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Citation

Qyli, J. (2024). *Digital Diplomacy. How does social media impact the Embassy-Public interaction?*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3728663>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Digital Diplomacy. How does social media impact the Embassy-Public interaction?

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05/01/2024

Abstract

Social media has become an integral component of public agencies and digital diplomacy. Prior scholars have emphasised the significance of social media in International relations (IR), discussing its advantages and difficulties. Nevertheless, in terms of public administration, there is a gap in their management, namely, in understanding how to use different platforms and the significance of social media content in engaging with the public. This research delves into the field of digital Diplomacy, examining the strategic use of social media content by the European Union's diplomatic missions based in Athens, focusing on engagement with the public. The mixed-method study examined how diplomatic missions use social media content to engage with the public by analyzing original posts on Twitter/X and Facebook and conducting semi-structured interviews with experts and diplomats from EU Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) and embassies. The findings revealed that the EU embassies tend to employ posts that promote the countries' image and interests' indicators of Symbolic representation. In addition, they demonstrate a preference for Transparency by regularly sharing content that aligns with the policies, daily agenda and activity of the MFAs or embassies. The analysis using the Engagement Index (EI) results is noteworthy as it signifies an enhanced public connection with Coproduction content. Finally, the study reveals the strategic use of the platforms and the content for effective public engagement. Future researchers can delve into new directions by exploring other platforms or focusing on public reaction via sentimental analysis. In summary, this research emphasizes the importance of social media in diplomatic missions' external communication and advances the field by implementing the framework in digital diplomacy, particularly in the EU.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Social Media, International Relations, Public Administration, Public Engagement

Acknowledgements

This Thesis is an academic and personal achievement that I am proud of. Yet, this endeavor would not have been possible without the support received during this period.

My family's, and especially my parents', unfailing love and support have been my rock throughout life, and I am eternally grateful to them.

Along this challenging academic path, I have been fortunate to have caring friends and colleagues who have been there for me every step of the way.

Last but not least, my supervisor has been an incredible motivation throughout my research. I am beyond grateful for his invaluable guidance, and constant encouragement to push me beyond my limits during my research.

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List of Abbreviations

API	Application Programming Interface
COVID-19	Coronavirus, COVID
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
EI	Engagement Index
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MMD	Mixed Method Design
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
IR	International Relations
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

Digital social media are becoming an integral aspect of people's lives. The rapid pace of digitalization has influenced social lives and political and economic domains (Manor, 2019, p. 38). IR and Diplomacy could not be untouched by this wave of technological advancement as social media influences diplomatic practices (Manor, 2019). The digital era is also causing significant changes in influencing policy and reshaping the diplomatic scene (Kenna, 2011). The digitization of mass communication, with various platforms and tools, has reshaped the essence of Diplomacy and the public sector, especially when talking about platforms such as Twitter/X and Facebook changing the way people, particularly young individuals around the globe, communicate and interact (Chopra, 2014).

This instant communication benefits digital Diplomacy as it overcomes the “*limitations of traditional Diplomacy*” (Manor, 2019, p.30). With instant communication, transparency, and engagement with the public, social media have democratized Diplomacy, bringing ordinary people into the political world (De Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Sönmez, 2022). According to Meijer and Torenvlied (2016), integrating social media into bureaucratic structures can enhance efficiency, interactivity, and transparency. Showing the importance and interest in studying the external communication of the embassies after the adoption of social media brings us to the core of this research. The digital era demands new means of communication, including chatbots, AI tools, and social media. Studying how embassies and ambassadors worldwide use the tools powered by the Internet, especially the use of social media in communication with other diplomatic agencies and citizens through meaningful content, is highly intriguing (Choi & Kim, 2016). Hence, the study delves into the managerial side of social media as an integral part of public agencies' communication. The study, building on public administration's frameworks, tries to explain the significance of social media in diplomatic missions.

From an administrative perspective, diplomatic missions have historically been the main actors in Diplomacy in fostering cooperation, orchestrating dialogues, and representing nations in foreign countries (Cull, 2008). Diplomatic missions are characterized as “*diplomatic representatives duly nominated by one state and accepted by another, together with the staff and established in the diplomatic capital of the state*” (Feltham, 2004, p. 13). As public government becomes increasingly digitalized, governments prioritize areas of Diplomacy, including their digital presence on social media platforms (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). This progression occurs as governments utilize the Internet to enhance citizens and government engagement, known as “e-governance” (World Bank, 2018). According to Gil-Garcia (2012), the concept can be described as the commitment to enhance the delivery of public services more effectively and efficiently while also aiming to strengthen the interactions between residents and their respective governments. Consequently, the government is making greater efforts to maintain communication with the public, solicit feedback, and establish credibility with communities (Deloitte, 2022).

Although the emergence of new technologies and social media are changing governmental agencies, their engagement with the public has been focusing more on other agencies, such as local authorities, lagging behind diplomatic missions in terms of academic

interest. The rationale for this argument is the restricted geographical academic interest in social media studies for diplomatic missions in the U.S.A. or China (Zhong & Lu, 2013) and the attention to social media use by local authorities (Graham, 2014; Criado & Villodre, 2020; Mergel, 2013). The significance of examining these specific political agencies stems from their involvement in both local and worldwide communities, as well as their adaptation to evolving technologies. This evolution made embassies and consulates gradually debunk the mythos of being impenetrable fortresses of secretive bureaucratic functioning. We can refer to a way of de-institutionalized Diplomacy in which “*diplomatic practice becomes a mode of behaviour rather than a set of institutional structures and processes*” (Hocking & Meissen, 2015, p. 54).

Emerging technologies paved the way for new opportunities. Diplomacy, as a vital tool of foreign affairs, has been transformed with the help of digital media. Nowadays, we speak of the term Digital or E-Diplomacy, as countries worldwide use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to engage with different stakeholders and create positive outcomes (Olubukola, 2017). Using websites, social media platforms, and similar means of communication creates a new way far from the linear, top-down traditional one. This transition to the digital sphere compels a paradigmatic shift in communication strategies of the diplomatic missions, which are in open dialogue with a broad audience, starting from their homologs and the public.

With the increasing importance of communication on social media and the ability to improve government agencies' communication with the public (Wukich et al., 2015) as well as digital Diplomacy as a new concept for understanding the influence of technology on conducting Diplomacy (Manor, 2019, p. 344), this thesis will navigate through the field of external communication via social media. This study will build on previous scholars that explored concepts such as e-government (Gil-Garcia, 2012), digital Diplomacy (Olubukola, 2017; Cull, 2019; Bjola, 2020; Manor, 2019; Hocking & Melissen, 2015) and social media communication from the public administration viewpoint (Mergel, 2012; Mergle, 2013; Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Graham, 2014; DePaula et al., 2017; Criado & Villodre, 2021; Wukich, 2022). However, it seeks to advance the discourse by examining the adoption of social media from the embassies, its practices, and the outcome of public engagement. Studying the transformation of the diplomatic bodies and their engagement with the public enhances the literature on public administration by analyzing the content and communication strategies used to reach the audience. This research also paves the way for further investigation into agencies' involvement in IR.

Notably, this study undertakes an exploratory investigation of digital Diplomacy. Scrutinizing the managerial side of the embassies and the aim for using social media, we come across topics such as transparency of the public sector and engagement with the public. Social media has allowed the public to be part of an open dialogue in a globalized world. The research questions seek to explain the strategic use of social media content presented by the EU embassies based in Athens, a city with a long diplomatic history and easier access for the researcher. Specifically, examining the posts of the EU embassies on Facebook and Twitter, together with in-depth interviews, will explain the significance of the content for achieving each embassy or MFA's scopes and goals. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following question:

“How do diplomatic missions utilize social media content to engage with the public?”

This study will focus on the Diplomatic sector within the context of “Smart governance”, examining how digitalisation and the use of social media contribute to the augmentation of citizen engagement in the public sector. In trying to find an answer to the research question, we will follow the theoretical frameworks of social media in the public sector and the importance of social media in IR. Methodologically, the study will adopt a Mixed Method Design (MMD). The primary intent of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the level of engagement between diplomatic missions and the public via their usage of social media platforms. Thus, the study will employ a two-phase, sequential mixed methods approach to achieve this aim. During the initial stage, the quantitative research will examine the EU embassies’ diverse content disseminated through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This analysis will be conducted utilizing Wukich’s (2022) categorisation framework. The second stage will collect data from semi-structured interviews with the managerial side of the embassies or their Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to explore the insights of their social media presence. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, this two-phased approach will offer a comprehensive understanding of the EU Embassies' social media behaviour and outcomes that bear theoretical and practical implications.

This research endeavour will significantly contribute to the current literature on public administration, digital Diplomacy, and the practical techniques of diplomatic communication, establishing a connection between these areas. Theoretically, this study explains how social media content can enhance external communication of diplomatic missions, building on previous studies of e-governance, social media theories and digital Diplomacy. This study thus advances the discourses on the importance of specific content types and their effect in engaging with the public via social media. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest recommendations that would be advantageous for the public administration of the diplomatic bodies. Specifically, based on the study’s outcome, understanding the strategic utilization of social media content, embassies and consulates can proceed to efficient communication and successful engagement with the public utilizing the content. Furthermore, examining the EU embassies’ content and the insightful interviews can serve as a model for other diplomatic missions to enhance their strategies in digital communication.

Following this section, **Chapter 2** conducts a literature review regarding digital Diplomacy and the use of social media in IR, providing a comprehensive understanding of concepts and frameworks that describe digital Diplomacy, social media engagement used by the public sphere, and relevant ideas. **Chapter 3** offers the study's theoretical framework that the study will follow during the methods section. **Chapter 4** will show the research design and the study’s methods. Specifically, it will outline the research design the study aims to follow and the rationale behind choosing it. In addition to the research design, the methods and the data collection will be presented to ensure a systematic approach is used during the research process. **Chapter 5** will offer the analysis of the findings by thoroughly reviewing the data gathering and its results. The findings and their link to the literature review will be discussed in **Chapter 6**. Finally, in **Chapter 7**, the study will reach conclusions and recommendations for future researchers.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will explore the concept of digital Diplomacy and its application in utilising social media platforms for public engagement. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the existing literature and underscore the importance of comprehending the interplay between public involvement and diplomatic missions, primarily focusing on digital Diplomacy and the use of social media by diplomatic missions. Additionally, the gap in the current literature review and the need for more study on social media content published by diplomatic missions will be emphasised.

2.1. The transition from traditional to digital Diplomacy: The necessity for Smart Governance and main concepts

The historical efficacy of traditional Diplomacy, characterised by in-person engagement, has been well-documented (Martin & Jagla, 2013). However, it is imperative to critically examine the sustainability of this approach in the long term. Public administration alternates through the years, and Diplomacy is part of it, too. Diplomacy is the peaceful means of resolving or settling troubled issues. In a multi-national system with different actors with different interests, diplomatic relations try to coordinate and balance these powers (Garling et al., 2006; Devin et al., 2010). The new methods emerging in the new type of Diplomacy consist of public and multilateral relations for this coordination, contrasting with the old one, where the relations and agreements were bilateral and secret (Devin et al., 2010). The primary difference for Melissen (2005) between traditional and public Diplomacy is the actors engaging. For example, in traditional Diplomacy, the actors of IR are the States, while in public Diplomacy, actors can be non-official groups such as organizations and individuals. Nowadays, with the emergence of new technologies, digital Diplomacy come to the surface as it is part of the general tendency of the government towards digitalization.

As Hocking and Melissen (2015, p. 6) state, *“Digital Diplomacy builds on trends predating web 2.0 based forms of communication and the rise of social media models of Diplomacy coalescing around different policy agendas involve distinct digital communication requirements.”* The transition behind from traditional to digital Diplomacy can be linked with the paradigm shift of “Smart governance” within public administration theories. Particularly, smart governance has received much attention in the recent two decades, with information and communication technologies (ICTs) being crucial tools for fostering citizen well-being and sustainable economic growth (Nastjuk et al., 2022). The integration of ICT contributes to the digitalization of governance by focusing on e-participation and open governance (Karakiza, 2015). Particularly, Jiang (2021) explains the “smartness” of the concept as the involvement of ICT and Big data as a response to critical issues, such as energy, e-government, health safety, and social inequality.

Some researchers raise questions about using new technologies under the threat of a highly corporate-led way of governing (Hollands, 2015). The importance of implementing community-based smart governance is highlighted by others, such as Gil-Garcia et al. (2016),

who describe the innovative tools of smart governance in the internal organisation. It seems that the external relationship with different stakeholders and networks based on an ICT service emphasises through different dimensions of smartness in governance that the model is not one way but can be found in every step towards “*sustainability, openly transparent, resilient, integrates, the creative and participative government*” (Gil-Garcia et al., 2016, p. 532). The participation part of smart government can be linked to adopting new communication channels, like apps and social media, which can enhance citizen participation and crisis communication management (Kumar et al., 2016)

Finally, the digital revolution has significantly transformed various public institutions, including Diplomacy. According to Melissen and Hocking (2015, p.53), it can be argued that digitalization and Diplomacy have become permanent fixtures in contemporary society. Hence, understanding the offline world is the foundation for digitalization, and governments must lead the change and overcome any obstacles to succeed in the complex field of digital Diplomacy (Melissen & Hocking, 2015, p. 58).

2.1.1. Digital Diplomacy

The process of transforming Diplomacy, which refers to the growing adoption of digital technology by diplomats and their respective institutions, has made significant progress in recent years (Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei, 2021). Diplomacy is a tool for promoting national interests; for this reason, whatever serves this scope looks like an appropriate way of using it. In 2012, the United States Department of State pioneered diplomatic practices by using novel communication tactics. This transformative shift in approach was seen by several governmental bodies and agencies, including the Department of Defense (Martin & Jagla, 2013). Other countries, international organizations, and entities, including the European Union (EU), have pursued this approach. The phrase “digital Diplomacy” emerged because of the implementation of innovative strategies within the diplomatic sector.

