put out a positive image of the country, but also that we can attain our policy goals.

In terms of domestic audiences, participants 2 and 3 explained that the group currently most invested in by the MFA is consular, and contains Dutch people interested in traveling. The "contact centre", aimed largely at this audience and opened recently as mentioned earlier, was accompanied by a large campaign to ensure the success for the MFA to actually reach most of the people this domestic audience. Participant 2 mentioned specifically chosen strategies to reach the domestic travellers to have included TV commercials, online commercials on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter accounts, sponsored or paid advertisements through Google and Facebook, and large billboard posters around Schiphol airport in Amsterdam. Other audiences that tend to follow the efforts to the MFA online generally include relevant professionals, citizens interested or educated in the MFA's efforts, or influential figures and partners. Some named targets include interested university students, people who happen to be searching for information on, are involved in, or connected to topics that are discussed and dealt with by the MFA, journalists and people who work for NGO's or other institutions that are cooperating with the MFA. Beyond this, one concern the MFA is still exploring and considering seems to be the question regarding the extent to which certain audiences should be sought online, and the depth of the information published: "Do you have to want to inform the whole of the Netherlands about human rights policies of our country?" (Participant 2).

V.2.3 Descriptions of platform usage for different targets/audiences

From all three interviews it became very apparent that Twitter is currently the most used and most invested platform. On Twitter, the MFA has 3 separate accounts that are used regularly and on which reactions are analysed. The three accounts have clear separate target audiences and each platform seems to reach (a part of) its target audience, because the types of followers and reactions from each platform are deemed relevant. Followers of the “@minbz” account are described as Dutch professionals or relevant/interested figures, followers of “@Dutchmfa” are described to be international partners, English speaking figures of relevance or English educated foreigners with interest in topics discussed, whereas the “@24/7bz” account has a large variation in Dutch speaking followers looking for travel information. The next most discussed platforms were Facebook, Instagram and the official website. YouTube and Google plus were mentioned but not further elaborated on.

Depending on the goal and audience, the MFA’s actions online change. As discussed above, during the campaign to reach domestic audiences interested in travel, the MFA used sponsored ads on Facebook and Google. With other audiences where it is less determined exactly who is reached or knowledge is less developed on how to reach these people, the online platforms offer a wide variety in users to post towards. “We work on corporate channels here and it’s important to do that, but what’s also important is that all the posts (embassies and such) in foreign countries have their own platform accounts. In total I think we have around 200 Facebook and Twitter channels (accounts)” (Participant 3). Participant 1 explained the way in which these posts use online platforms differently: “Some posts use social media to raise the topics they may be critical of in that country, for example in the field of human rights. They use social media to bring light to these topics in a careful manner”. Another use mentioned by Participant 1 is more economic:

Posts also use social media for nation branding and showing what the Netherlands has to offer, so imagine if a team from Delft [University] wins a “self-driving” car competition, that’s the kind of thing posts will put on their social media because it shows the Netherlands is good at it.

V.2.4 Descriptions of views on the extent of digitalization necessary for different audiences

When asked to what extent digital platforms are deemed better than traditional media for the creation and maintenance of different types of relationships, all three interviewees agreed that it is extremely dependent of the type of relationship that is sought for. Participant 1 explained that in reaching foreign stakeholders, the job still includes more traditional media than online platforms: “you can’t just go on twitter and expect to find any audience because perhaps the person you’re looking for is too old for that or has no interest in Twitter” (Participant 1). Factors Participant 1 mentioned to determine the necessity of online platforms for the MFA in relationships with foreign audiences were the presence of censorship on online platforms, the overall access of a population to the internet and the possibility of other media such as television being more dominantly used by populations. Participant 2 and 3 also mentioned most of these factors to be relevant, but did not go into age at all. These two mentioned the amount of technical experience or knowledge of a person of interest to the MFA to be an important factor determining the effectiveness in using online platforms for connections. This factor could be influenced by age, but does not have to. Participant 1 explained that depending on the relationship that is looked for and the difficulty or sensitivity in topics to discuss, face-to-face meetings tend to be best, but these only occur if the MFA targets an audience for a partnership or project, and not when a large audience is addressed for influence or information.

V.2.5 Descriptions of successful developments or adaptations

When asked about successes or improvements, Participants 1 and 2 were generally faster and more enthusiastic in their answers. Participant 3, with a constant context of comparing the efforts of the MFA with efforts of technical companies or other relevant players, was slightly less impressed overall but did point out the growth and achievements over the course of time; “I think it’s going slow but if you look at what happened in 1,5 years there’s quite some results” (Participant 3). Participant 3 explained that “success” in efforts of the MFA to digitalize and reach out to audiences online is generally not measured. This is because there are great differences in approaches and results that are looked for, and because the targeting of online audiences is still relatively new for the MFA. This is why the amount of positivity in the descriptions of strategies, and the amount of employees, time and money invested into certain platforms or strategies, will be important for this thesis.

