How Does Political Public Relations (PPR) Contribute to the Debate on Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy?

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1. Introduction

Political Public Relations (PPR) can be broadly defined as the extension of public relations strategies and tactics to the politico-societal domain. That is to say, public relations practices implemented by politico-societal organisations, not limited to parliament and political parties but also encompassing government offices (including foreign affairs ministries), interest groups, think tanks and non-governmental organizations (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2014). However, despite there being a long history of PR usage within politico-societal contexts, a practice dating as far back as Ancient Greece, Rome and the American Revolution, the practice of PPR was only fully conceptualised in 2011 (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2014).

Furthermore, PR is often a term associated with the corporate sector, with scholars of the practice having viewed it largely through a corporate lens, whilst at the same time, political communications and IR scholarship has afforded little attention to the practice. The potential for PR practices such as 'relationship management' to contribute to practices related to citizen participation (CP) in foreign policy, such as Public Diplomacy, have nevertheless been identified (Fitzpatrick, 2007). This suggests that PR, and PPR in particular, offers substance to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy. As such, this research looks to qualitatively analyse the contribution of this relatively recent concept to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy.

Citizen participation in foreign policy is direct citizen involvement in domestic affairs, either at the state level or the international level (Headley & van Wyk 2012). Whilst foreign policy is traditionally seen as something exclusive to the state, as being the 'prerogative of the executive' and as having a 'special need for secrecy' (Leira, 2019), some scholars have begun to question these underlying assumptions, asserting that there is a greater role for citizens in the policymaking process (Leira 2019; Pfeifer et al, 2020; Headley & van Wyk, 2012). Such an opening up of the foreign policy domain would allow for concepts such as CP and PPR to potentially enter into the fold, thus highlighting the academic and societal need to study their relationship and current interplay. For example, a study carried out into the role of citizen participation in the German MFA (Pfeifer et al, 2020) found that citizen participation has begun to extend to foreign policy issues, albeit in a limited, non-formalised way, with domestic citizen involvement in foreign policy also present in countries such as Canada

(Ostwald & Dierkes, 2018), Australia (Huijgh & Byrne, 2012) and the US (Salman & Engel, 2020). This research looks to extend and build upon Pfeifer et al's Germany case study (2020) and other such examples, using the Dutch MFA as a single case through which to gain empirical insight.

1.1. Academic Relevance

PPR is a long-standing practice and a recurring aspect of how official actors reach out to and communicate with public audiences. An example of its contemporary manifestation lies in digital diplomacy, and in particular the 'mediatization of diplomacy' (Manor & Crilley, 2019), whereby MFAs and international organizations use social media to communicate directly with online audiences and adopt modern-day 'media logics' to create a positive self-image. This was shown in a recent study of the International Criminal Court's use of Twitter, in which it was found that the organization promoted certain narratives to frame itself as a key global justice actor and would 'hashtag justice' in order to generate public support (Manor & Crilley, 2019).

Despite the apparent use of PR practices by official actors, however, PPR was only conceptualized in 2011 (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2019), highlighting a particular need to contribute to its conceptualisation given the ostensible time lag between theory and practice. Furthermore, following a relational turn in public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005), the new public diplomacy involves a multitude of non-state actors and appears to converge closely with PPR in its emphasis on 'key publics' and 'relationship management', the latter having always been an integral feature of public relations (Fitzpatrick, 2007). These correlating practices present a useful starting point from which to map the increasing convergence between PPR and new public diplomacy in particular.

When considering PPR's relevance for new public diplomacy, it then becomes interesting to understand the extent to which PPR is adopted by MFAs and how as a practice it can contribute to participatory processes. Indeed, there appears to be a research opportunity for understanding the ways in which foreign affairs ministries and citizens may benefit from the implementation of PR practices, with the debate on CP in foreign policy (Pfefier et al, 2020) and the current trajectory of public diplomacy (Melissen & Wang, 2019) being primary focuses through which to investigate this.

1.2. Societal Relevance and Chosen Case

The Dutch MFA, *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (BZ)*, was chosen as a single case for this research, mainly because it has a number of strategic functions and a department, *De Eenheid Strategische Advisering* (The Strategic Advisory Unit), which aims to make foreign policy 'externally-focused' and 'knowledge-based' (BZ, n.d.). This approach indicates a slight departure from the notion that foreign policy has a special need for secrecy and that there is some momentum on the part of BZ to look externally and involve other actors in order to enhance its knowledge base. There are indeed a number of civil society actors, such as *SDG Nederland*, as well as think tanks such as *The West Wing* and *The Clingendael Institute*, with which BZ is continually engaged. This is reflective of the ministry's overall focus on strengthening its strategic partnerships, which it sees as instrumental for enabling greater cooperation with civil society who it seeks to further support (BZ, 2019).

Within BZ, in addition to functions such as *Strategisch Beleidsadviseur* (Strategic Policy Advisor), *Strategisch Adviseur Operational Management* (Strategic Advisor Operational Management) and a *Strategisch Bestuursraad* (Strategic Management Board), there is also a communications directorate, *Directie Communicatie*, tasked with information management and communication around foreign policy. Within Directie Communicatie, there is also a *'Nieuwsmanagement'* (News Management) department (BZ, n.d.), which suggests relevance for PPR, seeing that news management is a traditionally key PR practice (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2019).

Therefore, with the Dutch MFA having both strategic and communications functions that have relevance for the research topic, and since the Netherlands has recently made this 'strategic turn', there is both reason to investigate how citizen participation occurs in relation to Dutch foreign policy as well as how political public relations is relevant to MFAs generally. Indeed, if the main goal of PPR is to utilize outlets to communicate specific interpretations of issues with a view to generating public support for official policies (Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006), this would suggest that PPR practices exist within MFAs such as BZ. A single case was chosen for this research since it is useful for testing certain theoretical propositions, and for generating an empirical account of a specific phenomenon that is comprehensive and nuanced. It is additionally suitable when one's reason to understand or explain that phenomena is subjective (Levy, 2008).

1.3. Research Question

This research investigates how *Political Public Relations (PPR) contributes to the debate on Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy*, and uses the *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, as a single case to inform the analysis.

Sub-questions

- What is the role and relevance of PPR for citizen participation in foreign policy?
- How can PPR's influence on citizen participation in foreign policy be valuable for both MFAs and citizens?
- In which ways does PPR align with contemporary forms of public diplomacy?
- How are PPR practices relevant to the mediatization of MFAs?
- To what extent does a two-way communication model exist between MFAs and citizens and how can PPR help facilitate this?

1.4. Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 has presented an introduction to the research topic, highlighted its academic and societal relevance and presented the chosen case and research question. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on PPR, Public Diplomacy and Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy. In so doing, it begins to introduce PPR into the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy and identifies any overlaps between the concepts being analysed. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework that will be used for the analysis and explains how the core concepts will be operationalised as well as providing a list of propositions. Chapter 4 introduces the research design, including a justification of the case selection, the primary descriptive sources that will be used and how the information will be collected. It also incorporates the chosen research methodology to conduct the analysis. Chapter 5 includes the results of this study and a discussion of the findings that have been drawn. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the paper with a summary of how PPR contributes to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy.

2. Literature Review

In this literature review, a rethinking of foreign policy is firstly undertaken given the recent questioning of some traditional, underlying assumptions about the practice (Pfeifer et al, 2020; Pfeifer et al, 2021; Leira, 2019). This leads into a discussion about the growing role of the citizen in relation to foreign policy (Headley & van Wyk, 2012), the domestic dimension of public diplomacy (Huijgh, 2012) as well as the increasing relevance of non-state actors in general as depicted in 'New Public Diplomacy' (Melissen, 2005). Finally, the relatively understudied concept of PPR is introduced (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2019) with its pertinence being highlighted for the debate on CP in foreign policy. This last section attempts to show how parallels can be drawn between PPR and domestic public diplomacy, and that this in turn makes PPR relevant to the overall debate.

2.1. Rethinking Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is traditionally seen as the 'prerogative of the executive' and unlike other policy forms as having a special need for secrecy (Leira, 2019; Pfeifer et al, 2020). Put another way, it is viewed as being managed exclusively by the state, and as operating without citizen influence, which is based on the realist assumption that domestic public opinion is uninformed, feeble and therefore untrustworthy (Leira, 2019). It is thought that those in power, namely the state, ought to take the reins of this particular policy domain, with a definition out of IR scholarship being *"the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations"* (Hill, 2003, see also Leira 2019, p.188).

However, the widely held belief that foreign policy represents an 'inside' and 'outside' of state dynamic, and that it differs from other kinds of policy, has by some scholars been challenged (Nel & van Wyk, 2003; Headley & van Wyk, 2012; Leira, 2019). For example, Leira (2019) has provided an alternative historic account of foreign policy, deconstructing the common understanding that in democracies it is something exclusive to the state (p.187). More specifically, the author questions the widely-held belief that foreign policy exemplifies an 'inside' and 'outside' of state, and that it differs from other types of government policy. The author argues that FP analysis first emerged by drawing on a naturalized understanding of foreign policy, which neglected how different states perceive it (making it comparable across cases), dismissed the historicity of the practice, and would treat foreign policy as an

abstract concept whilst discarding its practical aspects. Precluded in the emergence of foreign policy analysis were the effects that generate foreign policy, namely the processes that *"produce, and continuously constitute it, as a space of action"* (p.196). To highlight the fact that not all states possessed the same naturalized understanding of foreign policy, Leira (2019) reflects on Britain and France as two countries with differing albeit important FP trajectories, whose emergences can be characterized by one of reform and the other of revolution respectively.