The topic of discussion is the several terms used to refer to the practice of Diplomacy in the digital realm, such as “Digital Diplomacy,” “E-Diplomacy,” and “Cyber One.” (Markovski, 2022). In the study conducted by Markovski (2022), it was observed that incorporating numerous prefixes is employed to signify the complex and intricate characteristics of the term being examined. Within the field of public Diplomacy, diplomats are aware of how essential it is to place themselves where their target audience is likely to be found (DiploFoundation, 2016; 2022¹). This quotation demonstrates that Diplomacy is a governmental domain that adapts to the demands of the contemporary era. Social media has emerged as a prominent platform in contemporary society, serving as a prevalent environment for the present-day audience (Manor, 2019, p. 327). The user base of social media platforms has surpassed four billion individuals, a figure that is projected to experience further growth in the future (Statista, 2023). Consequently, it seems that the shift between traditional Diplomacy and what Hocking and Melissen (2015) referred to as the “Changing DNA of Diplomacy” is somehow justified.

¹ <https://www.Diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-Diplomacy/>

Based on Hocking and Melissen's (2015) report, increasing digitalisation has made the public sector and organizations adopt methods that comply with the new era. This step transforms Diplomacy from a closed system to a public one. Martin and Jagla (2013) argue that policymakers and diplomats seek new opportunities through social media for a tight engagement with the public; hence, we have a transformation from traditional Diplomacy and the management of international negotiations to public Diplomacy, which tries to be more open and engage and inform the foreign publics with the instant and worldwide communication that social media offer (Manor & Huang, 2022, p. 174). Based on the new DNA of digital Diplomacy, diplomatic missions are shifting the bureaucratic structure to a more public-centric approach (Manor, 2019). It is crucial to recognize that the transition from Public Management to New Public Services and Smart Governance has resulted in a shift in focus towards citizens as clients and their significance in administrative services. According to Page (2005), the paradigm shift discussed can be attributed to human service reform. This reform seeks to enhance administrative effectiveness by prioritizing customer service, implementing decentralization market mechanisms, fostering cross-functional collaboration, and promoting accountability as desired outcomes.

While digital Diplomacy is widely used to communicate between governments, organisations, and NGOs, its potential to be utilised as a tool to engage with citizens remains lower (Gil-Garcia, 2012). This consists of the general efforts of the local, national, or regional governments worldwide to adopt technologies and increase the importance of ICT in modern bureaucratic systems (Gil-Garcia, 2012). An illustration of this growing interest in digital Diplomacy can also be detected in the EU's interests. Through the "Digital Decade" policy program, the EU aims to enhance the digitalization of government, infrastructure, and skills (Europe's Digital Decade: Digital Targets for 2030, n.d.). The motto for the new era is "*Europe aims to empower businesses and people in a human-centred, sustainable, and more prosperous digital future*" (European Commission). The EU declaration on Digital Rights and principles mainly indicates a shift to a people-centric approach, citizen participation, solidarity and inclusion, sustainability, freedom of choice, and safety and security in the digital environment (Europe's Digital Decade: Digital Targets for 2030, n.d.). Digital Diplomacy is a central issue for the EU, as digitalisation is a crucial component. The Council Conclusions on EU Digital Diplomacy 11406/22 (2022) encapsulate critical insights into how embassies leverage social media for public engagement. The Conclusions focus on enhancing multilateral relations, such as exchanging information along homologs, particularly the UN, OSCE, and other regional fora. Information exchange can be more innovative and include stakeholders from other sectors, such as business, academia, and civil society.

In summary, Digital Diplomacy, as part of the technological advances, is affected by the broader digitalization environment (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). Present-day social media networks facilitate the equality of voices and configurations of actors, irrespective of their ideological or power-political connections (Lemke & Habegger, 2020, p. 240). This phenomenon underlines the potential for the audience's participation as a reality through social media platforms as a tool for broader engagement of stakeholders. This objective aligns with the "*open, free, global stable and secure Internet*" (General Secretariat of the Council [11406/22], 2022 p. 3). The subsequent section will discuss the significance of social media in

fostering a more extensive interaction with the public as a tool of emerging technologies and the digitalization of Diplomacy.

2.1.2. Social media use by diplomatic missions

In the era of digitalization and increasing ICT, social media are a game-changer. Social media communication has been a topic of interest in the public sector. Given a short definition, social media consists of online tools that facilitate social interaction and user-generated content (Hansen et al., 2011; Zahoor, 2017). Similarly, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) refer to them as *“a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”*. As used by governmental agencies, social media can be seen as a tool for promoting transparency and inclusion, as highlighted by Shira Dvir-Gvirsman et al. (2022) and Criado et al. (2013). Citizen engagement and the power of social media as part of diplomatic work are pointed out in the study by Martin and Jala (2013). Finally, social media can foster participation in the public sector by promoting transparency and efficiency, with the work of Criado et al. (2013) characterising social media as part of government innovation.

In this environment, MFAs are implementing strategies regarding tools, such as social media and ICT trends, to improve and continue online diplomatic activities, online consular Diplomacy, and international negotiations; they generally enhance the digitalization of the diplomatic processes and structures (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). Technologies and social media brought the citizen to the centre of the discussion. For instance, social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter allow public Diplomacy to interact with various stakeholders (Strauß et al., 2015). Diplomats were eager to leverage the power of social media to engage with the public through multiple channels, even avoiding face-to-face interactions (Martin & Jagla, 2013). This shift has given rise to a new generation of diplomats who operate within a more open diplomatic framework (Martin & Jagla, 2013). Networking is crucial for embassies to contact various stakeholders. However, it mostly stays within inner circles, such as friends and family of ambassadors or people who are already aware of the embassy’s social media pages (Strauß et al., 2015).

Focusing more on social media engagement raises the question, “Who needs digital Diplomacy, and who is behind it?” This question is getting tricky when considering the open area of Diplomacy with the rise of internet interaction. To answer this question, Bjola et al. (2019) provide two different future trends of digital Diplomacy. Firstly, the learning to evaluate the diplomatic staff as their actions and work, not those they represent. Secondly, multilateralism is augmented, creating solid digital diplomatic relations and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors (Bjola et al., 2019). It is also important to clarify that the digitalization of Diplomacy relates to the rise of social media and terms like e-participation and e-governance (Melissen & Hocking, 2015). It is essential for this study that the alternation in the communication channels transformed traditional Diplomacy from distant and unapproachable to more approachable and inclusive, making IR part of the public’s life. The digital revolution creates new possibilities and ways of social participation and public opinion growth, with the ability to engage all members of our society (German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2020).

Given these findings, it is unsurprising that diplomats are fostering communication strategies by leveraging social media to engage the public (Manor, 2019). The complexity of diplomatic relations can be improved when the specific entities involved are not clearly explained. Social media presence of Diplomacy can be either by the public structures of the embassies or consulates based in a host country or the presence of the actual diplomats on social media platforms. The techniques employed by diplomats when engaging with their peers on Twitter were examined by scholars who focused on the application of agenda-setting theory and its potential impact on the diplomatic capacity to actively participate in online debates (Manor & Segev, 2020). The use of Twitter as a novel manifestation of public Diplomacy, commonly referred to as “twitplomacy,” has surfaced (Su & Xu, 2015). Engagement in Diplomacy pertains to the participation of various entities, including governmental bodies, states, NGOs, and people, in exchanging communication on online platforms (Su & Xu, 2015). Simultaneously, prior studies have examined several aspects of Diplomacy, including the role of diplomats as persons who require time to adapt business practices and utilize the Internet within frameworks such as “Disintermediation” (Henrikson, 2006).

Previous research has indicated the importance of examining various platforms due to their distinct capabilities (Chen, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010) and informational content (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Strauß et al. (2015) propose that future academics investigate the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, in the context of Diplomacy in various countries or areas. Digital Diplomacy is a multifaceted concept encompassing more than just an informing platform; it necessitates active interaction (Strauß N et al., 2015). Furthermore, a dearth of scholarly investigations on the organisational structure of external government communications exists. For instance, integrating a hybrid communication approach is necessary, as evidenced by the public sector’s emulation of the private sector’s digitalization efforts in policy implementation. This phenomenon highlights the potential of social media in establishing a hybrid framework for government communications (Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016). Considering the social media platforms, Zoizner et al. (2022) use Facebook showing that in an emergency, people tend to receive and search for more information from traditional (television, media) or the Internet, primarily social media. In other words, many citizens consume more information through the Internet after the pandemic. Thus, it is interesting to see that for less economic and political countries, the pandemic boosted their communicational abilities because, according to some researchers, “Facebook Diplomacy” is characterized as part of the strategic communication of “poorer” countries (Spry, 2018).

One more interesting argument comes as part of Diplomacy as soft power, using tools such as social media from the public sector to gain some benefits from partners in the international environment. For instance, public Diplomacy and the use of social media for the candidate countries back then, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, and Croatia, was a tool of soft power to engage the public in exchange for integration into the EU. Nowadays, we can claim that this argument is still valuable, as Western Balkan countries are increasing digital Diplomacy while facing issues of transparency and openness (Velebit & Velebit, 2017). Countries such as Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Turkey actively use social media as part of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, launched by the European Commission in 2018 (European Commission, 2018).

Despite the considerable body of literature focusing on the digitalization of public Diplomacy, there is a limited analysis of academic literature on the relation of social media content in the context of diplomatic missions. As Spry (2018) argues, the recognition of the impact of digitalization on public Diplomacy is widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, a limited amount of scholarly attention has been devoted to examining both the content and users of social media platforms. Specifically, the literature on digital Diplomacy indicates an approach based on political and international fields, which lack the managerial aspect and provide a gap in the explanation of the effective social media use by diplomatic missions.

Researchers are studying governmental engagement and interaction with citizens on a plethora of platforms, such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook (Abdelsalam et al., 2013). Their findings showed that social media websites had a mainly informative profile with limited two-way interaction with citizens. Other researchers, such as S. Russo et al. (2022), showed how social media increased the participation of citizens in the public sector after Covid-19, while the content used by local authorities such as municipalities, police or crisis emergencies has been framed with success. Nonetheless, the sector of external diplomatic relations and the need for efficient communication is geographically and academically limited; they focus mainly on the US and its strategies for engaging in political and social matters, such as the papers of Zhong and Lu (2013) and I. Mergel (2015).

Specifically, as mentioned above, Zhang (2013) examines the diplomatic corps of the U.S. and China's social media and raises the potential of social media as a strategic tool which can be used to strengthen trends, formulate agendas, and address conflicts. Zhong and Lu (2013) also showed that the U.S. Embassy's use of Chinese blogging and microblogging platforms emphasizes common values, interests, experience-sharing, and relationship-building in public diplomatic communication. Others, such as Spry (2018), showed interest in the social media content and the active engagement of the audience, although the author examined the content in a four-part taxonomy of diplomatic discourse: outward-facing publicity, inward-facing publicity, engagement, and user-generated content, meaning that combines the social media and diplomatic structures, without referring to embassies as part of the public administration of a nation.

The above studies, although valuable, do not explain the content and strategy behind social media use in the context of diplomatic missions. Following the statement of Mergel (2013), due to the limited approaches, it is necessary to use more comprehensive measurement techniques for social media activities in governmental agencies. Analyzing the content can benefit the agencies' external communication and meet citizens' expectations for responsiveness and real-time information sharing. Notably, the interest is higher for agencies that are part of the local and international community. An overview of the EU embassies and their digital presence on social media platforms can broaden our understanding of public agencies.

This study focuses on innovative perspectives on diplomatic missions as part of the bureaucratic bodies of each country. Embassies and consulates are part of the national administration and will be examined with frameworks that can be applied to them. The reasons for examining this subject are the growing importance of public Diplomacy and its transformation through the years, with its interesting and complex structure. The different adoption protocols depend on their unique needs. The benefits and challenges that arise from

social media use, and finally, the focus on their engagement methods through their external communication with the public. To answer the research question on what effect social media has on the communication between embassies and citizens, we will need to see how the embassies interact through social media. Notably, we need to examine the content that they use in their posts and the audience they are referring to. Also, it is vital to determine the type of engagement they are trying to keep with the citizens and the public in general. The following sub-chapter will explain why the study needs to focus on the content analysis of social media via the embassies by focusing on the adoption of social media, presenting the benefits and the challenges, as well as the engagement strategies that diplomatic missions utilize with the public.

3. Theoretical framework

Various scholars have directed their attention to social media from distinct viewpoints. This section will present the theoretical framework that the study follows, based on an extensive review of the current literature, to conduct thorough research. Specifically, the attention will be on social media adoption, including the benefits and the challenges, as well as the engagement strategies based on the social media content. Also, this section it is important as will explain the categorization process that the original posts from the embassies are going to be classified with by presenting the content categorization framework of Wukich (2022).

3.1. Social media adoption: Benefits and challenges

Several authors study the adoption of social media by the public sector. For Mergel and Bretschneider, *“Social media applications are slowly diffusing across all levels of government”* (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013, p. 390). The researchers provide a three-stage adoption, which includes Intrepreneurship and Experimentation, Constructive Chaos, and Institutionalization. The decentralisation and informal use of individuals within governmental organizations characterize the first stage. Social media are seen as *“non-work-related activities”*. The second stage results from the *“activities of multiple intrapreneurs”* (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013, pp. 391-392). In this stage, informal norms and best practices emerge across the organizations. Finally, the third stage includes clear guidance and policy on social media use, making their use formal. What is interesting is that the outcomes of the study show that social media adoption is institutionalized as a top-down decision; however, it is a bottom-up adoption process highly driven by the *“experiments and the willingness of intrapreneurs to take the risks associated with the use of social media”* (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013, p. 397). Other social media adoption theories characterize social media platforms as an *“easy-to-use”* application that can involve more citizens in government initiatives and sectors while suggesting that social media presents challenges and opportunities for the public sector (Ayanso & Moyers. 2015).