From the descriptions above, but also from the generally positive wording used by all three interviewees, it can be determined that they see the newsroom as a success, because it brought along a new system and possibilities to oversee online discussions and room for improvements or growth. It is clear that the MFA invested a lot of money into the technologies and staff working longer hours in the newsroom. Besides the newsroom, it seems that the newly established contact centre offering consular help 24 hours a day is seen as a very big step in online strategies of the MFA. A lot of money and time was spent on the campaign for the opening of the consular services; Participant 2 mentioned extensive efforts including billboards, advertisements and a public opening with a famous Dutch figure. The participant went on to show me the advertisement and I noticed it had English subtitles. Initially, I thought this was done so that the (relatively small) population of non-Dutch speakers in the country would be able to understand and use the service, but it seems as though the English subtitles have more to do with nation-branding: foreign organizations and relevant actors or audiences abroad can watch and understand the advertisement, and see how well the Dutch MFA is working on digitalization and the overall safety of their inhabitants. “I am very much in favour of the public campaign. This is also something of which we as Dutch people can be a bit proud of in the world” (Participant 2). Despite the factors of pride, all three interviewees seemed realistic and understanding of the many challenges yet to come; as Participant 1 explained in discussing the tactics and platforms used for the consular services “For us a relevant platform is currently Twitter, but we don’t know how it will evolve and maybe a whole different channel with functions will come up soon” (Participant 1).

V.2.6 Descriptions of general struggles

It seems that one of the struggles the MFA still faces in terms of digitalization, is the above mentioned possibility (or rather, likelihood), for future changes or adaptations of platforms and their uses. The interviewees explained a growing exploration of the MFA into different platforms that could be useful, with the newest account being on Instagram. However, the ways in which these new platforms can be used needs more exploration and planning, as one participant mentioned that nobody in the MFA was sure yet what the goal of the Instagram account exactly is: “we are constantly thinking, and trying to figure out how to generate interesting content”. General efforts to get domestic audiences was explained to begin by making a message for the press to find and ensuring that this message becomes an article or

theme to new contributions on news reports online and on television. Additionally, the MFA will post any specific message on its targeted platform accounts. “But then it’s still the question, to what extent is it known or reachable for the one you’re trying to reach” (Participant 2).

Other factors for struggles in the MFA and its digitalization efforts include capacity and competition. Due to the official and political background of most of the employees’ field of expertise, technological advances are relatively slow and the capacity to effectively use technology for online strategies aimed at audiences is low. Especially on political topics of diplomacy rather than consular advices, the MFA is having difficulty in using online platforms. Participant 3 used the recent Ukraine referendum, in which “Voters were asked if they supported the European Union's association agreement with Ukraine, which aims to foster better trade relations with the war-torn country and former Soviet satellite” (Aljazeera, 2016). In January of 2016, the question had been approved by all EU nations but the Netherlands. The Dutch government had signed the treaty regarding closer links to Ukraine, but a referendum was held on 6 April 2016 for the Dutch public to contribute to the decision on the matter. The details on the matter and the extent to which the ties of the EU nations to Ukraine would become was much debated between speakers and influential figures, but it seemed that the public in the country was either unclear, or had a very strong negative opinion on the matter. Employees of the MFA, attempting to promote the initial agreement of the Dutch with other EU members, “spent a lot of time and effort to discuss the Ukraine referendum online but you can see that we are small online in terms of presence and impact” (Participant 3). This was visible in the outcome of the referendum, with a relatively low amount of votes in total. The necessary margin of citizens voting against the treaty with Ukraine was reached, and the negative result was described as “humiliating at the very time that the Netherlands holds the rotating EU presidency” (Aljazeera, 2016). Participant 3 described the difficulties the MFA faced in convincing and discussing online: “The only thing you can do as a ministry is send out facts, but no one is interested in facts. People vote from emotion. If anger and fear are used, well then you’re much more successful as opposing party” (Participant 3).

V.3. Interpretations on the concept of public diplomacy

V.3.1 Discourse used in describing Public diplomacy generally

From the theoretical framework, using constructivism, it has been discovered that repeated interaction and discussion can form concepts in the social world. Using this strand of ideas, it has been hypothesized that through discussion and interaction about public diplomacy, the understanding of this concept has come to refer to the reaching out to foreign audiences rather than foreign and domestic audiences, or solely domestic audiences. In the hopes to discover more about the truth behind this, opinions, definitions and contexts for public diplomacy were discussed with the interviewees, and their overall discourse contributed to the formation of an opinion as to how the concept is framed and viewed in the MFA. By looking at the discourse analysis of the MFA's digitalization so far, it can be discovered that domestic and foreign audiences are seen as separate goals with further sub-audiences within them. Employees with different functions reach out to different audiences due to this. So what do the employees see public diplomacy as? Which functions are seen as a part of public diplomacy? And why are audiences separated by location rather than, say, by relevance or age?