In addition to this, Nel & van Wyk (2003) place particular focus on the *citizen*. They perceive FP as "*the spontaneous, unrestricted and focused collective action taken by citizens, either through existing state institutions, or through other collective means"* (p.51). Similarly, Headley & van Wyk (2012) have identified a growing interest in foreign affairs by citizens. This, they assert, is a result of globalizing forces, both economic and political, transnational security threats and a rapid increase in communication technology. Pfeifer et al (2021) additionally point out, that issues such as migration, free trade agreements and climate change affect citizens domestically and yet are often a result of foreign policy decisions, from which they assert that public opinion cannot therefore be ignored and does indeed matter to foreign policy (p.3). Taking the notion further, the authors suggest that *"mass attitudes about foreign issues display considerable structure and reasonable prudence —even in circumstances of a deeply polarized political climate"* (p.3). Hence, there is not only greater pressure from the public to engage in and possibly influence matters of foreign interest, but also a more coherent voice on such issues. However, the level of influence that citizens in democracies currently have with respect to foreign policy is ambiguous. This requires an investigation into practices such as citizen participation and public diplomacy to which the paper now refers.

2.2. Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy

2.2.1. Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy

Leira (2019) asserts that foreign policy within IR scholarship is a taken-for-granted concept, with the widely held assumption being that it originated as a practice in seventeenth-century Europe following the separation of an inside and outside of state, and furthermore that it requires a special need for secrecy and is distinct from other policy forms (p.187). By

critically questioning and reifying foreign policy through historicization, highlighting how the difference between foreign and domestic policy is a result of specific political processes such as *"growing differentiation between state and civil society in the eighteenth century"*, and that secrecy in fact generated foreign policy rather than resulted from it, this in turn makes it possible to *"denaturalize the separation between different policy forms, as well as the necessity of secrecy" (p.187)*. Rethinking foreign policy in such a way and reconsidering what the term signifies has the subsequent effect of 'opening up' the domain, allowing concepts such as citizen participation and PPR to potentially enter into the fold.

To give a specific example, citizen participation has begun to extend to issues of foreign policy in Germany, as demonstrated in Pfeifer et al's (2020) analysis of Germany's MFA, *AA*, and environmental ministry, *BMU*. According to Pfeifer et al (2020), there are four understandings of citizen participation: *epistemic*, meaning citizens are actively consulted and formally involved in policymaking, especially if they have special expertise or are directly affected by the decision at hand; *elitist*, when executives offer CP mainly because of strategic interests; *evolutionary*, when the executive believes the current democratic system is fundamentally deficient and, as a consequence, needs reinventing; and finally *integrative*, when the executive sees CP as a means by which to connect politics and an increasingly alienated public, thus renewing trust in the political system (p.7).

In this study, Pfeifer et al (2020) found that there were deliberative participatory processes implemented by AA (the German MFA) and that a dialogue between AA and German citizens had been forged. More specifically, citizen participation takes the form of a communicative opening whereby a degree of negotiation in society around foreign policy exists, which helps to strengthen the 'feedback loop' between foreign policy decision making and the public (p.13). However, the extent to which AA understood and interpreted citizen participation was only integrative. This meant that CP outcomes did not enter formal decision making, whilst the dialogue with the public was "*non-binding*" (p.17). On the other hand, Germany's environmental ministry, BMU, was found to have an epistemic understanding of CP, meaning that citizens are actively consulted and formally involved in policymaking. This was often the case if they had special expertise or were directly affected by the policy decision, with BMU seeing citizen participation as broadening its knowledge base and strengthening its decision making (p.6). As part of Germany's Climate Action Plan (*CAP*) 2050, for example, a participatory initiative was set up by BMU which indicated that the

urgency of climate issues made policy change unfeasible unless relevant groups are engaged (p.18).

These findings indicate that whilst citizen participation may have extended to foreign policy issues in Germany, it still appears to be in a developing stage. Furthermore, the findings reflect an overall global trend that CP in foreign policy is not as well established as CP in environmental or climate policy, which has occurred in earnest for several years already (Pfeifer et al, 2020). It is also worth noting that, although a number of Western democratic governments have made strong efforts to adopt CP initiatives (Headley & van Wyk, 2012), it is an emerging phenomenon in the East such as in South Korea (Chandrasekara, 2020), and is not limited to the democratic model. However, for the purpose of this research, emphasis is given to the Netherlands and its respective experience with citizen participation in foreign policy. Indeed, *"democracy is widely believed to be the regime that makes best provision of all regime forms for citizen participation by institutionalizing rule by, for and of the people"* (Headley & van Wyk, 2012, p.13).

Other such examples of countries where there has been deliberate involvement of domestic publics in international policy areas include Canada, Australia and the United States. In 2012, Huijgh & Byrne noted that Canada and Australia's approaches to democratising international policy areas possessed a commonality in that the domestic dimension of their public diplomacy was *"resilient and adaptive in nature"* (p.395). According to these authors, Canada was at that time making purposeful efforts to engage with a wide range of domestic stakeholders, from opinion leaders to the general public, as well as specific stakeholder groups such as the youth and 'new Canadians', encouraging their contribution on issues of foreign policy substance (p.410). For Australia, the country was typically targeting 'attentive publics', especially those with economic or trade interests and depended largely on *"traditional, controlled and indirect methods of engagement"* (p.411).

To give another example of a country part of the current wave of citizen involvement in foreign policy, the United States has seen a reshaping of its foreign policy for the American middle class (Salman & Engel, 2020), which was urged specifically in an article by Joseph Biden in March 2020 (Biden, 2020). For Biden and the US, economic security and national security are synonymous, meaning that trade policy must begin at home through the strengthening of its 'biggest asset', the middle class, and by ensuring that all in society benefit from the country's economic success (Biden, 2020). It is specifically by tackling the distributional effects of 'foreign economic policy' - which has created growing domestic

inequality - as well as by ensuring that the rules of the international economy are fair, that the US believes it can make international policy work for that particular (and large) segment of society. This, in turn, *"requires substantial investment in communities across the United States and a comprehensive plan that helps industries and regions adjust to economic disruptions"* (Salman & Engel 2020, p.2).

This example highlights an apparent convergence of economic policy with foreign policy for citizen involvement, which, not unique to the US, has been identified in Australia and Canada also. Indeed, Australia's combined public diplomacy and economic policy efforts are led by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)*, whilst Canada's public diplomacy was previously led by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)*, and since 2015 by *Global Affairs Canada* as part of Prime Minister's Justin Trudeau's renewed focus on international engagement and open communication through public diplomacy (Ostwald & Dierkes, 2018). This again reflects the growing convergence of foreign policy with economic or trade policy, which has implications for citizen involvement by widening the possibilities and scope of its occurrence.

2.2.2. Public Diplomacy's Domestic Turn

Public diplomacy (PD) is generally described as *"a country's efforts to create and maintain relationships with publics in other societies to advance policies and actions"* (Melissen & Wang 2019, p.1). Whilst its evolution can be conceived along a continuum, beginning firstly with 'Traditional Public Diplomacy', becoming 'New Public Diplomacy' and later assuming a more 'Integrative' or 'Holistic' form, it is arguably more productive – given the focus of this research - to understand it within the context of *democratization*, whose processes move from indirect forms such as electing parliamentary representatives to a more direct type of participation by the people (Huijgh, 2016). Indeed, whilst it is interesting to note that public diplomacy also possesses non-democratic (modern) origins, take for example Soviet practices after the Russian Revolution and China who with non-democratic features has invested substantially in public diplomacy, it is a practice that tends to strive in a participatory democracy welcoming widespread constituent participation in governmental systems and policymaking (p.2).

Having identified PD within the context of democratization, its different variations and stages will nevertheless be addressed so as not to omit its conceptualisation. Firstly, traditional

public diplomacy is considered an offshoot of diplomacy, consisting of a one-way communication model that either informs domestic publics or influences foreign publics, whilst remaining largely indifferent to dialogue and relationship building and partly coinciding with the evolution of 20th century participatory democracy, most notably in North America (Huijgh, 2016). It is worth mentioning that as a one-way communication model, it occurs at best in two directions (Melissen, 2005; Melissen, 2018), with emphasis primarily given to its influence on foreign publics.