As was presented, the literature on social media studies various social media adoption (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013) and the public sector’s behaviour on social media usage. Regarding the adoption of social media by the embassies as the primary tool of foreign affairs, is an outcome of a bottom-up procedure, meaning that they need to adapt to the new era and engage more in their external communication brought social media as the appropriate tool for covering this issue (Hocking & Melissen, 2015). However, it is interesting to investigate how the MFAs institutionalize social media by understanding the way these agencies employ social media platforms. This includes examining the advantages and apprehensions associated with the public sector, explicitly emphasizing diplomatic missions.

Social media adoption can **benefit** many stakeholders (Sharif, 2015). The utilisation of social media in the public sector has demonstrated various benefits, such as enhanced communication, increased citizen involvement, greater openness, and the exchange of exemplary methods among government entities (Picazo-Vela, 2011; Picazo-Vela, 2012). Picazo-Vela (2011; 2012) also refers to the benefits of communication based on a good implementation strategy to avoid risks. Similarly, Khan et al. (2014) talk about the enhanced

transparency of the public sector and the accessibility of the public via social media. The communication between the government and the public changes, bringing a new form of open government model with open participation based on the principles of “*increase openness, participation, transparency and collaboration in the public sector.*” (Karakiza, 2015, p. 386). Finally, social media can be the platform for active engagement of the public and monitoring of the services, leading to continuous improvement (Ayanso & Moyers, 2020), or an information-sharing tool that provides new channels for citizens’ communication (Mergel, 2013).

Moreover, as a tool of digital Diplomacy, social media can play a vital role in connecting with the public because, as the literature reveals, the public can be involved in governmental matters. Specifically, Hocking and Melissen (2015) assert the significance of the diaspora as a contributing component in advancing digital Diplomacy. The author provides examples of MFAs that try to extend the boundaries using digital interaction to foster relations with the diaspora. Therefore, it can be argued that Digital tools have made it possible for diasporas to stay involved in their home countries' political, cultural, and economic lives (Bjola et al., 2021).

Incorporating social media in the public sector also presents **challenges**, such as concerns over privacy, security, and the necessity for cultural and organizational transformations to data management, accessibility, social inclusion, governance, and other information policy issues (Picazo-Vela, 2011; Picazo-Vela, 2012; Bertot, 2012; Ayanso, 2020). Notably, Ayanso (2020) states that social media can help governments engage with the public and monitor existing services for continuous improvements. Mergel (2012) discusses the challenges of adopting sophisticated social media tactics and shows the impact of social media interactions. Sharif (2015) identifies technological, organizational, and environmental factors that can impact social media adoption decisions in local government organizations. Nye (2019) presents an alternative challenge centered on digital Diplomacy. Meanwhile, social media are creating new challenges; their “free” service makes the citizens the product, as the information is mostly leading. In the Diplomacy field, reputation is essential for world politics, and with the use of social media, the importance of the term is being highlighted more. The power of “tweets” can now set the global agenda if it is highly credible, which is the power of reputation (Nye, 2019). Propaganda and disinformation are another challenge (Bjola et al., 2019). For example, Cull also raises concerns about issues arising from digitalized Diplomacy, such as, for instance, “*fake news, disinformation, paid trolls and bots*” (Cull, 2019, p.23). Hence, ignoring digital significance can bring several counter-effects, as in the digital environment, “*you need to define yourself or be defined*” (Bjola et al., 2019, p.87).

Consequently, it is essential to reflect those diplomatic missions, except actors in IR, are bureaucratic bodies crucial for citizens living outside their country of origin, especially now with the growth of the diaspora. Overall, this study suggest that social media can be a valuable tool for the public sector, but its use requires careful consideration of its challenges and opportunities. Following this, it is crucial to discuss engagement strategies, and how they have been conceptualized with social media interaction frameworks (Wukich, 2022; Criado and Villodre, 2021; Mergel, 2013).

3.2. Social media strategies: Content and interactions

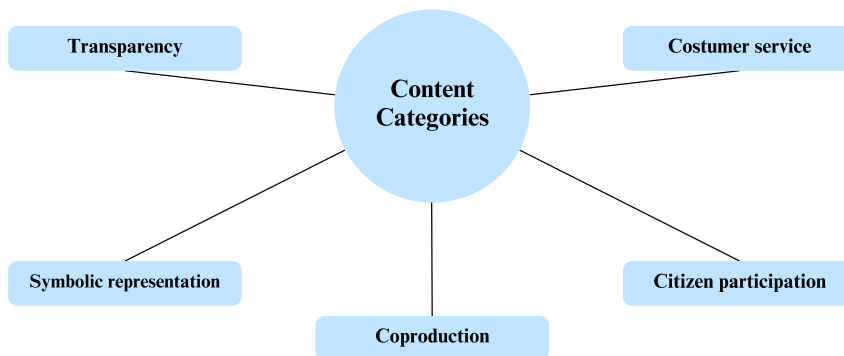
The way the government uses social media varies. It is noticed that most of the researchers based their work on the analysis of the local government (Graham, 2014), while public sectors like the diplomatic missions are studied mainly as case studies of specific countries like the U.S. (DePaula et al., 2018; Mergel, 2013) or China (Zhang, 2013). The aim of this section is to provide the theoretical framework that this study is based on. Building on the existing frameworks for social media content categorization and a critique of them, it presents the framework provided by Wukich (2022).

Undoubtedly, the rise of social media in the public sector has prompted numerous scholars to develop frameworks for categorising content. One of the most recent frameworks is the one proposed by Wukich (2022). Wukich (2022) involves the development of a comprehensive framework for categorising social media content. Particularly, the researcher presents a framework that critically evaluates prior academics' work and provides a response to the research topic. Wukich (2022) finds the study of Mergel (2013) not sufficient when it comes to explaining the complexity of the engagement modes and content, as Mergel (2013) builds the theoretical framework of measuring social media's impact on the public sector by developing a one-way push, two-way pull, and networking/Co-designing services framework to measure impact. Another framework on which Wukich (2022) builds his theory is the classification system for official communication and symbolic representation on social media, which aligns with the approach proposed by DePaula et al. (2018). The results of the DePaula et al. (2018) study indicated that a notable fraction of the communications had characteristics of self-presentation and the conveyance of information. However, they make content and structure mutually exclusive, meaning some content categories cannot cause engagement. A similar problem is identified in the framework given by Criado and Villodre (2020), which focuses on social media content and the importance of the strategy behind its use.

In more detail, Wukich (2022) conceptualized social media engagement with the public, utilising researchers such as Chen et al. (2020) and Rorario (2018); others who measured the citizens' engagement, such as Bryer (2013) and Mergel (2013); the symbolic presentation of the government in the social media DePaula et al. (2018); the flow of the interaction in a two-way of a multi-way dynamic, as presented by Mergel (2012; 2013; 2017) and the governments' goals such as transparency through including public to the communication, as seen in (Bertot, 2010; Mergel, 2013). Using the case of Hurricane Florence, the author demonstrates how cities used various content categories across different communication modes during the disaster. The study highlights that the content and the interaction strategies are evolving in the dynamic relationship of government and social media engagement. Specifically, the framework provides a comprehensive approach by integrating communication modes and diverse content goals. This attribute makes the framework readily applicable to authorities beyond those at the local level. For this reason, it can be applicable in the case of diplomatic bureaucracy, such as Embassies, which are in the middle of national and international negotiations. The multiple dimensions of the framework can show the complexity of the communication of these specific governmental agencies. Given this information, this research will use the framework content categories to classify the original social media content of the EU embassies.

Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the content categories as presented by Wukich (2022)

Illustration of Government one-to-many content categorization (Wukich, 2022, p.6)



Source: Wukich (2022)

As we saw, Wukich's (2022) framework on social media engagement forms in government is a structured content framework analyzing how the government spreads information through social media in parallel with the flow between the public and the government. His research raises this outcome after classifying the content based on the communication mode of one-to-many, one-to-one, and many-to-many and the content goals of Transparency, Symbolic presentation, Customer service, Citizen participation and Coproduction. This creates an effective framework for capturing the government's use of social media, where engagement depends on adjusting the content to various stakeholders and situations. However, for the purpose of this study, only the one-to-many flow, as well as the content categories, will be used as expected to show the engagement of the embassies with the public based on the specific content. Particularly, the categories explained by Wukich (2022) in combination with the literature on social media in the diplomatic field as follows:

- ⇒ **Transparency:** Public administrations use social media to provide information about their decisions and policies. Using social media to explain the process and the structure of the reports of their actions and the illustration of their agenda, including the activities of the chief executives and the description of the deliberation for enhancing transparency and legitimacy (DePaula et al., 2018; Criado & Villodre, 2020). For embassies, transparency is a crucial content, as seen in the study by Strauß et al. (2015) and Cull (2019), as they are trying to build "long-lasting relationships" with the public (Nye, 2019, p.13). Hence, the use of posts indicating the day-to-day operations and information about policies is expected.
- ⇒ **Symbolic Representation:** Symbolic presentation, as presented by De Paula et al. (2018), is the selection and sharing of specific content aiming at the favourable

impressions of the agencies they represent. In the context of the embassies, the literature explains that public Diplomacy is the good impression that a state wants to give to another country, a way of symbolic representation that makes the state appealing to the world (Nye, 2019). Thus, it is expected the use of national branding is a term which is popular, while characters like flags, national symbols or cultural references.

- ⇒ **Customer service:** Customer services may overlap in some topics with the symbolic presentation, as the governmental agencies focus on promoting their services. Aiming at service quality and brand awareness, communication through local governments works as a channel for supporting customer services by letting citizens know what they are able to perceive from the agency (Criado & Villodre, 2021; Wukich, 2021).
- ⇒ **Citizen participation:** Citizen participation is crucial for the public sector, making the public sphere more legitimate and knowledgeable (Baum, 2015). This content may involve the participation of the citizen in policy making (Yang & Callahan, 2007), while in the context of digital Diplomacy, it can be seen as an invitation of the embassies for online or in-person activities for the targeted public.
- ⇒ **Coproduction:** The process of Coproduction involves the mutual work of government with citizens to produce and provide public services. The Coproduction can be part of a detailed and lengthy government program for intelligence gathering (Wukich, 2016) or resource provision (Hughes et al., 2014), especially in crisis communication. In the context of the embassies' communication, the content may be referred to emergency events or collaboration with the public.

In summary, several frameworks have been discussed, and many perspectives have been explored. The vital outcome of this literature review is the growing importance of analyzing the external communication of the embassies as part of the public administration and as an outcome of emerging new technologies. Applying Wukich's framework to the existing literature on social media engagement and content by the diplomatic mission will enhance the managerial side of the platforms while giving a new perspective of the public administration prism to matters of IR. The framework will be used as a classification scheme for the original post of the embassies during the first phase of the quantitative research approach, in order to explore the content that embassies use for engagement with the public. Furthermore, based on the literature, the research results are expected to show that embassies, as part of the public administration, will be distinct from other bodies such as the local government. Embassies are expected to focus more on engagement via Symbolic representation and Transparency while they define their institute to the host nation and inform their citizens. With this foundation in place, the following chapter will present the research methods that best fit to answer the research question of how diplomatic missions utilize social media content to engage with the public.

4. Research Design & Methods

This chapter outlines the methodologies used to investigate the study question: “How do diplomatic missions utilize social media content to engage with the public?”. The research design adheres to a mixed method approach, encompassing a two-phase data collection process and analysis: quantitative content analysis and qualitative interview data. Both phases involve the rationale for choosing a specific methodology, gathering data, and choosing cases. The chapter will further present the research subjects and significant concepts that will be included in the analysis. The conclusion of this part will demonstrate the limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

4.1. Research design and rationality

This study focuses on how diplomatic missions use social media content to interact with citizens. The research specifically looks for the managerial aspect of social media engagement with the public through diplomatic missions; as such, the content that they utilize will be important. In order to address the research question of “How do diplomatic missions utilize social media content to engage with the public?”, it is suitable to proceed with a mixed methods design (MMD). Specifically,

“Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.”
(Johnson et al. 2007, p. 123)

The selected approach facilitates comprehension of theoretical expectations by leveraging quantitative and qualitative research strengths. The goal of this design is dual in nature, as it holds both an understanding of the impact of social media on diplomatic missions through numerical data analysis and depth via qualitative data. Based on Toshkov (2016, p. 312), “Mixed designs can be *nested* or not.”; this study follows an un-nested approach. The same cases are analyzed when nested at each stage of the research process. Combining data collection methods can be done simultaneously (concurrently) or sequentially (sequentially). (Toshkov, 2016 p. 312-313). MMD allows for the analysis of various sources and enables a more comprehensive academic inquiry into the complex and multi-dimensional topic of research. This involves collecting content and understanding the managerial aspects of social media behaviour.

The first part is descriptive, as it analyses the content and the way of communication that embassies are engaging in social media. Social media increases in importance in social life; hence, converting social media content as a source of information and key concepts is more than necessary (Lai & To, 2015). Embassies, as the primary bureaucratic body of foreign affairs, use social media as other government agencies or give more attention to different aspects. These embassies as case studies will be analysed using the structure-content

categorization designed by Wukich (2022), previously introduced during the theoretical framework section. The framework of Wukich follows a categorization of the content based on the goal that each post has; particularly, the categories that we are going to focus on are (1) Transparency, (2) Symbolic Representation, (3) Customer Service, (4) Citizen's participation and (5) Coproduction. The indicators for classifying the content are based on the framework of Wukich, modified to fit the bureaucratic body of an embassy; more about the classification is going to be presented in the operationalization part.

In the second phase, the research will proceed with a qualitative approach by utilizing semi-structured interviews. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 222) explain that a study following a two-phase data collection is characterized as “*an explanatory sequential study and aims to strengthen and explain the quantitative data collection with qualitative ones*”. Comparing and cross-referring data from multiple sources enhance the validity of the study and boost the credibility of the findings, as the central idea of triangulation is that “*a researcher can observe an object from two different perspectives will obtain a three-dimensional representation of this object by combining the two complementary two-dimensional images*” (Erzberger & Prein, 1997, p. 146). Proceeding to in-depth interviews is critical for the outcome because the questions derive from the literature review. More about the classification of the qualitative part will be explained in the part on the operationalization of the qualitative data.