The concept of public diplomacy created more confusion than had been anticipated initially. From research and own knowledge, as can also be discovered in the literature review, I had an idea of the meaning of public diplomacy as a strategy aiming to reach audiences, generally foreign ones. Through these interviews I hoped to discover more about the term and its application in practice, especially whether domestic audiences are also aimed and how the term's overall meaning developed in the past year, with more and more communication efforts moving online. In the beginning of the interviews, it quickly became clear that opinions on the concept differed in terms of its size and application. Participant 1's job function and daily tasks included the word "publieksdiplomatie", which is a Dutch term and directly translates to public diplomacy in English. When asked why the concept does not come up in the job function and tasks of participant 2 and 3, I was given the answer that "Diplomacy is our core business, so it doesn't need to be in our function's name or the way tasks are called. It's the underlying reason and task of everything we do" (Participant 3). Additionally, it seems that there are differing opinions of the meanings of "publieksdiplomatie", which is seen to incorporate tasks that are not necessarily seen as diplomatic. Discussing the consular services of the MFA, for example, the opinions of the extent of which these services are diplomacy seemed to differ. The interviewees seemed to see diplomacy as a strategy especially used in situations where

persuasion is difficult or sensitive, though some would argue that diplomatic efforts are used also in aiming for simpler target audiences of more similar perceptive and communicative backgrounds. Despite the differences in opinions behind the concept, it seems clear that the diplomatic efforts of the MFA have long passed “*een beetje gezellig chatten*” (Participant 3). There is no English word for “gezellig” but the overall phrase means something along the lines of “just chatting around a little bit”.

V.3.2 Public diplomacy: does/can it include domestic audiences?

As mentioned above, Participant 1, whose job revolves only around foreign audiences, mentioned the word public diplomacy (as well as “*publieksdiplomatie*”) the most. Besides discovering the differences in the concepts and the differences in the opinions as to what they mean and entail, I was curious whether the fact that Participant 1’s job only seeks out foreign audiences has anything to do with the choices in description and wording, seeing as academic research and discussion tends to point to such a conclusion. Referring back to the differences in opinions as to when a person is carrying out “public diplomacy” strategies, it is in fact easy to separate the domestic from the foreign; “Reaching international audiences is called diplomacy quicker because generally you are more concerned with influencing, convincing, discussing why human rights or freedom of press are important [...] we don’t apply diplomacy to the domestic stakeholders but on their behalf” (Participant 3). This statement makes clear the distinction one can see in dividing diplomacy into consular domestic efforts and foreign public efforts. It seems, however, that this distinction is too simple and actually leaves out audiences of possible importance. This may be due to the difficulties and requirements for development and improvements in the MFA’s strategies these audiences bring along, or simply because they are not awarded as much importance as other audiences.

To explain this point, I will refer back to the abovementioned Ukraine referendum. The MFA has an interest, as the organization in charge of the country’s foreign relationship, to increase knowledge and interest among its domestic public on the way different agreements and political situations work. In addition, the leaders of the organization would have a standpoint on the matter and want to work towards convincing the public to encourage more cooperation abroad. On the subject, Participant 1 explained that it is important for the MFA to explain its foreign policies to domestic audiences: “take the Ukraine referendum. Our audience online about that is pretty much only domestic- of course we also reach out to Ukrainians and Europe but that is

done by our embassies” (Participant 1). Now despite the possible disagreements over the extent to which simple consular services of the MFA fall under the term of “public diplomacy”, efforts of the MFA to persuade and clarify to the domestic audience events such as the Ukraine referendum seem difficult to categorise under concepts not including diplomacy. It is important to consider the extent to which the MFA’s policies and opinions should be made clear online (as the statement by Participant 2 above describes: “do you want to inform the whole country on your human rights policies?”). However, as can be learned from Participant 3’s description of the Ukraine referendum efforts above, there are policies for which the MFA has a high interest to promote and explain its views to the domestic public. Efforts should be made to address these situations and the ways in which strategies can be used to improve the online efforts of the MFA to convince or inform its own people.

An interesting claim to consider here is the one made by Fitzpatrick in her article from 2012, also mentioned above:

There is ample evidence that a strategic approach to the identification and segmentation of publics is critical to the success of strategic planning in public communication and engagement. If public diplomacy is to be managed strategically, nations must place greater emphasis on the process of identifying and prioritizing key publics (p.422).