From traditional public diplomacy, the practice has since transitioned to a 'new public diplomacy' (Melissen, 2005; Melissen, 2018), which emerged as a result of globalization's impacts, as a counter-reaction to US public diplomacy which was dominated by national security following 9/11, increased online and offline mobility, a growing number of diplomatic actors and the insertion of domestic publics into an area typically reserved for officials (Huijgh 2016, p.5). Indeed, although traditional public diplomacy is predominantly seen as involving foreign publics (Huijgh, 2012) and specifically *"aimed at relaying positive aspects of a country to foreign publics"* (Melissen 2005, p.10), it is since recognised that PD has a domestic dimension that considers domestic citizens as also part of this concept (Huijgh, 2016). By its domestic dimension, that is to say public diplomacy targeted to "*domestic civil society as publics, partners and actors"* (Huijgh 2016, p.2).

Furthermore, whilst embracing diplomacy's domesticization, the new public diplomacy engages a number of other non-traditional and non-state actors besides citizens, including civil society actors, international organisations, multinationals, NGOs and religious figures, therefore one of its key features is a multi-actor approach encompassing a number of non-state players both domestically and abroad (Huijgh, 2016). Increasingly, it is the relations that are formed between these actors, initiated through dialogue and networks, that help to differentiate new public diplomacy from its traditional equivalent (Huijgh, 2016). To be specific, emphasizing relationship building with civil society actors abroad and facilitating networks between non-state actors domestically and internationally is what differentiates new public diplomacy from its predecessor, as well as the need to 'make permanent friends' in other countries including with general citizens (Fitzpatrick, 2007).

Moreover, as Melissen (2005) remarks, *"international actors accept more and more that they have to engage in dialogue with foreign audiences as a condition of success in foreign policy" (*p.10*).* As such, transitioning from a traditional public diplomacy to a new public diplomacy is not only necessary for a country's foreign policy to succeed, reflecting the

indispensability of public diplomacy for standard diplomatic practice and good foreign policy, but also, public diplomacy can no longer be approached as a tactic of manipulation towards foreign publics or be limited to direct governmental contact with foreign publics as part of a broad foreign policy agenda. Instead, the practice of new public diplomacy requires ongoing cultivation of a country's reputation and of its relations with foreign publics in order to achieve its foreign affairs objectives (Fitzpatrick, 2007).

Key to this approach is the concept of 'soft power', which is being able to shape others' preferences based on the appeal and desirability of the cultural norms, political values and foreign policies of a country (Nye, 2004; cited in Fitzpatrick, 2007). In contrast to 'hard power', which is centred on military strength and which works to coerce, soft power is the skill of influencing behaviour and co-opting others, whether that be states, NGOs, corporations, civil society actors or citizens of foreign countries, to convince them of your values. An example of this has been seen in Canada (Potter, 2010) whose soft power has been projected via several government-sponsored programs and instruments, resulting in its foreign policy interests being viewed by the international community through the prism of its values (p.258).

Lastly, an 'integrative' or 'holistic' approach to public diplomacy appears to challenge any categorical thinking altogether, e.g. domestic-foreign, state-non-state and traditional-new. Some authors assert that such rigid categorizations help to accentuate differences rather than find complementarities and overlaps in the development of diplomacy research (Huijgh, 2012; Melissen, 2013). As a specific example, Melissen (2013) states that *"the juxtaposition of traditional approaches and the 'new public diplomacy' stifles thinking on its evolution"* (p.3). In so doing, a more integrative or holistic approach, whereby categorical thinking on public diplomacy is eschewed and synergies between PD's past and present are emphasized, looks to gain conceptual clarity on public diplomacy research and offers a productive way to consider the future of public diplomacy. For example, the integrative or holistic approach has implications for citizen participation, namely that there becomes less of a need to make a distinction between whether a public is international or domestic, with greater focus given to the ability of publics to become potential governmental partners. As asserted by Huijgh (2016), "*PD's international and domestic dimensions can be seen as stepping stones on a continuum of citizen participation that is central to international policymaking.. The degree to which specific publics (through their expertise, effectiveness and legitimacy) can become important governmental partners prevails over whether they are international or domestic*"

(p.2). Therefore, thinking about public diplomacy in an integrative and holistic way allows for the deconstruction of PD's domestic-foreign category, which is in turn useful for helping unlock the potential of citizen participation.

Before concluding this section, it is relevant to underscore the burgeoning literature on 'digital diplomacy' (Bjola et al, 2019) which, as an expanding practice, forms an integral part of today's public diplomacy, and as will be discussed in the subsequent section, has relevance for Political Public Relations also. Digital diplomacy is "*the growing use of digital technologies and social media platforms in the conduct of diplomacy* " (Mboya 2021, p.431), and as data becomes 'the new oil' (Bjola et al, 2019), provides both opportunities and challenges for public diplomacy going forward. For example, the growing use of digital technologies reshapes the medium of communication used by diplomats, encourages new diplomacy actors such as tech-based non-state actors (TBNSAs) and blurs the boundary between the domestic and the foreign.

This blurring of the domestic and the foreign has particular implications for public diplomacy in practice, an example being that MFAs subsequently face the challenge of *"whether they can continue to do their job effectively without also engaging in the public conversation at the domestic level"* (Bjola et al 2019, p.89). Indeed, whilst a greater voice has been given to citizens both at home and abroad due to increasing ease of accessibility of digital tools, this in turn amplifies the need for MFAs to address public concerns and be accountable, whilst paradoxically, increased digitalisation enables MFAs to connect with these actors instantaneously, providing them with an opportunity to rally domestic and foreign support and potentially even sway public opinion in favour of a foreign policy using the same tools (p.89). This reflects one of the paradoxical effects of accelerated digitalisation on diplomacy, with the increasing use of social media impacting public diplomacy by making it no longer limited to relaying information, but allowing for *"the interactive construction and leveraging of long-lasting relationships with foreign publics"* (Bjola & Zaiotti 2020, p.2). This ability of public diplomacy in an era of increased digitalisation to assume a strategy of relationship building coincides with the concept of Political Public Relations, with 'relationship management' being a key characteristic of PPR as will be shown in the next section.

2.3. Political Public Relations (PPR)

Public relations strategies and tactics have long been ubiquitous in politico-societal contexts and are visible in most modern day political campaigns (Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2013). In addition, whilst Political Public Relations is largely associated with political parties, the practice is also adopted by other politico-societal organisations such as government offices, interest groups, think tanks and non-governmental organizations (p.251). Despite this, theorising about public relations is often done in relation to the corporate sector, with the study of PR rarely extending to the politico-societal context. This research is guided by the notion that there is a particular need to contribute to the theory of political public relations due to the lack of attention afforded to it by public relations scholars and political communications (as well as IR) scholars alike, the former for having viewed the practice largely through a corporate lens and the latter for having ostensibly neglected or only briefly mentioning PR theory and research (Kiousis & Strömbäck 2019, p.3).

The potential for PR practices such as 'relationship management' to contribute to practices related to CP in foreign policy, such as public diplomacy, have nevertheless been identified (Fitzpatrick, 2007). For example, as was highlighted in the previous section, with the advent of new public diplomacy, when diplomacy took a relational turn and began to involve a multitude of non-state actors (Melissen, 2005; Melissen, 2018), a one-way communication model was superseded by a two-way dialogical one emphasising collaboration and long-term relationship building. It is in this way that public diplomacy converges with PR, a core feature of which is relationship management (Wang & Yang, 2020). Seltzer (2019) in fact argues that the main unit of analysis for PR scholarship has to be relationships, namely *"the relationships between organisations and their publics"* (p.105). Moreover, Ledingham and Bruning (2000) purport that the 'relationship paradigm' offers a framework through which to draw connections between PR objectives and organizational goals. As such, PPR draws several parallels with public diplomacy, namely that they are both concerned with addressing 'key publics' and assume strategic communication functions that cultivate a reciprocal relationship between official actors or states and publics (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). Through its intersection with public diplomacy, this also suggests that PR, and PPR in particular, offers substance to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy.

However, although having drawn similarities between PPR and public diplomacy, the terms 'public' and 'diplomacy' were once viewed as incompatible with the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations stating that the role of diplomacy was not about

interacting with citizens (Huijgh, 2016). Furthermore, public diplomacy has been interpreted by certain traditionalist diplomacy scholars, such as Berridge & James (2003), as merely *"a late-twentieth-century form of propaganda conducted by diplomats"* (p.197). Similarly, PR has been given a comparable association, *"often linked with public diplomacy's other disfavoured ancestors — the propagandists"* (Fitzpatrick 2007, p.190). Through this lens, public diplomacy is viewed as an occasionally useful albeit corrupted form of diplomatic communication, which is an alternative (albeit traditional) viewpoint that is considered when linking a concept such as PPR with public diplomacy and by extension with citizen participation in foreign policy. In addition to this, it has been noted that public relations practices, strategies and tactics are not always extendable to the politico-societal context, whilst political organisations and corporations as well as political settings and corporate settings can also pose many differences (Stromback & Kiousis, 2013). This, as well as variations across countries, should additionally be considered when evaluating and applying the concept of PPR.