4.2. Case Selection

This study examines the Twitter/X and Facebook accounts of the EU's embassies to analyse new findings. Selecting the 27 EU embassies and their MFAs in a specific country allows us to comprehensively understand the responses of different embassies in the same area. Specifically, this choice creates a cohesive group with shared regional and political ties, allowing for a comparison of their social media strategies and engagement. Another reason for exploring the EU embassies applies to the interest many countries have shown in “Twitplomacy” and the EU goal for the digital public sector until 2030 (European Union, 2023). For instance, countries such as France, Germany, and Italy have been early adopters of digital Diplomacy (Digital Diplomacy Index, n.d.), with Malta emerging as the EU torchbearer for public sector digitalization (Digital Public Services in the Digital Economy and Society Index, 2022).

Hence, this study will examine the 27 EU embassies on Twitter and Facebook in Athens, Greece's capital. Greece was chosen as host due to its ancient diplomatic history (Kurbalija, 2021). The study case's background is also attractive due to Greece's long struggle with digitalizing its public sector and its recent progress towards modernization with the “Digital Transformation Project” (OECD, 2022). Moreover, selecting Greece was appropriate for the study due to the researcher's easy access to data. Thus, this study examines all EU embassies in Athens to identify potential communication strategy differences between nations. It seeks to determine if public engagement patterns vary or if most people follow a similar path.

4.3. Phase A: social media content and engagement analysis

The basis of the research is built on a comprehensive approach that integrates three primary data sources: content analysis on two social media platforms, Twitter/X and Facebook and interviews with embassies and MFA's social media communication staff. As has previously, given the multiple data sources, triangulation will be beneficial for enhancing the validation of the research. The first phase of the research follows a quantitative content analysis. As cited by Clark et al. (2021, p. 271), a well-known definition for content analysis is given by Holsti (1969): "*Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.*". The two most important features of content analysis are objectivity and being systematic.

Content analysis on websites, social media platforms, and other virtual documents can be used to create qualitative and quantitative databases during the first phase. According to Clark et al. (2021), online content varies, so different approaches are needed. Social media analysis fits social scientists' more extensive research interests, which involve investigating various issues using Big Data from social networking platforms (Clark et al., 2021). The platforms selected for this study are Twitter/X and Facebook. These platforms are as they facilitate information between agencies (Wukich, 2020) and are used as digital libraries which provide information to the scientific communities (Larouk & Garanovieh, 2021). Also, the platforms are widely used by the citizens. Hence, collecting Facebook and Twitter/X data is appropriate for the study's research question. Specifically, the research sample and data collection period were sequential. The research sample began based on the 27 EU Embassies in Athens and their MFAs, respectively. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Luxembourg are excluded from the research because they are not on Twitter or Facebook; moreover, Greece is the host country, so it is not sampled.

4.3.1. Twitter

Twitter provides a rich setting for investigating social and material behaviours in the digital world and creates public and private data that may be evaluated using a range of tools and methodological approaches (Stewart, 2016). Data collection was possible thanks to `t-hoarder_kit` (Congosto et al., 2017), a Python script that uses the library "tweepy" to access the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). Previously, I manually searched on Twitter to account for the different embassies' accounts (Appendix C). After collecting all the users' names, a query was made to the Twitter API to gather the tweets that will be part of the analysis. The data we collected were from the 1st of January 2023 until the 27th of April 2023. The number of tweets is representative and can show the content and frequency with which each embassy uses Twitter/ X. I analyzed the tweets and tried to catch how embassies follow based on one-to-many communication, which identified as the original posts of the embassies. Parallel to this, the content follows the posts' categorization, as seen by Wukich (2022).

4.3.2. Facebook

Enhancing the data collection, I also considered it essential to collect data from Facebook. Facebook is the platform with the broadest range of users around the world. Facebook has become so popular that even the platform declares that it helps the diplomatic community “*reach, connect and engage the people*”². Analyzing Facebook content gives a more comprehensive approach to understanding the communication strategies of diplomatic missions. The audience on Facebook can interact through sharing, comments, and likes, measurable interactions that will provide us with helpful information about the way of communication with the public. The data from Facebook were collected manually as automatizing the process was not as straightforward as it was with Twitter due to the lack of a public API, and the researcher focused only on the original messages of the Embassies and not the reposts. Similar to the data collection during Twitter, I use the original text of the Embassies’ official pages on Facebook, as they are public. At the same time, the collected comments of citizens are part of the database only as a text, without further private information. The Facebook data collection period is January 1–May 17 and was also classified by the content categorization framework of Wukich 2022.

4.3.3. Operationalization

This research aims to answer how social media content is used in the relationship between embassies and the public. Drawing upon the theoretical framework proposed by Wukich (2022) and considering the research design, the emerging variables necessitate categorization as follows. The present study focuses on the categorization and frequency of information produced by embassies, explicitly examining the independent kind of content. The research aims to analyze the measurements utilized in the classification process and the frequency at which each category is employed. As can be seen during the theoretical framework, the categories are 1. Transparency, 2. Symbolic representation, 3. Customer service, 4. Citizen Participation, 5. Coproduction.

The content categorization is based on indicators that show how each post has been selected for the specific category; below is Table 1, which presents the categories/concepts with their indicators that determine the classification process; due to the nature of the embassies, the indicators are slightly different from the ones proposed by Wukich (2022). Also, the level of social media interaction, measured by metrics such as likes and comments, country of origin, and the platform being used, are determining factors.

² [Digital Diplomacy on Facebook Guide](#)

Table 1. Operationalization of the variables for Twitter/X and Facebook analysis using the Wukich (2022) categorization

<i>Concept/ Categories</i>	<i>Operational Definition</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Source</i>
Transparency	Government provides information about action, expenditures, deliberation.	Posts that indicate embassies or MFA activities, decisions, policies, or day-to-day operations.	Criado & Villodre, 2021
Symbolic Representation	Symbolic presentation, as presented from De Paula et al. (2018) is the selection and sharing of specific content aiming the favourable impressions of the agencies they represent. In the context of the symbolic presentation, we can detect terms like branding, symbolic acts, and marketing activities.	Posts that engage with flags, national branding, national symbols or cultural references, condolences, and congratulations.	DePaula et al., 2018; Bjola, 2019
Customer Service	Embassies respond or give information about concerns of the citizens by letting citizens know what they can perceive from the agency.	Posts that share information about the kind of services the citizens can take to them, such as certificates, production of national identification documents or passports, and information for election processes.	Criado & Villodre, 2021; Wukich, 2021; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2016
Citizen participation	Embassies are focusing on engagement with the citizens either through online participation such as likes and comments or the participation on in-person activities.	Posts that invite citizens to events, conferences, and social gatherings or need their input for a specific topic.	Yang & Callahan, 2007
Coproduction	The extent to which citizens provide information or content to help the embassies. This category is rare and complies more with the communication crisis emergency.	Posts that require interactions from the citizens, explicitly in emergency situations. Intelligence gathering.	Wukich, 2016; Hughes et al., 2014

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2. Selected posts per category from Twitter/X and Facebook

<i>Content Categories</i>	<i>Illustrative Posts Facebook and Twitter/X</i>	<i>Source</i>
Transparency	The Ministry of Culture and Sport @culturagob has announced new grants to promote #translation into foreign languages. You can consult the text of the resolution at the following link: https:// t.co/6II2EFERKx	@ EmbEspAtenas, Twitter, Translated tweet from Spanish
Symbolic Representation	We are proud and happy to recommend the upcoming performance at the "Piano days" @MegaronAthens of Filippos Klapsinakis, a prodigious GR RO Greek-Romanian pianist from Rethymno 🙌 ! A concert dedicated to #Mozart on January 29, 20:30! See you there! https://t.co/fINRJymMnV https://t.co/kr7zCBJ9bU	@RomaniaInGrece, Twitter account
Costumer service	🇧🇪🙌 Need a new passport or eID card and can't travel all the way to Athens? The mobile kit mission is coming to #limassol in Cyprus on Monday 27th of March ! 🇺🇦 →How?When?Where?→ You can find all the information here: https://www.greece.diplomatie.belgium.be/fr https://www.greece.diplomatie.belgium.be/nl	Belgian Facebook Profile
Citizen Participation	We invite Lithuanians from Greece, Cyprus, and Albania to a distance meeting on the citizenship referendum. ▶ Today (17 April.) ▶ 7 pm Lithuanian time. (Zoom link in the post below)	Lithuanian Facebook profile, translated from Greek
Coproduction	The night of 2023. The 28th of the year. February 1 to March 1, a passenger train and an oncoming freight train collided near the city of Larissa. 32 dead and at least 85 injured were reported. At present, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has no information that Latvian nationals suffered in the incident. The Embassy continues to monitor the events.If you need assistance, please call the Embassy of Latvia in Greece by phone: + 30 210 729 4483 or the Consular Section for emergencies: +371 26 33 77 11 or write to palidziba@mfa.gov . If you were at the scene and do not need assistance, please let your loved ones know that you are safe.	Latvian Facebook profile, translated from Greek

Source: Own elaboration

Engagement Index

Moreover, in order to measure the engagement of the public in a particular category or country with the original posts by the embassies, it is crucial to introduce an Engagement Index (EI). The EI is calculated using a weighted formula that considers the parameters of social media interactions, such as the number of posts, likes, comments, and reposts, as shown below. This formula considers these parameters and the ratio of these interactions per post, considering the correlation between the number of posts and the other interaction parameters. Each component is assigned a unique weight to showcase its relative importance in assessing the engagement of the embassies in social media. It is worth noting that the factors used in the weighted formula (1) are normalized and scaled to a value between 0 and 1 to compare the measured data's relative significance and have a consistent scale of the parameters that result in a consistent and comparable index. The normalization process is conducted by dividing the original values of the parameters by the maximum value in the measured data. In addition, the sum of the weights (w_1 to w_7) should result in 1 to provide a balanced distribution of the weights. This formula can be scaled with additional factors like adding the number of followers as a parameter. Integrating EI into the analysis offers a more nuanced and representative understanding of how effectively embassies engage with their audience.

Figure 2. Engagement Index (EI) formula.

$$EI = posts \cdot w_1 + likes \cdot w_2 + comments \cdot w_3 + reposts \cdot w_4 + \frac{likes}{posts} \cdot w_5 + \frac{comments}{posts} \cdot w_6 + \frac{reposts}{posts} \cdot w_7$$

Source: Own elaboration

4.4. Phase B: Qualitative data collection and analysis

In the second phase, it is vital for the outcome of the research to engage with the bureaucratic experts of the external communication of the diplomatic missions through interviews. The main aim of the qualitative part is to explore the strategies, experiences and more detailed information from individuals managing the social media of the embassies or MFA specialists who indicate the social media strategies to them. Qualitative research design can be defined as the research strategy emphasizing words, images, or objects (Clark et al., 2021). As Clark et al. (2021, p. 350) emphasize, qualitative research can have three features, “*tends towards an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research*”, “*it is broadly interpretivist in nature*” in an attempt to generate knowledge of the social environment by investigating how its members interpret it. Finally, “*it has an ontological position*” which can be described as constructionist, where “*social properties*” are seen as results of the relationship among individuals and not as only phenomena (Clark et al., 2021, p. 350).

Qualitative researchers commonly utilize interviews as the primary method for gathering information (Cassell, 2005; Alsaawi, 2014). For this reason, interviews were conducted as a tool for a more profound and comprehensive approach to the topic. Specifically, we are exploring how embassies use social media through the content they upload and how they communicate with the public. A critique of qualitative design is the need for more interaction with people, which does not serve our research. The statistical correlation, based on variables chosen by the researchers, may have a slight bias (Gray, 2018, p. 163). On the other hand, choosing the qualitative research design and content analysis provides reliability with the systematic and flexibility of the method; mainly, before coding and framing the material, it is essential to examine all the available content (Schreier, 2012).

4.4.1. Selecting participants and data collection

The selection of participants targeted the communication managers inside the embassies. Community managers are in charge of strategic content coordination and public affairs, including communication, such as social media. The interviewees are high-ranked MFA employees in different countries related to public Diplomacy, external communication, and the digital presence of the embassies. Having the EU embassies in Greece as a case study, the first step was to approach most of them. However, due to time restrictions, we found it essential to make a case selection that will represent 5 different countries. Having as a guide the DESI 2022, which monitors the European digital performance concerning the progress of the EU countries, we tried to contact countries with different digitalization percentages and geographical distribution; for this reason, 5 interviews were conducted with countries of different backgrounds.

The participant embassies and MFA that showed interest in the research are the Romanian and the Lithuanian embassies, both located in Athens. In addition, since the other EU embassies were unable to provide this kind of information, they provided contact for their MFAs as experts on external communication via social media; thus, the other three participants are employees from the MFA of Belgium, Latvia, and the Netherlands. The participation of these countries provides rich and comprehensive data collection for the topic, as all these countries had social media accounts with an active presence on the platforms, which indicates a strategy behind their content.

4.4.2. List of Interviewees

To facilitate this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with diverse individuals employed within diplomatic missions or MFAs. Since it is vital to preserve their privacy, the individuals' names have been omitted from the thesis. That said, the following table presents general information regarding their roles.