Though this statement points out a relevant thought, another approach may be more important for the Dutch MFA; it seems that the MFA may have identified, separated and prioritized its key audiences clearly, but the organization could improve its identification on the differing or similar strategies used to address these differing audiences. In other words, the target audiences are distinguished clearly but what is done to reach them and connect with them is given different names or even viewed in different categories. The efforts used to approach and convince possible partners or audiences online are largely the same for the domestic as well as the foreign audiences, and so are the sometimes unavoidable discussions on foreign policies or even domestic policies. Difficult political questions arise from domestic as well as foreign audiences, and generally “easy” questions also arise from both sides. The new service on Twitter is clearly a function that cannot be created for foreign audiences by the Dutch MFA, but similar ideas could be developed for visitors or other types of audiences, if the strategies were discussed in a different, more integrative or comparative, manner.

V.3.3 Public diplomacy: merging fields of knowledge?

When discussing the changes in the MFA to become more digitally involved, and the different aspects as to when the concept “public diplomacy” is applicable, the conversations with the interviewees went down the path of the earlier mentioned discussion between merging fields of expertise versus cooperation. Overall, it seems that both cooperation with companies and relevant technical experts, as well as attempts to learn from these partners and educate MFA employees to become more knowledgeable in these fields, have increased. Participant 1 answered: “There’s a cooperation, or actually it’s more us buying the technical systems” (Participant 1). Participant 2 especially noted the increasing efforts of the MFA to cooperate with others. The participant explains how the MFA has been working with publicity agents for campaigns until the very recent past, and that it currently still seems like knowledge on topics such as advertisement is not being incorporated enough into the organization: “the knowledge is not in the MFA but the question is whether it should be” (Participant 2). Of course, there is a reason as to why diplomats at the MFA are not educated to know about certain fields, and the usage of cooperation between organizations can account for growth due to increasing exchange of information and economic exchanges. In addition, raising a new generation of diplomats that are educated so broadly may cause for less specialized and knowledgeable employees on some important issues. On the other side, however, the world is changing and the roles of citizens as well as organizations are changing.

Participant 3, coming from a business background, mentioned the importance of integrating knowledge among employees on marketing and technology as much as increasing cooperation with other companies, from which the MFA can learn. Despite slow progress and difficulties in the possibility for the MFA to adapt and become a digitally advanced organization with knowledge in a combination of fields, Participant 3 perceives a growth in enthusiasm of colleagues who “get that in 2016 you need to do something with it, because you can’t leave those doors closed and do things for a lot of money without explaining why”. Additionally, this participant noted the importance in the roles of employees in the communications and “publieksdiplomatie” sectors to “guide people [their colleagues] in this and make them more tech-savvy” (Participant 3). Concrete steps are taken by the MFA to educate employees in relevant positions and increase the knowledge as to how online media can be used for promotion and growth for the MFA itself as well as for the Netherlands as a whole image, or the country’s relationships. The participant mentioned that people from “the start-up scene” in Rotterdam were going to come over for a meeting later that day, and that the plan was to learn from their

tactics and discover new online functions these start-up companies use. Currently, however, the MFA is far from a merged organization; “When you look at results, nothing is really measured though. No importance is awarded to what the return of investment is whereas that’s the first thing they’ll ask in businesses. It’s not in the DNA here to think about that” (Participant 3). There is much information left for the MFA to learn about and it is likely to take much time for the organization to discover the extent to which integration of knowledge or cooperation is more beneficial than cooperation, but steps in both directions seem to be explored.

V.4 Views on dialogic communication

V.4.1 Discourse used to describe dialogic communication online

From the theoretical framework, it is initially learned that dialogic communication is important for positive relationships of organizations with audiences. From initial research into this area, it was hypothesized that along this line of thinking, the MFA would find online platforms that allow for dialogic communications most useful or valuable for its strategies in creating or maintaining relationships with audiences. So far, this hypothesis is already supported in the responses of interviewees seeing Twitter as their most important platform, but the reasons as to this result are still not discovered and no value in the actual occurrence of dialogue has yet been pinned down. This section will go into the discourse interviewees used to describe events and perspectives linked to dialogues throughout the interviews. In discussing the themes above, the different functions for diplomatic attempts of the MFA, either through sending out information or looking out for interaction online, surfaced many times. To find the context and uses for which the employees see dialogue, the concept itself was not mentioned until brought up. Participant 1 and 3 were quick to bring up dialogue and its necessity in different online relationships, but participant 2 spoke more about “informing”, “explaining” and “showing”. Participant 2, though seemingly also in favour of two-way communication over one-way communication, was more careful about the use of interaction as a beneficial medium for the relationship between the MFA and its public, except when speaking of consular themes and audiences.