In addition, significant changes have occurred since the practice of PPR was conceptualised over a decade ago, the most important being the fundamental transformation of media environments that have taken place globally. In fact, the increasing importance of digital and social media has *"fundamentally altered the preconditions for and processes of political public relations, political communication, and democracy at large"* (Kiousis & Strömbäck 2019, p.3). This highlights the need to understand how the practice has evolved and adapted to an increasingly digitalised era, not least because Lee and Xu (2018) have noted a positive correlation between social media activity and electoral outcome. Furthermore, digital tools currently give official actors the opportunity to connect instantaneously with citizens (Dozier et al, 2016, cited in Sweetser, 2019), whereas prior to this, it is claimed that PPR campaigners were significantly less inclined to interact digitally with their constituents (Buskqvist et al, 2013). Hence, there is a need to understand how PPR occurs in a period of increased digitalisation and social distancing given the lack of research into this, and how it in turn impacts citizen participation in foreign policy.

Indeed, the recent mediatization of diplomacy and of MFAs in particular has been conceptualised (Manor & Crilley, 2019) with the proliferation of social media and the omnipresence of SM tools currently impacting the practice of diplomacy. For example, diplomats are now in a position to circumvent the press and deliver messages in a more direct form to online audiences, with MFAs able to generate media content, distribute the content

through social media channels and assume so-called 'media logics' in their day-to-day operations (p.66). They also seem to be readily adapting to this change, with 'digital diplomacy units' now situated within several MFA communications directorates and regularly headed by media specialists (Manor & Crilley, 2019). For example, digital diplomacy units can be found in the MFAs of Israel, Finland and Norway which consist in large part of PR experts or former media personnel. Interestingly, this ongoing mediatization of the MFA terrain suggests yet another link between public diplomacy and political public relations, most notably in how such digital units are permeated with the knowledge and skills required to construct 'strategic frames' (p.73).

Strategic framing is an approach that sees mass communication not as an expression of reality, but as a construction of such. A definition given by Dan et al (2011) is "*the deliberate articulation and use of frames in an attempt to influence the audience, the media, and ultimately policy to the interest of an organization"* (p.157). With this in mind, the mediatization of MFAs highlights the existence of PR functions, an example being the implementation of strategic framing by digital diplomacy units within MFA communications directorates (Manor & Crilley, 2019). Using strategic frames, digital diplomacy units appear to be adopting a practice that has long attracted the attention of PR (Hallahan, 2011) and more recently of PPR scholars also (Dan et al, 2019; Kiousis & Stromback, 2019).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Framework: Pfeifer et al (2020)'s four understandings

The theoretical framework that was used to conduct this analysis is the four ministerial understandings of citizen participation taken from Pfeifer et al (2020). A breakdown of each understanding is provided below (Box 1).

Box 1: The Executive's Understanding of Citizen Participation

Elitist	*- Mainly offering CP because of strategic interests.* *- Believes only 'conventional' official actors of representative democracy can make decisions, since they are formally legitimized to.* *- They engage in a 'politics of legitimacy' to justify their actions to the public.* *- Offers CP formats without attaching substantial importance, ascribing only a symbolic function. (p.7)*
Evolutionary	*- Attributes empowering function to CP by which ordinary citizens may build up the capacities to deliberate key policy issues and, in the long run, even co-decide them.* *- Sees the current democratic system as fundamentally deficient and in need of reinvention.* *- Views representative democracy and electing officials as one step in the evolution*

	of democracy. A next step would be to test new democratic procedures. (p.7)
Integrative	*- Views CP as an instrument to bridge the gap between officials and an increasingly alienated public, thereby renewing trust in the democratic system.* *- Open to providing regular citizens more opportunities to express their preferences and give opinions on solving policy issues.* *- CP may involve social groups who do not usually show interest in politics/official policy. (p.7)*
Epistemic	*- Primarily wants to improve and diversify the knowledge base upon which officials make decisions.* *- Whilst upholding its formal decision-making authority, realizes its capacity limits and therefore wants to increase the epistemic quality of its decisions by means of CP.* *- Ordinary citizens are involved and consulted, particularly those with a special expertise or who are directly affected by the decision at hand. (p.6)*

3.2. Operationalization of Core Concepts

The main concepts used for this research are Political Public Relations, Citizen Participation and Foreign Policy. ***PPR*** can be defined as "*the management process by which an official organization or individual actor through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals"* (Kiousis & Strömbäck 2020, p.25). ***Foreign policy*** is the *"sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations"* (Hill, 2003, cited in Leira 2019, p.188). Lastly, ***citizen participation*** describes *"activities by which people's concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters"* (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015).

To operationalise these, citizen participation in foreign policy is taken as a concept in and of itself, because its relationship is regularly theorised with terms such as 'public diplomacy' and in particular 'domestic public diplomacy' (Huijgh, 2016; Pfeifer et al, 2020). Therefore, in total two core concepts, ***PPR*** and ***Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy***, will be operationalised.

o 3.2.1. Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy

Below are indicators of **CP in foreign policy** and the sources for its discussion.

Indicators: Citizen dialogue; degree of citizens' knowledge on global issues; citizen perception of foreign policy; domestic public diplomacy; MFA's interpretation of citizen involvement; MFA involvement of citizens; citizen focus groups.

Discussion sources: interviews with members of the Dutch MFA, Dutch House of Representatives and other individuals with authority to speak on Dutch foreign policy; MFA website content and official documents.

o 3.2.2. PPR

Below are indicators of **PPR** and the sources for its discussion.

Indicators: relationship cultivation between politico-societal actors and publics through media; existence of digital diplomacy units; other strategic communications functions within

MFAs; strategic framing; relationship management; collaboration with key publics; politico-societal communication with key publics.

Discussion sources: Existing PPR literature; Existing Public Diplomacy and New Public Diplomacy literature; MFA website content and official documents.

3.3. Propositions

- The mediatisation of diplomacy has created strategic functions, namely digital diplomacy units, within MFA's communications directorates (Manor & Crilley, 2019) which indicate the existence of PPR.
- PPR draws parallels with 'new public diplomacy' suggesting interconnectedness and relevance between the two concepts.
- PPR is therefore linked to existing diplomatic studies literature and by extension to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy.
- By emphasising 'key publics' and 'relationship management', the relatively recent concept of PPR can contribute and add substance to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy.
- There is a lack of theorising about PPR relative to how long it has existed in practice, whilst PPR has likely evolved since 2011 as a result of accelerated digitalisation and the mediatization of MFAs.
- This alters PPR's preconditions, potentially impacting how it occurs and influences citizen participation in foreign policy.

4. Research Design

4.1. Case Selection: *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken* (Dutch MFA)

The Dutch MFA was chosen as a single case for this research, primarily because it has a number of strategic functions and a department, *De Eenheid Strategische Advisering* (The Strategic Advisory Unit), that has external focus and which appears open to diversifying its knowledge base. This strategic approach is relevant for this research in that it reveals BZ's potential to involve external actors such as civil society as well as other stakeholders in the foreign policy making process. Given that this 'strategic turn' is a recent development, it is then useful to investigate the Dutch MFA's interepretation of citizen participation in foreign policy and furthermore any present examples of CP in Dutch foreign policy.

Another reason for selecting the Dutch MFA as a case study relates to the matter of democratic accountability. Indeed, it is in democracies such as the Netherlands where citizen participation contributes to the strengthening of accountability, not least by encouraging a more transparent governance system (Halachmi & Holzer, 2010). Making representatives accountable is also an essential aspect of the democratic process, and right of citizens, in addition to the fact that the views of constituents should be represented so as to assure the common good (Headley & van Wyk, 2012, p.247). Furthermore, citizen participation can encourage democratic revitalization and complement parliamentary democracy (Halachmi & Holzer, 2010).

Whilst not a comparative case study, the case looks to extend a relatively recent case study carried out by Pfeifer et al (2020) on citizen participation in the German MFA, as well as examples of citizen involvement from Canada, Australia and the United States. This is with a view to building upon existing research and bringing it to a new context. Adopting the theories, concepts and terminologies from the Germany case study will increase research validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and strengthen the reliability of any comparisons that can be drawn.

4.2. Descriptive sources

o 4.2.1. Primary source

The primary source for this interpretative research is interviews, in addition to official documents of the Dutch MFA and Dutch MFA/government website content referred to in the discussion. Interviews were chosen as a contextually rich information source, providing opportunity for the researcher to gather the participant's experiences with the specific phenomenon (e.g. citizen participation in foreign policy) and in order to pursue more in-depth information around the topic. Most importantly, interviews allowed the researcher to focus specifically on what MFA practitioners have to say about citizen consultation, any CP practices present within the Dutch MFA as well as current public diplomacy examples. In order to address the research question specifically, notes and transcripts were collected from the interviews and responses that include themes relevant to the two concepts were highlighted. Significant weight was given to interviews as a research source, since they provide scope for in-depth probing on issues specific to the research question (Lamont, 2015).

o 4.2.2. Interviews

In total 7 interviews were conducted, with the Strategic Policy Advisor of the *Strategic Advisory Unit* (Dutch MFA), The Dutch Youth and Education Ambassador, representatives of *The West Wing* think tank, MPs of the *VVD, PvdA* and *D66* political parties and Project Manager of *SDG Nederland*. Individuals from both within and outside of the Dutch MFA were interviewed so as to lessen bias and generate a more balanced perspective. Conducting interviews with elite policymakers alone could potentially lead to misrepresented accounts, since policymakers may look to portray a careful, deliberately ambiguous policymaking process to external audiences (Tansey, 2007). Hence, interviews with several individuals outside of the Dutch MFA were conducted. More specifically, the interview range included individuals in parliament and from civil society in order to cover the depth of the research question, gather diverse insights as well as reflect the various mediums through which citizen participation can occur.