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Role</i>
Interview n. 1	25/09/2023	Embassy of Lithuania in Athens	Deputy Head of the Embassy of Lithuania
Interview n. 2	4/10/2023	Embassy of Romania in Athens	Minister-Counsellor, Second Secretary of the Embassy of Romanian
Interview n. 3	16/11/2023	MFA Latvia	Second Secretary Communications Groups
Interview n. 4	17/11/2023	MFA Belgium	Communication Officer, Press and Social media, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
Interview n. 5	21/12/2023	MFA Netherlands	Public Diplomacy/Foreign Audiences Communication Department

This research followed the semi-structured interview approach, as it is the most suitable way to extract information that was not anticipated by the researcher (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews also balance structured inquiries and open-ended exploration, making them especially suitable for complex subjects Wilson (2014). The 5 participants of the study were contacted by email. The interviews were held online via the Microsoft Teams platforms, contingent on their availability, following an explanation of the study's goal. During the interview, the participant was required to provide verbal consent for the recording of the interview and, after that, share it as an integral component of the findings of this research. The interview was recorded, and the records were incorporated into the database and will be erased subsequent to the report's publication.

Moreover, the interview transcripts were conducted with the AI tool Otter.ai and were part only of the database, which will be deleted after the research publication. The employees of the embassies and MFAs were guaranteed confidentiality during the interview under the ethical considerations of Leiden University. This was done due to their significant responsibilities and the need to protect national interests. To continue, the interview data analysis involves identifying and examining emerging themes and patterns. The interview questions undergo a thematic analysis, wherein the data are categorized according to themes such as the employee's background, social media management, adoption of social media, social media methods employed, and encountered challenges topics which align with the theory section of the study. Additional information can be obtained from the Table 3, including the operationalization of the primary variables, while the Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4.3. Operationalization of Interviews' data

This section of the study focuses on the second phase of the research methods, the qualitative data. As we saw, the qualitative data collection method is the semi-structured interviews. Table 3 shows the Operationalization of the interview questions. The questions derive from the theory section and are focused on the experience of the managers of the social media platforms,

delving into topics such as social media use and adoption, benefits, challenges, and engagement strategies.

Table 3. Concepts, Definitions, and Indicators

<i>Concept/ Theme</i>	<i>Interview question</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Background Questions	Q1. Could you briefly describe your role in the embassy or Ministry of Foreign Affairs? How many years did you work in the institution? What is your educational background and your working experience?	The answers indicate position, experience, and background in the Embassy or to the MFA.	Coded responses indicating roles, years of experience, or academic background.
	Q2. What is your role concerning the management of social media profiles? What are your main daily tasks in social media management?	Responses reveal responsibilities and day-to-day tasks related to social media.	Coded responses indicating tasks and responsibilities.
Social Media Adoption	Q3. How was the use of social media introduced in your embassies? Who introduced it? How it all started?	Indication of the origin of social media in MFA or embassy.	Coded responses indicating initiatives for adopting social media, reasons.
	Q4. What was the main objective/purpose of the adoption?	Goals and targets for using social media	Coded responses indicating the goals behind the adoption and usage.
Social Media Use and Content	Q5. How are your embassies using social media platforms? Which platform do you consider more important in the context of IR?	The main platforms used by the institutions and their importance	Coded responses indicating the platforms used by the Embassy or MFA.
	Q6. What kind of content are your embassies focusing on more? What are the objectives for using this kind of content? Can you give me some specific examples?	Responders show their preference and their motive using a specific content.	Coded responses indicating the specific content types, with additional examples.
Engagement Strategy	Q7. In your opinion, what are the main targets of your social media strategy? How do you engage with your audiences? Do you use the same strategy for all your Embassies around Europe?	Responses indicate the strategies behind the social media usage and the importance for the engagement with the public.	Coded responses indicating examples of targets and strategies.
Challenges	Q8. Based on your opinion and experience, what are some challenges of using social media by the diplomatic missions?	Answers show the challenges that may be faced by using social media.	Coded responses indicating certain challenges.
	Q9. How are you facing public opinion using social media? What are the protocols in place to face communication crises? How do you deal with citizen-related challenges such as fake news, rumours, negative comments...?	Responses indicate the protocols and strategies concerning managing public opinion and crisis.	Coded responses that show the strategies, protocols or tasks during negative opinion or crisis.
EU digital Diplomacy	Q10. How is your MFA's social media strategy complying with the EU digital Diplomacy strategy?	Alignment of the embassy's strategy with the EU's digital Diplomacy approach	Coded responses that refer to the compliance or not with the EU digital Diplomacy strategy.

Source: own elaboration

4.5. Methodological limitations and ethical considerations

While this research design is comprehensive and considers all the aspects of the study, it is not without limitations. One primary limitation of this study is the selection of the cases used to compare social media engagement with the public. The method of case studies typically exhibits a restricted scope. The study's generalizability is limited, as diplomatic missions' communication strategies and practices may vary depending on country, region, and cultural context. For instance, focusing on the EU embassies in Athens and their MFAs may lack representation, as the practices may vary worldwide.

Considering only EU embassies in one country may be biased and not accurately reflect the state of digital Diplomacy of each EU country worldwide. Nevertheless, it is essential to compare the data, as the case studies can give some general characteristics that can be applied to the other EU countries and their communication forms through social media. Another constraint on data viability and availability can be identified. Platforms may vary in accessing and collecting specific data, which can lead to inconsistent results. For instance, Facebook's API could not collect data due to privacy policies and technical restrictions. Therefore, the researcher proceeded to manually select the posts, which can introduce human error or bias, factors that affect the reliability of the findings.

With respect to the conducted interviews, the analysis of the gathered data is contingent upon the researchers' inherent biases or assumptions, which inevitably impact the categorization and interpretation of the data. The complexity and context-dependency of qualitative research design may necessitate enhanced comprehensibility (Schreier, 2012). Also, Interviews necessitate certain qualities, such as empathy, emotional control, and ethical considerations (Adams, 2015).

Lastly, we cannot omit ethical considerations. Ethical constraints during the data collection from the social media platforms are part of the limitation, as social media data can deal with sensitive or private information, even if it is online. In order to uphold sound and transparent procedures, the confidentiality and anonymity of every participant in this study were rigorously observed. By prioritizing ethical considerations, this research endeavor upholds rigorous academic standards and safeguards the rights of all participants and data subjects. It is critical to acknowledge the potential limitations of the research in their entirety; doing so will enhance the validity of the thesis.

5. Results

This chapter presents the study’s results to answer the research question of “How do diplomatic missions utilize social media content to engage with the public”. The data are analyzed sequentially, adhering to the structure recommended by the research design chapter. The initial stage of the study involves conducting content analysis and descriptive analysis of the data collected from the social media accounts of the embassies, along with the Engagement Index (EI). The second phase introduces the data gathered from the Interviews with employees of these embassies or their MFA, in combination with the quantitative one, providing a holistic representation of the data findings.

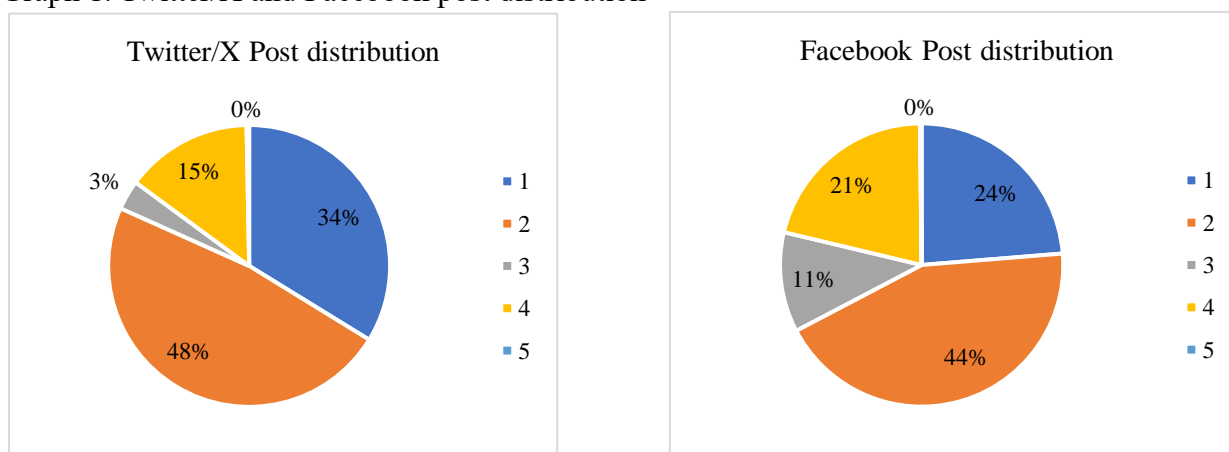
5.1. Phase A: Presentation of the quantitative data

Overall Data Distribution

The first phase of the data collection has been a comprehensive gathering of the original posts by the official accounts of the EU Embassies based in Athens (See Appendix C). The findings were categorized according to the theoretical framework for social media content categorization provided by Wukich (2022). The framework allowed for identification patterns depending on the content used by the embassies via social media. Even if the author uses the framework to measure communication in the emergence of crisis management, the concepts can have general validity and can be reflected in the embassies’ external communication.

Graph 1 demonstrates that the most common type of post is this of Symbolic representation, accounting for 48% and 44% of the total posts on Twitter/X and Facebook, respectively. Transparency is prominent employed on Twitter/X, with a notable prevalence of 34%, in contrast to Facebook's comparatively lower percentage of 24%. Additionally, it is crucial to highlight the balance distribution on Facebook of Customer service with 11% and Citizen participation accounting for 22%. Furthermore, Tables 2 and 3 provide a more comprehensive presentation of the data.

Graph 1. Twitter/X and Facebook post distribution



Graph: 1=Transparency, 2=Symbolic representation, 3= Costumer Service, 4=Citizen participation, 5=Coproductio

Source: Own elaboration

Tables 4 and 5 detail the distribution of collected data on Twitter/X and Facebook from all the countries across categories. The overall distribution of the Twitter/X profiles of the EU embassies showed that the posts on this platform focus more on Symbolic representation (N=325) and Transparency (N=229). The same tendency is also observed on Facebook's platform, with Symbolic representation (N=447) and Transparency (N=243) being the most frequent posts for the 20 profiles of EU embassies. The categories of Citizen participation and Customer services were used at a frequency of 99 posts and 23 posts, respectively, on Twitter/X. However, on Facebook, the EU embassies engaged more in these two categories, providing 216 posts for Citizen participation and 117 posts for Customer service. The final category of Coproduction is the least utilized content for both X and Facebook, with a minimal 2 posts each. The significant disproportion in utilizing this type of content can serve as an indicator of the audience of each platform and the objectives of each embassy for fostering interaction. Along with the frequency of each category of posts, the tables include metrics such as likes, comments, and reposts of each category, providing insightful data useful for the subsequent examination in the EI section.

Table 4. Data distribution per category on Twitter/X

<i>Content Category</i>	<i>Number of Tweets</i>	<i>Number of favorites</i>	<i>Number of replies</i>	<i>Number of retweets</i>
Transparency (1)	229	99	67	177
Symbolic Representation (2)	325	80	16	87
Costumer Service (3)	23	56	8	53
Citizen participation (4)	99	48	2	28
Coproduction (5)	2	43	3	15

Source: Own elaboration

Tablet 5. Data distribution per category on Facebook

<i>Content Category</i>	<i>Number of posts</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>	<i>Number of comments</i>	<i>Number of reposts</i>
Transparency (1)	243	7290	193	565
Symbolic Representation (2)	447	13931	323	1217
Costumer Service (3)	117	1050	46	187
Citizen participation (4)	216	3410	107	553
Coproduction (5)	2	77	3	53

Source: Own elaboration

The Engagement with the public

The EI, derived from the gathered data, assesses the level of audience interaction with social media content used by embassies. This Index helps us answer the study question of how embassies utilize social media content to communicate with the public. Specifically, in Table 6, it is evident that the highest engagement trend for Twitter/X can be identified in the Customer service (1,56) and Transparency (1,05) categories. The category of Coproduction has an extreme figure of 9,25, which can be caused by the low number of posts and the high response to them. It is worth noting that the reliability of the EI depends on variance in the collected data. In other words, the EI will converge to a reliable value when there are more posts for a specific category. For this reason, this limitation must be analyzed further in future studies. Even if it has the highest number of posts, Symbolic representation has an engagement of 0,63. Following Citizen participation, it has the lowest engagement of 0,40, as it also had limited posts. Finally, Customer Service and Transparency seem to be the most famous content for engaging with the public, as they had an Index of 1,56 and 1,05, respectively. On the other hand, in Table 7, the EI for Facebook shows that the most appealing content for the audience is Symbolic Representation (1) and Transparency (0,66). The Coproduction on Facebook also has a low number of posts and a high engagement of 1,31; this can also be part of this content, where the institution gathers information as a part of a crisis protocol. This category can be explained a little further during the qualitative interviews.