V.4.2 Positive discourse on dialogic communication online

When the uses of online interaction came up, interviewees tended to mention that online interaction is clearly an important goal of the MFA: “I understand from colleagues that we are quite far ahead in terms of communications with the Dutch public, there is one simple worldwide phone number that people can call us” (Participant 2). In terms of consular services, the MFA has already taken concrete steps to show consular dialogue and interaction is a definite goal, however, Participant 3 also noted importance of dialogue beyond that: “having conversations is really powerful; if you begin engagement with people and explain why you are doing something, then it really stays with them. So I also really believe in doing it” (Participant 3). This factor shows an important motivation for the MFA to increase and improve interaction, especially for goals such as the abovementioned Ukraine referendum. Participant 1 noted another aspect as to the benefits that dialogue online can bring to the organization; learning and bonding in relationships with possible figures of interest: “we are looking for the aspect of interaction because otherwise you are just sending information and we don’t want to do that. We try to get reactions and respond to them to create a dialogue” (Participant 1).

Participant 3 noticed referral to increasing online interaction “in all policy plans and strategies”. Participant 3 is directly involved in analysing, redirecting and answering questions and comments to the MFA’s online accounts. The participant explained new rules and targets to interact more correctly and faster online; one strategy includes forwarding incoming questions with certain themes to the relevant employees working in the MFA. This is a part of the overall goal of digitalization throughout the whole MFA: “we hope that subject-specific colleagues cooperate, and help us in finding and formulating answers. Those people have to get used to it too, because normally they get 3 weeks to answer something and now they have 50 minutes” (Participant 3). The change in speed and manners of speaking or writing to people online takes getting used to, but Participant 3 positively observes the usefulness in involving all the subject-specific colleagues into the digitalization and interaction strategies: “the fact that I’m constantly also shooting it to relevant employees gives them a feeling that stuff is happening online” (Participant 3). The participant explained that the constant inclusion of subject-specific colleagues causes them to realise that the topic they work on is discussed among different online users: “already that awareness of people in the organization is important” (Participant 3).

V.4.3 Critical discourse on dialogic communication online

Despite the much expressed goal of the MFA to interact and discuss more, there seem to be cases of doubt as to the exact use of dialogic communication for different targets and relationships. Participant 2 explained that “it has to be proportional what people ask of you: you don’t want people asking “where can I buy peanut butter in Senegal?” Because that is not what we, as an organization, are meant for” (Participant 2). The interviewees made clear that the interaction online should be to inform audiences with important information regarding their health or political standpoints, rather than irrelevant questions or overly extreme critiques aiming to spread anger or fear. In the opinion of Participant 3, the amount of difficult questions or comments aimed at the MFA online have not been an unmanageable amount: “on the “@24/7bz” account we do about 10-15 webcare cases per week”, which the participant describes is very little. Less communication, however, occurs on other accounts: “If you look at “@minbz”, “@Dutchmfa” and our Facebook accounts, you can count the amount of questions we answer in a week on one hand” (Participant 3). The English concept “webcare” was used a lot by Participant 3; it is defined by van Noort and Willemsen as “The act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns and complaints)” (van Noort & Willemsen, 2012 p.133). In explaining the reasons for the little amount of online questions and comments, the response was that “I don’t think that people tend to be very involved or interested” (Participant 3). It seems that the average Dutch person is more likely to engage in terms of the consular services offered through Twitter rather than looking at the overall accounts explaining policies and treaties.

Perceptions on the extent to which dialogue is necessary seemed to differ; the interviewees noted a portion of the population in the Netherlands and certain groups abroad, who are not looking for relevant information. Anyone interested in the MFA’s actions and goals tends to be from a relevant field, and can ask questions either through existing connections at the MFA or the parliament. These people tend to be Twitter users following the “minbz” or “Dutchmfa” accounts as well. On interacting with foreigners that have links to the Netherlands and want to ask questions generally, Participant 3 said: “We work on corporate channels here and that is important”, but what the participant saw as more important is that all the posts representing the Netherlands abroad have their own accounts in online platforms: “I think we have around 200 Facebook and Twitter channels; you can see that most of the international webcare occurs there” (Participant 3). Generally, there seems to be a relatively small portion of people who are

interested in the MFA and want to interact online, but have no personal connections to do so. For this group it is expressed that improvement and increase on intermediary sources are necessary to send messages and discuss effectively.

V.4.4 Discourse used to explain the results of Minister Koenders' "AMA" on Reddit+

On 8 February 2016, minister of foreign affairs Bert Koenders⁴ conducted a type of chat-session called an "Ask Me Anything", or "AMA", on the platform Reddit. This chat-session came up in all interviews because the minister had an online presence of half an hour and promised to answer as many questions from any Reddit users as honestly and transparent as possible, but was criticized afterwards for only responding to 11 questions, some of which being irrelevant to politics. It seems foreseeable that, as minister of foreign affairs from the nation holding the EU presidency, exposing yourself to a general public and asking internet users to ask you anything, will raise sensitive topics. The negative results lead me to wonder whether the MFA had not anticipated these difficult topics, whether perhaps preparation for the AMA had been insufficient, or whether an AMA may not be an effective style of diplomatic online relationships and promotion. The interviewees responded saying that the MFA, despite looking for and wanting to implement interaction as a strategy, is not developed enough yet to prepare or conduct such fast-paced interactions; "As an MFA, you're supposed to stay factual and not risk answering a question incorrectly due to pressure to react quickly. This is an aspect we are still trying to overcome because it's a difficult part to the communications" (Participant 1).