A combined snowballing and purposive sampling was taken (Tansey, 2007), because the researcher has prior knowledge of who was accessible and potentially useful to interview and

recognised that there was an interconnected network within the Dutch MFA that could generate new leads. It took a non-probability sampling approach whereby an interview sample was drawn, recognising that it was not possible to interview all Dutch MFA representatives within the limited timeframe (Tansey, 2007). The number of interviews conducted depended on the quality of the data as it was collected and when the most salient ideas were obtained (Weller et al, 2018). On this basis, a total of 7 interviews were conducted.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to maintain a basic structure throughout the process, to cross-reference across participants, and to give interviewees a degree of flexibility in their responses (Lamont, 2015). This was so as not to elude potentially relevant themes and insights. The interviews were conducted for a period of between 30 and 60 minutes depending on the interest and time availability of participants, and took place online via Teams. They included a list of open-ended questions that began as interpersonal and non-threatening in order to build rapport (Leech, 2002) and gradually led into questions guided by theory. Translated copies of the questions from interviews with The West Wing, SDG Nederland, the Youth and Education Ambassador and Strategic Advisory Unit have been enclosed as examples in the appendices (see Appendixes 1-4).

4.3. Methodology

o 4.3.1. Deductive thematic analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to interpret responses to interview questions (See Appendixes 5-11 for results of the analysis). This was chosen for flexibility in interpreting interview content, and suitable given that this is an interpretative study which involves sorting interview content into broad and relevant themes (Nowell et al, 2017). More specifically, a thematic analysis provided a verifiable and systematic way of making sense of the responses, i.e. what the interviewee was saying, by breaking the responses down into appropriate codes and themes (Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Furthermore, the benefit of a thematic analysis is that because the researcher possessed theoretical knowledge before conducting the analysis, aware of theoretical frameworks such as Pfeifer (2020)'s 'four understandings', it could use pregiven themes to organise, indicate and link to existing theories, as well as unify theoretical knowledge with raw interview data as it was generated.

Given the diverse interviewee sample involving individuals from various fields, the thematic analysis was useful for examining the perspectives of different research participants. Indeed, a thematic approach assisted in highlighting similarities and differences across interviews, and created unanticipated insight when relating interview responses back to the themes generated (Nowell et al 2017, p.2).

A six-step process developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) was used to perform the analysis. This involves:

Familiarising: Understanding the content by reading interview notes and transcripts.

Coding: Establishing shorthand labels or codes to describe the content and identify patterns emerging.

Generating themes: Combining codes to generate themes (which are broader).

Reviewing themes: Reviewing accuracy of the themes and their relevance for the research question.

Defining themes: Taking the list of themes and defining them in order to better understand their meaning for the research.

Writing up: Explaining how the thematic analysis was conducted and addressing each theme in turn. Any recurrence of themes and what this signifies are highlighted in the discussion.

o 4.3.2. Limitations of chosen methodology

The research took a deductive, thematic approach (Nowell et al, 2017) with a view to exploring preconceived themes based on prior knowledge of the research topic, e.g. foreign policy elitism and Pfeifer et al (2020)'s four understandings of CP. It is aware of the limitations of this approach in that vital information specific to the case can be eluded and thus allowed for other themes to emerge (Nowell et al, 2017). As a result of one's own subjectivity - which a thematic analysis heavily relies upon - there may be nuances in the data that were missed or inaccurate representations of the data generated, hence the researcher has carefully reflected on their own choices and interpretations as a non-Dutch citizen.

Indeed, when conducting a thematic analysis researchers carry with them their own theoretical positions and narratives, and play an active role when identifying patters and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher was therefore precise, consistent

and rigorous in how they handled this information, and disclosed and recorded the applied method in sufficient detail to increase trustworthiness (Nowell et al, 2017).

o 4.3.3. Internal and External Validity

External validity was particularly important for this research since it looks to build a mid-range theory that is generalisable beyond the individual case of the Netherlands (Beach & Rohlfing, 2015). The study recognises the limits of generalisation in that transferability across cases can never be certain (Lamont, 2015) and more specifically, that the theory's applicability to non-democratic states may be limited. Internal validity has been strengthened by considering multiple, potentially contrasting definitions of the concepts being used, to ensure that what is being studied is what is thought is being studied (Lamont, 2015).

5. Results & Discussion

5.1. Results

A thematic analysis was conducted using the notes and transcripts collected from interviews, with Appendixes 5-11 presenting all codes and the respective themes that were generated. For all of the interviews, several short-hand codes were established with one theme generated from each group of codes. Some of the themes were preconceived, e.g. 'Elitist understanding of CP (Pfeifer et al, 2020) and 'Convergence of economic policy with foreign policy' (Byrne & Huijgh, 2012), whilst new themes emerged through the process of the analysis.

From the seven interviews that were conducted, the following themes were drawn:

Interview 1

'Epistemic understanding of CP', 'Limited interdepartmental synergy', 'Symbolic involvement of civil society' (see Appendix 5).

Interview 2

'Intertwining of Dutch foreign policy with other policy forms', 'Dutch involvement in EU citizen dialogue initiatives', 'Need to automate categorisation of policy levels' (see Appendix 6).

Interview 3

'Reaching citizens through civil society as an opportunity for BZ', 'Civil society as creating dialogue for policy', 'Civil society connected to government and MFA' (see Appendix 7).

Interview 4

'Engagement of key stakeholder (the youth)', 'Elitist understanding of CP', 'BZ involvement in civil society/stakeholder network' (see Appendix 8).

Interview 5

'Convergence of economic policy with foreign policy', 'Foreign policy as a support base for citizens', 'Elitist understanding of CP' (see Appendix 9).

Interview 6

'Elitist understanding of CP', 'Consular affairs as citizen consultation', 'EU as a policy area through which consultation occurs' (see Appendix 10).

Interview 7

'Intertwining of Dutch foreign policy with domestic policy', 'Potential for citizen dialogue through various sources', 'Differing roles for BZ and parliament' (see Appendix 11).

5.2. Discussion

5.2.1. Citizen Participation in Foreign Policy

Based on Pfeifer et al (2020)'s four executive understandings, the Dutch MFA, BZ, appears to show both epistemic and elitist understandings of CP. To give a specific example, The West Wing is a BZ-affiliated think tank which recruits youths who have either a particular interest in foreign policy or a relevant educational background to contribute their policy ideas (The West Wing, n.d). That such an organization exists and works on behalf of BZ indicates that the ministry has an epistemic understanding of CP, in that these young individuals with either technology, economics or politics backgrounds are recruited for their special expertise, whilst BZ still *"retains its formal decision-making authority"* (Pfeifer et al 2020, p.6). These are regular citizens (with skilled backgrounds) who are given a platform to express their foreign policy ideas, and their inclusion by BZ suggests the desire to improve and diversify the knowledge base upon which officials make decisions, in line with an epistemic understanding (p.7).

At the same time, BZ seems to be offering CP *"mainly because of strategic interests"* (Pfeifer et al 2020, p.6). For example, as was mentioned by a representative of both BZ and The West Wing, one of the main objectives or 'external goals' of BZ is to strengthen policy ideas (personal communication, June 18 2021). This would suggest that The West Wing is used at most to strategically improve policy, but more likely as a CP format that is ascribed only a symbolic function in order to fulfil a requirement or 'tick a box' without substantial importance being attached to the process. Indeed, there were no concrete examples given of policy advice provided by The West Wing that influenced the policy decisions of BZ in practice. From this perspective, *"only 'conventional' official actors of representative*

democracy can make decisions since they are formally legitimized to (Pfeifer et al 2020, p.7). Another example of CP that looks to have been ascribed a symbolic function is the Youth at Heart programme. This is a BZ-led initiative that is commendable in its outreach and ability to empower young people in parts of the Middle East and Africa, in order for them to build a future for themselves, their communities and their societies (BZ, n.d.). The initiative also engages a key stakeholder (the youth) and entails 'on-the-pulse' conversations that drive citizen dialogue, whilst also exemplifying a two-way communication model as per the features of new public diplomacy (personal communication, 23 September 2021).

However, the initiative can also be seen as a form of PD that serves as a mechanism to impress domestic audiences, highlighting all that the country is doing to educate people abroad and there to correct any misperceptions foreigners may have of their own country. As argued by Cull (2019), *"one of the major problems facing public diplomats today is the tendency of some governments to conceive of their work not as a means to engage international publics, but rather as a mechanism to impress domestic audiences"* (p.26). Therefore, ascribing only a symbolic function to such CP formats whilst using public diplomacy as a '*performance for domestic consumption'* (p.26) would suggest elements of an elitist understanding. Moreover, this becomes further apparent when you consider that engaging the youth, a key stakeholder, helps to legitimise the work of BZ, and implies that the ministry is *"engaging in a 'politics of legitimacy' to justify its actions to the public"* (Pfeifer et al 2020, p.7). This initiative additionally evokes aspects of traditional public diplomacy in its emphasis on targeting foreign publics.