Table 6. Twitter/X Engagement Index (EI)

<i>Wukich's Categories</i>	<i>Number of posts</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>	<i>Number of comments</i>	<i>Number of reposts</i>	<i>Engagement Index</i>
Transparency (1)	229	99	67	177	1,05
Symbolic Representation (2)	325	80	16	87	0,63
Costumer Service (3)	23	56	8	53	1,56
Citizen participation (4)	99	48	2	28	0,40
Coproduction (5)	2	43	3	15	9,25

Source: Own elaboration

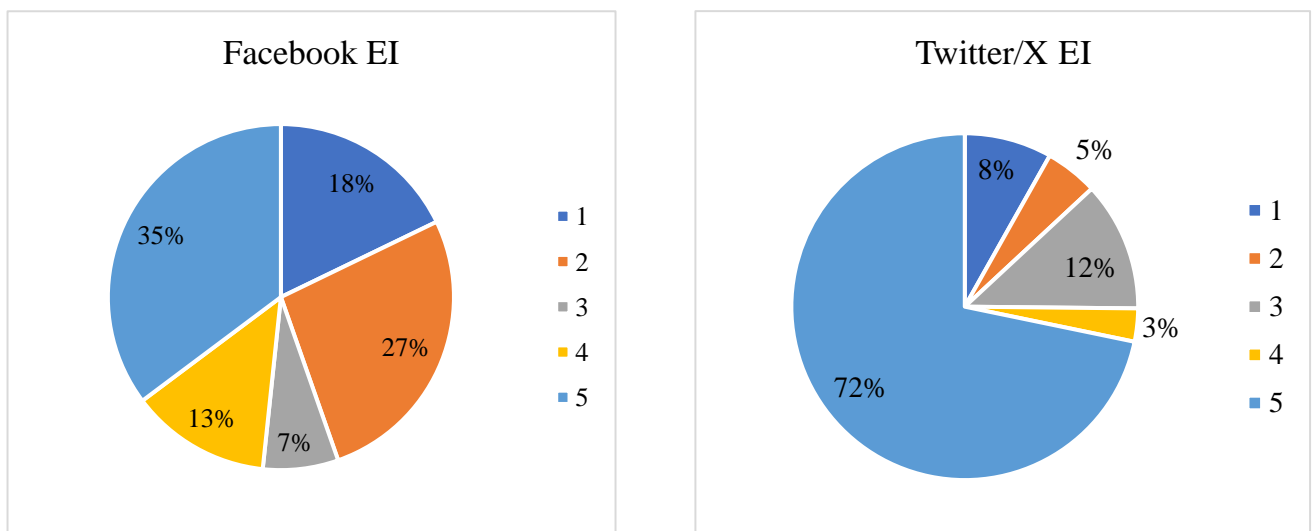
Table 7. Facebook Engagement Index (EI)

<i>Wukich's Categories</i>	<i>Number of posts</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>	<i>Number of comments</i>	<i>Number of reposts</i>	<i>Engagement Index</i>
Transparency (1)	243	7290	193	565	0,66
Symbolic Representation (2)	447	13931	323	1217	1
Costumer Service (3)	117	1050	46	187	0,26
Citizen participation (4)	216	3410	107	553	0,48
Coproduction (5)	2	77	3	53	1,31

Source: Own elaboration

An evident and noteworthy finding from Graph 2 is that Facebook and Twitter/X serve distinct purposes and cater to different audiences, as indicated by the varying levels of engagement with different categories on these platforms. This suggests the existence of a managerial team responsible for the social media presence of the embassies and objectives associated with the content, which will be identified in the second data collection phase through the interviews.

Graph 2. Facebook and Twitter/X EI



Graph: 2=Transparency, 2=Symbolic representation, 3= Costumer Service, 4=Citizen participation, 5=Coproduction

Source: Own elaboration

Subsequently, Tables 8 and 9 include an overall breakdown of the frequency of posts and their interaction parameters including EI in each country for the same period, the DESI 2022, the number of likes, comments, and reposts that the posts gained and finally, the followers of each profile on Twitter/X and Facebook, respectively. To effectively address the study question, it is essential to analyze the usage of social media content by the EU embassies in Athens, while closely examining the data distribution per country. The results of Tables 8 and 9 indicate that each country has a distinct strategy for social media content, resulting in varying levels of interaction. This suggests that countries prioritize their national interests and adapt their external communication strategies accordingly, a strategy that also brings different levels of Engagement with the public.

The use of the EI provides insight into the embassies' comparative levels of engagement, both at their highest and lowest points. The EI is subject to certain limitations, including the physical size of an embassy, the population of the country of origin, and the potential diaspora population from a country to the host nation. Countries with low DESI, such as Romania and Poland, have high engagement, while others, such as Malta and Finland, demonstrate comparatively lower levels of engagement with respect to other embassies. For instance, on Twitter/X, countries such as Sweden showed high engagement, potentially due to their accession to NATO and their presidency of the European Council during the data-gathering period. This argument suggests that cultural, strategic, and political factors can influence engagement in digital Diplomacy.

It is also essential to compare Facebook and Twitter again; embassies engage with the audience differently depending on the platform. This implies that the degree of engagement is not solely determined by a nation's level of digitization but is also influenced by factors such as political or social standards, the size of the embassy as well and the literacy of its administrations. For instance, Finland, having a high DESI of 85% on Twitter, has an EI of 0,05, while on Facebook score an EI of 0,28. On the other hand, Italy with a DESI of 61 % have a 0,85 EI on Twitter and Romania with a DESI of 43% achieved an EI of 0,67 on Facebook. This comparison between countries shows that the amount of digitalization has a limited influence on the level of EI. Consequently, smaller, or less digitally advanced countries can still attain significant levels of engagement by implementing effective content management strategies.

Finally, regarding the theme of the posts during the categorization, we saw that the posts followed similar themes. Topics that were trending on Twitter were the Ukrainian war (#standwithUkraine), the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and the deadly train accident in Greece (#Tempi #Greece). Other remembered days were those of the Holocaust Remember Day and the Greek Independence Day. On the other hand, similar themes were identified on Facebook. All these topics are under the Symbolic representation, the most popular content distribution. This illustrates how the composition of the embassies, and their outcomes are influenced by the political context and international relations.

Table 8. Twitter EI per country

<i>Countries</i>	<i>DESI (%)</i>	<i>Number of posts</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>	<i>Number of comments</i>	<i>Number of reposts</i>	<i>Number of followers</i>	<i>Index (0-1)</i>
Austria	76	51	642	11	91	990	0,30
Cyprus	50	9	93	2	17	1681	0,14
Finland	85	9	20	1	2	1201	0,05
Germany	63	64	1244	36	197	11700	0,44
France	70	39	4730	35	662	11600	1,78
Ireland	71	34	1197	16	152	3696	0,56
Italy	61	6	425	6	55	3663	0,85
Latvia	80	14	157	4	17	265	0,17
Malta	95	24	274	4	33	436	0,20
Lithuania	83	28	171	1	10	828	0,14
Netherlands	85	28	219	4	37	3188	0,17
Portugal	78	21	337	3	27	216	0,25
Poland	55	181	3625	46	645	2969	0,86
Romania	43	32	658	7	90	1055	0,35
Slovakia	60	6	141	0	16	973	0,29
Sweden	74	46	3593	36	454	3012	1,23
Spain	79	48	978	10	185	3306	0,40
Slovenia	60	38	415	5	95	1107	0,24

Source: own elaboration

Table 9. Facebook EI per country

<i>Countries</i>	<i>DESI (%)</i>	<i>Number of posts</i>	<i>Number of likes</i>	<i>Number of comments</i>	<i>Number of reposts</i>	<i>Number of followers</i>	<i>Index (0-1)</i>
Austria	76	59	642	20	62	2200	0,22
Cyprus	50	22	928	24	63	4200	0,34
Finland	85	84	678	31	71	4700	0,28
Germany	63	75	2529	71	212	39000	0,75
France	70	42	2559	67	369	20000	0,86
Italy	61	28	1854	32	219	4200	0,57
Latvia	80	28	261	2	63	1300	0,15
Malta	95	18	98	1	4	622	0,06
Lithuania	83	46	607	10	27	2200	0,17
Netherlands	85	55	829	24	168	17000	0,42
Portugal	78	142	2511	69	196	2600	0,53
Romania	43	104	3048	78	424	2300	0,67
Slovakia	60	77	1845	36	115	2400	0,36
Spain	79	39	589	15	63	9100	0,27
Sweden	74	100	3946	77	303	6100	0,67
Belgium	74	104	2148	81	102	3600	0,46
Estonia	90	35	475	14	24	1300	0,16
Denmark	84	32	474	14	104	3100	0,25
Czechia	63	57	485	10	33	1400	0,16
Ireland	71	1	32	0	14	928	0,47

Source: Own elaboration

In summary, after a comprehensive overview of the countries and trying to find the factors behind this quantitative, it is important to delve into the qualitative part, where, by analyzing specific countries, we can ascertain the underlying causes of the various distributions. It is imperative to clarify that, given the scope of this research, it is not feasible to compare all countries. Hence, we can see the 5 case studies of Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. These countries have different profiles regarding their DESI 2022 and social trends; comparing them gives significance to this study. The subsequent part will describe the findings derived from the qualitative database and the interviews conducted with Embassies' and MFAs' administrations.

5.2. Phase B: Presentation of the Qualitative data: Semi-Structure Interviews

This study aims to investigate the underlying motives behind embassies' specific utilizations of social media content. The quantitative data analysis shows us the content that has been used by the bureaucratic bodies of the embassies for a certain period. Categorizing the posts shows that most data is characterized as Symbolic Representation followed by Transparency and Citizen Participation. The reasons behind this distribution can be partially justified by the interviews with the managerial personnel responsible for external communication via social media. The semi-structured interviews were part of the MMD and gave us a comprehensive view of 5 cases: Lithuania, Romania, Belgium, Latvia, and the Netherlands. The researcher analyzed the interviews with a thematic analysis. Regarding the selection criteria, the participation of the Embassies based in Athens was a primary goal; however, most of the Embassies referred us to their MFA for a more comprehensive overview of the managerial side of the social media accounts.

Analyzing the findings, it becomes evident that there are noticeable trends in the educational backgrounds of the interviewees. The predominant fields of study among the participants include political science, IR, law, and communication. The diversity among the interviews provides an opportunity to gain insights into the hierarchical structure of social media management, ranging from the MFA down to embassies. In the MFA, we find workers focusing only on the external communication of their diplomatic mission, while in the Embassies, we find diplomats who manage social media as part of their daily tasks. This implies that social media coordinators need a comprehensive understanding of political and international affairs, in addition to their communication skills.

Furthermore, it is crucial to have a team within the MFA that provides support to diplomatic missions, especially for small embassies such as the Lithuanian and Romanian in Greece. Due to a small number of employees, these embassies use social media as a supplementary tool along with their day-to-day diplomatic activity (Interview 1; Interview 2). The interviews present the multitasking job the embassies are following, juggling traditional practices with digital engagement. For example:

“Because we are quite a small embassy, so we don't have too many events or communication things... we are trying to communicate as much as possible on the different events”

(Interview 1)

“But as I said, I'm not a communication expert. I'm just following my instincts and whatever is not that we are doing a very, very sophisticated communication, I'm trying to learn from the others.” (Interview 2)

The adoption of social media in the cases of the data is portrayed as a transition towards more strategic forms of communication. Specifically, the Lithuanian and Romanian embassies perceived the decision for social media presence as a “*top-down*” decision and “*part of the public engagement*” (Interview 1), or “*digital engagement at their Romanian community*” (Interview 2). The MFA of Belgium and Latvia saw the adoption as an initiative of former ministers and ambassadors, which the ministry followed and institutionalized with a more

strategic form, transforming from just an online presence to strategic communication specifically:

“There was a question of certain diplomats, were well wondering, can we what can we do on social media? Because we see that there is a big, big change.” (Interview 4).

“MFA and embassies and ambassadors, for example, also stepped into the social media. The Minister that we had previously, now the president of the country, was kind of an early adopter of Twitter, for example...of promoting Latvia’s message” (Interview 3).

In contrast, the Netherlands MFA described the integration of social media as something coming “naturally” from both sides, ambassadors, and MFAs, with the primary aim of reaching the public, especially the younger generation (Interview 5).

The utilization of social media platforms determines the diversity of information produced by embassies and the MFA. Consistency was reached among all interview participants regarding the customization of the message and content to align with the specific platform and target audience being addressed. For example, Facebook is used mostly as a platform to engage with the public, such as the diaspora of the country or local audience (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3). Crucial for all of them is to engage with the public; however, their target audience differs from platform to platform and country to country. For example, we see that some countries, even if they try to stay connected with the local audience, while others have as a priority their diaspora.

On the one hand, embassies that want a closer relationship with the local audience of the host country talk for a national narrative or tell the “*Dutch Story*” via social media and show why their Embassy is working for the host country (Interview 5). Belgium, similarly, referred to local engagement utilizing the most popular platform for the host country’s population; the embassies try to connect with the Belgians but also with the local audiences. For this reason, we see that the distribution of the posts is not focused only to their diaspora, which is not more than 5000 people living in Greece (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). On the other hand, via Facebook, Romania, Lithuania, and Latvia, except for informational use and the promotion of their country, try to engage with their diaspora. The embassy of Romania verified that in Greece, around 50.000 Romanian citizens live in the region of Athens. At the same time, Lithuanians admit that being close to their diaspora is essential for being active on social media. This can be seen from the data, where Transparency, Symbolic representation, and citizen participation are the three most used content categories. Latvia has a detailed policy for its communication with the diaspora, too. This can be seen with the use of Coproduction, which had the highest engagement index; one single post had 53 reposts, a number higher than all the reposts of all the content categories combined.

Meanwhile, Twitter has a political character and is used mainly for media and diplomatic interaction. For instance, the participants mentioned that Twitter was used for political affairs as a “*more traditional way of communicating*” (Interview 3) which is focused more on foreign public, with the use of the English language and retweets from the MFA and national political actors (Interview 2). From the qualitative analysis of Twitter, it is evident that countries like Lithuania predominantly shared content that focused on Symbolic representation

and Transparency, possibly because they use Twitter as the official profile of their ambassador (Interview 1). On Twitter, all the countries showed a high engagement in Symbolic representation, while categories such as Coproduction and customer service were not present. Finally, the highest EI can be identified to the case of Coproduction in the Latvian Embassy.

The participants referred to other platforms too, as part of their engagement strategies. For example, Belgium gave concrete examples such as of their representation in China, where the diplomatic missions engage with the Chinese media, and other regions like Africa (Interview 4). Also, we see that Belgium does not have a Twitter account, which can be due to their strategic using of the platforms (Interview 4). Similarly, the Latvian MFA referred to platforms that are becoming popular to their strategy, LinkedIn, and Instagram, as they facilitate more opportunities for engagement, through hiring processes, and transparency and “*behind the scenes*” moments for the public (Interview 3). Also, the preference for Instagram was expressed also from the Dutch MFA.