Participant 2 mentioned that behind possible answers to some of the questions, regarding difficult topics such as the MH17 flight crash, there is an extremely deep network of discussions and processes but "not many concrete affairs to report" (Participant 2), which makes it difficult for Koenders to create a satisfying or informing answer, that does not expose too much sensitive information within the little time given. Besides these factors, two of the participants mentioned the limitation that Koenders himself is supposed to answer the questions, and no extra staff can type for him. Of course, this aspect makes it more reliable for the online public looking to interact with the minister, but, when the person conducting the AMA is not fast at typing and creating correct answers to difficult questions within a limited amount of time, the aspect of reliability for the interested online public cannot properly be met. Participant 3 mentioned the

⁴ Who will be referred to as "Koenders" from hereon

initial good intentions of the ministry to be more open and explanatory but explained that currently, “all the characteristics that social media have are the opposite of the characteristics of the MFA. Social media is fast; this organization is slow. Social media is transparent and this organization is closed” (Participant 3). Despite the MFA’s efforts and concrete investments into the area of interaction online, the participants gave the impression they were still all at sea and need to learn more.

V.4.5 Discourse on perceived measures necessary to improve dialogic communication online

From the steps that have been taken to increase dialogic relationships, it can be seen that the MFA seems to view fast, informing conversations as the background for a successful dialogic relationship. Twitter is currently the most used and best viewed, due to the different types of accounts with different kind of interested followers, that can be addressed and learnt from. Though it is clear that the MFA wants to develop beyond the short and selective Twitter-style conversations, this seems to be an area where not much value has yet been noticed because of the difficulties that come along with it for an MFA, seeing as there is not enough knowledge about marketing, technology and the exact requirements of the audiences. It seems that the MFA looks at other relevant players and tries to learn from them, but does not invest enough time and expertise to learn how to go about online dialogic relationships. Despite the clear distinctions in target audiences and the clear goal of increasing digitalization and interaction online, the strategies used to approach people online vary within and between target audiences, causing differing results for the MFA. Participant 3 mentioned that the “trial and error” in differing attempts can help and provide the MFA with lessons to learn from. For example, it is now widely accepted in the MFA that future choices of individuals to begin such conversations as an “AMA” will need to be based on relevant skills necessary, such as rapid computer use. At the same time, ideas came up for alternatives for relevant figures that may want to interact online but prefer using video chats or other methods to communicate online. Looking at this conclusion more critically, however, it seems rather dangerous for organizations such as the MFA to rely partially on trial and error in order to learn methods of public diplomacy online.

V.5 Assessing the interviews

The interview method rather than document or statistical analysis, has been very helpful to gain a personal understanding of different views and perceptions that employees working on the MFA's online relationships have on their jobs. Though the interview protocol was very useful, the semi-structured nature of the interview-style was a great contribution because it allowed for adaptation to each participant and deeper understanding of the subjects or concepts they were interested in most, knew about most, or chose to bring up most. Additionally, it was interesting to note any topics the interviewees seemed not to be interested or knowledgeable about. It was significant, for example, that Participant 2 chose to word his opinions of dialogue on certain themes more carefully than the other participants, stressing the importance and effectiveness in the MFA's strategies of informing audiences rather than engaging with them. It seems that the rather ineffective approaches of the MFA to enter into direct discussion on more thematic or difficult topics, especially via Reddit, had affected this participant's opinion and caused for a less confident view on the MFA interacting with any type of audience at its current stage of development in the digital age.

By paying attention to the wording and expressions of interviewees, it was possible to find phrases of significance to this research. Firstly, all participants used the concept "social media" to refer to almost any internet platform besides the official website of the MFA. It seems that this concept is deemed practical for describing modern online platforms, but for the purpose of this research, it was most important to find uses of platforms with most possibilities for dialogic communications. By asking about more specific platforms and usage, I discovered that Twitter was deemed most important because the MFA has invested the most into this specific platform, and because its users contain the largest amount of audiences deemed relevant. The concept "webcare", which is explained above, was used frequently by Participant 3 to describe the administrative area of online diplomatic efforts by the MFA; including consular advice. As is explained in the reaction to Fitzpatrick's idea above, having sub-themes within public diplomacy efforts not just to distinguish audiences, but also topics addressed on different platforms can help in establishing concepts and different strategies to successfully present the organization, and communicate online. The transcribed and translated interviews were hard to analyse in terms of discourse, due to the slight possibilities in changing meanings or wordings, but the overall method of discourse analysis helped to pinpoint words of significance and find differences in the ways how interviewees described their points of views, depending on their use of internet and targets of audiences. This is because many English words were used when

it came to discussing online or foreign targets (concepts that were originally used in English included sponsored, social media, platforms, stakeholders and more). The English concept of public diplomacy was then even compared to the Dutch word “publieksdiplomatie”, giving the discursive analysis of this concept more depth.

VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to answer the research question: “How have internal understanding of strategies and identification of audiences online affected the way in which the Dutch MFA pursues public diplomacy?” and discovered several interesting findings through the use of interviews. To begin with, it is clear that the MFA sees digitalization as an important and relevant aspect of its workings in different ways. Investments occur both on the subjects of learning to use online platforms and on cooperating with relevant companies. Public diplomacy by the MFA is increasingly pursued online but much is left to be learned and perfected before there can be speak of a genuinely digital MFA.

Contextualizing the answers to hypothesis 1

On the subject of evolving online strategies that are part of public diplomacy for different audiences, the interviewees showed mixed responses. The MFA clearly addresses certain domestic audiences: travellers especially. This becomes apparent from their investment into strategic Twitter accounts, and advertisements to appeal to Dutch speaking inhabitants looking for consular advice. It seems that despite the domestic audience of Dutch speaking inhabitants looking to travel, or relevantly educated/employed actors with specific interests in what the MFA is doing, there are no efforts to reach other domestic audiences. The average Dutch person is thus not necessarily reached. In comparison with foreign audiences, however, the same is found. Only subject-relevant and interested actors are reached online. What is significant for this study, however, is the fact that even though the MFA reaches similar types of audiences online both within the nation and abroad, the strategies that are used to reach these audiences are discussed under different concepts and ideas. From the fact that the employee most involved in foreign audiences referred to the term most frequently, it was initially assumed that public diplomacy is in fact seen as a strategy only for foreign audiences, as suggested in research. However, different opinions on the meaning of public diplomacy as a concept were soon discovered. Some of the interviewees did not see consular advice as a part of diplomacy, and thus only accepted the label for the online efforts in their relationship with the smaller fraction of the domestic public in the Netherlands which is relevantly educated or interested in the MFA. However, the employee who mentioned that public diplomacy is the very core business of the MFA seemed to point to the idea that public diplomacy actually does include any strategy to any audience, consular or not.

Linking these ideas back to the research question, it can be noted that identification of audiences online has affected, and is still affecting, the way in which the MFA pursues public diplomacy due to the intentions of the MFA to increase its presence online and to form or keep different bonds with different audiences. From these findings, guided by a constructivist framework asserting that concepts arise from repeated interaction and understanding among actors, it can be assumed that the employees still see the MFA's public diplomacy strategies aimed mostly at foreign audiences. Concepts used to describe efforts for similar domestic audiences largely fell under the broader theme of communications. These findings point to the basis of an answer to hypothesis 1, because it suggests that the interaction about public diplomacy strategies points to foreign audiences, with domestic audiences seen as a separate target. However, the interviewees did show differing perceptions and ideas on the MFA's digitalization and the development of public diplomacy for reaching different audiences. Due to the changes and advancements online, and keeping in mind the statement by Participant 3 that public diplomacy is the core business of the MFA, it can be presumed that perceptions and targets of public diplomacy may evolve to include more domestic audiences in the foreseeable future. This means that more research on the subject, or more time for the MFA to improve in its digital advancements, could contribute to a more concrete confirmation on the MFA's perception and strategies toward audiences such as the domestic.

Contextualizing the answers to hypothesis 2

On the topic of dialogic communication and platform use, answers of interviewees were clearer and more aligned. As the public relations theory of dialogic communication specifies, dialogue is determined as an important aspect of relationships between actors and their audiences. Hypothesis 2 can be acceptable as an explanation, seeing as several answers in the analysis and discussion confirm that the uses of dialogue online are extremely valued and invested in, and because the MFA mostly uses the platform Twitter (which allows for direct dialogue) to conduct its online public diplomacy strategies. The second-most discussed medium for these strategies included Facebook, which is another platform allowing for direct dialogic communication. Looking at the extent of interaction sought for, it was found that attempts were even made to interact directly over Reddit, which is a platform allowing for high levels of dialogue, but this did not have positive results regarding the reputation of the MFA and Koenders as its minister. The need for the organisation to further develop and advance in using

online platforms allowing for dialogue is definitely clear. Until successful strategies of dialogue online are in place, or besides the dialogic online methods, one-way public diplomacy strategies through advertisements or billboards are also still deemed as valuable and necessary by the MFA employees. These methods, however, are not as popular online and were awarded less focus in descriptions of the employees of successful public diplomacy.