In 2008, Verbeek & van der Vleuten noted that during the period of 1989 and 2007, there was a domesticization of Dutch foreign policy, which they argued was a paradoxical result of Europeanisation and internationalization. The authors claimed that there had been a transformative shift in the foreign policymaking process which could no longer expect a stable public consensus, and that there was added pressure in Putnam's two-level game (1988) from a more engaged, internationally integrated domestic public (Verbeek & van der Vleuten, 2008). This led the authors to surmise that, in the post-Cold War era, Dutch foreign policy would be increasingly driven by domestic considerations.

However, although then observing that *"the (Dutch) general public is more strongly concerned with foreign policy issues and has more opportunities to raise its voice"* (2008, p.375), it appears from the interviews and background research conducted in this research, that there is a lack of engagement from BZ with the domestic general public and furthermore

limited opportunities for citizens to participate. For example, whilst the Netherlands may be party to EU-wide citizen dialogue initiatives, with Dutch involvement in the European Citizens Panels at the Conference on the Future of Europe (futureEU, n.d.), and in national consultation as part of other EU panels (personal communication, 14 July 2021), BZ itself does not run equivalent citizen dialogues or initiate focus groups for domestic citizens to engage on matters of foreign policy specifically. As such, there seems to be no direct attempt to invite the general public into this policy domain, implying an elitist understanding of CP.

With regard to the lack of involvement of the general public in Dutch foreign policy, one reason for this appears to be that as a policy area it still remains rather obscure. For example, it was highlighted by a representative of BZ's Strategic Advisory Unit that a considerable amount of Dutch foreign policy is enmeshed with other policy forms and therefore cannot always be discernible to citizens (personal communication, 14 July 2021). Whilst it may be difficult for citizens to discern, however, these findings at least indicate some departure from foreign policy as having a 'special need for secrecy', given the suggested overlap of foreign policy with domestic policy forms. In the same interview, it was mentioned that the merging of the domestic with the foreign is partly due to the fact that some of the country's policy solutions are situated in the international context, after not being reached domestically (personal communication, 14 July 2021). This intertwining of domestic and foreign policy forms was further substantiated by an MP of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (*VVD*), who referred to a convergence of Dutch economic policy with foreign policy, giving the example that international security affects citizens in its influence on trade agreements, which in turn leads to impacted employment and jobs (personal communication, 15 October 2021). A specific example was given of when essential products or materials become either scarce or no longer available, there can be a political incentive to reduce dependency on certain countries, which can subsequently either reduce or increase the number of jobs domestically. As a principle, it was emphasized that nothing is done abroad unless it makes sense domestically (personal communication, 15 October 2021).

An MP of the *Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)* similarly denoted a merging of Dutch foreign policy with domestic policy forms, alluding to the domestic significance of international events such as the 2017-18 mass demonstrations in Morocco. It was posited that the demonstrations led to greater involvement and influence of parliament in a terrain that is typically occupied by BZ, with the need for parliament to take a stand on the issue, aware that

such an event could potentially impact the domestic context given the Netherlands' large Moroccan diaspora.

Throughout the interviews, the notion of 'our foreign policy is our domestic policy' was therefore alluded to, a message which has been commonly associated with President Biden in the US. It was indeed viewed as a comparable theme, suggesting that there is an increasing convergence and enmeshing of foreign policy with domestic policy forms in the Netherlands also. Interestingly, in the US, this has created the potential for increased citizen involvement, not least through greater engagement with the middle class (Salman & Engel, 2020) which has increased their opportunities for participation in international policy areas. However, seeing that domestic and foreign policy solutions are in convergence in the Netherlands, with some domestic solutions able to be found in the international domain rather than the domestic, this would both reinforce and refute the findings of Verbeek & van der Vleuten (2008). Indeed, given that some Dutch citizen dialogue occurs at the EU level, and since foreign policy is becoming evidently more a trade issue, one could argue that the effects of globalization and Europeanisation have internationalized/Europeanized policy solutions rather than domesticized them. And yet, at the same time, an enmeshing of domestic and foreign policy would suggest in and of itself some domesticisation of foreign policy and a departure from the notion of it having a special need for secrecy, thus reaffirming the authors' findings (Verbeek & van der Vleuten, 2008).

Furthermore, in terms of other cross-case comparisons that can be drawn, the Dutch experience of citizen participation is similar to Germany's in that there has been more CP in aspects of environmental policy than in foreign policy (Pfeifer et al, 2020; Dang 2020; Coenen et al 2000). For example, in an interview with the Youth and Education Ambassador, it was said that the youth tend to think naturally about and engage in climate issues, which happens to be an area with which BZ as an entity is also concerned (personal communication, 23 September 2021). Another example of this can be seen in SDG Nederland, who as a civil society actor has a number of grassroots initiatives led by citizens which revolve around climate and environment issues (personal communication, 6 July 2021/SDG Nederland, n,d.). This further shows, in addition to the fact that there is greater citizen engagement in environmental policy rather than foreign policy, a form of consultation through domestic stakeholders and civil society rather than direct CP with general citizens. However, BZ's involvement with SDG Nederland and other civil society actors nevertheless demonstrates

that it possesses elements of an epistemic understanding in that it wants to diversify its knowledge base.

5.2.2. Political Public Relations' Contribution

A number of practical as well as conceptual connections can be drawn between political public relations and public diplomacy, with scholars of both fields mapping their growing convergence (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013; Kiousis & Strömbäck, 2014; Wang & Yang, 2019; Seltzer, 2019). To begin with, they both serve as focused communication functions that aim to reach public audiences, and are both open, communicative and calculated practices (Wang & Yang, 2019). They are even viewed within the context of the broad field of communications as 'sub-areas', with each possessing *"similar concepts, objectives and tools"* (p.289). For example, the importance of relationship management, which is to say *"the state existing between an organization and its key publics whereby the actions of one entity impact the economic, social, political or cultural well-being of the other",* has been internalized by both fields, by PR for well over two decades (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) and more recently by public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, 2007). In its mutual influence, relationship management is integral to the current environment which is characterized as a 'network society' in which the global system is viewed less as permeated with states or organisations, and more as a web of interaction among social actors where there is a continuous exchange of messaging and where therefore the value of relations comes to the fore (Wang & Yang, 2019). To give an example within the context of public diplomacy, a nation may seek to initiate a dialogue with key publics on Facebook, which creates a network structure, which in turn necessitates relationship management.

On a conceptual level, it has been suggested that the theory of relationship management put forth by Ledingham & Bruning (2000) could pave the way for a more ethical and effective approach by a state in achieving its foreign policy goals (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). More specifically, a relational paradigm can provide public diplomacy with a more 'symmetrical' and reciprocal worldview as well as a unifying framework that could enhance its strategic aspects in the current network society (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). It is worth noting that the strategic departments of MFAs, including BZ's Strategic Advisory Unit, would therefore benefit from and perhaps even require the incorporation of such a relational model. This is

because for new public diplomacy – and an integrative or holistic public diplomacy - to be effective, it must be aware that non-state as well as state actors assume a more social and relational role (Wang & Yang, 2020). Indeed, the dominant paradigm within PR is centred on relational concepts including relationship management that prise "two-way symmetrical practices" (Fitzpatrick et al 2013, p.7) and, in its more contemporary focus, on 'collaboration', which suggests the utility of core PR components for public diplomacy's current trajectory (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013).

Furthermore, the advent of new public diplomacy has led to greater emphasis on forming dialogues with foreign publics, whereby it is conducive to learn to engage and potentially even accommodate alternative viewpoints, divergent opinions and evidence, rather than attempting disapprovingly "to talk over them" (Fitzpatrick 2007, p.196). This again highlights the need for reciprocity and two-way symmetry in how states manage relationships with key publics, whilst some public diplomacy scholars even venture to suggest that the relational approach *"stands for genuine cooperation and collaboration with foreign communities"* (Arsenault et al, 2013, p.2; cited in Wang & Yang 2019). Interestingly, this willingness for states to engage with and empower their key publics draws close parallels with 'dialogic communication' in public relations, which is a concept that gives precedence to relationship cultivation over image cultivation despite the latter's traditional PR association (Arsenault et al, 2013).

More broadly, in 2015, Adler-Nissen called for a relational approach to the field of international relations, asserting that relationalism as an ontology could help us better understand *"the diplomatic production of world politics"* (p.285). This view marks a departure from the substantialist ontology with which IR as a field is most commonly affiliated, with the author claiming that diplomatic practitioners are generally averse to IR theory, since they see the world more in the context of relations, whereas IR scholars have a propensity to think in terms of substantialism.