The content of the post plays a vital role in promoting the engagement activities of Diplomatic missions and their MFAs with the target audience. Regarding efforts to engage the audience, the interviewers jointly recognized that the information was tailored to be appealing to the particular target (Interview 3). In addition, they discussed modifying their material to suit the specific audience, including the Romanian and Lithuanian diaspora, and employing many platforms to reach a wide range of countries, such as Latvia and Belgium. It is also worth noting that for countries that adhere to more traditional practices, such as Romania, social media platforms serve as a supplement, and their digital presence cannot replace the importance of in-person Diplomacy.

Transitioning to the obstacles section, it is noteworthy to emphasize that most interviewees’ primary concern has transitioned from prior issues, such as:

“The risks and challenges related to cybercrime, disinformation” (Interview 2),

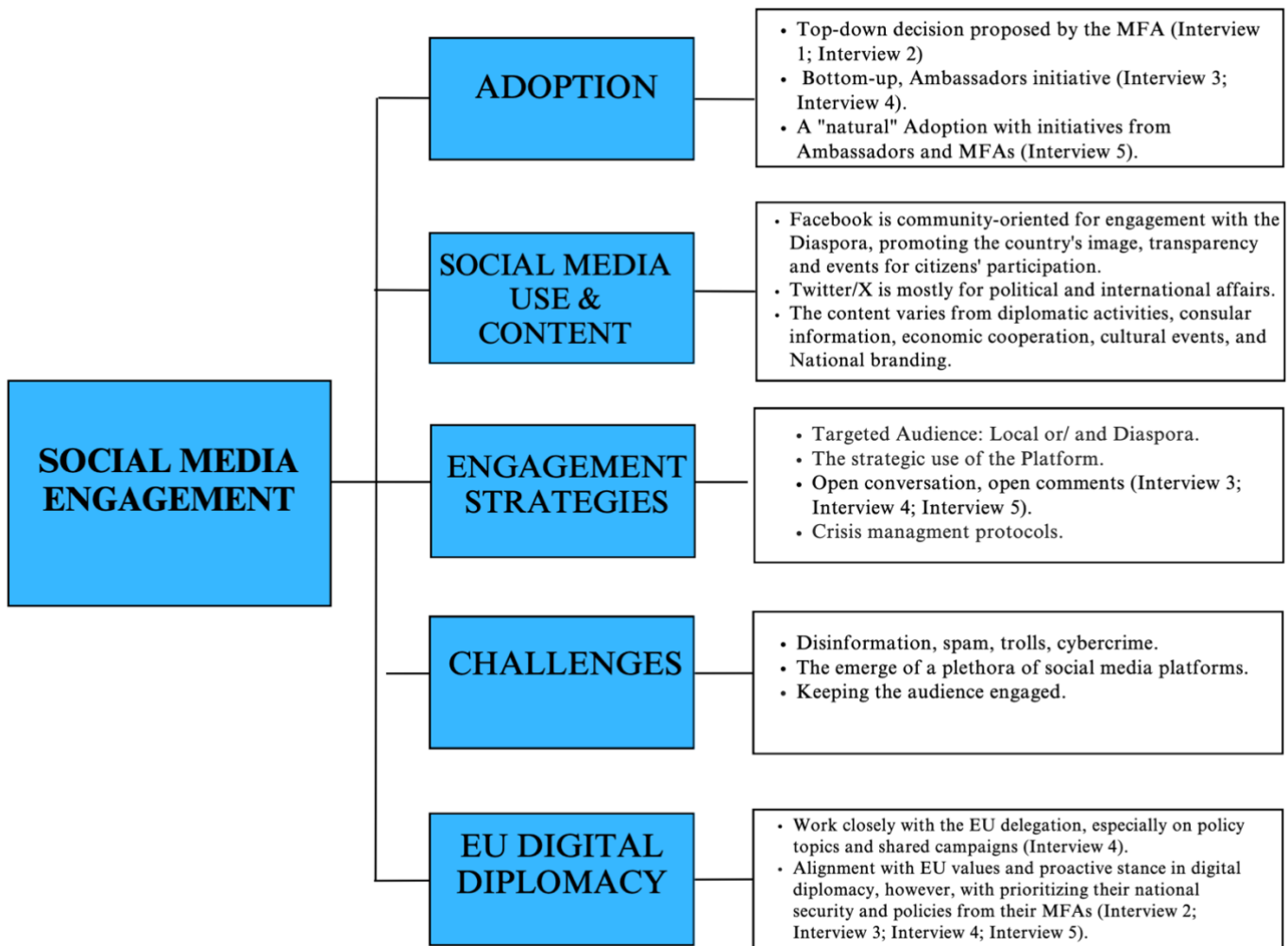
to the current obstacle of effectively engaging with the audience due several factors, such as the plethora of new platforms and the difficulty in capturing and maintaining the attention of the audience (Interview 3; Interview 1), and the challenge of making the content easy and engaging for the public (Interview 4). Furthermore, a common thread across all interviews is the challenge of limited resources, particularly when adapting to the digital realm. For instance, the Belgian team consists of three individuals who provide assistance to all embassies across the globe. Alternatively, some embassies, such as Romania and Lithuania, do not have a dedicated individual responsible for social media management. One important part of their communication strategy is communication during a crisis. Diplomatic missions follow protocols in case of emergency, and some utilize social media platforms to distribute information. For example, Latvia referred to an extensive protocol for emerging situations that prioritizes the safety of its citizens.

Regarding the management of public opinion, the participants mostly discussed their commitment to certain protocols in handling disinformation (Interview 3), addressing trolls (Interview 4), and moderating negative comments (Interview 5). An important theme that arises from the interviews is the presence of a monitoring team that not only oversees the performance of their social media accounts but also monitors social media platforms and collects

information regarding their online reputation (Interview 4; Interview 5). Social media plays a crucial role in monitoring the environment and addressing any negative national reputation.

Finally, regarding the compliance of the diplomatic missions and the EU Digital Diplomacy Act, the participants show that even if their countries align with the general guidelines, the national interest and the profile of the country need to be promoted first (Interview 3; Interview 4), by always highlighting their national security first, for example, platforms such as TikTok can bare highest risks of political and geographical concerns and it is less used (Interview 5). As a summary of the interview data collection and before proceeding to the chapter of the Discussion, Illustration 2 shows the data collected in a comprehensive way.

Figure 3. Summary of the Semi-structured Interviews



Source: Own elaboration

6. Discussion

The data analysis sheds light on the strategic management of social media by focusing on the public engagement by the EU embassies in Athens with active Facebook or Twitter/X accounts, as well as the selected case of the Romanian and Lithuanian embassies and the MFAs of Latvia, Belgium, and the Netherlands during the interviews. This paper section provides the theoretical justification of the findings presented in the literature review. It aims to bridge the gap between the theoretical frameworks and the practical applications of digital Diplomacy.

6.1. Social media use and content

Researching the topic of digital Diplomacy and the transformation of external communication via social media makes the study relevant to the new pragmatics and the public sector with the augmentation of technology. Talking specifically for Diplomacy, as Melissen (2005) defined the transition from traditional to digital Diplomacy, the importance of the actors involved in public Diplomacy comes to the surface. These actors, except for players in IR, as we saw during the research, are the citizens. The way embassies use this communication method has changed from a one-way direction to a more open and transparent sector where citizens can interact with them and provide feedback. A vital factor in the transformation of the communication direction and the engagement level is the content posted by the agencies. For this reason, Wukich's (2022) content categorization framework, coming from public administration literature, allowed us to examine the diplomatic structures from a different spectrum.

The embassies in this study are not seen only as part of IR but also as a vital part of the public administration of each nation. Analyzing the EU embassies' social media strategies provides a different application of this category, involving strategies for bilateral and multilateral relations extending Wukich's framework to a broader geopolitical context. The significance of Symbolic representation and Transparency, as emphasized by Wukich (2022), is supported by the case studies conducted in this research. The findings demonstrate a nuanced interplay across these categories, implying that digital Diplomacy may extend beyond the initial implications of the framework. This validates the framework, by demonstrating the strategic use of the content by the EU embassies and offers a response to the existing gap by presenting insights into the strategies of social media employed by EU embassies.

In contrast with other public administration bodies, embassies tend to use Symbolic representation. Oliveria and Welch (2013) suggested that local authorities used social media as an informational tunnel to external audiences, having as goals gathering feedback on service quality and facilitating participation by citizens or external stakeholders. Giving more details on the specific content, the findings showed that the posts by the embassies engaged people to create communities. This phenomenon was particularly common in embassies with the diaspora in Greece. Other reasons for using the specific content were the engagement with the local audience and the promotion of the image and interest of the country. This can align with Melissen's (2005, p. 15) quote that "*Public Diplomacy builds on trust and credibility, and it often works best with a long horizon.*". This justifies the extended use of Symbolic representation not as a way of propaganda but as a communication of ideas and information to

the foreign public in the context of international and contemporary relations (Melissen, 2005), a goal supported by the study's data, too. Consequently, we can say that the characteristics of public diplomacy are part of the digital one, and social media is no longer an extension of diplomatic tasks but is essential to the interplay of IR.

Likewise, another aspect contributes to the nature of content communicated by an embassy to its audience, with the primary determinant being the specific platform employed for sharing purposes. The results showed that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, play a significant role in facilitating the embassy's fundamental operations by fostering the establishment and advancement of networks and partnerships (Su & Xu, 2015). Platforms such as LinkedIn or Instagram gained popularity as well. The literature analysis reveals that practices such as utilizing social media platforms like Twitter or engaging in virtual interactions indicate the digital era's impact on international bilateral and multilateral relations, aligning with the study's findings (Cull, 2019). Twitter/X became the environment for hosting political affairs, including IR. Starting with the characteristics, the message on Twitter contains limited characters, which means that the communication needs to be direct and efficient so they can have the best outcomes Bjola et al. (2019). This distinction of the platforms adds depth to the categorization by Wukich (2022), by providing a platform-specific strategy.

The concept of "twitplomacy" (Su & Xu, 2015) has gained prominence due to its ability to facilitate political communication on Twitter/X, engaging various players, including government entities, state institutions, NGOs, and individuals on Internet platforms. This aligns with the data obtained from the analysis, with the utilization of content based on Symbolic representation or Transparency. Nonetheless, even if Facebook allowed interaction with various stakeholders (Strauß, 2015), it had a more community-based character. As Manor (2022) explained, social media is the environment for the present-day audience, with the diplomats behind the initiative of transforming the talks to a digital environment for creating communities and engaging with the local public, including their national Diaspora, as it also confirmed from the study. Having all these actors, and the paradigm shift we can talk for a democratization of Diplomacy, with social media providing more inclusivity and transparency for the public.

The public-centric approach Manor (2019) identifies is visible from the data distribution. Embassies use the content so they can attract the attention of the local audience using figures of their country, events, promoting their interest or providing information. Abdelsalam et al. (2013) consider platforms such as Facebook to be tools for information, a statement that aligns with the embassies' behaviour. The embassies on social media act like a "blogger" who has the authorization to share verified information or be part of their crisis communication. Therefore, on Facebook, we see a wider distribution of content with enhanced appearance of content such as Customer service, and Citizen participation content along with the ones mostly used on Twitter for Symbolic representation and Transparency. Recognizing the diversity of the audience and tailoring the content accordingly is an effective way of communication. Summarizing our data set, this study can develop recommendations that can make social media management more efficient and enhance engagement.

6.2. Policy recommendations for social media use

According to Riordan (2016), the emergence of social media has presented diplomats and MFAs with novel opportunities. In addition to facilitating communication, social media platforms serve various other purposes. Diplomatic missions utilize many means to collect information, evaluate public sentiment, and disseminate consular advisories. Based on this argument, the results highlight the importance of a comprehensive social media strategy. The embassies need the support of their respective MFA to develop clear goals and objectives. These goals need to be translated into the content by utilizing the adequate content type. For example, the study showed that Coproduction had the highest engagement level. In Greece, with a deadly accident in Tempí³, the embassies of Lithuania and Latvia used this content to bring the highest engagement of all the other posts together. This indicates that the public in emergencies is expecting information or assistance from their embassy. This can mostly relate to host countries with a certain number of Diaspora in the country, which shows that in emergencies, tend to search for information on social media (Zoizner et al., 2022), especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (Russo et al., 2022). Thus, creating a clear, proactive crisis communication protocol can bring higher engagement with the public.

Similar content, such as Symbolic representation and Transparency and Citizen participation, had a high engagement, especially on the platform of Facebook. This finding brings into line with those of authors such as Mergel (2013), who argue that refining social media strategies can increase public engagement, optimize the content, and be more effective. Hence, if embassies want to expand their audience except their diaspora, they can be in discussion with the local audience of the host country by providing accountability via posts of their policies and day-to-day operations (Transparency), national branding and engagement in the local traditions (Symbolic representation) and events focusing on engagement (Citizen participation).

Moreover, in networked Diplomacy, the execution of diplomatic responsibilities is primarily influenced by one's knowledge, capacity, and capabilities rather than being determined only by formal identity. As can be observed from the interviews, engaging with the public requires the employees of the embassies to be highly motivated and literate in social media usage. The analysis shows that social media use in diplomatic missions is a blended outcome of bureaucratic strategies and individual initiative. This dual approach indicates the evolving nature of digital Diplomacy to a sector that moves from the bureaucratic framework to a more personalized engagement. Overcoming struggles that focus on technical difficulties, for instance, limited working force, which is shown mostly in smaller embassies, and multitasking can incorporate social media as part of their everyday agenda. The support from their MFAs, with its clear guidelines and recommended content and training, is undeniably advantageous and significant. Still, a review of local trends can enhance levels of audience interaction. Hereby, social media needs to be incorporated into their everyday tasks and used by trained or self-motivated staff, which will tend to a constant frequency of posts and efficient audience engagement tactics.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64813367>

Based on the previous remarks, EU embassies and their MFAs can increase their accountability through two distinct approaches. To improve the posts connected to Transparency, enhancing their content and ensuring responsive communication is important. This can be achieved through methods such as posts related to their activities and bilateral relations and the use of Q&A sessions or live chats, which allow for rapid responses to public inquiries. According to the literature, e-government and e-participation are phenomena that digital Diplomacy is linked to, without skipping issues such as cyber security and Internet freedom (Melissen & Hocking, 2015). Embassies, respecting Internet freedom, can adopt a monitoring system, as referred from Belgium's, Netherlands', and Latvia's MFA, to assess their country's online image. This method not only involves engaging with the public but also examines the perception of their country in the digital sphere. Understanding the significance of "rumours" can assist in formulating a strategic approach and constructing a national narrative. This is crucial, as demonstrated in the literature study, as engaging in online discussions, and defining oneself is more advantageous than allowing others to shape one's image (Bjola, 2019).