Linking the findings on this hypothesis to their impact on the overall research question, it can be noted that the MFA's internal understanding of strategies online revolves largely around dialogue. The use and perceived value in platforms allowing for dialogic communication is high, and assumed to rise further unless no manners of using these platforms more successfully are adapted. Here, it is appropriate to add the statement by Sommerfeldt, Kent and Taylor that "Arguably, many communication professionals simply do not understand the history of online communication or they would understand that the potential of the Internet has just begun to be tapped" (Sommerfeldt et al, 2012 p.311). The answers uncovered on the field of hypothesis 2 therefore provide a good understanding to the way in which online platforms are used in the MFA, and which types of targets in public diplomacy. In addition, the findings allow for increase in that they uncover the beginning trend of online interaction and dialogue, which only seems to be increasing further. It is, of course, still possible that the amount of attention and investment for dialogue online will become less, but with the efforts to this point and through the perceptions of the employees, this seems unlikely or much further in the future.

Overall

The research and analysis done to answer the research question of this thesis provide a good basis for knowledge on the perceptions and uses of public diplomacy as a digitalizing practice in the MFA. The employees interviewed had relevant tasks and enjoyed discussing concepts and practises in depth, which contributed to the expansive discussion and formation of conclusions. To discover further findings on this topic and contribute to future events as the digitalization process in the MFA evolves, this project could be continued by conducting more interviews with relevant figures in the MFA, or by conducting surveys among target populations and audiences of the MFA to discover their perceptions on the public diplomacy strategies of the MFA online. Additionally, this study could be enriched by the creation of a comparative study, using the findings from this project and comparing them to findings at an MFA from a country with similar online activity and strategies in public diplomacy, such as

Canada. These suggestions could be taken on by researchers in order to continue the contribution to the study of public diplomacy as a digitalizing concept, a topic of relevance and impact in today's world of sharing, connecting, adapting and growing.

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VII. 2 In-person interviews

- Participant 1, (2016). Interview with MFA-employee 1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, The Hague.
- Participant 2, (2016). Interview with MFA-employee 2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, The Hague.
- Participant 3, (2016). Interview with MFA-employee 3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, The Hague.

VIII. APPENDICES

VIII.1. Interview Protocol

[Introduce self: name is Julia Kaumann, Dutch-German student international relations and diplomacy writing my master's thesis with Dr. Melissen from the Clingendael Institute of International Relations. I'm very interested to learn about ways in which the MFA has adapted to growth and increase of technology in terms of communications with different audiences]

1. Could you explain the functions of your department?
2. Could you walk me through your typical day at work?
3. Which digital platform (including but not limited to social media) is currently invested in the most by the MFA?
- (How) has this changed over the last 5 or so years?
4. Which factors are looked for to determine the importance of a digital platform for certain strategies to reach audiences?
5. Can you give me an example of different types of audiences the MFA is trying to reach online?
- What different relationships are sought for with these audiences?
6. Can you give me some examples of strategies the MFA uses online towards the different audiences? (e.g. types of posts or timing)
7. With the growth of the internet and globalization, how does the MFA select audiences?
8. Which kinds of people tend to respond most to the MFA online? And on which types of platforms does this most occur?
- Is that intended for by the MFA or does it occur only because the platform allows them to respond?
9. Could you explain how, if at all, cooperation between the MFA and businesses/technological organizations has been changing over the years to adapt to changing behaviour of the audiences aimed for?
10. Is it important for the MFA's relationship to audiences to have two-way communication?
- Has this changed over the last years?
- What successes or difficulties does dialogue/discussion with audiences bring for the MFA?

11. How would you define successful public diplomacy online?

-How is this different from what would have been found successful 5 to 10 years ago?

12. From research, it is found that public diplomacy is defined as targeting foreign audiences. There are few scholars looking into the domestic dimension. Do you (and/or the ministry) see the efforts of the MFA in targeting the domestic public online as a part of public diplomacy?

13. Is there anything else on the topic which I didn't ask but you would like to mention?

Thank you very much for your time.

VIII.2. Example of the consent form

Consent to Participate in Research

Dimensions of domestic public diplomacy in an increasingly digital world

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Julia Kaumann. I am an MSc student at Leiden University, working with my supervisor Prof. Dr. Melissen on my thesis. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns the adaptations of the MFA to the digitalization of citizens, and the ways in which it reaches out to different audiences (the domestic in particular) online.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your tasks at the MFA and last around 30 minutes. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. If you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study.

Risks/Discomforts

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; but I am taking precautions to minimize this risk. Otherwise there are no risks for you in taking part.

Confidentiality

Your information will be handled as confidentially as possible. Only your name and position at the MFA will be used in the study, if you agree to this. When the research is completed, I will delete/ remove the taped voice recordings from this interview.

Compensation

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any more questions about the study at any point after the interview, you can contact me:

juliakaumann@gmail.com

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

If you agree to allow your name and position at the MFA to be included in the final thesis, and possibly in a published version or report, please sign and date below.

Participant's Signature

Date