This view of diplomacy as the making of world politics is echoed by Sending et al (2015) who argue that diplomacy, whilst being fundamentally focused on relations, actually helps constitute and reconstitute significant aspects of IR. For example, through its evolution as a practice, diplomacy is involved in generating agents such as the state, objects such as embassies and treaties, and structures such as sovereignty. To use the example of the state, the job of diplomacy is rooted in and oriented around the state, helping to produce and reproduce it *"as the naturalized political arena for the generation of meaning and*

belonging" (p.7). By extension, should the makeup and constituent parts of diplomatic practice evolve, so should the significance of statehood also. What can be taken from this analysis is how the social world is inherently relational, which is to say that the agents, objects and structures such as those mentioned, are made through exchanges and connections (namely relations) that exist prior to these entities (agents, objects, structures) whilst also being constitutive of them. Furthermore, that diplomacy as a field is somewhat unique in its focus on relations (Sending et al, 2015).

The importance of relationalism as an ontology for diplomatic practice is further argued by Qin (2016), who advocates for a relational approach to international relations and puts forth a relational theory of world politics. This is a viewpoint which contrasts with the dominant Western understanding of IR which has a tendency to magnify the individual actor and assume 'individual rationalism' as its theoretical core, whilst not considering 'relations between actors' as a unit of analysis from which to begin. Rather, a relational approach to IR treats international actors as *"actors-in-relations"* (p.33), with such actors inclined to think from and about relations when beginning their decision-making processes. It is this relatively recent emphasis on relations given by diplomacy scholars, and such calls for a more relational approach to IR, that appear to suggest that political public relations, with its focus on relationship management, presents tools and substance to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy. Indeed, if relationalism as a theoretical framework can *"enable us to see the IR world from a different perspective, reconceptualizing key elements such as power and governance"* (Qin 2016, p.33), it may also allow us to see citizen participation in foreign policy differently, with PPR's emphasis on relationship management proving a useful starting point.

In addition to this, it is through relations with key publics that political public relations begins to coincide with public diplomacy and by extension with citizen participation in foreign policy. Indeed, both public diplomacy and PPR require effective *communication* channels in order to reach key publics and manage relations with them. As such, PPR has a part to play in the emergent field of digital diplomacy and more specifically in the mediatization of MFAs, primarily through a concept which Sweetser (2019) terms 'digital political public relations'. Digital PPR coincides with digital diplomacy in how, as a strategic approach for reaching publics, it takes advantage of evolving communication channels and the increasing use of digital tools, *"enabling official actors to truly connect with citizens"* (p.82). An example of this can be seen in how PPR practitioners use social media with a view to improving electoral

outcome, seeing digital tools as a core component of their broader PPR strategy. Furthermore, the recent mediatization of MFAs assumes that MFAs are now media actors, regularly utilizing social media in a network structure that values 'real-time framing' and exchanges with diverse audiences (Manor & Crilley, 2019). Therefore, given PR's particular focus on 'strategic framing' (Dan et al, 2011) which becomes digitalized through digital PPR, and since social media has become a *"key operating channel in public relations"* (Roth-Cohen & Avidar 2022, p.1), this suggests that digital PPR as a strategic approach offers useful insight for digital diplomacy and the mediatization of MFAs going forward.

Indeed, this convergence of digital PPR and digital diplomacy reaffirms the notion that both public relations and public diplomacy are practice-driven, communication-centric endeavors (Wang & Yang, 2019). In particular, the two fields operate in a network society where organizations (corporations and socio-political) as well as individuals can routinely cultivate horizontal and vertical networks of exchange that have the capability of reaching global audiences. What is interesting is that 'social networks' in particular are viewed from a relational standpoint, with a social network being "*a set of relationships among related social actors"* and *"the primary building blocks of society"* (p.299). In social networks, according to Wang & Yang (2019), it is important to recognize that organisations and states and their stakeholders do not exist in isolation of eachother, but are related communicators within a multi-layered web of interaction. Furthermore, that it is useful to view social networks 'holistically' – which evokes aspects of public diplomacy's holistic approach (Huijgh, 2012) - given that they consist of multiple pairs of relationships and not a single pair. In this way, the social network perspective, one which public relations scholarship has recently been drawn to, suggests another juncture at which public relations and public diplomacy are situated, providing more opportunities for cross-disciplinary synergy.

6. Conclusion

Given that the Dutch MFA currently has elements of an elitist understanding of CP, it would do well to learn from a more relational approach to international relations and would greatly benefit from further adopting a key PPR practice, namely relationship management. Its epistemic understanding of CP already suggests a willingness to diverse its knowledge base as can be seen from its engagement and investment in relationships with key stakeholders such as the youth of The West Wing and civil society actors such as SDG Nederland. Dutch foreign policy, in its apparent intertwining with domestic policy forms, appears to be departing slightly from the principle of 'a special need for secrecy' and yet remains indiscernible to citizens despite this coalescence of policy forms. Comparisons can be drawn from Australia, Canada and the US in how the Netherlands sees economic or trade policy as being increasingly relevant to domestic actors which in turn opens the scope for citizen participation in international policy areas. A key message that can be taken is that nothing is done abroad unless it makes sense domestically, with international security becoming more relevant for the citizen as it begins to affect trade and domestic employment. This convergence of economic with foreign policy and the intertwining of domestic and international policy forms more generally thus presents opportunities for increased citizen involvement in foreign policy.

However, given that BZ still shows aspects of an elitist understanding, ascribing only a symbolic function to the work of The West Wing, for example, and not incorporating its policy advice in a concrete form, this would suggest that it either does not attach much importance to CP processes or views itself as the only conventional actor legitimized to make foreign policy decisions. Its current attempts to involve civil society actors in the foreign policy domain either occur at arm's length or give the impression of being a symbolic gesture that acknowledges but does not include such actors in policymaking. Nevertheless, the importance BZ assigns to its strategic partnerships and willingness to support civil society shows that it is open to engaging non-conventional actors. This becomes apparent in its public diplomacy efforts with the foreign youth abroad, an example being the Youth at Heart programme which demonstrates a two-way communication model as per the principles of new public diplomacy. However, this initiative could also be viewed as 'a performance for domestic consumption' whereby it serves as a mechanism to impress domestic audiences, to

correct international misperceptions of the Netherlands and highlight all that the country is doing to educate people abroad. Therefore, whilst demonstrating an epistemic understanding of CP, there also remain elitist elements and traditional forms of public diplomacy in how foreign publics become the principle recipients, with some intention to build enthusiasm domestically for such overseas programmes also.

In addition to this, there appears to be a research opportunity for understanding the extent to which PPR practices such as relationship management are adopted by the Dutch MFA, and how this intersects with both the theoretical and empirical findings presented in this paper. At present, there is no evidence of such practices being used to consult general citizens directly which suggests the need for BZ to better communicate with key publics more, in particular the domestic public, and invest additionally in relationship management in line with PPR principles. However, in order to connect meaningfully with key publics it will need to cultivate more of a two-way symmetrical model and collaborative approach with general citizens as well as other external actors. Furthermore, relationship management plays a prominent role in the current 'network society', where different entities such as states, organisations and stakeholders establish networks and are social actors in a web of interaction. With relationship management providing fertile ground for forming and cultivating networks, this quintessential PR tool, evident in current PD practices, highlights a merging of the two fields: political public relations and new public diplomacy.

Indeed, relationship management reflects the value of a PPR component for new public diplomacy, where non-state as well as state actors take on a more social and relational role. This is in addition to the fact that both fields, in targeting their key publics, enter and maintain social networks that are holistically seen as *sets* of relationships rather one pair, in which one should recognize themselves as a related social actor with the ability to reach global audiences. This paper has highlighted that a social network perspective presents an opportunity for cross-disciplinary exchange between public diplomacy and public relations. Public relations could also benefit public diplomacy, in particular new public diplomacy, in how it is a collaborative enterprise that values two-way symmetry, dialogic communication and collaboration, which are useful principles in an environment where non-state actors also increasingly playing a diplomatic role. In the network society, relations become the key component for interaction and are an important asset for creating, maintaining and cultivating network structures.

However, with the Western-dominated ontology within IR being one of substantalism and not relationalism, this suggests a renewed need for both relational theories of IR as well as understandings of diplomacy that view international relations from a relational perspective. Seeing the social world as made up of interactions and exchanges that create agents, objects and structures allows for a rethinking of the potential for diplomats as relational actors. PPR is linked to the relational approach to IR, outlined by such authors as Qin (2016), Adler-Nissen (2015) and Sending et al (2015), in its emphasis on relationship management and can in this way contribute to a relational future for international relations. If diplomacy is fundamentally about relations, and if it in fact constitutes world politics, then PPR can then provide tools for diplomatic practice going forward and help develop a truly diplomatic facet, the management of relations.