Furthermore, it is undeniable that social media provides embassies with benefits, enhancing the citizens' presence in the discussion by enhancing e-participation. Embassies can be more transparent by promoting their image without being accused of propaganda, however everything comes with it one cost. Using social media platforms is not free of challenges. The data showed that for challenges regarding cybersecurity, disinformation, trolls and negative comments, the EU embassies and their MFAs are aware of, but also prepared with protocols for coping with them. A new threat for them is the changing social media landscape every day and the way of keeping the engagement with the people high. Particularly, the interview data showed that making the complex content easy and accessible for the public is challenging, while the emergence of platforms such as TikTok bears threats regarding their security and difficulty of adjusting their content. Despite the challenges, robust cybersecurity measures for their social media accounts and regular reviewing and adapting strategies based on the digital landscape, the diplomatic needs and audience preferences will strengthen the engagement and communication tactics.

Finally, Diplomacy is the art of a country promoting its own interests, and this scope cannot be skipped. The promotion of the identity was centric during the analysis of the data. The content of Symbolic representation was highly popular on both Twitter/X and Facebook, as it can be easily detected through the quantitative database. Monitoring the preferences of the audience and actively engaging with them can improve their online presence. Subsequently, the study will finish by briefly summarizing the main concepts, findings, and limits of the study while also offering recommendations for future research.

7. Conclusions

This thesis embarked on the examination of the use of social media content by the EU diplomatic missions in Athens with a principal scope for engagement with the public. This study observed the concept of digital Diplomacy from the viewpoint of public administration by employing an extensive literature review, a mixed-method research design, and an in-depth analysis of social media usage. It also included a comprehensive discussion of the topics that arose during the analysis. The study provided insights into diplomatic missions' strategic utilization of social media content. The analysis demonstrated that social media content is significant in engaging diplomatic missions and the public. The content is strategically crafted to suit the specific audience and platform it is posted on.

The results were achieved through a sequential process involving collecting content material from Facebook and Twitter platforms and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with expert bureaucrats from selected EU MFAs and embassies. The initial stage of the technique involved conducting a content analysis based on the theoretical framework developed by Wukich (2022). The findings revealed that studied embassies frequently employ Symbolic representation and Transparent content in their communication. A significant discovery is seen in the EI, which indicates that the public demonstrates greater involvement with Coproduction content. This suggests that they actively seek assistance from embassies during crisis situations.

Furthermore, it has been noted that various platforms exhibit distinct content. Twitter primarily facilitated political and formal diplomatic communication, whereas Facebook functioned as a more dynamic tool for engaging with citizens. This distinction underlined the existence of a strategic approach to social media content. In addition, the interviews utilized extensive findings. The key findings include the significance of public interaction for embassies and the MFAs, the emergence of diaspora as a crucial aspect in using social media, and the challenge posed by the evolution of social media for the external communication of the embassies.

Regarding the theoretical implications, the research's primary findings align with the literature review on digital Diplomacy, while the realm of public administration in the context of Diplomacy illuminates the management aspects of embassies and the strategic use of social media content. In addition, this study expands upon Wukich's (2022) paradigm by incorporating more empirical data, specifically focusing on the strategic application of content to engage the audience. The framework revealed that Transparency and Coproduction were significant findings. Applying this framework to digital Diplomacy makes it evident that embassies employ structured information and meaningful content to engage with the public effectively in various circumstances.

Except for the theoretical significance, the study shows practical implications for public administration and digital Diplomacy. From a public administration's viewpoint, the research underlines the shift from traditional bureaucratic communication to more dynamic and interactive approaches. This shift is linked to the context of public services, with concepts like transparency and efficiency delivered via social media. In the digital Diplomacy field, the study provides evidence that studying social media content and measuring engagement can drive

more efficient communication via social media. Moreover, evolving communication strategies based on content and audience can be a guide to ensuring efficient communication for all the emerging social media platforms.

While offering a comprehensive database, this research has several limitations. The data collection for the quantitative part has been focused on the EU embassies based in Athens, which limits the generalization of the study. Also, the content categorization and the conceptualization of the interviews can bear some potential biases, as the researcher categorizes them manually. Moreover, dealing with the dynamic social media landscape and measurements that try to find engagement via social media, public opinion, and Diplomacy requires cultural and contextual factors. This means that digital Diplomacy can be a product of political and economic influences that were not part of this study. For example, the study does not examine each country's cultural and political background; therefore, making assumptions about how social media influence is used in their diplomatic missions can be limited. Moreover, regarding the EI, the formulated EI does not take into consideration the population of each country, or the number of diasporas located in Greece, which may change the outcomes. Finally, regarding the limitation, social media, due to their quick development, are not suitable for long-term application results, making the findings of the research temporal.

Additionally, this study provides recommendations for future scholars interested in investigating the external communication of embassies. Firstly, exploring other social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, and their implication for IR and the managerial side of the MFAs can bring some valuable insights. Secondly, by using content categorization frameworks, such as the one by Wukich 2022, and gathering sufficient data, a statistical model, such as linear regression, can be achieved, which can be used as a model to assume future attitudes. Thirdly, the EI is a base that can be improved in the future by using more sophisticated mathematical methods beyond the current ratio of the control variables that leverage the correlation between the metrics. The EI can also be improved by using more reliable metrics that are relevant to measuring engagement. Fourth, future researchers can work towards a sentimental analysis of the public's reaction, analyzing the comments to explore if the engagement is positive or negative or following other response categorizations such as the one suggested by Skoric 2016. Finally, this work also provides a foundation for future scholars to explore the correlation between smart or e-governance and digital Diplomacy in greater depth. Examining the alignment between digital Diplomacy activities and public administration frameworks in terms of aims like improving service deliberation and policymaking would be intriguing.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to the area of public administration and digital Diplomacy by understanding the patterns and the goals behind the diplomatic mission's use of social media, especially in the EU. The findings highlight the importance of the social media presence of the embassies, not only as part of IR but also as an unrepeatable faction of each national administration. The need for continued practice, data-driven strategic management, and the development of external communication via social media is crucial for digital Diplomacy. Providing a solid foundation on efficient social media use opens the road for more interdisciplinary studies that will link public administration studies with digital Diplomacy. Scholars can enhance the relevance of their work in a dynamic digital context by acknowledging limitations, investigating future proposals, and developing thorough

frameworks and practical instructions. As this thesis ends, it is vital to remember that Diplomacy extends beyond verbal communication. It primarily involves active participation, as each post, like, comment, or share serves as an expression of trust in the power of digital Diplomacy.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction: My name is Joana Qyli, and I am pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Administration at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Currently, I am conducting my thesis on the external communication of the European embassies. I analyze how diplomatic missions utilize social media to engage with the public. Specifically, the interview questions will focus on the content the embassies use to engage with the public, their objectives for posting specific content if they follow a particular strategy, and some challenges or benefits social media provides to the institution.

Confidentiality and Consent: All your responses are confidential, and the transcript will be only part of the data collection of the Thesis.

I would like to ask you for permission to record the interview. The interview recording will be deleted right after the master thesis is completed. If you wish to discontinue the record or the interview itself at any time during the interview, please let me know. Your responses will remain private and be used for research purposes, always following the ethics of Leiden University.

Duration: The estimated time of the interview is between 30-45 minutes.

Interview Questions

Q1. Could you briefly describe your role in the embassy or Ministry of Foreign Affairs? How many years did you work in the institution? What is your educational background and your working experience?

Q2. What is your role concerning the management of social media profiles? What are your main daily tasks in social media management?

Q3. How was the use of social media introduced in your embassies? Who introduced it? How it all started?

Q4. What was the main objective/purpose of the adoption? Social media use and content

Q5. How are your embassies using social media platforms? Which platform do you consider more important in the context of IR?

Q6. What kind of content are your embassies focusing on more? What are the objectives for using this kind of content? Can you give me some specific examples?

Q7. In your opinion, what are the main targets of your social media strategy? How do you engage with your audiences? Do you use the same strategy for all your Embassies around Europe?

Q8. Based on your opinion and experience, what are some challenges of using social media by the diplomatic missions?

Q9. How are you facing public opinion using social media? What are the protocols in place to face communication crises? How do you deal with citizen-related challenges such as fake news, rumors, negative comments...?

Q10. How is your MFA's social media strategy complying with the EU digital Diplomacy strategy?
Conclusion

Q11. We are approaching the end of the interview. Do you have a document or a social media policy guide that you think can be helpful for my research?

Q12. Is there any other person you might consider I should be interviewing?

Q13. Do you have any other comment that has not been part of this interview but you think can be important for my research?

Conclusion: I would like to share my appreciation and thank you for your input. Your expertise is vital for the outcome.

Appendix B: 27 EU countries' Profiles

Country	EU Membership Year	Eurozone Membership Year	Schengen Area Membership Year	Embassy's Social Media in Athens (Twitter)	Embassy's Social Media in Athens (Facebook)
<i>Austria</i>	1995	1999	1997	Active	Active
<i>Belgium</i>	1958	1999	1995	Missing	Active
<i>Bulgaria</i>	2007	-	-	Excluded	Excluded
<i>Croatia</i>	2013	2023	2023	Inactive	Inactive
<i>Cyprus</i>	2004	2008	-	Active	Active
<i>Czech Republic</i>	2004	-	2007	Inactive	Active
<i>Denmark</i>	1973	-	2001	Inactive	Active
<i>Estonia</i>	2004	2011	2007	Inactive	Active
<i>Finland</i>	1995	1999	2001	Active	Active
<i>France</i>	1958	1999	1995	Active	Active
<i>Germany</i>	1999	1999	1995	Active	Active
<i>Greece</i>	1981	2000	2001	Excluded	Excluded
<i>Hungary</i>	2004	-	2007	Excluded	Excluded
<i>Ireland</i>	1973	1999	1999	Active	Active
<i>Italy</i>	1958	1999	1997	Active	Preferred
<i>Latvia</i>	2004	2014	2007	Active	Active
<i>Lithuania</i>	2004	2015	2007	Active	Active
<i>Luxembourg</i>	1958	1999	1995	Excluded	Excluded
<i>Malta</i>	2004	2008	2007	Active	Active
<i>Netherlands</i>	1999	1999	1995	Active	Active
<i>Poland</i>	2004	-	2007	Active	Inactive
<i>Portugal</i>	1986	1999	1995	Active	Active
<i>Romania</i>	2007	-	-	Active	Preferred
<i>Slovakia</i>	2004	2009	2007	Active	Active
<i>Slovenia</i>	2004	2007	2007	Active	Inactive
<i>Spain</i>	1986	1999	1995	Active	Active
<i>Sweden</i>	1995	-	2001	Active	Active

Source: (EU Country Profiles | European Union, n.d.)

Appendix C: EU Embassies in Athens, Greece, and their social media Accounts

Country	Twitter account	Facebook Account
<i>Austria</i>	https://twitter.com/AustriainGreece	https://www.facebook.com/AustriainGreece
<i>Belgium</i>	Not found	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064405883204
<i>Cyprus</i>	https://twitter.com/cyprusingreece	https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069836577136
<i>Denmark</i>	https://twitter.com/DKAmbGreece	https://www.facebook.com/athensdk
<i>Estonia</i>	Not found	https://www.facebook.com/estemb.athens/
<i>Finland</i>	https://twitter.com/FinEmbAthens	https://www.facebook.com/FinnishEmbassyAthens
<i>France</i>	https://twitter.com/FranceenGrece	https://www.facebook.com/ambafrance.gr
<i>Germany</i>	https://twitter.com/GermanyinGreece	https://www.facebook.com/GermanyinGreece
<i>Ireland</i>	https://twitter.com/irlembathens?lang=en	https://www.facebook.com/EmbassyOfIrelandGreece
<i>Italy</i>	https://twitter.com/ItalyinGreece	https://www.facebook.com/ItalyinGreece
<i>Latvia</i>	https://twitter.com/latviaembathens?lang=en#	https://www.facebook.com/Embassy-of-Latvia-in-Greece-Latvijas-vēstniecība-Griekijā-244638605608798/
<i>Lithuania</i>	https://twitter.com/lithuania_in_gr?lang=en	https://www.facebook.com/lietuvosambasada.graikijoje
<i>Malta</i>	https://twitter.com/MaltaInGreece	https://www.facebook.com/MaltaInGreece
<i>The Netherlands</i>	https://twitter.com/NLinGreece	https://www.facebook.com/NLEmbassyAthens/

<i>Poland</i>	https://twitter.com/PLinGreece	Not found
<i>Portugal</i>	https://twitter.com/EmbaixadaPt_Gr#	https://www.facebook.com/portugalingreece/
<i>Romania</i>	https://twitter.com/RomaniaInGreece	https://www.facebook.com/AmbasadaRomaniaAtena/
<i>Slovakia</i>	https://twitter.com/SK_in_Greece	https://www.facebook.com/SlovakEmbassyGreece
<i>Slovenia</i>	https://twitter.com/SLOinGRE	Not found
<i>Spain</i>	https://twitter.com/EmbEspAtenas	https://www.facebook.com/embespate
<i>Sweden</i>	https://twitter.com/SwedeninGR	https://www.facebook.com/EmbassyOfSwedenInAthens
<i>Czech Republic</i>	Not found	https://www.facebook.com/czech.embassy.athens

Source: Own elaboration