Furthermore, digital PPR has been likened to digital diplomacy in how they both require and seize effective online communication mediums to reach publics in the digital era. This paper has argued that digital PPR could assist in the ongoing mediatization of MFAs in that it attempts 'to truly connect with citizens' by utilising the digital channels that are available. This presents another research opportunity in studying the extent to which digital PPR exists within foreign affairs ministeries given that several now possess digital diplomacy units witin their communications directorates. More generally, mapping such connections between PPR and public diplomacy shows how, in its association with the public diplomacy literature, PPR is by extension linked to the debate on citizen participation in foreign policy. This paper has drawn a number of parallels between PPR and new public diplomacy (as well as synergies and opportunities), highlighting the concepts and practices from which they as fields can both benefit, in so doing demonstrating how PPR can contribute to the debate on CP in foreign policy.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1 (interview questions) - The West Wing

Questions for The West Wing

- Can you say something about what The West Wing does as an organisation?

- One of the four themes/policy questions you are currently working on is Track MOS/DEU. What does this project entail?

- The term 'Public Diplomacy' has often been used in connection with this theme/policy question. In your own words, what does Public Diplomacy mean?

- Regarding a specific quote on your 'About' page: "As a youth think tank, we advise the ministry on various areas of foreign policy."

In which areas exactly does The West Wing provide foreign policy advice?

- Another opening sentence on one of the website sections reads:

“In recent years, society has acquired a stronger role in opinion-forming and decision-making with regard to foreign policy, with the use of social media in particular having a major impact on the scope of expressed opinions.”

Can you given an example of how social media has impacted this or are you able to elaborate on the point further?

- To what extent would you say that The West Wing represents the ideas and opinions of young Dutch people and the student population?

- How, if at all, does the West Wing engage with foreign and domestic publics?

- How do you think both BZ and The West Wing can communicate effectively with domestic as well as foreign audiences?

Appendix 2 (interview questions) – SDG Nederland

- Can you talk a little bit about what is happening in the Netherlands with the SDGs?

Is there something that you think is special about the Netherlands?

- How can you participate in the SDGs as an individual in the Netherlands?

- What kind of reactions have you had from the general public? Are they inspired to make a change in their own lives according to the principles of the SDGs?

- How important do you think the general public is in the shaping and implementation of SDG alliances?

- Can you give an example where the work of SDG Netherlands has a direct or indirect influence on Dutch foreign policy?

- How is BZ showing the foreign ministry it is an opportunity for them?

Do you think BZ sees the SDGs as an opportunity? Can you talk more about that?

- Are there goals that are not so important in the Netherlands, but which Dutch citizens and SDG Netherlands are working on?

- How useful is the MyWorld survey and online communication generally for engaging people with the SDGs?

Appendix 3 (interview questions) – Youth and Education Ambassador

What are the guiding principles of the Youth at Heart project?

What connects an initiative such as Youth at Heart with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

What do you think are the benefits of a dialogue between BZ and citizens, and in particular between BZ and young people? What role does education play in this?

Why is citizen dialogue in general important for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

Is Youth at Heart or BZ generally involved in focus groups with citizens? What do they consist of?

VAAs are often used for Dutch elections. Does BZ have specific experience with this tool?

How can an initiative like Youth at Heart educate young people about global issues or things that happen outside their borders, for example? Is this relevant to the initiative?

Are there any principles of Youth at Heart that can be applied to the Dutch context?

Appendix 4 (interview questions) – Strategic Advisory Unit

What role does ESA play in shaping and informing Dutch foreign policy? What are you able to say about this?

Can you discuss briefly citizen dialogues in relation to EU policy? What experience does ESA or BZ have with this?

The European Commission has 'question and answer sessions' in connection with Citizens' Dialogues on EU policies – how do you think this is a useful way to reach out to citizens?

What do you think is the difference between long-term sustainable policy advice and non-long-term sustainable policy advice?

How can citizen dialogue on policy forming have a positive impact? Do you have a specific example of where it can have a positive impact?

In what way do you think citizens could be more involved in foreign policy?

Appendix 5 (interview 1: The West Wing) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• BZ desire to improve knowledge base • BZ upholds its formal decision-making authority • Includes expertise and those directly affected by policy decisions (the youth) • Potential for youth and BZ to be 'allies' • Young people think naturally about global issues (e.g. climate change) with which BZ as an entity is concerned	Epistemic understanding of CP
• Limited contact between ministries • Scarce working collaboration • Potential to work together more in the future • Some incongruence between parliamentary decision making and what BZ does in practice	Limited interdepartmental synergy
• WW Policy advice and ideas not formally implemented • Lack of strengthening of decision and opinion forming by BZ • Recruitment of the youth with specialist backgrounds	Symbolic involvement of civil society

Appendix 6 (interview 2: BZ Strategic Advisory Unit) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• Domestic policy solutions often found in the international domain • Solutions not realised or resolved through domestic sphere • Multiple governmental departments working on global issues affecting the domestic context • Intertwining of policy areas not always visible to citizens	Intertwining of Dutch foreign policy with other policy forms
• Dutch involvement in 'Conference on the Future of Europe' • Includes citizen panels on EU issues and national consultation • Involvement in multiple EU wide citizen dialogue projects, e.g. 'Citizens for Europe' • SDP party assesses opinion polling around citizen perception of EU • Recent Dutch initiative taken with the purpose of attaining 'maximum citizenship dialogue' as part of wider EU project	Dutch involvement in EU citizen dialogue initiatives
• A need to automate policy issues by levels, e.g. state, province, council, EU • A lot of legislation that impacts the Netherlands made and regulated in Brussels • Intertwining of the domestic, the national and the EU difficult to address without categorisation	A need to automate categorisation of policy levels

Appendix 7 (interview 3: SDG Nederland) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• Citizens contribute to global movement through SDG Nederland • Consists of grassroots and bottom-up initiatives • Difficult to reach those who are not intrinsically motivated to be involved	Reaching citizens through civil society as an opportunity for BZ
• Citizen dialogue arises from engagement with SDGs • Engagement with SDGs occurs first in civil society and then in policy circles	Civil society as creating dialogue for policy
• SDG Nederland engages multinationals, civil society, councils and local government • MP involvement in SDG Nederland • SDG aligns with BZ objectives and SDG reports are published on government website	Civil society connected to government and MFA

Appendix 8 (interview 4: Youth and Education Ambassador) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• Youth and education initiative (Youth at Heart) • Partners with young people in parts of Middle East and Africa • Features 'on the pulse' conversations • Example of two-way communication model (new public diplomacy) • Involves exchanges between the domestic and the foreign youth	Engagement of key stakeholder (the youth)
• PD as performance for domestic consumption • Symbolic function ascribed to CP • Engaging youth helps to legitimise work of BZ • Emphasis on foreign publics	Elitist understanding of CP
• BZ has several partners, e.g. West Wing, Jongerenvertegenwoordigers, One Young World • BZ as a support base and platform for the youth • Other ministries, universities, NGOs, and the EU also do foreign affairs	BZ involvement in civil society/stakeholder network

Appendix 9 (interview 5: VVD Member of Parliament) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• International security affects the citizen through impact on trade • Unsuccessful trade agreements have implications for Dutch employment • Joe Biden's 'Foreign policy for the middle class' quoted as a comparable theme • Nothing is done abroad unless it makes sense domestically	Convergence of economic policy with foreign policy
• CDA is concerned with what Christians in the world experience • VVD is concerned with global issues related to its manifesto • Emphasises the need to understand what people experience in their daily lives • And how Dutch foreign policy can contribute to resolving public concerns	Foreign policy as a support base for citizens
• Foreign policy involves issues that usually lie far from the reality of the regular Dutch person • BZ not in conversation with general citizens in cities across the Netherlands • Distinction made between consulting stakeholders and consulting citizens	Elitist understanding of CP

Appendix 10 (interview 6: D66 Member of Parliament) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• Focus given to domestic issues when consulting citizens whilst discarding the international • Coupling of foreign policy and security part of most political parties' strategies • What a Dutch citizen can do or influence is then restricted • Limited amount in the foreign context that citizens are responsible for • Parties know they must translate and communicate policies around foreign issues but these don't always "sell well"	Elitist understanding of CP
• Parliament involvement when Dutch citizens without a visa consult the embassy • Afghanistan evacuation crisis • Parliament assisted in consultation with BZ due to overwhelming crisis situation	Consular affairs as citizen consultation
• As a party member you can easily engage with an MP about an EU-related topic • Citizens able to gather information directly from the Second Chamber or European fraction • A question that is EU-related can be quickly escalated to an MP	EU as policy area through which consultation occurs

Appendix 11 (interview 7: PvdA Member of Parliament) – Codes and themes

Codes	Theme
• Events abroad have an impact on Dutch society, e.g. unrest in Gaza, events in Turkey, MH17 disaster, migration flows • Domestic significance of 2017/2018 demonstrations in Morocco led to parliamentary influence on BZ • President Biden's "Our foreign policy is our domestic policy" a comparable theme	Intertwining of Dutch foreign policy with domestic policy
• Ongoing dialogue with Dutch people about the EU • Possibility for citizen dialogue through parliament • BZ is engaged with regard to Europe and in support of think tanks such as Clingendael • BZ covers themes of 'society influence' in the Netherlands	Potential for citizen dialogue through various sources
• As a European MP or European Commission official there can be much contact with BZ but as a Dutch MP less so • Limited working collaboration between BZ and parliament	Differing roles for BZ and parliament